

Exodus Chapter 33 v 1 - 17

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[0 : 00] Good evening. Let us pray together. Let us commit our time to God.

Father in heaven, we come before you this evening as those who, by your grace, have been brought into your love. Thank you that we can come to a God who welcomes and receives us. God who, knowing us completely and entirely, yet also is a God of great grace, who has made forgiveness for our sins not only a possibility, but has made them a certainty because your Son, Jesus Christ our Saviour, has taken them, every single one, and nailed them to the cross. We thank you that there they remain. There they have been dealt with. There they are completely pardoned and atoned for. We thank you again, our Father, that as we come, we come now as those who are accepted in Christ, loved in Christ.

Thank you, yes, we come as sons and daughters of your own. Children born by your Spirit, created by your great power, but brought into that wonderful experience of your life and love through your Holy Spirit whom you've given us, who has been poured out into our hearts and lives so that we have become new creatures, so that we have become born again, so that we have become, yes, Lord, children born of God.

[1 : 43] O grant us your help this evening. Help us, Lord, we pray, to worship and adore you. Help us, Lord, to draw near and know you'll draw near to us. Meet with us and speak with us and help us and encourage us.

We thank you again, O Lord, that it is your good desire to bless us. That's why you call us to seek your face. That's why you put us in churches, Lord, that you might do us good.

We pray, O Lord, that you would do us good. Do us good not only that we might rejoice and worship and delight in you, but do us good that we might be do-gooders, that in our lives we may take this wonderful gospel, this wonderful good news, this wonderful truth to the schools, to the colleges, to the factories, to the streets, to the shops, to the offices that we work in, that, Lord, in our lives, the goodness of God may be revealed.

And that, Lord, others may seek you and come to know that goodness for themselves. So, Lord, be with us now. Receive our thanks now. Send your blessing now.

O Holy Spirit, descend upon us, we ask. For we ask it all in and through. The name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Amen. Amen. Amen. And this time, chapter 33.

[3 : 11] Fortnight or so ago, we're considering, and the week before that, of course, considering this awful event, the making of a calf, worshiping of it, while Moses was up the mountain in fellowship with God, and God revealing to him his wonderful commandments and writing them on the stone tablets.

People, we're told, ran amok and began to fall into terrible sin. And Moses interceded for them. And a plague followed.

And so, chapter 33, it continues in that same situation. They're at Sinai. They're at the mountain and receiving God's word and his truth. And we pick it up from verse 1.

We'll read from verse 1 through to verse 17. Verse 17. 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.

I will send an angel before you and drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey.

[4 : 35] But I will not go with you because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way. When the people heard these distressing words, they began to mourn and no one put on any ornaments.

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.

So the Israelites stripped off their ornaments at Mount Horeb. 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. And whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose and stood at the entrance to their tents, watching Moses until he entered the tent.

As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance while the Lord spoke with Moses. Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshipped, each at the entrance to their tent.

[5 : 49] 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 assistant Joshua, son of Nun, did not leave the tent.

Moses said to the people, sorry, Moses said to the Lord, you've 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 found favor with me. 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. The Lord replied, my presence will go with you and I will give you rest. Then Moses said to him, if your presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here.

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?

[6 : 57] The Lord said to Moses, I will do the very thing you've asked because I am pleased with you and I know you by name. Let's turn back then to Exodus and chapter 33 and we're going to be considering these events in the life of God's people and Moses particularly.

Now, a fortnight ago, if you can remember that far back, I likened Moses to the first superhero, as it were, of the Old Testament and how we looked at some of the qualities that were displayed in chapter 32 as he went down from the presence of God and faced the people with their idolatrous sin.

And of course, if you watch superhero films or you, comics or whatever, they all, every superhero has their own superpower. Some have more, Superman has several, but most of them just have one special power that they pertain.

And I've got one of those noses again where I feel like I'm going to sneeze, but I'm not going to sneeze. So I'll be just there for a moment. What's Moses' superpower? What is his gift? What is it that he is so very good at?

Well, it seems to me that particularly in chapters 32 that we've looked at and we're going to look again in 33, that one of the great talents of Moses, the things that marked him out as a man of God and a servant of God was his prayer life or rather his intercessory, prayer, his praying for God's people.

[8 : 35] Turn back to chapter 32, verse 11. But Moses sought the favor of the Lord his God. Lord, he said. Then later on, chapter 32, verse 31.

So Moses went back to the Lord and said. There's a sense of prayerfulness and we looked at very briefly the prayer life of Jesus this morning, didn't we? And how he too was someone who sought the Lord, his God, his heavenly Father in prayer.

And then again, now in chapter 33, we find him once more in prayer. In verse 12, Moses said to the Lord.

And then verse 15, then Moses said to him, that's the Lord. And we know wonderfully as well that his prayer was answered again because, verse 14, the Lord replied, my presence will go with you. Verse 17, the Lord said to Moses, I'll do the very thing you have asked. If we're honest, and again, we thought about it this morning and it's wonderful how the Lord brings things together, which I never plan.

[9 : 43] If anything looks like it's organized, it's not me, I can assure you of that. It's always the Lord's goodness. But again, we come to the subject of prayer. And if we're honest again, we say that prayer is a challenge for us.

Prayer is difficult. Prayer is hard. Prayer is not something that we, any of us I'm sure, can say we have the superpower of, we have the gift of. We find it hard, particularly, to motivate ourselves to prayer.

We can find a million and one things to do apart from praying. And if we do happen to get down to pray, then we find it very hard to keep on praying.

To persevere in prayer. And particularly to pray through a situation or a circumstance if we don't get the answer quickly. So prayer is hard, it's difficult.

That's why I chose that hymn, of course, based upon the words of the disciples, wasn't there?

When they went to the Lord Jesus, Lord, teach us how to pray. And of course, the Lord Jesus gave us the Lord's Prayer.

[10:45] There's more to it than that, isn't there? I think that we can learn a lot from Moses and I hope that we'll do that a little bit this evening and not just be challenged by Moses and say, what a great man of prayer he was, what a useless man of prayer I am, but rather see how the Lord can motivate and does motivate us and move us to pray and especially how we should pray.

So let's look at this episode. Let's ask a few questions about Moses' prayer life. See what we may learn that will help us in our own prayer life. Of course, we recognize at the outset that prayer is important, don't we?

We're not talking about an abstract matter. We're not talking about something which is just sort of way down the line, as it were, of the Christian life. This is, if not the most important, amongst the most important things for us as believers.

That's why we read, sorry, sang that hymn, eight verses. Isn't it great? Do you realize that when a lot of these hymns were written, they had some like 20, 30 verses, some of them.

I don't know whether they sang them all at the same time. I'm not sure, but eight verses. But what does he say there in verse six? Prayer is the Christian's vital breath. The Christian's native air is one sense.

[12:00] He's reminding us that it's something daily, it's something constant, it's something ongoing. Prayer is so vital and important. Our spiritual life, our spiritual health, our ability to stand against temptation, our holiness, our godliness, our witness, all these things are dependent upon prayer.

I'm sure you've seen, used to have on the church notice boards, those sort of posters, didn't they? Seven days without prayer makes one week.

W-E-A-K. Seven days without prayer. Now, I don't need to labor the point, I don't need to hammer it home to you about the importance of prayer. You all know how very important prayer is.

You all know for yourselves and recognize for yourselves how vital it is that we are people of prayer. But like myself, I'm sure, struggle with it. So let's ask a few questions.

Let's ask questions, first of all, here about Moses' prayer. What prompted Moses to pray? Because that's the thing. What motivated him to pray? What moved him to pray? Prayer doesn't occur in a vacuum, if I can put it that way.

[13:11] It's not just talking into space. It's not just glibly speaking mumbo-jumbo or babbling things like, sadly, other religions. No, prayer, like all the aspects of the Christian life, is a response to God.

It's a response to what God has done or what God is doing. So the Apostle Paul argues in 1 John, chapter 4, we love because he first loved us.

Everything in our lives, the initiative is with God and everything that we do is a response and a reaction to that love, whether it is loving, whether it is praying and so on.

God's the one who has begun this work in us, isn't he? The spiritual life that we have within us is a work that God has given us. The faith we have is a faith that God has given us.

We live because he lives. There's nothing that naturally originates from our sinful hearts. In fact, when you listen to Jesus in Matthew 15, he tells us that from the heart comes malice and murder and sinful thoughts, immorality and so on and so forth.

[14:20] Nothing good comes from our human sinful heart. That's the place of weakness. That's the place of rebellion. Only from the work of God does prayer come.

So what is it that moved Moses to pray here in this situation? Well, a word from God, isn't it? God speaks to him and to the people. Verse 1, leave this place, you and the people, you brought out of Egypt and go to the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

God speaks. The next start, the next part of the, or the next stage of the journey from slavery to the promised land is about to take place. They've been at Mount Sinai, they've been there for some time, now they're to go on.

But also God gives him a promise as well. God's word speaks to him but he promises him. Verse 2, I will send an angel before you to drive out the Canaanites, Ammonites, Hittites, Teresites, Hivites and Gemesites.

Isn't that wonderful? God says, you're going to go to the land and I'm going to rid it of your enemies, I'm going to rid it of all the people's problems. And he says, the land's a lovely land as well.

[15:32] I'm sending you somewhere nice. Verse 3, Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey. So, it's God's word that prompts Moses to pray. And, well, take it on face value, it seems a wonderful word from God, a wonderful promise and assurance of having their enemies defeated, of an angel going before them, of the land that God had promised and it's a lovely land as well.

Well, the natural response, surely, that Moses would pray in response to that would be, thank you Lord, that's great, that's wonderful. But, of course, it's not, is it?

That's not the response that Moses gives. He's not moved to praise God or thank him for those promises, rather he goes to God in prayer to ask for something that God says he will not give him. He's not satisfied with what God has said. He's moved to pray earnestly for the one thing that God will not give. He says this, but, verse 3, I will not go with you.

That response of Moses strikes me. That response of Moses really makes me stop in my tracks.

[16:51] He's praying out of a discontentedness with God. He's praying out of a discontentedness with God.

All the promises God's given are not enough, he wants more. I believe that God says this in verse 3 and says it to Moses and says it to the people intentionally provoking Moses to pray.

Again, I think he's putting Moses on the spot. He's testing Moses' faith. He's prodding him to get him praying for the very thing that ultimately God will give him, but begins by saying he won't.

If you go back to 32 when we have the situation where Moses is sent down from the mountain, God says to Moses in verse 10, now leave me alone so my anger may burn against them that I may destroy them.

And we find of course that Moses is stirred up to intercede for them and to pray for them. And what do we find? The Lord relented. Now we've got to be very careful here.

[18:05] Whenever we come to circumstances like this we have a similar situation in the life of Jonah. And some people then say, oh well here's a fickle God. Here's a God who can be easily swayed here and there.

Here's a God who keeps changing his mind and prevaricating. And one minute he says he's going to do something and he doesn't do it. What sort of a God is that?

He's going to do it. So we have to understand it in a different way. God says things to motivate, to stir up his people to pray. He's not using reverse psychology.

Remember, you know what I mean by reverse psychology. It's the sort of thing that we use with our children. And we say to them, you know, we want them to go and play in the garden but they're stuck in front of the Xbox, you know, playing on that and doing that.

And you sort of say to them, look, stay out of the garden. Stay out of the garden. It's a dangerous place. You don't want to go in there and you're better to stay where you are.

[19:09] There's something within the natural rebellious heart of the child and actually we don't lose it when we get older because that's exactly how much advertising works as well to get us to buy things we don't want.

The child's rebellious nature then kicks off. You told me I'm not to go in the garden. I want to go in the garden because I want to do something that you don't want me to do. And so they turn off their game and off they go.

They feel like they're putting one over on you. But in fact they're doing what you really wanted in the first place. Now God isn't using reverse psychology but he knows our hearts, he knows our minds, he knows how to move and motivate us to pray and to seek his face.

He doesn't play tricks on us but he sows in our minds those seeds which will stimulate us to pray. And that's exactly what he did here.

He puts into Moses' mind I'll not go with you because your people are stiff neck and wicked and evil and I'll destroy them on the way. God often motivates us to pray by withholding those things which

he desires to give us.

[20 : 25] I want to unpack that a little bit and explain it. God motivates us to pray by allowing us to experience what it is to go without. And why does he do that?

He does that because he wants us to learn to trust him. He wants us to learn the vital lesson of relying solely completely upon God. You see the wonderful thing is with our God is that all the blessings we get come freely from his grace.

We don't earn them, we don't deserve them. In fact most often we are ungrateful for them and forgetful of them. He gives us blessings day by day which you don't even ask for do we?

Do you go to bed at night saying please Lord let me get up in the morning and be well enough to go to work? Please Lord give me food on the table. We just take a lot of things and the blessings of God for granted.

Now if that was the case with everything then we would become as we often do become rather content and rather faithless and rather ungrateful.

[21 : 41] God but he withholds things from us that we should seek him. Remember when Jesus taught on prayer in Matthew chapter 7 I'll just turn to it for a moment and he says this ask and it will be given to you seek and you will find knock and the door will be opened to you.

Now those are all pictures of prayer. It's all about our relationship with God. For everyone who asks receives the one who seeks finds the one who knocks the door will be opened.

Which of you if your son asks for a bread will give him a stone? If he asks for a fish will give him a snake? If you then though you are evil know how to give good gifts to your children how much more will your father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?

Surely the reason that you and I do not pray as much as we do and do not pray as earnestly and as perseveringly and as determinedly and faithfully as we should is because we are actually quite content.

We're satisfied with the status quo. We're satisfied if I can put it this way with the blessings of God that we have but we aren't hungry and thirsty for the more that he wants to give us.

[23 : 06] Now I'm not preaching some prosperity about finances not preaching some prosperity about healing I'm talking about the spiritual riches and goodness of God that he longs to pour out into the laps of his people but we are quite happy with what we have.

Thank you very much. And so we do not ask we do not seek and we do not knock. James in his epistle scolds the believers and he says to them you don't have because you don't ask God.

It's our satisfaction with what God has given that keeps us from calling earnestly for more. And I believe that's why God does what he does with Moses.

That's what motivates Moses. He says yes these promises you've given and the blessings you've given of the angel and the land and the promise and the honey and the milk they're great but they're not enough.

I'm not going to settle for anything less than the very presence of the Lord. Are you settled dear friends?

[24 : 26] Are you quite content with the status quo of people not being saved? of churches closing around the land?

Are you settled with your own spiritual walk with the Lord? Have you got to that place where you've plateaued? I've grown as a Christian over the years and now I've just reached this lovely plateau. I feel like my walk with the Lord is fine and I don't need to grow anymore and I don't need to be stretched anymore and I don't need to be have you got there? Have you bottomed out in one sense?

Dear friends that is a seriously seriously bad place to be. Christian life is always the ascent. It is always upward. It is always forward.

It is always hungering and thirsting for more. How can I say that? Because you just read the Psalms. Just read the prayers of David.

[25 : 28] Like a deer panting for the water Lord. My soul longs after you. Read the very attitude of Paul. Remember Paul as he writes to believers in Philippi and he says I haven't reached it yet.

All the blessings, all the good things that Christ has done for me. I haven't reached it yet. This is what he says. All of us then who are mature should take this same view.

I press on, forgetting what is behind, straining towards it as head. I press on towards the goal. Are these people who are mediocre Christians?

Was it because they were living sort of mediocre, low-type Christian lives, below our great plateau position? Or was it because they were such godly and passionate men hungering for God that they still wanted more and like Moses they weren't satisfied even with the good things that God has given?

That doesn't mean to say that they were ungrateful for them but they knew that the Lord had more. Don't we need a holy hunger?

[26 : 46] Don't we need a sense from God of him saying I'm not going to go with you? I'm not going to bless you.

I'm not going to save souls in your midst. Until we cry, until we call, until we long, until we seek, until actually our hearts are engaged in our prayers.

Moses is motivated and moved to pray by the word of God and by the withholding of the blessings of God.

Then just think for a moment, and you may think this is not important but it is, I believe, very important. We think about the place where Moses prayed. Look at verse seven and following. We're told that before the tabernacle was built, this wonderful precursor to the temple, remember we've been looking at the structure of that and the ark and the table and the altar and so on.

[27 : 53] Before that was built, there was this tent of meeting. We don't know much about it, except it was used for that particular purpose.

It was placed outside the camp, it was outside that circle, remember the camp was almost circular or certainly square shaped, you had three tribes here, three tribes to the south, three tribes to the north and so on.

And the tabernacle was going to be in the middle, but this was outside beyond the walls. And it was placed there by Moses so that he or in fact it seems anybody if they wanted to seek the Lord could go there and pray and when Moses would go the pillar of cloud which was the symbol, the visible sign of God's presence of his nearness would descend upon it.

Moses went in there and what we told wonderfully, verse 11, the Lord would speak to Moses face to face as a friend speaks to a friend.

And that's prayer, isn't it? Face to face as a friend speaks to a friend. It's none of this sort of, how can I put it, arm's length prayer.

[29 : 09] It's just very much drawing near to God. As I was saying a little bit this morning, heaven is opened. It's a sense of being in the very presence of God. Now, it's very good for us, I think, to have a place of prayer.

Remember when Jesus talked about prayer, he says, when you pray, go into your room and close the door. I think the A.V. was saying, go into your closet and shut the door. In other words, there's a sense of being apart from others, isn't there?

There's a separateness. There's a locking ourselves in with God. Also, it's good, I think, for us in prayer to have a specific time. It helps me a lot to set aside a particular time of the day to pray. For myself, that's the first thing in the morning. But for others, it may be later in the day. But it's good to set aside. You may say, well, that makes it religious or a habit and we should be praying all the day.

Well, yes, we can do that. And there is that sense of relationship. But particularly, it's good and helpful to set aside a particular time when we know that we can be undisturbed or be away or be where we can get face to face with the Lord.

[30 : 26] But I think there's something more than that, more than this place physically. I think there's this place, if I can put it this way, spiritually, which is being spoken of, and it comes out, I think, particularly in verses, in verse 12.

Moses said to the Lord, you've been telling me, lead these people, but you've not let me know whom you will send me with. You have said, I know you by name and you have found favour with me.

In other words, the place from which Moses approaches the Lord is a place of favour, or of course we know that phrase means, a place of grace. When he comes to God, he comes to God always from a position of knowing that he's accepted and received because of the favour and the grace of God.

He's never coming to pray to God, if I can put it this way, with a sense of, Lord, you know how good I've been today. You know that this week I haven't told any lies, fingers crossed, I haven't done

anything wrong, I haven't, so Lord, can you please do this for me?

He never comes from that sense of self-righteousness or earning or deserving God's ear, but rather he stands in that place of grace. There's that wonderful phrase, isn't there, sentence in Romans chapter 5, verses 1 and 2, therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ and we stand in grace.

[32 : 07] Stand in grace. And of course when we're told in Hebrews about praying, what are we told to pray to? Bring our prayers before the throne of grace. God's favour, his unmerited affection towards us.

And I think when we forget that, that can affect our prayers as well. When we forget that we are coming to God purely on the basis of grace, not on the basis of how good I've been this week or how much I've read my Bible this week or I went to church on Sunday twice this week, then it gives us confidence to pray.

You see, if I hope that God will answer me because I've been a good boy or a good girl this week, well then, I've got no confidence at all because what about all the other things I've done wrong? No one of the good things I've done to merit him hearing me, what about all the bad things that dismerit me from hearing him? But if I come to God in prayer, believing he'll heal me only because of his amazing, unconditional love, then in one sense, whatever's happened doesn't change that. Yes, I know I'm a sinner and I know I've failed and I know I've got it wrong, but Lord, you received my grace. I have to say to you, dear friends, that's a lesson I'm still learning, but I hope I've come a long way along the road.

[33 : 36] It's something we still struggle with. Lord, hear me because of what I've done. Hear me, I hope, because of this or that.

No, Moses comes from, I know you by name, you've said this, Lord, and I've found favour in your sight, so therefore I'm praying. It's from the place of grace, a place of favour.

And thirdly, dear friends, let's just look at what it is that Moses prays for. What does he ask God for? What are his prayers? What are his petitions? Well, there's two, isn't there? There's two.

First of all, verse 15. Moses said to the Lord, you have been telling me, lead these people, but you've not let me know whom you'll send with me. You've said I know you by name and you have found favour with me.

If you are pleased with me, or since you are pleased with me, if I'm that way, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favour with you. Remember that this nation is your people.

[34 : 38] What's he actually praying for? Well, we know what he's praying for because the Lord gives him the answer. Verse 14, my presence will go with you. The Lord has said I'm not going to go with you, I'm not going to go with these people.

Well, Moses' prayer is literally this, Lord, continue with me, go with me, lead me, teach me, I can't go on my own. And notice how Moses begins by his prayer.

He doesn't begin by asking directly, go with me Lord, but he actually repeats the very words of God himself. Lord, you have been telling me, lead this people.

This is me carrying out your will, obedient to you, but you've not said who you're going to send me. You have said I know you by name and you have found favour in my side. He's arguing his case, if I can put it that way, before God on the basis of God's own words.

He's taking God's own promises. Here's a lovely quote from William Gurnall, one of the Puritans of the 17th century.

[35 : 44] He said this, prayer is nothing but the promise reversed, or God's word formed into an argument and returned by faith upon God again.

See, we're not asking God to do anything except what he's already promised he will do. Has God said that he will save sinners? Yes, he has. So when we're asking for him to do that, we're taking his promise.

As God says he wants us to grow in maturity. Yes, he has, so we can pray for that. As God says he wants to bless his church. Yes, he has, so we can pray for that. All we're doing is taking the very promises of God.

Lord, you've said the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church. So in this spiritual battle, Lord, give us the victory. Lord, you've said you'll build your church, therefore build your church and save sinners.

The promises of God are the prompting for us to pray and the things that we're to pray for. God hasn't left us ignorant of what we're to pray about. He's told us exactly what we're to pray about in his word.

[36 : 50] And here we have at the beginning of this prayer of Moses him praying for himself, isn't he? It's very personal. You've been telling me, lead these people, but you've not let me.

He's praying for his own needs, his own concerns, the things that are upon his own heart. And it's proper that we do that. Sometimes we get the idea, prayer is only praying for other people. If you're a real Christian, you're only going to pray for other people. No, we're to pray for ourselves. Yes, we're to pray for others and we long for others to pray for us because we need that support, but we're to pray for our own needs.

Like Moses, we've been commanded to serve. Lead these people, you said, Lord. God has laid out before us in his word, what his will is for us, how we're to live day by day, what is it that he wants from us, how we're to turn from sin and seek righteousness and so on.

But Lord, how can we do that without your help? One of the great errors, one of the great mistakes that many people make is this, they think that somehow they can live a life that pleases God in their own strength.

[38 : 00] Or they think that Christianity is all about doing good, trying to do the things that are right and we sort of read the Sermon on the Mount or the Ten Commandments and we say, right, this is what God wants, I'm going to really try to live this way and do this and please God and what happens?

We fall, we sin, we get tempted, we do it wrong and we say, well that's impossible, I can't love these people who are so unlovely, I can't do these things that God wants me to do.

I keep on getting it wrong, I keep on tripping up, I keep on making mistakes, I keep on getting angry. But we know, don't we dear friends, that to follow Christ we must have God's help, we must have God's Holy Spirit within us.

We can't do it in our own strength, we can't come to God, we aren't good people naturally, we're sinful people naturally and God is the one who changes our hearts and puts within us the strength and desire to follow him.

And so God has said to Moses, off you go, lead these people, carry out my will, and he said, Lord, but I can't do it without you, unless you go with me, unless you're the one who leads and teaches and helps me, I'm going to fall flood on my face.

[39 : 27] Do you know your own weakness? You might say, well, aren't I supposed to concentrate on my own strengths? Well, that's good if you know your own strengths, but surely if you know your own strengths, you should know your own weaknesses.

Do you recognize, do I recognize my need of the Lord's help and enabling to live in the way that pleases him? Do I recognize that without him I can do nothing?

Remember those words of Jesus, he says, I am the vine, you are the branches, apart from me, you can't do anything, but he who abides in me will bear much fruit, apart from me.

That doesn't just mean that coming to faith in Christ brings us into this wonderful unity with him, this living union in which Christ by his very power enables and equips and keeps and strengthens and sustains us, but it also means that we're constantly feeding upon him, constantly looking to him, constantly depending upon him.

If I have a sense of weakness and Moses knew it, then I'll pray. Sometimes we think that feeling of failure is a bad thing, if I can put it that way.

[40 : 45] Oh, I'm just so awful and I'm just so terrible and I wish I was like the pastor, he's such a godly man. No, he's not. I wish I was like the elders, oh, they're so brilliant, I wish I was like so and so, I'm just an awful, awful Christian.

Well, what are you going to do about it? Apart from just moping and thinking people are better than you, they're saying the same thing about you, I wish I was like him or like her, I wish I could pray like they pray and be obedient and stand up to the tests that they've stood up to.

If we feel our weakness, it's because God wants us to feel our weakness, because he wants to strengthen us in our weakness. When your tummy rumbles, it tells you you're hungry, so what do you do?

You eat. When your spirit rumbles, if I could put it that way, what do you do? You go to the one who sustains.

But Moses had a request, not only for himself, Lord be with me and lead me and teach me, I need you, but he also prayed for the people, didn't he? He had a further prayer, a second request, not for himself, but for the church.

[42 : 01] His language changes, doesn't it, from me to us. Verse 15, then Moses said to him, if your presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here.

if the Lord was going to go with Moses, then surely the Lord had to go with the people. Lord, you said you won't go with them, and I can understand why you're not going to go with them, because they're sinful, and they committed idolatry, and they built this calf, and they worshipped it, and they've broken your commandments, I can understand that, but Lord, if you're going to go with me, you need to go with them.

And he brings some wonderful arguments, again, remember, prayer is not twisting the arm of God, God, prayer is bringing our will in line with God's, understanding his purposes.

But he says these things, when he prays, he prays, and he says, Lord, if you're not going to go with us, there's no point in us going at all. Verse 15, if you're not going to go with us, don't send us.

How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with the people unless you go with us?

Remember, God had promised a land flowing with milk and honey, a wonderful land. And Moses says, I don't care, if you give us the promised land but you're not there, it might as well be a desert.

[43 : 36] It might as well be a wilderness. Without the Lord, even the very best things that the world in which we live can offer is unsatisfying and empty.

I'm sure you've experienced that. Isn't it such a sadness that the world in which we live we find people pursuing and chasing after the promised land. Oh, if I could have a life flowing with milk and honey, if I could have a life flowing with money or with health or relationships or with good things or possessions, oh, that'd be great.

But what they never grasp is that all those things without the Lord God are absolutely empty and meaningless and dissatisfying. They're there for a moment and then they're gone.

But a person who's got the Lord and nothing else is the richest person alive. Moses says, Lord, we don't want the land without you.

We want you first. The land's a bonus. That's great. But we want you. Don't send us if you don't go with us. And then he says, if you don't go with us, everyone will assume that you're not pleased with us, that you have washed your hands of us.

[44 : 56] As I read there, how will anyone know, verse 16, that you are pleased with us and with your people unless you go with us? The distinguishing mark of God's people is not that they are good people, religious people, happy people.

The distinguishing mark of God's people is that God is with them. Remember when the apostles stood before the Sanhedrin in Acts, I think it was chapter four, and we're told they marked that these men had been with Jesus.

They took notice they'd been with Jesus. What is the church? What are we doing on a Sunday? If we're gathering together and singing hymns and reading the Bible and hearing somebody preaching and praying and God isn't with us, we might as well all go home.

Because it's absolutely pointless us being here. Unless we are here and the Lord is here. The presence of the Lord is that sign of his acceptance. The absence of the Lord's presence is the sign of his displeasure and rejection.

The difference between somebody who is a Christian and somebody who is not Christian is simply this. God is with that person and that person is without God. Without God and without hope in the world, says Paul.

[46 : 19] And then thirdly, he argues, if you don't go with us, how can we ever witness to the world about the wonderful God you are? How will the people see that we are your people?

What else, he says in verse 16, the second part, what else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth? The only thing that makes the church effective is the presence of God.

The only thing that will make people sit up and take notice of the gospel we proclaim is the presence of God. The only thing that makes the difference between us being here and being at the bowls club, being down the pub, is the presence of God.

So let me ask you, dear friends, do you long for the presence of God? Do you long for the nearness of the Lord personally? Do you long to know that joy, that sweet fellowship of being with him?

Has that been something which has been absent from your quiet times, your prayer times, your Bible times for a long time? Then ask, Lord, go with me, come with me, be present, let me know your nearness.

[47 : 32] And do I see that the greatest need of this church and of every church is for God to be tangibly present with us? See, the greatest need of this church and every church is not we need to do more or we need to be more loving, that's important, or we need to be more giving, that's important, or we need to be more this or that.

The greatest need of this church and of every single gospel church is that the tangible presence of God is with us. That there is that sense in which we know the very nearness of the Lord in all that we do, that we know the blessing and the ownership of God in all we do.

Remember that psalm that says, if a builder builds a house, he labors in vain, if the Lord doesn't build the house. The watchman watches in vain unless the Lord watches.

churches in vain, unless it's the God who's working in the church. And as Moses prays and brings these persuasive arguments to God, as he pleads with the Lord, what do we have?

And this is surely must encourage us more than anything else to be people of prayer. He says, I will do the very thing you have asked.

[48 : 51] Oh, isn't that lovely? I will do it. God is not a God who does not want to answer prayer. He's not a God who does not want to give his people good gifts.

And there's one more prayer request which we'll look at God willing next week. But already I've gone on for a very, very long time. Thank you for your patience.

Dear friends, may the Lord teach us how to pray. Let's sing our final hymn together. It's number 405.

405. Only six verses, not eight verses this time. Come, my soul, I plea prepare. Jesus loves to answer prayer.

He does, as we've seen. 405. 405. 405.