

A Relationship Restored

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Date: 03 July 2022

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[0 : 0 0] Coming up in Sunday school, we used to do a lot of memory verses. I think they've fallen a bit out of fashion these days, but not at our church. They're enormously helpful, aren't they?

Because they bring to mind God's advice when you really need it. The other good thing about memory verses is they keep you warm when you say them. And so I thought we could do a few, carrying on the good tradition of kids' church, we could do a few memory verses ourselves.

I'll take it from here. Okay, so before we do that, hang on. Does anyone feel brave enough to stand up and recite a memory verse they had when they were children?

Warwick, go on. Show us how it's done, Warwick. I worked with you in 1972, in year three. I'm a very quote-unquote Tarii teacher. The grass visits, the failed place, the word of the Lord stands forever.

I died for you, but... Oh, that deserves a clap. Thank you, Warwick. You deserve a block of chocolate for that as well.

[1 : 0 6] Anyone else feel brave enough? No? How about we do them together? Would that be okay? So, you already got a sneak peek. John 3.16. Nice, easy one to start.

I'll kick it off and you can follow. So, for God so... Whoever believed in him... Good. John 3.16.

There it is there. Well done. Let's get a bit trickier. John 14.6. Jesus answered, I am the... It started good, didn't it?

Once we started getting into the truth and the life, it got a bit shaky. Oops. So, yeah. I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. Let's get more tricky.

There's a lot of fruit of the Spirit. It's a big tree. So, let's see how you go. But the fruit of the Spirit is... Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control.

[2 : 2 0] Well done, Cullens. Yeah, yeah. Well done, Cullens. Leading the way. There it is there. Good. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Good. There's one more memory verse I'd like to do. We've already had a leg up because we did it at Kids Church. There it is there. Can we say it together? Again, would that be all right?

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.

Okay, let's see what you learnt at Sunday school. Let's go. The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and believing wickedness, rebellion, and sin.

Excellent. Well done for the really brave ones. Anyone? Anyone? Josh, do you want to have a crack? The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, maintaining love to thousands, forgiving wickedness, and...

[3 : 33] Good on you, Josh. Well done, mate. You basically got it right.

There it is there. The reason we're doing it as a memory verse, and the reason we're thinking about memory verses is, this passage here is so important in the Bible. It's such an important memory verse that the Holy Spirit repeats it 23 more times in the Old Testament, because there'll be 23 more times that Israel will ruin their relationship with God and need to remember what He's like.

This passage here is the fullest expression of what God is like in the Old Testament of the Bible. It stands in direct contrast to last week at the Golden Calf, where Israel made a version of themselves in their own mind according to their own likeness.

Today, God speaks and says, no, no, this is what I'm really like. Gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in love. And therefore, because Israel needed it 23 more times in their Old Testament, we Christians need to memorize it as well, because there'll be 23 more times in the Christian life where you'll let God down and worry that you've ruined your relationship with Him.

And that is where we are in this story today. You remember that Israel last week made a mockery of God with the Golden Calf? What's more, they gave it the credit for rescuing them out of Egypt.

[5 : 07] And last week, God said to them, leave me alone, that my anger may burn hot against you and that I may destroy you and start again with you, Moses. In other words, they've totally ruined things with God.

And you can tell that that is the case by how we pick up the story in verse 7. So everyone get your Bibles to page 90. Page 90, 33 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 have a Tent of Meeting, but it was called the Tabernacle.

It was full of gold and rich stuff. God would dwell among their presence. But now, it's just a plain old tent. It's outside the camp.

It's some distance away. God and Israel, they're on the outs, you see. There's distance between them. Moses, in verse 8, he's allowed in the tents, but the people remained outside at their own tents.

[6 : 16] Verse 9, the pillar of cloud would come down. The Lord would speak to Moses. But verse 10, for everyone else, they could only watch on from their own tents.

Verse 11 is the standout. Have a look at it. It says, The Lord would speak to Moses face-to-face as one speaks to a friend. It is such a curious idea.

It's basically unique in the Old Testament, that idea. But face-to-face with a friend, that's the big idea today. It's a picture of friendship that's in a good condition, face-to-face.

For everyone else, they could only watch on from a distance. And we've learnt a lot about face-to-face contact these past two years, didn't we? Church online, Bible studies, meetings on Zoom.

It's a halfway house-type meeting, isn't it? A sort of a halfway house-type friendship, because you're always aware of the distance. It's not proper church, not proper friendship, until it's face-to-face, in the room, face-to-face, in front of someone.

[7 : 24] Here is a tent, but it's no golden tabernacle. Moses can speak to God, but the people only watch at a distance. A halfway house-type of tent for a halfway house-type of relationship.

They really did ruin things at the golden calf last week. And Moses is so worried that in verse 12, he steps up to intercede.

Look at verse 12. 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 everyone else with me.

The end of verse 13. Remember that this nation is your people. Don't just be my God, be their God too. Remember, they are your people as well.

And Moses said to him, verse 15, If your presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and your people unless you go with all of us?

[8 : 28] 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 would not be with his people.

The word presence in verse 15, it's the same word for face. Face-to-face contact. It means a friendship's in order. In other words, let the people enjoy your presence, your face.

Let them enjoy the same face-to-face friendship that I enjoy with you. And God said to Moses, verse 17, I will do the very thing you have asked because I'm pleased with you, Moses.

And I know you, Moses, by name. And he says in verse 18, God, show me your glory. God's glory here, it's like seeing his face.

God's glory, it's all of his goodness, it's all of his power, all of his majesty. It's all the weighty, weightiness of being God, the very essence of who he really is.

[9 : 31] And so naturally, it's too much for mere mortals to behold. Moses says, just give me a glimpse of your glory. Show me your face, just a smile, please, God, so I know that the relationship is okay.

You know when husbands and wives, when couples have an argument and someone, one says sorry to the other and then the other one gives them a smile just so they know the relationship's okay.

Same thing here with Moses, show me your glory, Lord, show me your smiley face so I know that the relationship's okay, I'm really worried. Verse 21, the Lord said, there is a place near me where you may stand on a rock.

When 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.

You see, God's glory is too much for mere mortals to behold. My glory will not, you cannot see my face and live, he says.

[10 : 37] And so instead, he puts Moses in a cleft in the rock, he covers him with his hand and do you know what Moses saw? Nothing at all. Pitch black. Not a glimpse of God's glory made its way into Moses' sort of retinas because it would kill him.

And instead, what he heard was extraordinary. Verse 6, 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.

this is the fullest expression of what God is like in the whole of the Old Testament. It stands in direct contrast to last week when Israel made their own version of God according to their own likeness in a golden calf.

But our passage today, these verses, this is what he's really like. He says he's compassionate and gracious, which means he doesn't judge people as they deserve.

You see, for making a golden calf, Israel deserved justice, which means they should be destroyed. But God makes them with compassion and grace instead.

[11 : 48] The Lord, the Lord, he's slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, which stands in contrast to Israel who couldn't even wait 40 days before they put their love onto a golden calf.

Verse 7 says, God maintains his love to thousands and forgives wickedness and rebellion and sin. At every point in the memory verse, God is opposite to what people expect or deserve.

It's good news for Israel who've ruined their relationship with him. It's the opposite of what they deserve. And some people look at our memory verse and think that it's a free pass to carry on sinning.

But verse 7 says that God hasn't forgotten about his justice. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished. He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.

He hasn't forgotten how to be just. But for those who mourn their sin and the damage that it does to their relationship with God, they'll get forgiveness and compassion and love.

[13 : 01] See, that's how God's grace plays itself out in the life of a sinner. They'll discover that God's vengeance is meager compared to his love and forgiveness.

It's three to four generations compared to a thousand generations. You see, Moses wanted to see God's smiley face so he knew the relationship was okay. But instead of seeing his face, God gives him a word, a memory verse repeated another 23 times so sinful people would always get to know what their God is really like.

The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

And it's in this word that we discover the solution to how a holy God will dwell with a sinful people. We're not exactly sure how forgiveness works just yet but it has something to do with God's man interceding on their behalf.

And that's what Moses does in verse 9. Lord, he said, if I found favour in your eyes then let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our wickedness and sin and take us as your inheritance.

[14 : 24] And just so you know that Moses' intercession has worked, I put a table on your handout because chapter 34 is a picture of restoration.

At every stage, it's a before and after of what the golden calf or what happened at the golden calf. So, before there was a covenant written on stone tablets, remember the Ten Commandments brought down from the mountain.

Last week, what did he do? He smashed those tablets. But in 34 verse 1, there are new tablets. Verse 10, God says, I'm making my covenant with you.

New covenant, new tablets where before they were smashed. Previously, God promised that he would drive out the nations before Israel, that Israel would be formidable amongst her enemies.

But last week, they became a laughingstock with their drunken party. But today, verse 11, obey what I command you today. I will drive out all those foreign tribes.

[15 : 26] Before, they used to have feasts, didn't they? Feasts to remember what God was like, that he was the one who brought them out of Egypt, Passover, unleavened bread. But last week, who did they give the credit to?

The stupid golden statue. But in verse 18 to 26, the feasts are reinstated. Passover, the feast of unleavened bread. You see, in each element of chapter 34, the relationship is restored.

It's restored after it was ruined last week at Golden Calf. But the main one is in verse 29. Have a look at verse 29. It's an odd thing because Moses seems to have a shiny, glowy, radiant face.

Verse 29 says, it was because he had spoken with the Lord. So in other words, God's glory, his face, is reflecting off Moses. To see Moses' face, it's to catch a glimpse of God in his face.

And it's a curious idea. It's almost unique in the Old Testament. And it mirrors the unique thing we saw at the start where God would speak to Moses face to face as one spoke to a friend.

[16 : 36] And that is the point. You see, the author has top and tailed this whole story with two face-to-face encounters with God. Previously, only Moses could speak with the Lord while the people watched on at a distance.

But now, verse 31, it's like they are speaking with the Lord when they see and speak with Moses. Remember, he asked, he said, Lord, show me your face so I know that the relationship's okay.

And now, when the people look at Moses, they see God's face reflecting off his so they know the relationship's okay. The author has bookended our story with two curious scenes about looking God in the face.

At first, it was only Moses who had that special relationship. But now, the people get a glimpse of God's face as well. Remember, face-to-face contact means a relationship, a friendship, is in good condition.

In each element of chapter 34, it's a picture of a relationship restored. You see, after a huge argument with someone, don't you want to turn back the clock to the way things used to be?

[17 : 45] Have you ever had a falling out with someone so huge that even after you said sorry, things just weren't the same and you wanted them to go back to normal? And that's what God seems to have done in chapter 34.

He keeps reinstating things the way they were before the golden calf to reassure them that the friendship is back to normal.

And that is what sinful people need to know when they've ruined their relationship with God. Have you ever felt like that before? That you've ruined your relationship with God?

Have you ever felt so convicted of your sin that even after you confess in church, you still don't feel like things are normal? Do you feel a distance between you and God?

You see, I doubt that you've ever made a golden calf. I doubt you've ever credited your salvation to an idol but even if you had, you need to know what Israel learnt that day that with the Lord your relationship can be restored.

[18 : 53] Not because of anything you have done. in this story, Israel are complete passengers. It's only because of who the Lord is. The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, maintaining love to thousands, forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

This is what you need to know if you've sinned against God even for the thousandth time that He is gracious and compassionate. that He doesn't judge you as your sins deserve, that He's slow to anger, He's steadfast in His love, not fickle and fair weather the way we are.

It is good news, it is the gospel for people who've ruined things with God, who feel a distance with Him in their friendship.

Our New Testament reading which is on the screen, John chapter 1, 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.

Way back in Moses' time they could only catch a glimpse of God and even then not His actual face and so He gave them a Word instead. But for us we have a Word made flesh.

[20 : 15] We have the person of Jesus. Then, the memory verse, it was only about 30 words long. It was the fullest expression of what God is like in the Old Testament. For us, we have a whole New Testament, a whole Jesus who leaps off the pages so we're not left to make a version of Him according to our own likeness and our own whims and fancies.

In the person of Jesus, you don't have to guess what God is like. There He is, tabernacling or dwelling among us. The next slide, please.

It says, 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. Moses, he wanted to see God's face so he knew the relationship was okay but there's Jesus who is Himself God making Him known.

The idea of the story is that way back then they could only catch glimpses of God so they didn't really have the fullest picture of what He was like which is tricky if you've damaged your relationship to Him but for us we can see Him clearly when we read about Him in the pages of the New Testament and so if you mourn your sin and the way it's damaged your relationship to God you can do better than Moses pleading on your behalf because there's Jesus pleading on your behalf instead.

Father, Father forgive them for they know not what they do. We can do better than Moses who's begging just for a glimpse of God so he knows the relationship's okay because there's Jesus in 3D on the pages of the New Testament so we're not left guessing what He's really like.

[22 : 07] You see sometimes Old Testament stories are amazing but Moses and the rest of them would look at us and say that we are the blessed ones. That you really get to see God face to face in the person of Jesus.

Yeah. God really sent His only Son to atone for your sin so I didn't have to beg and plead on your behalf. Yeah, that's right. They would look at us and say that we are the blessed ones that we're not left guessing what God is really like.

It is good news for people who've damaged their relationship with God who mourn their sin. The Lord, the Lord the compassionate and gracious God slow to anger abounding in love and faithfulness maintaining love to thousands forgiving wickedness rebellion and sin.

That is the gospel for people like us who are fair weather and fickle. And so let's pray that we would commit it to our memories. Amen. Father God, we praise You that You don't treat us as our sins deserve, that You are gracious and compassionate, that You long to meet us face to face as one speaks to a friend.

And so Father, we're so grateful for the Lord Jesus who is such an improvement on everything Moses had. Father, thank You that we're not left in the dark to guess what You are like.

[23 : 40] that Jesus makes You known. Father, thank You that He is the one who intercedes for us, who forgives our sins, who shows us Your face so we know that the relationship is restored.

Father, we thank You that You are slow to anger and quick to love, that You're forgiving for people like us. We ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.