

Exodus 33:12-17

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/exod/exod-33/exodus-3312-17/>

Moses approached the LORD (“face to face”) with concerns in the Tent of Meeting. The LORD had said that He would not go with Israel to the Promised Land or remain in their midst as a result of their sin in chapter 32.

The first concern (vv. 12 – 14) was about what the LORD’s intentions were concerning the people of Israel. The second concern (vv. 15 – 17) was about whether the LORD was going to accompany His people as they travel to the Promised Land.

We now get an amazing opportunity to eavesdrop on a conversation between Moses and God. Moses presents his request as an attorney might plead his case. Moses’ first concern involved his ability to lead the people of Israel. In light of the LORD’s statement that He would no longer go with them in their midst ([Exodus 33:3](#)), *Moses said to the Lord “See, You say to me, ‘Bring up this people!’”* ([Exodus 32:34](#)). Moses then added *But You Yourself have not let me know whom You will send with me*. Moses’ expresses that the LORD gave him a command to lead the people but not sufficient guidance as to how to accomplish it.

In particular, Moses argues that *You Yourself have not let me know whom you will send with me*. God had said that He would send a messenger, an “angel” to lead them instead of being in their midst. Perhaps Moses is saying “What does that mean? I know how You operate. You gave me the task, walked step by step with me, now I am left hanging.” To strengthen his case, Moses again quotes the LORD, who had told Moses—*I have known you by name, and you have also found favor in My sight*. Moses reminded the LORD of two things. The first is that the LORD said, *I have known you by name*, which is in effect saying “I have chosen you” and you are my partner in this venture. The LORD chose Moses to lead His people out of Egypt, while God delivered Israel with His mighty hand. Moses had trusted God, and courageously followed God’s commands. The second item was that Moses *found favor* in the LORD’s sight. The word for *favor* can also be translated “grace,” and the phrase “find [or found] favor in Your sight” occurs five times in vv. 12 – 17.

Based on these things, Moses now entreats the LORD with a petition (*I pray You*), *if I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You, so that I may find favor in Your sight*. Moses’ fundamental concern

is to know God's ways that he might know God Himself. Moses understands that this will bring even more favor in God's sight. Moses' was initially reluctant to lead Israel ([Exodus 3:11](#)). But in this case Moses is not trying to opt out, as he did initially. He has grown as a leader. Now he seeks effectiveness for himself as well as for the people. He wants to *know* God's ways.

Moses states that if he could "*know*" the LORD's ways, he would also know God Himself—His character, His nature. In this context, knowing the LORD's ways likely includes knowing how to lead the people. Moses is arguing that if God really favors Moses (as He said in His own words) then the way to show His favor is to *let me know Your ways*. In this context this would include how to lead Israel. After all, Moses argues, God should *consider too, that this nation is Your people*. By showing Moses His ways, Moses argues that God accomplishes two things. One, He demonstrates His favor toward Moses. Second, He favors His *nation* that is His *people*.

Moses' appeal works. It is amazing to see God interact with Moses on a human level. This could foreshadow God coming to earth as a human, to interact with humanity as a human. It is also instructive to consider that Moses' effective petition relies on an appeal to God's own words. This too can be instructive for any believer seeking to appeal to God in prayer. The Bible does say that the prayer of the righteous makes a big difference ([James 5:16](#)). This peek into the interaction between Moses and God is an illustration of this principle.

Verse 14 records the LORD's answer to Moses' petition. He told Moses that His *presence* (lit. "face") *shall go with you, and I will give you rest*. As a result of Moses' intercession, the LORD promised that He would *go with* His people and not abandon them. This would have been of great comfort to Moses, and given him *rest*. Clearly God knew more about Moses' concern than Moses, and answers not only the petition, but the underlying cause of Moses' anxiety. Similarly, this passage from Romans tells us:

"In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."

([Romans 8:26-27](#))

In this instance, God answered the immediate petition of Moses as well as an unspoken petition for *rest*.

But Moses did not yet *rest*. He continued his petition before the LORD by saying *if Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here*. Moses wants to know the *ways* of God by walking alongside, in fellowship, with God. Moses' reasoning was that *how then can it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people?* In other words, "If I have really found favor in your sight, as you said, then shouldn't you show that by coming with us?"

Moses now includes the people in his intercession, and hearkens back to the argument he previously used successfully that God's reputation with Egypt and the other nations will be directly affected by what they see of God's interaction with Israel ([Exodus 32:12](#)). Moses asks: *Is it not by Your going with us, so that we, I and Your people, may be distinguished from all the other people who are upon the face of the earth?* Moses' argument was that the LORD's presence with His people would be a visible confirmation to the world that the Israelites were His special people and the recipients of His *favor*. This would confirm to these pagan nations that God is the supreme God over all, and was a necessary part of God's assigned mission that Israel should be a priestly nation, showing the other nations a better way to live ([Exodus 19:6](#)).

In response to this pleading, *the Lord said to Moses, "I will also do this thing of which you have spoken*. The LORD agreed to provide His presence with the Israelites as they go to the Promised Land. The reasons He gave were that Moses had *found favor in His sight* and He "knew" Moses *by name*, which suggests a close relationship.

This is quite amazing, that God grants favor to an entire nation because of His favor on one man. It underscores the basic notion Jesus stated that His disciples are to be salt and light in the world ([Matthew 5:13-16](#)). Only a small amount of salt is necessary to bring flavor to or preserve a slab of meat. A small flame can light a room. This underscores the immense impact any one person can have through their faithfulness.

Biblical Text:

¹² Then Moses said to the Lord, "See, You say to me, 'Bring up this people!' But You Yourself have not let me know whom You will send with me. Moreover, You have said, 'I have known you by name, and you have also found favor in My sight.' ¹³Now therefore, I pray You, if I have

found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You, so that I may find favor in Your sight. Consider too, that this nation is Your people.”¹⁴ And He said, “My presence shall go *with you*, and I will give you rest.”¹⁵ Then he said to Him, “If Your presence does not go *with us*, do not lead us up from here.”¹⁶ For how then can it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people? Is it not by Your going with us, so that we, I and Your people, may be distinguished from all the *other* people who are upon the face of the earth?”¹⁷ The Lord said to Moses, “I will also do this thing of which you have spoken; for you have found favor in My sight and I have known you by name.”