
GOD'S ABSENCE OUR TERROR

EXODUS 33

**GOD'S ABSENCE MAKES US RESTLESS,
BUT GOD'S PRESENCE MAKES US REST.**



LIVING THE BIBLE

Have you ever feared God's withdrawing his presence from you? It's one of the great terrors of the Christian life, isn't it? God's presence is so precious, we can get terrified that he will leave us. I had a time like that in my own life.

From 2000 to 2003, I was pastoring a congregation without a church building. We met in the local Town Hall every Sunday and enjoyed some of the most wonderful worship services I've ever been part of. Despite the unusual and rather dilapidated surroundings, God's presence was evidently and palpably with us. Throughout those years, we were saving up for our own church building. God moved the hearts of his people to give generously and within three years the church was built and it was ready for opening.

The last Sunday worship in the Town Hall was a nervous occasion. We had been so blessed by God there, that many of us were reluctant to move into our beautiful new church. The big question on everyone's minds and lips was "Will God come with us?" I therefore preached on Exodus 33 where Moses pled for God's presence to go forward with God's people.

LEARNING

GOD'S PRESENCE CAN BE REDUCED (1-6)

In the previous chapter, God had punished Israel for worshipping a golden calf. He was so angry with the people, in Exodus 33, he announced to Moses that he would send an angel before them into the Promised Land but, because of their sins, he himself would not go with them in the pillar of cloud and of fire. He would be with them indirectly through his angel, but not in such a special, direct, and visible way.

GOD'S PRESENCE MAY BE REDUCED
BUT IT IS NEVER REMOVED

So, did Moses just settle for that reduced presence of God? Not at all, he could never settle for that.

GOD'S PRESENCE CAN BE PLED FOR (7-14)

We might have given up at that point, but not Moses. God's mediator went into God's meeting place, a place he knew well. There, God would come down in a cloud and **speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend** (11).

That's when God's mediator went to work, pleading with the Lord to reverse his pronouncement. He boldly presented his case for God's presence with a number of arguments: You and I are friends, you've shown me great grace in the past, this nation is your people, and without you no other nation will know we are your special people. (12-13, 16).

GOD'S MEDIATOR IS FACE TO FACE WITH GOD
AND FRIEND TO FRIEND WITH GOD

So, how did God respond?

GOD'S PRESENCE CAN BE RESTORED (15-17)

In response, God promised a restoration of his presence. **"My presence will go with you and I will give you rest"** (14). But Moses wanted a double promise and continued to plead: **"If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here"** (15). He was basically saying, "I'm not moving without you." He'd rather stay in the wilderness with God, than enter the promised land without God. That's how precious God's presence was to Moses.

God gave Moses the extra security he craved by answering, **"This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name"** (17).

GOD'S ABSENCE MAKES US RESTLESS
BUT GOD'S PRESENCE GIVES US REST

LOVING

We can identify with Moses's craving for God's presence and dreading the loss of it, can't we? I certainly did back in 2003 when I preached on this passage to my nervous congregation. If we'd had to choose, we would have stayed in the ugly Town Hall with God rather than gone to a beautiful new church without him. But thankfully we didn't have to choose because God graciously fulfilled his promise again in a wonderful way, **"My presence will go with you and I will give you rest."** And we weren't depending on Moses to be our mediator, but Jesus Christ, who speaks to his Father face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. Through him God is with us and gives us rest.

LIVING

Plead for God's presence in your life through Jesus, and be prepared to give up anything to have it and not lose it.
