

Sunday, July 19, 2026

Character of God Part 1

Exodus 32:1-14; 34:4-9

1. Opening Question

Write this question where everyone can see it:

When you think about what God is like, what words immediately come to mind?

Let students call out answers and write them down without correcting or evaluating them.

Then ask:

- Where do our ideas about God come from?
- Can our experiences with parents, teachers, churches or authority figures affect how we imagine God?
- What is the danger of creating a picture of God based only on our feelings or experiences?

“here are many things people say about God. Today, we are going to look at one of the most important places in Scripture because this is where God describes himself.

2. Set the Scene

Read Exodus 32:1–6

Before reading, explain:

God had rescued Israel from slavery, brought them to Mount Sinai and invited them into a covenant relationship. Israel agreed to follow him. Moses then went up the mountain to receive the covenant instructions.

While Moses was receiving the instructions, the Israelites built the golden calf.

Ask:

1. What had God already done for Israel?
2. Why do you think they turned to an idol so quickly?
3. What does their decision reveal about their trust in God?

They were breaking the first two commandments while Moses was still receiving them.

They had promised to be faithful to God, but they betrayed him almost immediately.

Read Exodus 34:4–9

Tell the students to listen especially for the words God uses to describe himself.

After reading, ask them to name the descriptions they heard:

- Compassionate
- Gracious
- Slow to anger
- Abounding in loyal love
- Faithful

What makes this passage so powerful is when God says it. He does not reveal these words after Israel has behaved perfectly. He reveals them after Israel has betrayed him.

3. Watch the Video

4. Discussion Guide

You probably will not need every question. The starred questions are the ones I would prioritize.

A. Observe What the Passage Says

1. What stood out to you from the video?

Allow broad answers at first.

Possible follow-ups:

- Was anything new to you?
- Was anything confusing?
- Was there something you disagreed with or wanted explained further?

★ 2. Which description of God is most comforting to you? Which is the most difficult to understand?

Do not rush past this question. Students may have very different experiences with words like compassion, patience and faithfulness.

What makes that particular description easy—or difficult—for you to believe?

3. Why do you think God begins by repeating his name: “Yahweh, Yahweh”?

Help them see that this is personal. God is not merely giving Moses a list of abstract qualities. He is revealing his identity.

This is who I am. This is how I consistently act.

B. Understand the Context

★ 4. Why does it matter that God gives this description after the golden calf?

Possible answers:

- Israel had betrayed God.
- They deserved consequences.
- God's mercy was not based on their perfect behavior.
- God remained faithful even when they were unfaithful.

Push deeper:

“What would this description mean if God had only said it after Israel had done everything right?”

The context shows that compassion, grace and loyal love are not rewards God gives to people who earn them. They are expressions of his character.

5. What did Israel want when they made the golden calf?

They wanted a god they could see, control and understand.

Ask:

- Do people still try to remake God into the kind of God they prefer?
- What are some versions of God that people create today?

Possible examples:

- A God who never tells us no
- A God who exists only to make us successful
- A God who hates everyone we dislike
- A God who does not care how we live
- A God who is always disappointed and impossible to please

Then ask:

How is allowing God to describe himself different from creating a God who agrees with us?

C. Wrestle With Mercy and Justice

★ 6. Is God merciful or is God just?

The answer is not one or the other. He is both.

Ask:

- What would happen if God were merciful but never confronted evil?
- What would happen if God were just but never showed mercy?
- How would victims feel if God simply ignored everything people had done to hurt them?
- Where would any of us be if God never forgave guilty people?

Main point:

God's justice means evil matters. God's mercy means evil does not have to have the final word.

★ 7. Why does the passage say God is “slow to anger” rather than saying God is “never angry”?

Help students distinguish between uncontrolled human anger and God's righteous response to destructive evil.

Ask:

- Can anger ever come from love?
- What kinds of things should make a loving person angry?
- Would God really be good if cruelty, abuse, racism, exploitation and violence never mattered to him?

Make clear:

God is not quick-tempered, unpredictable or looking for a reason to explode. He is patient. But because he loves people, he responds to the things that destroy them.

The literary design places “slow to anger” between God's compassion and grace on one side and his loyal love and faithfulness on the other. His anger is surrounded by—and rooted in—his loving character.

8. Why doesn't forgiveness mean that people can simply do whatever they want?

Possible follow-ups:

- What is the difference between forgiveness and pretending nothing happened?
- Can someone be forgiven and still face consequences?
- Why are consequences sometimes necessary for healing and restoration?

A useful statement:

Grace is not God saying sin does not matter. Grace is God refusing to abandon sinners while he deals with what sin has done.

D. Talk About Generational Patterns

★ **9. What do you think the passage means when it talks about sin affecting the “third and fourth generation”?**

Let them wrestle before explaining.

A helpful explanation:

This does not mean God arbitrarily punishes innocent children for something their parents did. It recognizes that sinful choices create patterns and consequences that can continue through families and communities when later generations repeat the same rebellion. The much larger contrast—judgment to the third and fourth generation but loyal love to thousands—emphasizes that God’s mercy is far greater than his judgment.

Ask:

- What are some unhealthy patterns that can be passed from one generation to another?
- Can patterns also spread through teams, schools or friend groups?
- How can someone decide that a destructive pattern stops with them?

Students do not need to share private family situations. They can speak hypothetically.

Possible examples:

- Anger and violence
- Addiction
- Dishonesty
- Racism or prejudice
- Refusing to apologize
- Gossip
- Treating people as disposable
- Walking away whenever relationships become difficult

Then ask:

What would it look like for God's compassion, patience and faithfulness to begin a new pattern through you?

E. Bring It Home

★ **10. Which of the five descriptions of God do you most need to trust right now?**

Go around the room, but allow students to pass.

- Compassionate
- Gracious
- Slow to anger
- Loyal in love
- Faithful

Follow up:

“How might believing that about God change the way you respond to what you are facing?”

11. How should God's character shape the way we treat someone who disappoints or hurts us?

Clarify that imitating God does not mean tolerating abuse or refusing healthy boundaries.

Ask:

- What would compassion look like?
- What would patience look like?
- What would justice or truthfulness look like?
- How can we forgive without pretending that wrong choices are acceptable?

12. Where do you see these qualities most clearly in Jesus?

Possible directions:

- Jesus was moved with compassion toward hurting people.
- He welcomed people who had not earned his favor.
- He was patient with failing disciples.
- He confronted hypocrisy and injustice.
- He remained faithful even when others abandoned him.
- At the cross, God's justice and mercy meet rather than canceling one another.

5. Closing Activity — 5 minutes

Have students complete this sentence:

Because God is _____, I can _____.

Examples:

- Because God is compassionate, I can bring him my pain.
- Because God is gracious, I do not have to pretend I am perfect.
- Because God is slow to anger, I can confess my sin instead of hiding.
- Because God is loyal in love, I know he will not abandon me.
- Because God is faithful, I can trust him even when I do not understand.
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