



PRAYER

PURITY OF PRAYER

EXODUS 34:1-30

MAIN IDEA

Spending time with the Lord is vital for believers. Just as Moses was changed by the presence of the Lord, we are transformed when we make authentic prayer our priority.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

Everyone needs a second chance at some point. Do-overs can make a huge difference in our lives. Golfers have a common word for this concept: mulligan. This allows a player to redo a shot that goes way off course. Although this isn't allowed in professional golf, the mulligan is widely known and used by amateur golfers around the world. Usually do-overs are limited, with a designated number of mulligans allowed per round.

As imperfect people who don't always make the best choices, we all find ourselves in need of second chances sometimes. Thankfully, the compassion of the Lord and the number of times He forgives when we repent of our sin and turn back to Him have no limit. Today, we will study a passage in Exodus that confirms the character of the Lord and the impact experienced by spending time with God and coming to know Him more fully.

SUMMARY

After the original Ten Commandments were broken following the Israelites worship of the golden calf, God gave the people another chance to get it right. God is in the business of forgiveness and grace. He called Moses back up the mountain and spent forty days and nights with him. During that time, God instructed Moses to write the Ten Commandments on a second set of tablets so that the people would have His instructions to live by.

The time Moses spent in the presence of the Lord changed him in an obvious way. We are called to spend time with the Lord in prayer and as we do, we are transformed into His likeness. On the mountain, God revealed more of His character, leading Moses to respond in worship. When we spend time with God through prayer, we get to know Him more and are transformed.

- **How does it make you feel to know you can have a do-over if you mess up in some situations?**
- **How does it impact you to regularly remember God's grace in your life?**

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> Have someone in your group read Exodus 34:1-6a.

Chapter 32 of Exodus records the destruction of the original Ten Commandments God gave the Israelites. When Moses descended from the mountaintop with the two stone tablets and saw the people's idol worship, he was so upset that he threw down the tablets and smashed them. Today, we are studying the circumstances around the creation of a second set of tablets and the life changing transformation Moses experienced through prayer and time with the Lord.

Following their sin with the golden idol, the Israelite people repented, and God restored them as Moses interceded on their behalf. Like the first time the commandments were given, God called for only Moses to come meet with Him again on the mountain so a second set of tablets could be given to the people. In this way, Moses continued his role as mediator between God and the people.

Time with the Lord is vital to the life of a Christ follower. Moses met with God for guidance and instruction so he could lead the people according to God's will. Today, we have unlimited access to the father because of the work Jesus completed on the cross. By His perfect sacrifice, we can interact with our holy God, and we must make this a priority as Moses and many others in the Bible did.

- **How has Jesus served as our once and for all mediator with God? How has this changed our access to Him in daily life?**

In the Old Testament, God's presence was often identified by a cloud. God's presence is shown this way numerous times throughout Scripture. One example is here on Mount Sinai, where He met with Moses. We read that the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with Moses (v. 5).

- **What does the Bible tell us about God's presence with His people today? How is this better than the physical manifestation Moses experienced?**

We also read that God proclaimed His name to Moses as, "the LORD" (v. 5). Moses encountered the Lord and gained a better understanding of who He was. This experience was unprecedented, and Moses would forever be changed. We should also seek to be in the presence of the Lord regularly. We may not be on a literal mountaintop with Him, but we have been given access to His presence every day through the Holy Spirit. When we ask God to reveal Himself through His Word, His Spirit, and His people, He will. Knowing God's character and experiencing His presence will change us just as it did Moses.

- **Application: What are some ways we can actively seek to be in the presence of the Lord so that we might be changed?**

> Have someone in your group read Exodus 34:6b-9.

The Lord described His characteristics to Moses when the cloud descended. God wanted Moses to know Him. The same is true today. We have been given the revelation of the Word of God so that we can know Him and His character. The more we know about the Lord, the more we will want to know Him and the closer we will draw to Him. One takeaway from this passage is God is with and wants to be known by His people.

God identified Himself as the LORD or Yahweh. This was the same name God revealed to Moses in the burning bush. It was familiar to Moses but now he was experiencing Yahweh in a new way. God often gives His people the opportunity to see Him in new and powerful ways as He did for Moses.

The character of God never changes. Who He revealed Himself to be to Moses and Israel is the same God He is to His people today. He is compassionate and gracious. This was evidenced by the fact that Moses and the children of Israel received a second chance to get it right with the Ten Commandments. After their rebellion and idolatry, they were given another set of tablets, and though they faced consequences for their sin, God did not abandon them.

- **Which self-description of God stands out most to you? How have you experienced these characteristics of God?**

Consider your life and the times you deserved punishment for your sin, yet God continues to forgive us when we repent because of Jesus's work on our behalf. These characteristics of the Lord are evidence of who He is and how much He loves us. He has given us the Holy Spirit to help us keep His instructions and whenever we fall short of His standards, the Lord is gracious and forgiving.

- **How does God's ongoing presence in the Holy Spirit lead us to repentance when we need it?**

Recognizing who the Lord is and all that He has done caused Moses to fall to his knees in worship. This is the appropriate response as we encounter God. His holiness and character move us to worship, as we recognize just how unworthy we are and how much we need Him in every aspect of life. Moses cried out to the Lord and asked for His continued presence with and forgiveness of His people.

- **Application: How does the presence and character of the Lord motivate you to worship?**

> Have someone in your group read Exodus 34:27-30.

God instructed Moses to write His words on the tablets. It wasn't enough to merely hear them again, these words needed to be written down, remembered, and upheld. Each of these practices are helpful for recall: hearing words spoken, writing words down, seeing words written. We can continue to remember the Word of God each day by doing these things.

- **What do you think is the connection in this passage between the amount of time Moses spent with God and the transformation he experienced? How is this also true in our lives?**

The fact that Moses stayed with the Lord for forty days and nights without food or water was miraculous. Although other accounts tell of people fasting from food for forty days, fasting from water for that long is nothing short of miraculous. Moses could only survive this through supernatural sustenance from the Lord. Here we are reminded of Jesus's words that man does not live on bread only but on the words of God (Matthew 4:4).

Following these forty days, Moses descended from the mountain with the new tablets. As Moses walked back into the camp, it was obvious he had been with the Lord. Time spent in

fellowship and communion with the Lord should make us look and act different. Moses's appearance was so altered that the people were scared to go near him. They had a healthy reverence for the presence of the Lord. Moses's face was described as shining like the sun. But the glory shining in his face wasn't his—it was God's.

- **How does spending time in prayer with God change how others see you? How should it?**

The glory of the Lord was reflected in Moses face, and it scared the people who saw it. The fact that Moses was unaware of the glory shining from him is a reminder of where his focus was. When we spend time in the presence of the Lord, we will also look different. We should seek to reflect God's glory and character to the people around us as a direct result of the Lord and nothing we do in our own strength or power. Moses's experience reminds us fellowship with God is transforming, and we experience that same transforming power when we pursue Him in prayer today.

- **Application: How might you seek extended time with the Lord so that you might become more like Him?**

APPLICATION

God offers second chances and beyond because of Jesus. Moses broke the first set of tablets in righteous anger over the idolatry and rebellion of the people when he came down Mount Sinai. Because of God's character and nature, when Moses interceded for the people and they repented, God forgave them and continued with them.

Bringing Moses back onto the mountain, God revealed more of His character and allowed Moses to know Him more fully. During the forty days and nights that Moses met with God, he was profoundly changed. When he brought the new tablets down, it was obvious to everyone that Moses was now different. His face glowed and reflected the glory of the Lord. Time spent with the Lord in authentic prayer will result in our being transformed into the likeness of God as we reflect His glory to the world around us.

- **How is God calling you to set aside specific time for prayer so that you might grow in knowing and loving Him?**
- **How can we encourage one another and even come together to grow as people of prayer?**
- **Who do you need to pray for to come to the saving knowledge of Jesus? How can you pursue this person in love this week?**

PRAY

Thank the Lord for giving you many additional chances when you fail. Confess any things you need to repent from and ask God to continue to transform you every day.

Historical Context of Exodus

Purpose

The book of Exodus shows God at work with the goal of having such close fellowship with people that he is described as dwelling among them. He rescued the Israelites in order to make himself known, not only by the exercise of his power but also through an ongoing covenant relationship based on his capacity for patience, grace, and forgiveness. The record of what the Lord did for the Israelites provided grounds for them to recognize him as their God who deserved their complete loyalty and obedience. This record would make clear to the Israelites their identity as God's people and would continue the display of his glorious identity.

Author

The book of Exodus does not state who its author was. It does refer to occasions when Moses made a written record of events that took place and what God had said (17:14; 24:4, 7; 34:27–28). The book also contains references to preserving and passing on information. Along with the other four books of the Pentateuch, it has long been considered to be primarily the work of Moses. Moses could have written Exodus at any time during a forty-year time span: after the Israelites finished constructing and dedicating the tabernacle at Mount Sinai, at the start of their second year after leaving Egypt (1445 BC), and before his death in the land of Moab (about 1406 BC).

Setting

Exodus picks up where the Genesis narrative ended with the death of Joseph around 1805 BC. It quickly moves us forward almost three hundred years to a time in Egypt when the circumstances of Jacob's descendants had changed. The Israelites were serving as slaves during Egypt's Eighteenth Dynasty, probably under the pharaohs Thutmose and Amenhotep II. The Hebrew slaves experienced a miraculous deliverance by God's hand through his servant-leader Moses. The Israelite slavery ended in 1446 BC. The book of Exodus records the events surrounding the exodus from Egypt and the Israelites' first year in the wilderness, including the giving of the law.

Special Features

The title "Exodus" is an anglicized version of a Greek word that means "departure" in recognition of one of the book's major events—the departure of God's people from Egypt. Exodus could be considered the central book in the Old Testament because it records God's act of saving the Israelites and establishing them as a covenant community, a nation chosen to serve and represent him. Exodus describes the enslavement and oppression of the Israelites; the preparation and call of Moses; the conflict between Yahweh the God of Israel and the gods of Egypt (represented by Pharaoh); the exodus of the Israelites; their establishment as a nation in covenant with the Lord; their rebellion; and the Lord's provision for their ongoing relationship, symbolized by his presence at the tabernacle they built for him.

Exodus 34:1-9,27-30

34:1–4 Writing new tablets signified that God had forgiven Israel and had reinstated his covenant with them. **Notes:**

34:5–7 Rather than providing a new visual description (in contrast with chaps. 3; 13–14; 19–20; 24), the account of the Lord's display of his glory this time offers his list of a series of invisible qualities. The Lord has the capacity to be compassionate and gracious, to be slow to anger, and to forgive, in addition to exacting punishment (cp. Nm 14:18; Neh 9:17; Ps 86:15; 103:6–14; 145:8; Jl 2:13–14; Jnh 4:2; Nah 1:3).

34:8–9 Nowhere in Moses's prayers for the Israelites did he point to their repentance or promise any improvement; their future would depend on the Lord's ongoing favor, forgiveness, and faithfulness.

34:18–28 These verses reemphasize the laws previously given (23:14–19) with a sampling of instructions.

34:29–35 The veil that Moses put over his face was like the boundaries placed around Mount Sinai (19:21–22; 20:18–19), like the curtain that hung between the holy place and the most holy place (26:31–33), and like the Lord's hand placed over the rocky crevice where Moses was hidden (33:20–23). All were gracious provisions to protect people from casual and deadly exposure to the glory of God. The shining (Moses's face was radiant) and the veil demonstrate the success of Moses's intercession; the Lord had agreed to go with the Israelites in such a gracious way that they could safely see his glory among them, despite their stiff-necked frailty (cp. 2Co 3:13–14).

34:27 While God wrote the Ten Commandments on two stone tablets (31:18; 34:1), Moses is commanded to write down the rest of the words of the covenant.

34:28 This is the second time Moses spent forty days and nights on the mountain. It would only have taken a day or so to write what God spoke. His prolonged fast was an earnest (and successful) appeal for God's grace in the face of Israel's rebellion. He wrote probably refers to God (v. 1).¹

References

1. Dorian G. Coover-Cox, "Exodus," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 145–146.