

DEVOTIONAL 10



# GOD IN OUR MIDST

# EXODUS 32:11-14, 30-34 33:1-6, 12-18

<sup>32:11</sup> But Moses implored the LORD his God and said, "O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? <sup>12</sup> Why should the Egyptians say, 'With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people. <sup>13</sup> Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.'" <sup>14</sup> And the LORD relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people.

<sup>30</sup> The next day Moses said to the people, "You have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." <sup>31</sup> So Moses returned to the LORD and said, "Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. <sup>32</sup> But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written." <sup>33</sup> But the LORD said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book. <sup>34</sup> But now go, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you; behold, my angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them."

<sup>33:1</sup> The LORD said to Moses, "Depart; go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'To your offspring I will give it.' <sup>2</sup> I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites,

the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. <sup>3</sup> Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people."

<sup>4</sup> When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments. <sup>5</sup> For the LORD had said to Moses, "Say to the people of Israel, 'You are a stiff-necked people; if for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you. So now take off your ornaments, that I may know what to do with you.'" <sup>6</sup> Therefore the people of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward.

<sup>12</sup> Moses said to the LORD, "See, you say to me, 'Bring up this people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.'

<sup>13</sup> Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people." <sup>14</sup> And he said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

<sup>15</sup> And he said to him, "If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. <sup>16</sup> For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?"

<sup>17</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, "This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name." <sup>18</sup> Moses said, "Please show me your glory."

# DAY 1

EXODUS 32:11-14

<sup>11</sup> But Moses implored the LORD his God and said, “O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?” <sup>12</sup> Why should the Egyptians say, ‘With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth’? Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people. <sup>13</sup> Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.’” <sup>14</sup> And the LORD relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people.

It is important to remember here that Moses includes this prayer in the text to address and remind Israel of the covenant. First, he reminds them of what God has done for them in rescuing them from Egypt by his “great power and with a mighty hand” (v. 11). Often, the first part of a covenant was a history of what the ruling king had done for his vassal/servant. Here, Moses is reminding the people of what God had done for them.

A second part of the prayer was a reminder that Israel had broken the covenant with God. God’s anger burned after the people of Israel because they had formed their own god to worship and had lost faith in the one true God and his servant Moses. Even though they didn’t have the Mosaic law yet, they knew what they were doing was wrong. For God had shamed the gods of Egypt and here they were shaping a new god in the image of the gods they had left behind. They also knew that they were called out of Egypt for a purpose—to worship and serve God. It was not merely a denial of who had saved them but also a denial of their purpose.

Finally, Moses also reminds Israel of the covenant promises that God had made—in particular, the promises of becoming a great nation and of a promised land in which they would dwell. This was part of the pattern of the prophets: after revealing the judgment that God would bring for their sins, the prophets would remind them of God’s promises. Why would they do this? To call Israel back to God. It’s a reminder of the faithfulness of God and the hope we have in God’s promises.

Moses's prayer provides a good pattern for our own prayer life. First, it is important to remember what God has done for us. We need to continually be reminded of the gospel, the good news of our salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Second, like Israel, we still sin but we know that our sins have been forgiven, that Jesus took on God's wrath for us. And yet, we still need to confess and recognize our continual struggle with sin as we move on in our sanctification and are conformed to the image of Christ. Third, we need to be reminded of God's promises that one day all God's people will dwell in the New Heavens and the New Earth. It is easy to forget the promises of God and place our hope in other things, so we need to be reminded that God is faithful and that his promises are true.

## PRAYER

*Lord, your goodness and mercy are overflowing and out of these you have provided us salvation through the obedient sacrifice of your Son. Though I am freed from sin, Lord, strengthen my heart. Help me to be conformed to your Word through your Spirit so that I may fulfill my calling to serve and worship you. Give me a vision of your promises so that my hope may be renewed. Lord, your goodness and mercy are overflowing. Amen.*

# DAY 2

EXODUS 32:30-34

<sup>30</sup> The next day Moses said to the people, “You have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.” <sup>31</sup> So Moses returned to the LORD and said, “Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. <sup>32</sup> But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written.” <sup>33</sup> But the LORD said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book. <sup>34</sup> But now go, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you; behold, my angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them.”

One of my favorite characters from literature is Charles Dickens’ Sydney Carton as he is portrayed during the French Revolution in *A Tale of Two Cities*. Sydney is desperately in love with Lucie Manette, who will never love him back because she loves Charles Darnay. When Darnay is sentenced to the guillotine for being a noble, Carton, who looks remarkably like Darnay, orchestrates Darnay’s escape by taking his place at the guillotine so that the love of Charles and Lucie could go on. Sacrificial love—the willingness to lay down one’s life in the place of another—is a story that always touches something deep within us, whether fictional or real.

Sacrificial, atoning love is what we meet in this account of Moses and the Israelites. As we have seen, the Israelites have “sinned a great sin” (v. 31). God’s character is such that justice is required; a price must be paid.

*Enter Moses.* Moses has come a long way since his reluctance to lead the people (Ex. 4:1-17). He remembers how his wife Zipporah stood in the gap for him (Ex. 4:21-24). He has seen the effect the blood of the lamb had in averting the angel of death (Ex 12). He has received from God the instructions for the sacrificial system (Ex. 21-31). He knows that God will accept the blood of another to atone for sin, to satisfy his justice. So Moses intercedes with YHWH and offers his life for the lives of his people: “But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written.” (Ex. 32:32).

This non-fictional, historical offer of sacrificial atonement touches that same chord within us that the fictional Sydney Carton does. That someone would lay down their lives for the sake of another—in both cases, someone who may not have deserved it—takes our breath away. We wonder, *Do I have that in myself? Do I trust in the mercy and justice of God enough to intercede for the world with such fervor? Do I love my family or my neighbors or my co-workers with the type of self-sacrifice that Moses does?* We should note that Moses turns down an offer from God to wipe out Israel and start over with Moses (Ex. 32:9). That kind of self-promotion is certainly tempting, but Moses goes in the opposite direction. Yet, YHWH does not accept Moses’s offer. Why? Because Moses, as a sinner, could not offer the type of perfect sacrifice required to atone for this kind of sin.

*Enter Jesus.* Jesus is the greatest sacrificial figure for humanity ever recorded. Like Moses, he is absolutely historical. Jesus definitively gave himself as a ransom for many (Mk. 10:45). He is able to make atonement for the sins of the world because he knew no sin. He became sin in our place (2 Cor. 5:21). The just wrath of YHWH is turned away (Rom. 5:9). Believers are cleansed. Amazing love. How can it be?

## PRAYER

*Jesus, how can we ever thank you for such sacrificial love? Holy Spirit, we pray that the reality of this sacrifice would occupy our lives more and more. May this love produce in us love for those around us—family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, even those around the world who look different than us and live very different lives. Undergirding this all, may our love for you grow and grow. In the beautiful name of Jesus, we pray. Amen*

# DAY 3

EXODUS 33:1-6

<sup>1</sup>The LORD said to Moses, “Depart; go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, ‘To your offspring I will give it.’ <sup>2</sup>I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. <sup>3</sup>Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people.”

<sup>4</sup>When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments. <sup>5</sup>For the LORD had said to Moses, “Say to the people of Israel, ‘You are a stiff-necked people; if for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you. So now take off your ornaments, that I may know what to do with you.’” <sup>6</sup>Therefore the people of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward.

Today’s text invites us to consider a penetrating question. What if you could have everything that this world has to offer—success in your ventures, peace from your enemies, material riches, even a direct avenue to God—but not have the presence of God in your midst? Penetrating, right? This is exactly the proposition that YHWH puts to Moses regarding the people of Israel following their rebellion with the Golden Calf. He promises to guide them by means of an angel, conquer their enemies, bring them to a wealthy environment, even be available through Moses’s intercession, but he would not be in their midst. To Israel’s credit, they recognize this as a “disastrous word” (v. 4). And as we will see as the story plays out, through Moses’s pleading with God to display his glory, the tabernacle, containing the presence of God, is eventually built in the very center of the camp. Disaster averted.

But before we move on too quickly, do we recognize the force of the choice that God put to Israel? What do our hearts truly desire from YHWH? Do we want him? Or do we want his stuff? Are we infatuated with who he is? Or are we content with political peace? Material security? A sense of guidance? Clergy to intercede for us? Asaph, confronting a similar conundrum, puts it this way in Psalm 73: *Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.* (vv. 25, 26). May God increase our passion for HIM!

## PRAYER

*Lord, we make Moses’s prayer our own today, Show us your glory! We confess that too often we have been satisfied with the good gifts that you bestow on us rather than with you. Thank you, Holy Spirit, that you take up residence in the hearts of believers, assuring us that you will never leave us or forsake us. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.*

# DAY 4

EXODUS 33:7-11

<sup>7</sup> Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp. <sup>8</sup> Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise up, and each would stand at his tent door, and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent. <sup>9</sup> When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the Lord would speak with Moses. <sup>10</sup> And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, each at his tent door. <sup>11</sup> Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.

The interaction between YHWH and Moses contains a lot of drama. Notice some of the words used in Exodus 3–10 from the NLT and other translations.

3:11, 13: Moses protested to God.

4:1: Moses protested again.

4:10: Moses pleaded with the Lord.

4:13: Moses again pleaded.

4:14: Then the Lord became angry with Moses.

4:24: The Lord confronted him and was about to kill him.

5:22: Then Moses went back to the Lord and protested.

6:12: “But Lord!” Moses objected.

10:18: Moses pleads with the Lord.

This kind of interaction is standard fare between God and Moses. We see these discussions continuing throughout Exodus and the rest of the Pentateuch. Moses felt free to express all his concerns, and God listened to them. The apparent tension didn’t inhibit the ongoing discussions. We may be somewhat uncomfortable with how contentious they seem. Perhaps there are dynamics going on that are unfamiliar to us.



Today's passage may help us see what those dynamics are. Verses 9–11 indicate that Moses had respect for the presence of the Lord. His burning-bush experience meant he knew how to have reverence toward God throughout the rest of his life. Even with all his protests, he must have known when to be quiet and listen. At times in their interaction, reverence required complete acceptance. This is something we often don't do very well. We can't seem to avoid sputtering and trying to justify ourselves, even when acceptance of consequences should be clear and forthright.

That God would communicate with Moses “face to face as a man speaks to a friend” (33:11) is indicative of the kind of relationship they had. God took Moses seriously. As a true friend, he understood everything there was to know about Moses—his strengths and weaknesses; his biases and blind spots; his foibles and fears; his quirks and hang-ups; his preferences and passions; the good, the bad, and the ugly. Yet he was always there—teaching, leading, inspiring, and showing Moses his way.

The tent of meeting provided space to carry on the conversation. It was a unique place where a unique conversation was going on, and the whole camp knew it. Witnessing that conversation reminded the whole nation of the depth and breadth of God's love. God was making himself available to Moses right in their midst. As we read Exodus, we too are privileged to witness and learn from this remarkable relationship.

## PRAYER

*Lord, we thank you for your friendship, your patience, your understanding, and most of all your love and acceptance, which we so desperately need. Help us to be receptive to all that you have to say to us so that we can be the people you want us to be.*

# DAY 5

EXODUS 33:12-17

<sup>12</sup> Moses said to the LORD, “See, you say to me, ‘Bring up this people,’ but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, ‘I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.’ <sup>13</sup> Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.” <sup>14</sup> And he said, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” <sup>15</sup> And he said to him, “If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. <sup>16</sup> For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?”

<sup>17</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, “This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.” <sup>18</sup> Moses said, “Please show me your glory.”

The honest and sometimes contentious interactions between God and Moses that we looked at yesterday continue in these verses as Moses develops his friendship with God. He uses his friendship and history with God to secure his presence for their journey to Canaan. He reminds God that these are his covenant people, his chosen nation, rebellious though they are. He reminds God that he, Moses, is known and favored. Moses is a mediator because he is a friend of God and belongs to this covenant community.

- Do you know God as a person or as an idea?
- What has God shared with you, his friend, in his Word that informs your prayers?
- What promises of God give you boldness as you intercede?

Moses’s request to see God’s glory is a result of walking with God—seeing, hearing, submitting for many years. He was rescued as a baby boy in Egypt, taught at his mother’s knee, trained for leadership in Pharaoh’s palace, and humbled in the desert. From a burning bush he heard God’s call to be a deliverer and saw God’s mighty power in the plagues and the exodus. He received God’s covenant, written on tablets of stone. He has now seen holiness and mercy meet after Israel worshiped a golden calf. Who had ever seen such a God? How could Moses think of leading such a fickle and forgetful people unless this God was with them? How would they be any different than the nations around them?

God is using these honest, sometimes contentious, interactions to invite Moses into a deeper and truer relationship. Moses has heard what God has said and seen what he has done. Now he wants God himself! He wants to see his glory, the radiance of his perfect character and the weightiness of his eternal being. He wants to be engulfed in his presence. This is the safety and rest we are seeking!

# PRAYER

*Consider using the words of the psalmists to express your love and thirst for God.*

*“One thing I have asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.”*

*Psalm 27:4*

*“As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.”* Psalm 42:1,2

*“O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live.”* Psalm 63:1-4a