

Encountering the Heart of God
Sermon 2: 'Compassionate and Gracious'
Sermon Bible Passages Exodus 33:18 - 34:11a; Luke 15:11-32
(*God has a Name* – chapter 3; *Gentle and Lowly* – chapter 2)

This week we are looking in greater depth at the character of God, as stated by the Lord himself in Exodus 34:6. Moses has asked to see God's glory (33:18), and God says that he will 'cause all of his goodness to pass in front of him.' (33:19)

Before we read the chapter, what do you think is meant by 'the goodness of God'?

Read Exodus 34:1-11a, focussing on v 6-7.

The qualities that we find in Exodus 34:6-7 summarise for us the goodness of God.

The first two of these, which we will be looking at today, are his compassion and his grace.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What does the word 'compassion' mean to you? (It might help to begin by brainstorming some ideas of people who you think are compassionate, or what you might define as compassionate behaviour.)

Here in Exodus 33, the Hebrew word for compassionate is 'Rahum', which is a feeling word – it's about how we are disposed towards others from our guts, the very centre of ourselves – in a way that longs for the best for another.

- What do you think this shows us about God's attitude towards both ourselves, and towards people in general?
- Think of some examples from the life of Jesus in which the Son of God demonstrates the compassion of God. (*Gentle and Lowly* refers to Mark 8:2-3; Matthew 9:2,35,36; Matthew 14:14; Matthew 15:32; Mark 6:34; Luke 7:13; Luke 19:41; John 11:35; Luke 7:34.) So there are lots!
- In what ways have you experienced the compassion of God?
- If God is compassionate what does that imply for his followers?
- How can we show this compassion in our work and home communities?

- What does the word 'gracious' mean to you? (Again, brainstorming might help.)

The Hebrew word for gracious is 'Hanun', which means to show grace and favour – it involves action – helping out when someone is in need.

- Think of some examples from the life and death of Jesus in which the Son of God demonstrates the graciousness of God.
- In what ways have you experienced the graciousness of God?
- If God is gracious, what are the implications for his followers?
- Sometimes it is hard to be gracious. Do you have examples of when you had to work really hard to be gracious? Did you feel God with you in this?



Spend some time looking together at a copy of Rembrandt's Painting 'The Return of the Prodigal Son'.

- Which person in the story do you most identify with and why?

In his book 'The Return of the Prodigal: a Story of Homecoming', Christian writer Henri Nouwen reflects on how at different seasons of his life, he has identified with different characters in the painting for particular reasons.

- How far has that been your experience and why? Has it been helpful?
- I wonder what you have learnt and the difference this has made to you in being compassionate and gracious with others.

God declares to Moses that he is 'compassionate and gracious'. Henri Nouwen says that the father in the picture 'asks no questions, wanting only to welcome his children home'.

- Consider how Rembrandt seeks to show the compassion and grace of God in his depiction of the father. Look for instance at the posture of the Father, his clothes, his hands ...

RESPONSE

- What have you learned today about who God is that is new for you? Or something that you are reminded of that is particularly helpful at the moment?
- Individually, write down some ways in which you would like to follow God more closely this week in being more compassionate and gracious. It might be something that has struck you from the painting, or from the Exodus passage, or something from the life of Jesus.
- I wonder what you learnt of the character of God and how this might change your relationship with Him?

A prayer from Augustine of Hippo (354-430) in our 'St Chad's Daily Prayer booklets' says this...

'Help me to know you, that I may truly love you,
And so to love you that I may fully serve you.'

Reflect together on what it says, first and then say it together.

Pray for each other that through this sermon series, the Holy Spirit will reveal to you the 'deep things of God' and help you to know God better, so you can love him better.

DAILY RESPONSE

Each day this week:

- ♣ Take a few minutes each day to read Exodus 34:6-7 and meditate on it. Maybe take a word each day and pray through what that says about God.
- ♣ Then pray the prayer from Augustine of Hippo above and take some time to sit in silence and just be with God and allow him to encounter you.... and see what He does...