



The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond V24 N43 October 23, 2022

WAY OUT

“When God Is Your Friend”

Exodus 33:1-11

THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

Personal God

I believe God is involved
in and cares about my
daily life.

*“I lift up my eyes to the
mountains – where does my
help come from? My help
comes from the LORD, the
Maker of heaven and earth.”*

Psalm 121:1-2



Who can be
God's friend?

The Central Belief, Personal God, suggests that God is a friend. A couple of passages suggest as much. According to Exodus 33:11, “The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend,” suggesting that the LORD was Moses’ friend. And according to James 2:23, “And the scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness, and he was called God’s friend,’” stating that the LORD was Abraham’s friend—even as Jehoshaphat had said (2Chr 20:7) and the LORD himself had said (Isa 41:8).

A number of proverbs regarding “friends” suggest the implications of friendship with God. Proverbs 17:17 reads: “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity.” One commentator explains: “The friend is represented as always present, in good times and bad; the relative only in adversity. A friend rejoices and weeps with you (Rom. 12:15); a relative functions more as a safety net. But even in adversity the friend’s spiritual ties are better and stronger than blood ties (18:24 and 27:10)” (Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31*, NICOT, 57). As the commentator notes, Proverbs 18:24 echoes the same theme. It reads: “One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” The apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus (aka the book of Sirach or just Sirach) expresses the thought of verse 24 this way: “There is a friend who is a table companion *but* will not stand by you in your day of trouble” (6:10). The same commentator has this to say about Proverbs 18:24: “The comparative closer than a brother (*mē’āl*; see 18:19) uses the blood relative as a basis of comparison for sticking to someone through thick and thin but which the subject has to an even greater degree (see 17:17) . . . A friend more loyal than a brother is needed because even a brother inwardly ‘hates’ a poor relative (19:7)” (Waltke, 97). All of this suggests that the person who has God as their friend is truly blessed.

The *stated* “friends” of God in the Old Testament are only two, Abraham and Moses. Friendship with God seems to connote a level of intimacy enjoyed by

few. However, in the New Testament friendship with God, more specifically Christ, is enjoyed by many. Note Jesus’ words to his disciples in John 15:12-17. “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other.”

Perhaps Jesus’ words apply to his disciples *only*, namely, the Twelve minus Judas, but a few observations suggest he has a broader audience in view. He is about to lay down his life for his “friends,” and of course, he died for more than just those in the upper room. Besides, more than just the eleven will know their “master’s business” in the future. Furthermore, Jesus made known everything he learned from his Father to more than just the disciples. What’s more, his command to “love each other” applies to all believers as John’s three epistles indicate. His most telling comment, however, is this: “You are my friends if you do what I command.” Friendship, intimacy if you will, with Jesus is available to all of his disciples who keep his commands. Another commentator writes: “Jesus now calls his disciples ‘friends’ (15:14-15) to distinguish them from servants, who do not know the deeper thoughts of their masters. What characterizes such friends is that they obey him. In the Old Testament both Abraham (2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8; cf. Jas. 2:23) and Moses (Ex. 33:11) are called friends of God. This title is unusual and speaks of the highest relationship possible between God and a human being. This friendship is not our doing; rather, Jesus chooses us as friends (15:16a), which gives us tremendous security that his affection for us will not disappear” (Gary M. Burge, *The NIV Application Commentary: John*, 419).

Read Exodus 33:1-11

1 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Leave this place, you and the people you brought up out of Egypt, and go up to the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants.' 2 I will send an angel before you and drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. 3 Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people, and I might destroy you on the way."

4 When the people heard these distressing words, they began to mourn, and no one put on any ornaments. 5 For the LORD had said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites, 'You are a stiff-necked people. If I were to go with you even for a moment, I might destroy you. Now take off your ornaments and I will decide what to do with you.'" 6 So the Israelites stripped off their ornaments at Mount Horeb.

7 Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the "tent of meeting." Anyone inquiring of the LORD would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp. 8 And whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose and stood at the entrances to their tents, watching Moses until he entered the tent. 9 As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the LORD spoke with Moses. 10 Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshiped, each at the entrance to their tent. 11 The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Circle "you" in v. 1.
- Underline "I promised on oath" in v. 1.
- Circle "an angel" in v. 2.
- Circle "destroy you" in v. 3.
- Box "But" indicating *contrast* in vv. 3, 11.
- Box "because" indicating *reason* in v. 3.
- Highlight v. 5.
- Bracket "tent of meeting" in v. 7.
- Bracket "pillar of cloud" in v. 9.
- Bracket "face to face" in v. 11.
- Box "as" indicating *comparison* in v. 11.
- Circle "Joshua" in v. 11.

What one word would you use to describe the TONE of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What is one thing you do not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the THEME of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about _____."



DIG DEEPER

Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. “Then the LORD said to Moses” (v. 1; cf. 32:35). *When?*
2. The LORD refers to the Israelites as “the people *you* [Moses] brought up out of Egypt,” not “the people *I* [Yahweh] brought up out of Egypt.” Do you think that’s worth noting? Explain.
3. Even after his people’s great sin (32:30), God pledges to keep his covenant promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ge 12:7; 15:18-19). What *promise* is that, and what does God’s *pledge* indicate to you about the covenant?
4. The LORD said, “I am sending an angel ahead of you” (23:20-23) into Canaan. Here he says, “I will send an angel before you” into Canaan (v. 2). But this angel is different. How so?
5. About verse 3, one commentator says, “The *punishment* of a limited divine presence carries with it an *element of mercy* as well.” How so?
6. Explain why the Israelites “stripped off their ornaments at Mount Horeb” (v. 6).
7. The “tent of meeting” could not be the tabernacle. Why not?
8. Explain *why* the people *do* what they *do* described in verse 8.
9. Explain the *comparison* (“as”) in verse 11.
10. **Discussion:** Moses is portrayed as God’s “friend” in this passage. Talk about how New Testament believers’ relationship to Jesus (cf. Jn 15:13-17) compares to Moses’ relationship to God.

Commentary On The Text

Perhaps it's an overstatement to say that the golden calf debacle (Ex 32) changed everything between the LORD and his people. It didn't change God's intent to keep his promise to Abraham regarding the land (Ge 12:7; 15:18-19; cf. 33:1). Nevertheless, it did leave a scar and did threaten to have serious consequences for Israel. In his introduction to Exodus 33:1-34:35 entitled "The Restoration of Israel," one commentator explains: "Moses had now returned to Mount Sinai, and there God spoke with him again." (Time must be allowed between the end of chapter 32 and the beginning of chapter 33 for the plague announced in 32:35 to run its course.) "The text has several indications that the author now wants to show that Israel's relationship with God had been fundamentally affected by their 'great sin' of worshiping the golden calf. All was not the same. The narrative shows that there was now a growing distance between God and Israel that had not been there before. Each of the following sections of narrative demonstrates specifically the changes that have occurred in God's relationship to Israel" (John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 313).

The NIV as well as various commentators divide 33:1-11 into two parts—verses 1-6 and 7-11 (see Sailhamer, 313-14; Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2, NAC, 689-98; and John I. Durham, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 3, *Exodus*, 434-443). Verses 1-6 record the people's reaction to hearing the news from Moses that the LORD will not be going with them to Canaan as he had previously said (see esp. 23:21 regarding the angel, "my Name" representing God's presence "is in him"). Verses 7-11 describe the "tent of meeting" pitched by Moses "outside the camp some distance away" where "anyone inquiring of the LORD would go." This included Moses.

A few comments on verses 1-6 are in order. *First*, in spite of the people's "great sin" (32:30), the LORD makes it perfectly clear that he still intends to keep his promise to "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (v. 1). The covenant he made with Abraham is unconditional; its fulfillment is guaranteed. *Second*, the "angel" mentioned in verse 2 is not the same "angel" mentioned in 23:21, for the "angel" or "messenger" mentioned in 23:21 is identified as the LORD (see above). The "angel" described in verse 2 is clearly not the LORD, because the LORD says emphatically in verse 3, "I will *not* go with you." Hear what one commentator says: "In the present narrative, the reason for God's sending his angel to go before them has

changed. God now said, 'I will send an angel before you. . . . But I will not go on the way' (vv. 2-3). Whereas previously God had sent his angel to destroy Israel's enemies (23:23), now he would send his angel *lest he himself* would destroy Israel: 'If I were to go with you even for a moment, I might destroy you' (33:5). The angel represents not so much God's *presence* with Israel as this *separation* from them" (Sailhamer, 314). In this case, their punishment is ironically a display of God's mercy. *Third*, the people react as might be expected. Disappointed, afraid, ashamed, rebuked, at "these distressing words" (v. 4), the people mourned, which involved stripping off their jewelry. Perhaps their *immediate* expression of grief (v. 4) becomes a permanent one (v. 6) (Durham, 437-38).

Likewise, a few comments on verses 7-11 are in order. *First*, although the words used to refer to the two are exactly the same, the "tent of meeting" mentioned in verse 7 is clearly not the "tent of meeting," the tabernacle. "In contrast to the elaborate tabernacle and its many symbols of the presence of God, the Israelites would now deal (for a time) with a small, simple 'meeting tent' (or as tradition words it 'tent of meeting') . . . Instead of the community's being organized around the tabernacle (Num 2), the tent of meeting would reside 'outside' the camp. Instead of worshipping at the tabernacle in their midst, the people would worship from afar, from their homes looking toward the tent of meeting. Instead of a cadre of priests led by Aaron manning the tabernacle, the tent of meeting would be manned by one person, Joshua, so that in the absence of priests and sacrifices, there stood only a non-Levitical assistant a caretaker. God's presence would now be both distant and non-continuous (v. 10), a *diminished presence*" (Stuart, 694). *Second*, that said, the "tent of meeting" provided access to the Lord's presence. Anyone could go to the tent to inquire of the LORD. Moses would go there to speak to the LORD "face to face, as one speaks to a friend" (v. 11). These are the most striking words in verses 7-11, if not in the whole text. The LORD spoke to Moses as one speaks to a friend. A devotional reading of Ex 33:1-11 leaves the reader thirsting for that kind of relationship with God. But the point of the passage seems to be, however, while Israel's "great sin" did affect the nation's experience of God's presence, it did not result in God abandoning his covenant promise to give his people the land of Canaan.

Word Studies/Notes

v. 1 **you** “Here and there, Israel is called the people whom Moses brought up from the land of Egypt. It is almost as if Yahweh cannot bear to take any responsibility for a people who have behaved as Israel has” (John I. Durham, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 3, *Exodus*, 436).

v. 1 **I promised** Although the people have “committed a great sin” (32:30), God intends to keep his unconditional covenant with Abraham to give his descendants the land (cf. 3:17; 6:8; 12:25; 13:5, 11; 32:13-14).

v. 2 **an angel** Cf. 23:20-23, where “an angel” is clearly identified as Yahweh himself. “Whereas the name, i.e. the presence of Jehovah Himself, was to have gone before the Israelites in the angel promised to the people as a leader in chap. xxiii. 20, now, though Jehovah would still send an angel before Moses and Israel, He Himself would not go up to Canaan (a land flowing, etc. see at iii. 8) in the midst of Israel, lest He should destroy the people by the way, because they were stiff-necked” (C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, vol. 1, *The Pentateuch*, 2: 233). “The Lord’s presence, earlier assured to his people (see 23:21 and note), is now temporarily withdrawn because of sin” (*The NIV Study Bible*, note on Ex 33:3).

v. 3 **destroy you** “The verse is saying that because of the people’s bent to rebellion, Yahweh would not remain in their midst as he had formerly said he would do. Their lives would be at risk if he did” (*The NET Bible*, 8tn on Ex 33:3). “The punishment of a limited divine presence carries with it an element of mercy as well” (Stuart, 692).

v. 5 **ornaments** “In the ancient Near East, mourning tended to involve appearance, not just attitude, so that what one wore was a part of the appearance aspect of mourning. Nothing fancy could adorn a mourner because fancy dress was associated with cheerfulness and might contradict the desired pattern, which was thoroughgoing mourning behavior designed to appeal to a god (or the true God) for relief of suffering (including in this case relief from the unknown miseries that might be subsumed under ‘and I will decide what to do with you’) Therefore they removed all adornment and made their appearance ‘plain’ as a sign of mourning” (Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2, NAC, 691-92).

v. 7 **tent of meeting** “This ‘Tent’ was not the same as the tabernacle. The ‘Tent’ was a meeting place with God that was ‘outside the camp some distance away’ (33:7). That this was not the tabernacle is clear from the fact that at this point in the narrative the tabernacle was not yet built by Bezalel and his company of skilled workers (36:8-38)” (John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 314). “There is no evidence that this ‘tent of meeting’ played any other role than that of a communication point—it never held the ark or any other sacred furniture, and it never was employed as a site for sacrifices” (Stuart, 695). This Tent was deliberately located outside the normal patterns of traffic and provided a place of access to the Presence of Yahweh for those seeking to know his will, whether by oracle or in some other manner” (Durham, 442).

v. 9 **pillar of cloud** Cf. 13:21-22; 14:19, 24. “When Moses had entered the Tent, the column of cloud both symbolizing and concealing Yahweh’s presence would descend and take up a position at the opening of the Tent. From this cloud, Yahweh would speak to Moses, and presumably (v 7) through Moses to anyone else who might come out to the Tent with a petition” (Durham, 442).

v. 11 **face to face** I.e., “an idiom of intimacy” (Durham, 443). “Moses’ speaking ‘face to face’ with God does not contradict the fact that he was not allowed to see God’s face (v. 20) as ‘face to face’ is a figurative expression suggesting openness and friendship (cf. Num. 12:8; Deut. 34:10; and comments on John 1:18” (John D. Hannah, “Exodus,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 157). “Its sense is more that of the Eng. expression ‘up close and personal.’ The Eng. Idiom ‘person to person’ is relatively similar as well (because it does not imply visual perception), and the idiom ‘heart to heart’ is also analogous (because, likewise, it emphasizes the quality of intimacy of the conversation rather than any visual perception)” (Stuart, 699).

v. 11 **Joshua** “Joshua here or elsewhere in Exodus is Moses’ assistant, and his role in the Tent is probably that of a guard” (Durham, 443)



APPLY THE TEXT

CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

Although sin affects our experience of God's presence, it neither threatens the fulfillment of his promises nor precludes our worship of him.

CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The "Living Questions" are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?

2. What does this passage teach me about myself?

3. What does this passage lead me to do?



FAMILY TALK

My husband is a Star Trek fan. A few years ago, I picked up a board book of opposites featuring Star Trek pictures even though our kids had long outgrown the board book phase. There are classic pictures of our favorite characters showing angry and happy, hot and cold, big and little. We always get a kick out of the tribble page showing one and many (Google it!). Kids should understand the concept of opposites around four years of age. So, why does it take adults so long to grasp such a simple principle? The opposite of obedience is disobedience, and in many cases, there's no grey area. The Israelites in our text today offer a classic tale of opposites for every adult to consider. Going against God is disobedience; following His commands is obedience, and the results are vastly different. It's like turning a page in a child's board book of opposites – honoring God, *not* honoring God. We like to pretend what we're doing is so innocuous, yet when we turn from God, He is deeply, deeply grieved and the result is devastating. Though His love is steadfast, and He is long-suffering, though He holds us in the palm of His hand, God allows us to experience the consequences of our sin, and like any good father, I'd be willing to bet it hurts Him more than it hurts us. Our kids need to hear the Israelites' story as well as our own. They need a front row seat to our mistakes, growth and God's sweet redemption. This week, invite your kids into your journey. Model for them how to humbly walk with God.

What Does The Bible Say?

Read Exodus 33:1-11

1. Why did God say He would not go with His people?
2. How did God show the camp that He was with Moses?
3. How did God speak to Moses?

What Do You Think?

How do you think the people felt watching Moses in God's presence while they stood outside of God's presence?

What Do You Do?

Time to make a fort! This week set up a "tent" where you can do your Bible study and meet with God for prayer. Set a special time and don't let anything interrupt you. Invite your family to join you one day.

CORE COMPETENCY: Personal God

I believe God cares about everything in my life.

MEMORY VERSE: Psalm 18:29

"With your help I can advance against a troop; with my God I can scale a wall."

KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRAL Kids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: kids@wearecentral.org

- _____ I completed my Bible Study
- _____ I memorized this week's verse
- _____ I brought my Bible to church
- _____ I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME

GRADE

PARENT SIGNATURE

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

CENTRAL BELIEFS

Authority of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)
I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Eternity (John 14:1-4)
I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)
I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.

Humanity (John 3:16)
I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Identity in Christ (John 1:12)
I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4)
I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.

Life Purpose (Acts 20:24)
I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.

Personal God (Psalm 121:1-2)
I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Salvation by Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)
I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.



CENTRAL VIRTUES

Love (1 John 4:10-12)
I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Joy (John 15:11)
I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace (Philippians 4:6-7)
I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.

Patience (Proverbs 14:29)
I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness (1 Thessalonians 5:15)
I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others

Faithfulness (Proverbs 3:3-4)
I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Gentleness (Philippians 4:5)
I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Self-Control (Titus 2:11-13)
I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Grace (Colossians 3:13)
I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.

Hope (1 Peter 1:3-5)
I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.

Humility (Philippians 2:3-4)
I choose to esteem others above myself.



CENTRAL PRACTICES

Bible Study (Hebrews 4:12)
I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Biblical Community (Acts 2:44-47)
I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Compassion (Psalm 82:3-4)
I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.

Disciple-Making (2 Timothy 2:2)
I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.

Evangelism (Acts 1:8)
I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)
I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.

Prayer (Psalm 66:16-20)
I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-Mindedness (Matthew 6:33)
I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:4-6)
I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)
I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Tom Bulick (M.A. in Educational Leadership, Eastern Michigan University, Th.M. in Old Testament, and Ph.D. in Bible Exposition, Dallas Theological Seminary). For more than forty years, Tom has served as pastor, faculty member, and administrator. Tom was Vice President for Student Life and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Trinity Western University (Vancouver, B.C.) from 1986 to 1998 and Spiritual Formation Pastor at Central Bible Church (Arlington, TX) from 1998 to 2022. He and his wife Ruth have one son, Zach.

Stephanie Thomas (B.B.A University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James and they have four children: Elijah, Levi, Ella and Simon. Stephanie has attended Central Bible Church for more than 20 years, has been on staff since 2014, and now serves as Children's Minister.

The Scrolls Bible Study is a spiritual growth resource of Central Bible Church, Fort Worth, Texas.

© 2022 Central Bible Church.

Material researched, written and supervised by Dr. Tom Bulick. All Scripture referenced from the New International Version unless otherwise noted. This resource is freely distributed and may be copied without permission.



**CENTRAL
BIBLE CHURCH**

8001 Anderson Boulevard
Fort Worth, Texas 76120
817-274-1315
wearecentral.org