

A Relationship Restored

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- [0 : 0 0] When I was growing up in Sunday school, we used to do a lot of memory verses. Did you do that as a child, memory verses? They were great, weren't they? I think they've fallen out of fashion for some, I don't know why, for some reason, because I think they're really helpful because they bring to mind God's advice just when you need it.
- The other reason memory verses are helpful is they keep you warm when you're saying them. So we're going to forget that we're grown-ups just for a moment, and we're going to say some memory verses.
- Does anyone feel brave enough to share a memory verse that they learnt when they were a child? Not very right, that's fine. How about we do some memory verses together on the screen?
- I'll kick us off and you join in. An easy one to start. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.
- Great. Good. Well done. Let's make it slightly trickier. John 14. Jesus answered, I am the way, the truth, and the life.
- [1 : 0 9] No one comes to the Father but by me, except by me. Great. And there it is there. Good. Let's get a little bit trickier. Oh.
- Galatians 5. Galatians 5.22. Galatians 5.22. Let's see if you can name all the fruit of the Spirit. There's a few of them there. The fruit of the Spirit is? Love, joy, peace, patience.
- Patience. Right. Right. Annette gets a gold star. I don't know about the rest of you. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.
- Good. Excellent. Well done. Your pastor is very proud of you. But there's one more memory verse that I'd like to do with you all. And it's in our passage today, which Kathleen read to us.
- It's there. Would you say it with me? 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.
- [2 : 1 6] Got that? Can you picture that? Let's do it again. The Lord, the Lord, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, maintaining...
- Well done. I'm nervous to do this now. Anyone want to go? All right. Maybe not. We'll get to it later.
- That's all right. good. It's such an important memory verse. I'll put it back on the screen there. It's such an important memory verse that the Holy Spirit repeats it 23 more times in the Old Testament.
- That means there's 23 more times that Israel will need to come back to this idea. It's the fullest expression of what God is like in the Old Testament. It's what sinful people need to know about what God is really like. It stands in opposition to last week at the golden calf.
- Remember the real problem with the golden calf was not idolatry but they made their own version of what they thought God was like in their own minds and today God says now I'm going to speak for myself.

[3 : 37] 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.

And therefore we should commit this passage to memory as well because there will be at least 23 more times in the Christian life where we will let God down, where we'll worry that we've ruined our relationship with him. And that is where we are in the Exodus story. You remember that last week Israel made a mockery of God with the golden calf. What's more, they gave it credit for rescuing them out of Egypt. And last week God said, leave me alone so that my anger may burn hot against them and that I may destroy them and start again with you, Moses. Just clear that up. In other words, last week Israel totally ruined things with God and you can tell that that is the case by how our story starts today. Verse 7. Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away calling it the tent of meeting. You see once upon a time there was a plan to give Israel a tent of meeting. It was called a tabernacle. It had gold and rich stuff. God would actually dwell in their midst.

But now today they've got just a plain old tent. Notice that the tent is outside the camp, some distance away. God and Israel, they're on the outs. You see, there's distance between them.

You see in verse 8, Moses, Moses was allowed in the tent, but the rest of the people, they remained on the outside watching from a distance at their own tents. Verse 9, the pillar of cloud would come down.

The Lord would speak to Moses. He's a special one. But for everyone else, they could only watch on from their own tents. But verse 11 is the standout. It says that the Lord would speak to Moses face to face as one speaks to a friend. That is such a curious statement. It's pretty much unique in the Old Testament that God speaks to Moses face to face as one speaks to a friend. And face to face is the key today. It's a picture of a friendship that's in a good condition. For everyone else, they could only watch on at a distance. And we learnt a lot about face to face this past two years, didn't we?

[6 : 18] Church online, Bible studies on Zoom. It's a halfway house type of meeting because you're always aware of the distance. It's not proper church, not proper relationship until we're face to face together again. Here is a tent, but it's no golden tabernacle. Moses, he can speak to God, but the people can only watch at a distance. A halfway house type tent for a halfway house type relationship. The golden calf really did ruin their relationship with God. And Moses is so worried that in verse 12, he steps up to intercede for the people. Moses said to the Lord, you've been telling me, lead these people, but you've not let me know whom you'll send with me. In other words, don't just send me to the promised land, send them with me.

At the end of verse 13, he says, remember that this nation is your people. In other words, don't just be my God, be their God too. Remember, they are your nation as well. Moses said to him, verse 15, if your presence does not go with us, don't send us up from here. How will anyone know that you're pleased with me and your people unless you go with all of us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth? You see, Moses can't bear the thought that God is not with his people. The word presence in verse 15, it's the same word for face.

See, in other words, let the people enjoy the same face-to-face relationship that I get to enjoy with you. You are the only thing, Lord, that makes us special. Be their God, just as you're my God.

Let them enjoy face-to-face with you, just as I do as well. And the Lord said to Moses, verse 17, I will do the very thing you have asked because I am pleased with you, Moses, and I know you, Moses, by name. And so verse 18, he says, now show me your glory. And God's glory here, again, it's another word for face, same as presence above. Moses wants to see a glimpse of God's face.

Just a smile, please, Lord, so I know that the relationship's okay. Do you know when couples, when people have fights between them, have arguments, one person says sorry, and then the other person gives them a smile just to let them know that the relationship's okay? Well, that is Moses here. Show me your glory. Show me your face, Lord. Just a glimpse, just a smile, so I know that the relationship's okay. Verse 21, the Lord said, there is a place near me where you may stand on a rock where my glory passes by. I'll put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I've passed by. Then I'll remove my hand and you will see my back, but my face must not be seen.

[9 : 34] You see, God's glory, which Moses wanted to see, it's all of his goodness and power and majesty. It's all the weighty, weightiness of God being God. It's the very essence of who he is.

And so therefore, it's too much for mere mortals to gaze upon. And so instead, he puts Moses in the cleft of the rock. And do you know what he saw? Nothing at all, pitch black. Not even a glimpse of God's greatness would enter Moses' eyes. He was only immortal. But what he heard, was extraordinary. Here's our memory verse. 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. He wanted to see God, but he got a word instead. And this memory verse is the fullest expression in the Old Testament of what God is really like. It stands in direct contrast to last week, where they tried to create their own version of him to suit their needs. It says that God is the compassionate and gracious God, which means he blesses people in a way that they don't deserve. You see, for making the golden calf, the people deserve to be judged. That's what justice demands. But God meets them with compassion and grace instead. The Lord, the Lord, he's slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love. Israel, they couldn't even wait 40 days before they've set their love onto a golden calf instead. Verse seven says, he maintains love to thousands and forgives wickedness, rebellion and sin. At every point in the memory verse, God is the opposite or unlike what people expect or deserve. It is good news for people who deserve justice and who've ruined their relationship with him. It's the opposite of what they deserve. And some people might look at the memory verse and see it as a free pass to keep on sinning. And so the end of verse seven says that he hasn't forgotten about justice. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished. He punished the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation. God has not forgotten how to be just. The memory verse is not a free pass to keep on sinning. But for those who mourn their sin, they'll get forgiveness, compassion and love. That is how God's grace plays itself out in the lives of sinful people. They'll discover that his vengeance is small, only four generations compared to his grace and love, thousands of generations. You see, Moses wanted to see God smile. So he knew the relationship was okay. But instead of seeing his face, all he got was a word, a memory verse, a memory verse repeated 23 more times in the Old Testament for desperate sinners have ruined their relationship with God. The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, maintaining his love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

And it's in this word that we see what God is truly like. It's the solution to how a holy God can deal and dwell amongst a stiff-necked, stubborn, sinful people. We're not exactly sure how the forgiveness works just yet. It seems to have a lot to do with his man pleading on their behalf. And that's what Moses does in verse 9. Lord, he says, if I have found favor in your eyes, then let the Lord go with us.

Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our wickedness and our sin and take us as your inheritance. And just so you know that Moses' intercession has worked, the rest of the chapter is a picture of a reversal. It's a picture of a restoration. I put a table on your handout so you can see what I'm talking about. It's a before and after of the golden calf. So before the covenant was written on stone tablets, remember, on top of the mountain. Last week at golden calf, Moses smashed them, didn't he? But now at 34 verse 10, 34 verse 1, there's a new covenant.

There's new tablets that God is making. God promised once that he would drive the nations out before Israel, making them formidable in their enemy sight. But last week, they were a laughingstock, weren't they, amongst the nations. But now, 34 verse 11, obey what I command you today.

[14 : 48] I will drive out before you all those foreign tribes. Before, remember they used to have feasts to remember what God did, how he brought them up out of Egypt, Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

But last week, they gave the credit to the golden calf. But this week, verse 18 to 26, all the feasts are reinstated. You see, in each element of chapter 34, it's a picture of a reversal, or in this case, a relationship restored after they ruined it last week. But the main one comes in verse 29. 29 to 35, it's where Moses has a shiny, glowy face. Verse 29 says, it was radiant because he'd spoken with the Lord. So in other words, God's glory was reflecting off Moses. To see Moses' face is to catch a glimpse of God's glory, you know, bouncing off his, like a terrific sunburn. It was, in a way. And it's a curious idea. It's almost unique in the Old Testament. In fact, it mirrors the statement, the start, where the Lord would speak to Moses face to face as one speaks to a friend. And that is the point. You see, the author has top and tailed a story with two curious scenes of people seeing God face to face. So previously, the people, they could only watch on from a distance, couldn't they? But now in verse 31, when Moses speaks, it's like they're speaking with the Lord themselves. I remember Moses said to God, show me your face, so I know the relationship's okay. And now when the people look at Moses, they catch a glimpse of

God's face as well. So the people know that the relationship's okay. The author has bookended our whole story with two curious scenes about seeing God's face. At first, it was only Moses who had this face-to-face friendship with God. But now the people have it as well as they catch a glimpse of God's face when they look at Moses, all glowy and radiant and shiny. Remember, face-to-face contact is a sign of a friendship that's in good condition. In every element of chapter 34, it's a picture of God's relationship with the people restored, wound back, as it were.

You see, after you have a fight with someone, don't you want to wind the clocks back to how it was at the beginning? You had a falling out with someone so bad you wished things could just go back to normal?

Well, that's what God seems to have done in chapter 34. He keeps reinstating things with Israel the way it was before they did that terrible thing last week with the golden calf. It's a confirmation that the friendship is back to normal. And that's what sinful people need to know when they've totally ruined their relationship with God. Have you ever felt like that?

[18 : 04] That you've ruined your relationship with God? Have you ever felt so convicted of your sin that you're too nervous even to confess? And even when you come to church and say confession with everyone else, you still feel distance between you and God? You see, I doubt you have ever made a golden calf. I doubt that you have given credit for your salvation to an idol. But even if you had, you need to know what Israel learnt, that with the Lord your relationship can be restored.

Not because of anything you have done. The people in this story do nothing at all. It's entirely because of who he is. 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. This is what you need to know when you've damaged your relationship with God, even for the thousandth time.

He is gracious and compassionate. He does not judge us as our sins deserve. He is slow to anger and steadfast. We are fickle and faithless. It's the gospel for people who've ruined their relationship with God, even the thousandth time. Our New Testament reading, which is on the screen, which Joyce read for us, the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only son who came from the father, full of grace and truth. Back then, they could only catch a glimpse of God's face and even then just reflected off Moses.

And then he put the veil on, not his actual face. And so he gave them a word instead. A memory verse, our memory verse. It's only about 30 words long, but it's the fullest expression of what God is like in the New Testament until Jesus arrives and we get a word that became flesh. They had 30 words.

We have a whole person. They had 30 words. We've got a whole New Testament. It's a massive improvement when it comes to revelation of what God is like. Last week, the great sin of the golden calf was making a version of God to suit yourselves. Now we have a word from God in person. So we're not in any doubt as to what God is like. Sinful people who feel a distance with God. There's Jesus dwelling or tabernacling amongst us. The next part of the reading, no one has ever seen God, but the one and only son who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the father has made him known. Remember Moses, he wanted to see God's face, show me a smile so I know the relationship's okay, but there's Jesus face to face on the pages of the New Testament who is himself God and who makes the fathers known. The idea of the story is that way back then they can only catch a glimpse of God. They didn't have a clear picture, which was tough if you've damaged your relationship with him. But for us, we can see God clearly, face to face, when we read about the person of the Lord Jesus. And so if you mourn your sin, you can do better than Moses pleading on your behalf because there's Jesus pleading for our forgiveness as he dies on the cross for our sin. We can do better than Moses begging for a glimpse of

[21 : 54] God because there's Jesus face to face, jumping out of the pages of the New Testament for us to get a real understanding of what he's like. You see, sometimes Old Testament stories are amazing and they're detailed and they're intricate, but Moses and all the rest of them would look at us and say that we are the blessed ones. They wouldn't believe, they couldn't believe that we could stare God in the face so easily as we do when we read about the Lord Jesus on the pages of the New Testament, that God's grace would go so far for stiff-necked people that he would even send himself, his son, to die on the cross for our sins. And so let me pray that we would take full advantage.

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.

Our Father, we are so grateful that this is what you are really like. Father, we're so grateful that we don't have to resort to versions of you. We praise you, Father, that you are gracious. You don't judge us as we deserve.

Father, we praise that your love is steadfast while ours is fickle and fair weather. Father, thank you so much that you would forgive people like us.

And thank you for the Lord Jesus who shows us what you are really like, a word made flesh. Thank you that we don't have to guess who you are, that we can see you clearly when we look at the Lord Jesus.

[23 : 43] Father, help us never get over how amazing it is that you would want to tabernacle amongst people like us. And we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.