

**Freedom Means... Continuing to Grow**  
**Exodus 33:12-23 (AFBC 8/5/18)**

If you believe there's a God, that this world is not accidental, but rather our lives have purpose and meaning because they're the result of a Divine Creator—if this is your faith, then it follows that you will want to know everything you possibly can... about God.

Moses wanted to know about God. He already knew God well—better, I suppose, than anyone else in his day; but Moses wanted to continue growing in this relationship. He wanted to go deeper — to know God better. Let's look at our text (**Ex 33:12-23**):

**<sup>12</sup> Moses said to the LORD, "You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me.' <sup>13</sup> If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people."**

**<sup>14</sup> The LORD replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."**

**<sup>15</sup> Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. <sup>16</sup> How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?" <sup>17</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name."**

**<sup>18</sup> Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." <sup>19</sup> And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.**

**<sup>20</sup> But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."**

**<sup>21</sup> Then the LORD said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. <sup>22</sup> When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. <sup>23</sup> Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen." (hymn no. 340)**

Moses says to the Lord (**Exodus 33:18**), “**Now show me your glory.**” What follows that request can help us in our own walk with God. What Moses learned, and, also, what he did not learn, is helpful for us as we seek to grow in our understanding of God.

**I. What would we like to know about God? In a word, everything.** We want to know all there is to know. God has given us inquisitive minds. We are naturally curious. Human beings have an insatiable desire to investigate and discover and know.

I spoke to a person who’s a chemist for a large corporation. He spends every workday in a lab doing research. He studies. He analyzes. He takes apart and puts back together.

He told me he may spend weeks at a time doing research without having any clear sense of what he’s looking for. But then he makes a discovery. He finds something new and useful.

The corporation secures a patent for a new process or product and begins to market this new knowledge. This only magnifies the researcher’s desire to know, and he searches even harder for the next new thing.

When it comes to God, I think most of us here want to know more. There is a field of study—it’s called “theology”—that seeks to study and learn more about God.

We have theological seminaries where ministry students study the Bible in depth. Hopefully, in the process, they deepen their understandings of God.

Of course, there’s no guarantee this will happen. People discuss God in a seminary classroom, just as they do in a Sunday School classroom. In both places, theology is being done—more or less.

Theology simply means “God-talk” or “words about God;” but it’s possible to talk about God in either setting without really growing in our understanding of God or His will for our lives or our world.

Theology, by itself, is not a relationship with God any more than Botany is a flower or Astronomy’s the stars. You see the difference. Theology is simply the name we give to our pursuit of God—as we seek to grow in Him and understand Him better.

Moses was on a theological quest. He wanted to know more about God when he said to the Lord, "Show me your glory." Moses had already experienced God's call from the burning bush. He'd walked through the sea on dry ground and received manna from heaven.

But Moses still wanted more. He was a striking example of what Jesus would say later, that "man does not live by bread alone." There's a deeper hunger within us—a yearning of the spirit—to know God.

That's not an accident. God put this desire in us. He created us to know Him and to enjoy fellowship with Him. It's a good sign of spiritual healthiness when we want to grow in this relationship.

Jesus said, "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness." Righteousness simply means to be in a right relationship with God.

To want to grow in this relationship is a "blessed" endeavor, Jesus said; and He promised to satisfy this hunger and to quench our thirst if we truly desire to know God.

But just as our desire to know God is a sign of spiritual health, an absence of this desire is a sign of spiritual sickness. We've all known people who once had a healthy craving for God.

Worship, Bible study, and prayer were important to them, and these received the time they deserved. Thus, their relationship with the Lord was alive and well.

But somehow their journey with God got sidetracked. Maybe they were overcome by a temptation, or their lives were deeply shaken by some tragedy.

Or as often happens today, life was just pulling them in too many directions. The demands on their time were becoming too great. It was easier to say "no" to God than anyone else—so they did.

We've all seen it happen to others. Maybe it's happened to us. Perhaps you feel right now that you're nearly there, close to losing your desire to know God and to grow in your relationship with Him.

If that's you today, please know that you're in danger of forfeiting the most important relationship in your life.

Moses, as we find him here, may have been having a similar struggle. This was right after Moses' first trip to the top of Mt. Sinai. When he came down from the mountain, he found the people feasting and playing before an idol, a golden bull.

This was hard for Moses. He was angry. He felt like a failure. So he was still hurting when he prayed, "Lord, show me your glory."

Maybe some of us need to pray that prayer today. "Show me your glory, Lord. Let me see you again. I want to be closer to you." To be spiritually healthy, we must desire to "keep growing."

**II.** If this is what we want, then we must realize something else. **It does not matter how much we desire to know God, there will be some limitations on our knowledge.** There are things about God that we simply cannot know.

God knows everything there is to know about us. The Bible says he even knows the number of hairs on our head, and the deepest and most personal thoughts in our hearts. God knows us that completely.

But you and I cannot know God like that. If we could know God fully, He wouldn't be God. That person you've been married to for say, five years or maybe fifty years, you still don't know him or her completely; so I think it's safe to say there are things about the Lord that we don't know—that we cannot know.

Did you hear what God said to Moses? **"You cannot see my face, Moses, for no one may see me and live."** Now, don't try to take this too literally or you'll miss the point.

God is Spirit. When he spoke to Moses concerning His face, he wasn't talking about eyes, nose, mouth-- facial features, in other words. God was speaking of His completeness, the fullness of His nature and glory.

This is what Moses couldn't see, for such a vision would surely overwhelm him. He would not be able to comprehend it all.

There's always more to God than we can know. 'His ways and thoughts are higher than ours.' 'The foolishness of God is wiser than men; the weakness of God is stronger than men.' His completeness—the fullness of God—is always beyond our grasp.

This is a terrible stumbling block for some people. Their relationship with God dies the death of a thousand questions.

They can never quite come to faith because there's always some question standing between them and God. Unless they have all the answers, they refuse to believe.

There's another group of folks, however, who are people of faith, but who still cannot endure God's mysteriousness. Their way of dealing with their questions is to form an answer for everything.

They place God in a theological box of their own making, and they're very threatened by, and even hostile toward those, who disagree with them—who don't see it their way.

How much better it is to simply make peace with the Biblical witness that there are those things about God which we cannot know and which must remain for all of us a mystery—at least for now. As the Apostle Paul said: 'Now we know only in part...'

The Lord said, "No, Moses, you cannot see my face." There're limits to our knowledge of God. There are those things about the Almighty that we simply cannot yet know.

**III.** But there is one other truth I want us to see and understand in this Scripture. **While there are those things about God that we cannot know, there is so much we can know.**

There's plenty to know and understand because God has chosen to make Himself known. What God has chosen to reveal about Himself is—listen—it's sufficient to fill our lives with joy and purpose and peace.

Moses asked to see God's glory—to see his face; but, instead, God chose to reveal... His goodness. Verse 19 says, "I will make all my goodness pass before you..."

God placed Moses in “the cleft of the rock”—perhaps a cave or a deep crevice. God shielded Moses with His hand. Then God removed His hand in time for Moses to see his back—not his face; but his back.

Now, again, I don’t know exactly what that means... except that Moses had a very definite vision of the presence and glory and goodness of God.

What Moses witnessed that day, what he learned of God, was sufficient. It was only God’s backside, but it was all Moses needed to know.

The Bible says that God shielded Moses from seeing Him completely because Moses wouldn’t have survived it! God revealed to Moses all that he could handle, all that his finite mind could comprehend, and all that he ultimately needed to know.

Friends, it’s our faith as Christians that God has revealed Himself to us in Jesus Christ, and He’s all we need to know. What we see in Jesus is sufficient for salvation and eternal life.

God made all his goodness pass before us when the Carpenter from Galilee walked across the stage of human history. Jesus said, “He that has seen me has seen the Father.”

And the Apostle Paul bore witness to the truth when he said that God “...has shone into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God... in the face of Jesus Christ.”

Maybe you feel you would like to grow in your relationship with God, that you want to go deeper and understand more. Then look to Christ. See the Heavenly Father revealed in Him.

Listen to His words. Observe his actions. Take everything Jesus does and all He says to heart.

Receive Christ by faith as your Savior and Lord and experience His Spirit at work in your life. Then you’ll know God. You’ll be on a life-long journey with the Lord—hopefully, a closer walk day by day.

Gradually, in God's own good time, the questions that need to be answered will be, and you'll be content to leave the other questions you have trustingly in God's hands.

I like this story. A young girl was sitting at her desk drawing a picture. Her mom asked her what she was doing. "I'm drawing a picture of God," she said confidently.

This surprised mom and she said, "But, honey, nobody has ever seen God. Nobody knows what God looks like."

The little girl, though, just kept at it and said, "After I finish drawing this picture, they will."

Lots of folks, even grown-ups—no; especially grown-ups who've lost their child-like hearts--try to draw their own pictures of God.

They end up making God in their own image in some way, reflecting their own prejudices and misunderstandings.

Just as foolishly, though, others will choose to leave the page blank. They have no picture of God at all.

There's a better way! Look at Jesus. God sent us His Son that we might see in Him the goodness and graciousness of the Father.

He sent us Jesus, the Christ, so that by receiving Him in repentance and faith, trusting in Him as Savior and Lord, we could know God as He is and experience the forgiveness and love and life He wants to give each one of us.

Want to see what God is like? Then look at Jesus Christ.

Want to go deeper with God? Then follow Christ as your personal Savior and Lord. Love Him. Learn from Him. Obey Him.

I promise you, you'll not only know God. You'll have lots of God--more than you'll be able to handle!

But it'll be good. It's well worth everything we put into this relationship—because our Lord just keeps on putting in more!

And the more we grow in Him, the sweeter and more fulfilling the relationship becomes. So, friends, let's keep growing!