

**OPEN**

- What one word would your friends choose to describe you?
- A child asks you, "What is God like?" - What's the first word that comes to mind?
- What would be your top 3 words to describe what God is like?

**DISCOVER**

Exodus 34:6-7 describes what God is like. <sup>i</sup>

To understand the significance of the text, we need to understand the context.

- Where are we in the storyline of the Bible (for help, see Genesis 1:31; 3:6, 15; 12:1-3; 50:22)?
- What major events have taken place in Exodus 1-18 (for help, see Exodus 2:23-24; 3:15; 5:2; 12:21-24; 14:21-25)?

In Exodus 19-40 Israel arrives at Mt. Sinai and camps there for a year.

- What are the key events in Exodus 19-24 (see Exodus 20:1-6 and 24:3)?

In Exodus 25-31 Moses receives the blueprints for the Tabernacle so God can come and live among them. In Exodus 35-40 Israel builds the Tabernacle.

- While Moses is on the mountain receiving God's covenant and instructions for the Tabernacle, what are the people doing (see Exodus 32:1-4; compare Exodus 20:3-6)?

- What is God's response (Exodus 32:7-10)?
- What argument does Moses make in defense of Israel (Exodus 32:13-14)?

The LORD relents, but this episode introduces a tension will persist throughout the rest of the Bible: God is both merciful and just. God's people deserve judgment and yet the LORD has made promises to Abraham and his descendants.

**DEEPEN**

Exodus 34:6-7 is a good example of how Hebrew writing can use nested parallel lines to highlight similar or contrasting points.

- What points are being made by the structure of these verses?<sup>ii</sup>

1 a God merciful and gracious

2 **slow to anger**

3 abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness

4 **keeping steadfast love for thousands**

5 **forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin**

6 **But who will by no means clear the guilty,**

7 **visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children,**

8 **to the third and the fourth generation**

- What is required for a God of justice to keep "steadfast love for thousands" when his people are constantly rebelling?

- Does God’s promise to forgive sin mean people can do whatever they want? Why or why not?
- Even in judgment there is a hint of mercy – Why are the time frames for judgment and mercy different?
- How does this tension between God’s mercy and judgment point to Jesus<sup>iii</sup>?

**SO WHAT?**<sup>iv</sup>

- What attribute of God found in Exodus 34:6-7 do you need to keep more in mind? How might you do that?
- What do you think would be most surprising for people in your neighborhood to learn about God from Exodus 34:6-7? How might someone learn this who doesn’t attend church?
- Where do you need to see God’s mercy and grace show up in your life in the next week?

<sup>i</sup> These verses are referenced and quoted over twenty more times in the Bible (for example: Numbers 14:18; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalm 86:15; Psalm 103:8; Psalm 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Nahum 1:3).

<sup>ii</sup> Lines 1 and 3: both made up of three Hebrew words expressing two attributes of God. They bracket a fifth attribute in between. The emphasis is on God’s mercy.

Lines 2 and 6: the LORD is slow to anger and yet not letting the guilty get away with sin!

Lines 5 and 7: The Lord is merciful, forgiving sin and yet he’s visiting iniquity on grandchildren!

**PRAY**

Take time to pray for one another. No need for long or lofty sounding prayers. Short prayers based on what was shared in the last question are great! Example: *“LORD, give Bob mercy when he goes to the doctor next week. Amen.”*

Prayer Requests

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Line 4 and 8: note the difference in how long God’s mercy endures as compared to judgment.

<sup>iii</sup> Jesus is God’s ultimate answer to resolve the tension between mercy and judgment. Jesus takes the judgment we deserve, satisfying God’s justice. Sinners receive mercy for the sake of Jesus.

<sup>iv</sup> SO WHAT questions remind us that the goal of studying the Bible is not more information, but life. Jesus says he comes to give us life, abundant life (John 10:10). The Word calls for a response. We can respond to the Word many different way. We can repent, believe, trust, pray, give thanks, share, meditate, forgive. What is the LORD calling you do to in order to live an abundant life with him?