

God is Forgiving

God is... (Part 7)

Exodus 34:5-7

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Hilltoppers for Christ | Worship Wednesday | [Slides](#) | 10.7.20

Exodus 34:5-7

Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation."¹

Review + Context of Exodus 34

- Exodus 34:5-7, the clearest description of God in the Old Testament
 - What you think about when you think about God is very important. It's the most important thing about you.
 - A. W. Tozer - "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."²
 - "Our opinions about God will not change God, but they can change us."³
 - John Mark Comer - "This is ground zero for a theology of God."⁴
 - Evertt Huffard - "the most descriptive self-description of God in the Old Testament"
- Describe the context leading up to God disclosing His character to Moses in Exodus 34:5-7.
- Characteristics of God we've discussed so far:
 - *Compassion* - a feeling word, a word used to describe the feeling a mother has towards her nursing baby
 - *Grace* - God's favor towards His people, people who do not deserve God's favor and can never repay Him for His favor
 - *Slow to anger* - literally translated as "long of nostrils." God is patient, but eventually, He will get angry because of the evil and suffering in the world.
 - *Love* - God is love.
 - *Faithful* - God is trustworthy, reliable, dependable. He will do what He says He will do. God keeps His promises.

¹ All biblical references in this document are taken from the New International Version (NIV). *The Holy Bible: New International Version*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011.

² John Mark Comer, *God Has a Name* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 23.

³ Austin Fischer, *Young, Restless, No Longer Reformed: Black Holes, Love, and a Journey In and Out of Calvinism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), back cover.

⁴ Comer, *God Has a Name*, 32.

The Forgiving God

- Think of a time when you were offered forgiveness. How did that make you feel?
- Think of a time when you were denied forgiveness. How did that make you feel?
- Think of a time when you offered forgiveness. How was that experience?
- Hebrew
 - *nasa* (Hebrew word) "forgiving," "to lift up," "to carry," "to take away"⁵
 - *avon* (Hebrew word) "wickedness" "a junk-drawer word that basically means any kind of bad behavior"⁶ "iniquity"
 - *pesha* (Hebrew word) "rebellion" "to break the law" a legal word⁷ "transgression"
 - *hata* (Hebrew word) "sin" "to miss the mark" It's the word for when an archer misses a target. It means to mess up.⁸
 - "God forgives sins of all shapes and sizes"⁹
- Why is sin such a big deal?
 - "Sin is dehumanizing...When we sin, we miss the mark of all that our Creator intended for our lives."¹⁰
 - Sin is counter to the intent of God.
 - Sin harms other people.
 - Sin harms you.
- God is a forgiving God. God doesn't just forgive. It's not just something He does. It's who He is. Forgiveness is a part of His character.
- *Micah 7:18-20* - Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. You will be faithful to Jacob, and show love to Abraham, as you pledged on oath to our ancestors in days long ago.
- *Psalms 103:8-12* - The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
- "'[God] does not reluctantly forgive sins against himself or others; he does so eagerly, as a manifestation of his character.' ... It's like Yahweh is itching to forgive. Like he's up early in the morning, thinking, 'Who can I forgive today?'"¹¹

⁵ Comer, *God Has a Name*, 222.

⁶ Comer, *God Has a Name*, 223.

⁷ Comer, *God Has a Name*, 223.

⁸ Comer, *God Has a Name*, 223.

⁹ Comer, *God Has a Name*, 223.

¹⁰ Comer, *God Has a Name*, 245.

¹¹ Comer, *God Has a Name*, 224.

How does Jesus exemplify the forgiving God?

- We've pointed this out every week of this study on the characteristics of God: Jesus is the clearest picture of God we've got. "[Jesus] is the image of the invisible God...in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (*Colossians 1:15, 19*). God is like Jesus. Jesus is like God. If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. This means that if God is a God of forgiveness, Jesus perfectly exemplifies being forgiving like God.
- God accomplishes the forgiveness of sin through Jesus.
- There are consequences of sin. A price must be paid. Jesus paid that price for us.
 - If someone knocks down a mailbox, even if the owner of the mailbox forgives the one who knocked it down, the owner still pays the price for the new mailbox.
- From the very beginning of humanity up until the time of Jesus, it was predicted and prophesied that there would one day be a person sent by God to save God's people from their sin. This person was Jesus.
- In the beginning, God created everything, and everything was good. God and humanity were in a perfect relationship with one another. However, when sin entered the world, a division was created between humanity and God (humans fled from God and God banished them from the garden). But even in the very beginning, when sin first came into the world through the temptation of the serpent, God made a promise, and promise of good news.
 - *Genesis 3:15* - And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."
 - Protoevangelium
- A figure who would take the sins of God's people upon Himself was prophesied about by Isaiah the prophet.
 - *Isaiah 53:4-5* - Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.
- Even before Jesus was born, it was said by an angel from God that Jesus would save His people from their sins.
 - *Matthew 1:21* - She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.
- John the Baptist, the one who was to prepare the way for Jesus, when he announced the coming of Jesus, Jesus taking away the sins of the world was central to John's message.
 - *John 1:29* - Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

- Sin separates us from God. But through Jesus' sacrifice, we are reconciled to God.
 - **2 Corinthians 5:16-21 - 16** So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. **17** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! **18** All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: **19** that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. **20** We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. **21** God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
- Even until the very end when Jesus was hanging on the cross, Jesus was interceding to God on the behalf of people for their sins to be forgiven.
 - *Luke 23:34* - "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."
 - Do you think God granted Jesus his request?
- What other examples in the Bible show us that Jesus is forgiving?
 - Jesus healing and forgiving the paralytic (*Mark 2:1-12*)
 - The woman caught in adultery (*John 8:2-11*)

Our Response to the Forgiving God

- Acknowledge your need for forgiveness.
 - *Romans 3:23* - for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God
 - We've all messed up. Every single one of us. Acknowledge that we have messed up, and there's no way to completely make up for our sins.
- Rest in God's forgiveness.
 - *Exodus 33:13-14* - [Moses speaking] "If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people." The Lord replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."
 - When Moses asks to understand more about God (*Exodus 34:5-7*), God responds to Moses and says He will give Moses rest.
 - When we see God for who He really is, we receive rest.
- Go to God for the forgiveness of sins.
 - *Acts 2:38* - Peter replied, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
 - There's no one else in the world you can go to for the forgiveness of sins.
- Repent of your sins.
 - *Romans 6:1-2* - What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

- Since God paid such a price for the forgiveness of your sins, why keep sinning! He got you out of that mess. Don't go back into it.
- Seek forgiveness and reconciliation from those you've wronged.
 - *Matthew 5:23-24* - Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.
- We've pointed this out each week in this study on the characteristics of God: God created us in His image (*Genesis 1:27*). This means we are to be like Him. This means we're to strive to be forgiving like Him.
- Forgive others like God forgives you.
 - *Matthew 6:9-15* - This, then, is how you should pray:
 "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.
 For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."
 - *Colossians 3:13* - Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.
 - *Matthew 18:21-22* - Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."
 - Forgive people even if they have not asked for it.

The Power of Forgiveness

- Jesus tells us to forgive. For followers of Jesus, that's all the motivation we should need.
- But it has been well documented the benefits of forgiveness, both for the one receiving forgiveness and the one offering forgiveness.
- Tweet from Heather Thompson Day
 - "My student killed a motorcyclist in an accident.
 It destroyed him. Dropped out of school. Severe depression. Want to know who pulled him out of it?
 The parents of the man he killed.
 They asked him to meet for dinner.
 He goes now every year.
 Forgiveness can be the ultimate healing"¹²
- There's great power in forgiveness.

¹² Heather Thompson Day, Twitter post, October 2, 2020, 6:59 PM, <https://twitter.com/heathertday/status/1312180340228718592?s=21>.