

LIVING THE WORD—Week 1 (Jan. 25-31)

The God of the Mighty Acts: the Great Story of God's Relentless Love

Key Verse: Exodus 34:6-7

We are embarking on a journey, all of us, young and old together, to rediscover the God who has revealed himself in history, in Scripture, and in Jesus Christ. In their book, *Living God's Love*, Earl Lavender and Gary Holloway write:

In the Bible, God reveals his true character...God pulls back the thick curtain of our misconceptions to walk boldly onto the stage of history and make himself known. (p. 16)

When the Scriptures present God to us, they do not try to explain the mysterious doctrine of the Trinity, or expound on God's divine omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence. They do not attempt to explain to us *what* God is. Rather, they show us *who* God is. At the heart of the story of God is his steadfast, unfailing, unrelenting love. In one of the most important passages in all of Scripture, God describes himself:

"The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin..." (Exodus 34:6-7, NRSV)

In the Bible, God is known by his character and his mighty acts—by who he is and what he has done. And the two are interwoven, because God's loving character is revealed through the great things he has done for the people he loves. To truly know God and experience life in him, we must know him as he has revealed himself to us. In a world of so many competing spiritualities, Lavender and Holloway write that we must know what makes Christian spirituality unique:

Christian spirituality is a lived relationship with the God revealed in the Bible. He is a God with a story, a history with humanity. He made us, pursued us, even died for us. He wants to be our God and for us to be his people.

This story of God was the heart of Israel's faith and worship in the Old Testament. It reached its fulfillment in the story of Jesus and his church in the New Testament. And it is all moving toward a final chapter when Jesus returns to bring to completion God's great plan to save his people—a people whom he has loved relentlessly from before the beginning of the world.

Each week we'll take a closer look at one of the 10 most important events in God's story. These are not merely events on a timeline or a list of historical occurrences. These are *God-revealing, faith-shaping, life-changing mighty acts of God*. Each week we'll come together Sunday morning to hear how the Scriptures reveal God through this story, and what these events tell us about ourselves and our own story with God. (Our children and teens will be learning the same things in their lessons that we'll be discussing in the sermons.) We will then gather in our home churches to discuss how these lessons apply to our lives and encourage each other to live what we learn. We'll invite you to spend some quiet time each week with God, just as Jesus would go to a mountain to pray. We'll suggest activities and conversations you can share with your family as you sit around the table or in the family room. And we'll propose ways we can take the story of God into the world around us. Join us as we encounter what the story of God's love tells us about God...and about ourselves.

Next Week: The Creation—Part 1 (Genesis 1-2; Psalm 8; Amos 4-5)

Memory Verse (for Weeks 1-4): Exodus 34:6-7

On the Mountain (“*Love God*”—set aside 30 minutes this week for quiet time with God)

1. Read the great prayer of repentance that the people of Israel prayed in Nehemiah 9.
2. Meditate on God as he is described in the prayer.
3. Praise God for his mighty acts in the Bible and in your life.
4. Reflect on how you may have been like the people of Israel in your life. Do you need to confess to being disobedient and stiff-necked in your relationship with God?
5. Read Exodus 34:6-7. Thank God for his gracious and merciful love and commit to love him with all your heart and soul and strength.

In the Gathering (“*Love Each Other*”—discuss with your home church or small group)

1. How do you suppose most people think of God, especially the God of the Old Testament?
2. How does God describe himself in Exodus 34:6-7?
3. If God forgives sin and iniquity and shows love to a thousand generations, then who are the guilty that God will punish so severely that the consequences will be experienced for 3 or 4 generations? (Hint: think about when in the Bible he did this.) Why do you think people sometimes get focused on the end of that passage and miss the real emphasis in the description of God?
4. Read Psalm 136. How is the God described in Exodus 34 seen in his mighty acts listed in Psalm 136? Pick a few statements and discuss what each says about God’s character.
5. Psalm 136 praises God for defeating Sihon and Og, two kings who tried to prevent Israel from reaching the promised land (that story is told in Numbers 21:21-35 and again in Deuteronomy 2:24-3:20). Where are the Sihon and Og in our lives? What kinds of things stand as barriers that would keep us from experiencing the promise of life in God?
6. Pray together, praising God for what he has done and asking him to defeat the things that would keep us from life in him. (Consider also the suggestion below for **In the World**.)

Around the Table (“*Love Your Family*”—sit at home and talk together as a family)

1. Read Psalm 136.
2. “Finish” the psalm. List some other mighty acts of God in the Bible and ask what they tell us about God.
3. List some things God has done for your family and respond to each one with the praise: “*his steadfast love endures forever!*”

Into the World (“*Love the World*”—prayerfully consider God’s mission for us in his world)

1. Pray for people who don’t know the one true and living God and have put their trust in something other than the God who made them and loves them.
2. Pray for those who may believe in God, but have a mistaken understanding of who he is and don’t know his steadfast, unfailing love in their lives.
3. Pray that God will use you to help people around you see and know the love of God.