

*“Refresh your spirit, renew your passion for God.”*

—Philip Graham Ryken

FORTY DAYS  
— ON THE —  
MOUNTAIN

*Meditations on  
Knowing God*

STEPHEN  
SMALLMAN

By gloriously weaving the new covenant into the study of this Exodus passage, Steve Smallman compellingly and comprehensively reveals the God of love and grace pursuing us, redeeming us, and making a way to know him and enjoy his presence through the atoning work of the cross. I have easily adapted this as a study guide for small groups in a forty day, semester, or yearlong format. Participants have found themselves invited into an experience with God so foundational to solid discipleship that it has spread to friends in other churches who are now using it as well.

—**Libby Cannizzaro**, Former Women’s Ministry Coordinator,  
The Falls Church (Anglican)

In a hurried and cacophonous world, Steve’s gentle and wise insights, farmed by Scripture reading, hymns, and prayers, will help readers grow in the knowledge of God, pointing in every meditation from Moses and his experience on the mountain to the Lord Jesus Christ.

—**Michael Kelly**, Assistant Professor of Old Testament, Westminster Theological Seminary

Steve Smallman invites us in these daily devotions to follow Moses in his passion to press on to know the presence of God. I was greatly blessed by Steve’s challenge.

—**Rose Marie Miller**, Author, *From Fear to Freedom*

Steve Smallman is an experienced, godly pastor with a heart for helping people grow in the knowledge of God—not just theologically but also experientially. The scriptural meditations will refresh your spirit, renew your passion for God, and help you to find rest in the gospel grace of Jesus Christ.

—**Philip Graham Ryken**, President, Wheaton College

This book is just what one expects from a seasoned pastor who has a heart for providing edifying nourishment for the soul. What is particularly refreshing is a view of God's grace often overlooked in God's dealing with Moses on the mountain.

—**Robert I. Vasholz**, Author, *The Old Testament Canon in the Old Testament Church*

As usual, Steve Smallman leads us to Christ. As we follow Steve's lead, we discover that Christ is leading us to himself. Follow along for forty days and see his glory.

—**John Yenchko**, Pastor, North Shore Community Church,  
Oyster Bay, New York

F O R T Y D A Y S  
O N T H E  
M O U N T A I N



F O R T Y D A Y S  
O N T H E  
M O U N T A I N

*Meditations on  
Knowing God*

S T E P H E N  
S M A L L M A N



P U B L I S H I N G

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To the congregation of McLean Presbyterian Church,  
which it was my joy and privilege to serve from 1967 to 1996.

As Paul wrote to the Philippian congregation:

“I thank my God in all my remembrance of you.”





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# Acknowledgments

As I explain in the Introduction, *Forty Days on the Mountain* began several years ago as a personal journal that I wrote while on a sabbatical from McLean Presbyterian Church. I appreciate the people along the way who have continued to encourage me to get it published. Among them are: Dick Strong, who passed manuscript copies along to numbers of people he ministered to; Libby Cannizzaro, who has used it as a tool to disciple dozens of Young Life leaders; Betty Herron, who found it a great comfort during her last months on this earth; and most persistent of all, my wife, Sandy, who has encouraged me in all my writing projects but felt this was the most helpful of them all.

These meditations were originally published by Crossway Books in 2007. I appreciate the fact that the editors of P&R Publishing felt it was important to keep them in print. I have enjoyed working with Julia Craig in preparing this new edition, which is essentially unchanged from the original.

Such a book is only possible because God Almighty himself chose to make it possible that we could actually know him. May he receive all the glory if this effort can be used to help us grow in that knowledge.



# Introduction

I invite you to join me as I try to capture something of what it means to know God. How can mortals like you or me—self-centered, sinful ones at that—actually think about knowing the eternal, immortal God? But that is what Moses, Paul, and countless others have desired and prayed for, and it is an opportunity that is available to us as well. In fact, that is how Jesus defined eternal life: “that they *know you* the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3).

The meditations on knowing God that you are about to read grew out of a very needy time in my life. After almost twenty-five years of pastoring the same congregation (McLean Presbyterian Church, a church in suburban Washington, DC), I was granted an extended sabbatical. My wife, Sandy, and I, along with our youngest child, Andrew, went to a home near Denver, Colorado, for six months of rest and reflection. I reasoned that while a change of location and situation might provide physical rest, only the Lord could bring the deeper kind of rest I needed. And I was asking him to give it. To help accomplish this desire, I was drawn to Exodus 32–34, the remarkable passage recording Moses’ meeting with God to intercede for

the people of Israel. At the core of his dealings with God was a passion to know him, to know his presence, and even to be shown the glory of God.

Shortly after our arrival, I set apart one day each week to go to the library of Denver Theological Seminary to explore my chosen text through the various commentaries available to me. As you will see, door after door of understanding opened as I tried to enter vicariously into Moses' experience with God. It also took me all over the Scripture. I began writing down the insights I was gaining as journal entries just for my own benefit. Gradually I became convinced that I needed to find a way that would allow others to share in the blessing of what I was learning. Moses was on the mountain for forty days on two separate occasions. Since the unit of forty is very common in Scripture, I decided to divide up my thoughts in a format that would help others meditate on the knowledge of God for that same basic period of time. That is how *Forty Days on the Mountain* was born.

When I returned to the McLean congregation I felt renewed personally and had a new heart for the ministry.<sup>1</sup> Several of our members read through the manuscript of *Forty Days* and offered many helpful suggestions. They also expressed enthusiasm for what they learned. We reproduced it for limited distribution as part of our Fiftieth Anniversary Jubilee celebration. In the time since then I have returned to the themes of *Forty Days* over and over in retreats and conferences. I never fail to find that my own heart is stirred and renewed along with those who attend.

## Who Should Read This Book?

These meditations are written for anyone who is serious about

1. Read about the remarkable confirmation of God's hand when I returned from the sabbatical, in "Kathy's Story," chap. 1 of my book *Beginnings: Understanding How We Experience the New Birth* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015).

knowing God. Individuals very new to the faith as well as those who are advanced in their knowledge have used *Forty Days*. It has been read by couples for their devotions, and it has been studied in small groups as the basis for training in spiritual leadership. The one thing all have in common is a sincere desire to know God.

Some of you reading this book might consider yourselves *seekers* rather than *believers*. I hope you will find this book life changing. But you need to recognize that I have two basic assumptions in writing: (1) We can know God only because God wants us to know him. “He is there and he is not silent.”<sup>2</sup> He has made himself known through written Scripture, demonstrating this revelation by commanding Moses to write what he was told in a book.<sup>3</sup> (2) Knowing God ultimately comes as a result of God making himself known through his final Word—God revealed in human flesh. Authentic spirituality is anchored in the Son of God, Jesus Christ. I’m not going to try to *prove* either of these ideas—even if you have unanswered questions (and who doesn’t?) I pray that you will nevertheless patiently work through these lessons and let their truth and reality bear witness to your own heart.

## How Should You Use This Book?

Obviously, there is any number of settings where these meditations would be profitable for you as an individual or for a couple or a group. But there are three expectations in my mind for those who want to gain maximum benefit from reading and studying them.

2. A phrase coined by Francis Schaeffer, who wrote a book by the same title, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1972).

3. I use the masculine pronoun to refer to God without apology because the Scriptures use it for God. This is not to insist that God is male but simply that our language is limited and that this is how God has chosen to reveal himself.



## The First Expectation: The Use of Scripture

It is my assumption that *Forty Days* will be read with an open Bible. I am including a portion of the text in the *English Standard Version* of the Bible at the beginning of each meditation as well as when I quote Scripture in the meditation. You will find the meditations even more profitable if you read from the Bible you ordinarily use in reading and study. That means not only using your Bible for the reading for the day, which is given at the beginning of the meditation, but keeping it open before you as you work through my remarks. My objective is that you will try to understand the teaching of the passage before making an application.

Scripture itself is the key. Let the Spirit minister to you through the Scripture with my thoughts provoking you to think about things you might not have noticed before. I hope you will find yourself going back to reread parts of the passage or even reading other places in the Bible.

As we shall see, even at the moment when God met Moses on the mountain in answer to his bold praying, what Moses received was not an experience or a vision, but a *word*. He was then told to write these words for the benefit of the people (Ex. 34:27). The written Scripture must be central if we are to enter into genuine spirituality.

## The Second Expectation: The Use of Time

You need to be willing to give these readings and meditations time to sink in. I have tried to make each meditation fairly brief. But this was not done with the intention of a casual thought-for-the-day. Rather I have tried to walk deliberately through a very profound topic—the knowledge of God—one small step at a time. Don't be impatient; try to allow each day's lesson to sink in. Some have told me one meditation every day is too fast. There is certainly no requirement that these be read in forty consecutive

days. But they will be more helpful if read in sequence and close enough together so that one day will prepare you for the next. I strongly encourage you to find a regular time in your day or week when you can have at least thirty minutes of quiet.

Time also allows you to stop and pray through what you have read and thought about. The entire passage is about Moses' meeting with God—which is the essence of prayer—and every day should end with a time of prayer and reflection. It will also be helpful to make use of a journal to record your own thoughts and prayers. Journal keeping is a time-honored aid to spiritual growth, and for very good reasons.

### **The Third Expectation: The Use of Place**

For maximum benefit, I want to add a comment about the importance of place. This is, in fact, the subject of a meditation (Day 12). But several readers have encouraged me to include in my introductory words the value of locating a place (a room, a corner, a particular chair) that will serve physically as your “prayer closet.” We are such harried people, and we should make use of any little thing that can aid in bringing quiet to our souls, so it is vital to have a “quiet place.”

I wish I could tell you that as a result of writing these meditations I have entered fully into the knowledge of God for which I pray. But that awaits a better world. Growing up spiritually is a slow process, and I am thankful that I have been able to take a few more steps as a result of the work of preparing *Forty Days*. It is my prayer that your time with this little book and *The Book* will help you do the same.

Stephen Smallman  
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# Selections from Exodus 32–34

*Exodus 32:30–35; 33:1–23;  
34:1–10, 27–35*

The next day Moses said to the people, “You have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.” So Moses returned to the LORD and said, “Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written.” But the LORD said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book. But now go, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you; behold, my angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them.”

Then the LORD sent a plague on the people, because they made the calf, the one that Aaron made.

The LORD said to Moses, “Depart; go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, ‘To your offspring I will give it.’ I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Go up to a land

flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people.”

When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments. For the LORD had said to Moses, “Say to the people of Israel, ‘You are a stiff-necked people; if for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you. So now take off your ornaments, that I may know what to do with you.’” Therefore the people of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward.

Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the LORD would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp. Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise up, and each would stand at his tent door, and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent. When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses. And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, each at his tent door. Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.

Moses said to the LORD, “See, you say to me, ‘Bring up this people,’ but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, ‘I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.’ Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.” And he said, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” And he said to him, “If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. For how shall it be

known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?”

And the LORD said to Moses, “This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.” Moses said, “Please show me your glory.” And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The LORD.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.” And the LORD said, “Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.”

The LORD said to Moses, “Cut for yourself two tablets of stone like the first, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. Be ready by the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself there to me on the top of the mountain. No one shall come up with you, and let no one be seen throughout all the mountain. Let no flocks or herds graze opposite that mountain.” So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the first. And he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and took in his hand two tablets of stone. The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to

the third and the fourth generation.” And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped. And he said, “If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance.”

And he said, “Behold, I am making a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels, such as have not been created in all the earth or in any nation. And all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the LORD, for it is an awesome thing that I will do with you.

And the LORD said to Moses, “Write these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.” So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights. He neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses talked with them. Afterward all the people of Israel came near, and he commanded them all that the LORD had spoken with him in Mount Sinai. And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.

Whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would remove the veil, until he came out. And when he came out and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, the people of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face was shining. And Moses would put the veil over his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

## DAY 1

# The Overview

*Exodus 32:30–35; 33:1–23;  
34:1–10, 27–35*

Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. . . . And he said, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” And he said to him, “If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?” And the LORD said to Moses, “This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.” (Ex. 33:11, 14–17)

The purpose of today’s reading is to get focused on the basic facts of the story that we will be studying in detail. Did you get a sense of the intensity of Moses’ prayers and the determined and almost reckless way he approached God? He was a man with whom the Lord spoke “face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (33:11). He wanted to know God and find favor in his sight (33:13). But that was not enough. Moses would not stop praying until



he secured the continued presence of God, not only for himself, but also for the people he was leading (33:15). And even that was not enough—Moses went on to make the extraordinary request, “Please show me your glory” (33:18).

As we approach this remarkable passage, focusing in on these few verses gives us more than enough to think about. However, no teaching in Scripture can be taken in isolation. Almost as though retracting a zoom lens, we need to move our perspective back to see how this meeting with God is set into a larger picture. For example, Israel’s sin of dancing around the golden calf (Ex. 32) is basic to understanding the passage. The grace to be revealed shines all the brighter in contrast to the shocking evil in the hearts of the people. But the golden calf incident also needs to be put in context. We need to consider the whole book of Exodus to appreciate what is going on between God and Moses.

Exodus is nothing less than the story of salvation by grace alone. That doctrine is stated in the New Testament, but in Exodus it is presented in exciting narrative with dramatic pictures that have been with us from childhood. God Almighty heard the cries of the helpless children of Israel and did battle with the most powerful nation on earth to set them free. God carried them “on eagles’ wings” and brought them to himself at the mountain of Sinai with the intention of making them into his “treasured possession” (19:4–5). There, from the mountain, he spoke to them and gave them ten basic “words” by which they could enjoy the liberty that he had purchased for them. He then not only obligated himself to them by way of a covenant, but he also promised his presence to a degree unknown by any nation of people on the face of the earth. All these thoughts need to be looked into to make Moses’ meeting with God all the more meaningful.

The final aspect of context that must be appreciated, if our passage is to have its full meaning, is the perspective of the New

Testament. Even the exquisite glimpse of the glory of God given to Moses was only prologue to the coming of Jesus Christ and the privileges that are given to those who are in Christ. But it is important to begin our reflection with the basic facts of the passage as well as an awareness of the larger context. Then pray with anticipation that God will be pleased to teach you experimentally (as the Puritans would say) the realities behind the facts.

# DO YOU LONG TO KNOW GOD DEEPLY AS YOUR GOD, FATHER, AND FRIEND?

Whether you are a new believer or have been a Christian for many years, this is what God wants for you—to experience his presence. And he wants you to desire this too.

If you're not sure where to start, try learning from a man who spoke with God face to face. Moses met God in a startlingly personal way when God introduced himself by name from a burning bush. In the years that followed, God repeatedly proved his holiness, loyalty, and love for his people . . . and Moses had a front-row seat.

Sit alongside Moses through forty meditations that delve into God's rich, unfolding self-revelation and point to a glorious new covenant with Christ at its center. You'll learn what it means to pursue God's daily presence in your life, and, in doing so, discover reasons to love him as you ought.

“These scriptural meditations will refresh your spirit, renew your passion for God, and help you to find rest in the gospel grace of Jesus Christ.”

—**PHILIP GRAHAM RYKEN**, President, Wheaton College

“Steve Smallman invites us in these daily devotions to follow Moses in his passion to press on to know the presence of God. I was greatly blessed by Steve's challenge.”

—**ROSE MARIE MILLER**, Author, *From Fear to Freedom*

“Steve Smallman compellingly and comprehensively reveals the God of love and grace pursuing us, redeeming us, and making a way to know him and enjoy his presence through the atoning work of the cross.”

—**LIBBY CANNIZZARO**, Former Women's Ministry Coordinator, The Falls Church (Anglican)

**Stephen Smallman** served for over forty years in pastoral ministry. He is an urban missionary serving with CityNet Ministries and is assistant pastor of New Life Presbyterian Church in Glenside, Pennsylvania.

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