

God's Character: Compassionate and Gracious

1. To gain a glimpse of how God may have felt, we will role play the thoughts and feelings of God, Moses, and the people of Israel. With the teacher as the Narrator, we will need 2 student characters: God and Moses. The rest of the class will be the people of Israel.

Narrator (Ex 19:1-2): 3 months after leaving the land of Egypt, the nation of Israel camps at the foot of Mt. Sinai.

God (Ex19:4-6, NIV): You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Narrator (Ex 19:7): So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him.

People (Ex 19:8, NIV): We will do everything the Lord has said.

God (Ex 19:9, NIV): I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you.

Narrator (Ex 19:20): The Lord came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain. And the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.

God (Ex 20: 1-3, NIV): I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.

Narrator (Ex 24:3): Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the rules.

People (Ex 24:3, NIV): Everything the Lord has said we will do.

Narrator (Ex 24:5-7): With burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord, Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he read the Book of the Covenant to the people.

People (Ex 24:7, NIV): We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey.

Narrator (Ex 24: 8): Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and ratified the covenant.

Moses (Ex 24:8, NIV): This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.

God (Ex 24:12, NIV): Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone with the law and commandments I have written for their instruction.

Narrator (Ex 24:18; 31:18; 32:1): Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights. After speaking with Moses on Mount Sinai, God gave him two tablets of stone written with the finger of God. While Moses was delayed, the people gathered themselves together to Moses' brother Aaron.

People (Ex 32:1, NIV): Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.

Narrator (Ex 32:3-4): So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf.

People (Ex 32:4, NIV): These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!

God (Ex 32:7-8, NIV): Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, "These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt."

Narrator (Ex 32:19): As soon as Moses came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain.

Moses (Ex 32:26, NIV): Whoever is for the Lord, come to me!

God (Ex 32:33, NIV): Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book.

Narrator (Ex 32:35): Then the Lord sent a plague on the people, because they made the calf, the one that Aaron made. A short time later, Moses revisits Mt. Sinai.

God (Ex 34:1, 6-7, NIV): Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.

2. When a covenant is ratified, it is a solemn and lengthy process cementing that commitment. How many times did the people promise to obey God? Do you feel God's anger when the people violated God's first command just days after making their commitment?

3. Because God introduces His character with the pairing of "compassion" and "gracious" together, biblical writers thought it important to use them together when describing God, which is seen in 11 of 13 uses of each adjective (Ex 34:6; 2 Chron 30:9; Neh 9:17, 31; Ps 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 112:4; 145:8; Joel 2:13; John 4:2).

To gain some sense of God's compassion and graciousness, these two definitions can help introduce the immeasurable depth of God's compassion and grace.

Mercy = God the Judge forgives or withholds a punishment that you deserve.

Grace = God the King grants something that you don't deserve like an unmerited favor, blessing, or healing.

When Moses brings the two tablets for God to rewrite the covenant law (Ex 34:29), God passed in front of Moses, proclaiming:

"The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation." (Ex 34:6-7, NIV)

Discuss how abounding love is involved with our compassionate and gracious God.

God's Character: Compassionate and Gracious Teacher Notes

1. To gain a glimpse of how God may have felt, we will role play the thoughts and feelings of God, Moses, and the people of Israel. With the teacher as the Narrator, we will need 2 student characters: God and Moses. The rest of the class will be the people of Israel.

In this role play, have each speaker(s) stand when each are saying their part. Remind the students that the nation of Israel saw and experienced the supernatural ten plagues and miraculous Exodus from Egypt with their wealth. The invisible God of Israel makes His presence known and tangible.

Narrator (Ex 19:1-2): 3 months after leaving the land of Egypt, the nation of Israel camps at the foot of Mt. Sinai.

God (Ex 19:4-6, NIV): You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

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2. When a covenant is ratified, it is a solemn and lengthy process cementing that commitment. How many times did the people promise to obey God? Do you feel God's anger when the people violated God's first command just days after making their commitment?

The nation of Israel, in unison, makes 3 public proclamations of commitment and participated in the formal covenant ratification process. The ratification process included a) setting up 12 stone pillars representing the 12 tribes, b) sacrificing young bulls and making burnt offerings, and c) sprinkling of the bulls' blood on both the altar representing God and each person of the nation of Israel (Ex 24:4-8).

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Discuss how abounding love is involved with our compassionate and gracious God.

There are a few emotions associated with compassion. Help the student explore them and understand their differences through examples.

1a) When you see a homeless person, what do you feel?

The most common answer is **pity**, which is a feeling of sadness or sympathy with their circumstances.

1b) When your grandparent becomes homeless because of a fire, flood or tornado, what do you feel? Would you offer a room in your home? Why?

While you feel pity for your grandparent, compassion motivates you to offer a room in your home, because you love them.

2a) You are driving your car at 40 mph in an unmarked 25 mph zone, and you get a ticket for the violation of \$100. You go to court to explain to the judge that you didn't know of that 25 mph zone. What do you feel if the judge forgives you and cancels the \$100 ticket? What if you ignore the ticket and never pay it?

The most common answer is **mercy**, which is receiving forgiveness from a punishment for violating the law.

If you ignore the ticket, the ticket will cost more later with interest. If you receive more tickets, you could go to jail.

2b) In the Old Testament, God tells the nation of Israel, how to make up for intentional and unintentional sins by doing certain things. In the New Testament, God tells the world that you can make up for intentional and unintentional sins by believing in His Son who He sent to pay for their sins. What do Believers feel when they are no longer accountable for their sins? Why?

While you feel mercy, you recognize God's compassion (His love) because He provided the means for forgiveness – initially in the Old Testament with the Law of Moses and later in the New Testament with the sacrifice of His only Son. God is slow to anger and maintains love to thousands, forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin. But God does not leave those who are guilty (those who ignore Him and the way to restore a relationship with Him) unpunished.

God's compassion includes pity and mercy. God is gracious, because He sought a way to restore your relationship with Him and His sinless nature by providing the means of making up and removing your sins.

Note: While the pairing of “compassion” and “gracious” was always used in the context of God, there is one exception in Psalms 112:4, which uses “compassion” and “gracious” to describe a righteous man. In accordance to the Mosaic Covenant, the person blessed by God is one who is active in the pursuit of godly wisdom and makes an effort to establish God's righteous kingdom on earth. The Psalmist is saying that the character of the righteous, he who lives as a genuine Believer, is marked by godliness and shares God's character trait of “compassion” and “gracious.”