God is Love

Second in the series, “Giving Thanks for God’s Character”

# Scripture: Psalm 36:5-10

# Key Thought: We give thanks for the steadfast love of God.

# Intro:

## goals of this series

To worship God must be the consuming passion of the heart, whether we express it in old ways or new ways, in silence or with shouts, in stillness or with dancing. (Graham Kendrick)

One of the goals of our series called, “Giving thanks for God’s Character” is to help us be ready to worship God with Thanksgiving in this November season. Another goal is to increase our confidence in God.

Our confidence rises as the character of God becomes greater and more beautiful and more trustworthy to our spiritual comprehension. (A. W. Tozer The Tozer Pulpit volume 3 p. 42)

## mining keywords

Sometimes in Scripture, there is a key word in the original language that is behind a truth that we need to learn about. That is the case in today’s message. NRSV is consistent about using the phrase “steadfast love” to translate the key Hebrew word "hesed." The phrase "steadfast love" occurs 120 times in the book of Psalms alone in the NRSV which shows what a fundamental concept this word represents. KJV sometimes renders "hesed" with the word “mercy” and sometimes with the word "lovingkindness." NIV uses the phrase “unfailing love” to translate.

According to the Dictionary of New Testament Theology, the basic idea of the word “hesed” is “proper covenant behavior, the solidarity which the partners in the covenant owe one another” (Vol. 2 p. 594). However, another reference authority points out that there are numerous passages where the word is used (Ruth 1:8,9; Esther 2:9,17) where there is no covenant in view. So, a broader definition that includes concepts of kindness and love is needed. “The word "lovingkindness" of the KJV is archaic, but not far from the fullness of the meaning of the word” (Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament volume 1 p. 307). Hence the modern translations as “steadfast love” (NRSV) or “unfailing love” (NIV).

# God's love is bountiful

## God’s love is the source of bountiful blessings for us

So, let’s think together about the steadfast love of God. The first big picture truth about the love of God that I see affirmed in this Psalm and that we need to be reminded of today is that God’s love is bountiful. David says it poetically.

Your love, Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies. Ps 36:5 NIV

There is a similar verse in another Psalm of David;

Great is your love, reaching to the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies.
Psalm 57:10 NIV

And another in Psalm 86

For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you. Psalm 86:5 NIV

Famous preacher C. H. Spurgeon used to tell the story about a large sum of money that was given to a man named Roland Hill to dispense to a poor pastor by mail. Mr. Hill thought it unwise to send the whole amount at once in the mail, so we put a small amount in the envelope and with it a note that said, “More to follow.” In a few days the man received another envelope containing the same amount and with the same message, “More to follow.” At regular intervals, there came a third and a fourth; in fact, such pieces of mail continued, along with those cheering words, until the entire sum had been received. How amazing it must’ve felt to always be living with the prospect that more was to come. But isn’t that exactly how it is for us as Christians who are living in the bounty of the love of God? For Jesus said that God is always at work and he too is working. And all the persons of the Trinity are at work for our good to share with us who abide in their love from the bounty that is continually available. Think of the connection between the riches of God’s love and his power at work in our lives that Paul makes for us in Ephesians chapter 3.

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.
Eph 3:16-19 NIV

 As we head into the Thanksgiving holiday season, surely one of our desires is to remember the bounty of blessings that come to us because of the “unfailing love” of our God. As David exhorts us at the beginning of Psalm 103;

Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits! Psalm 103:1,2

There is an old hymn that we used to sing in my youth, the words of which expressed this idea of the bountifulness of the love of God.

Hymn: O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus

Words by S. Trevor Francis

1. O the deep, deep love of Jesus!
Vast, unmeasured, boundless, free;
rolling as a mighty ocean
in its fullness over me.
Underneath me, all around me,
is the current of thy love;
leading onward, leading homeward,
to thy glorious rest above.

3. O the deep, deep love of Jesus!
Love of ev'ry love the best:
'tis an ocean vast of blessing,
'tis a haven sweet of rest.
O the deep, deep love of Jesus!
'Tis a heav'n of heav'ns to me;
and it lifts me up to glory,
for it lifts me up to thee.

As we make some lists to help us give thanks in this season, let us give full credit to the source, the “steadfast love” of God.

I think of Paul’s joy at all that God has given us in Jesus as he exclaimed in the opening verses of Ephesians,

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, Eph 1:3-8 NIV

God’s love to us is indeed bountiful! Let us allow it to fill our hearts with joy and overflow in worship and thanksgiving this season.

## God’s love is inexhaustible

Another facet of the meaning of the bountiful nature of God’s love in Scripture is the idea that God’s love is inexhaustible, in never ends, it does not run out. This is the primary thought in Lamentations 3:22

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. Lam 3:22-23 NRSV

The Complete Jewish Bible translates the word “hesed” with the word “grace” and follows the Jewish custom of using the Hebrew “Adonai” where English translations usually use Lord. Keeping those in mind, I love how they have handled this passage. Remember that the prophet Jeremiah is writing in a time of deep despair over the violent and murderous destruction of Jerusalem.

But in my mind I keep returning to something, something that gives me hope —
that the grace of Adonai is not exhausted, that his compassion has not ended.
[On the contrary,] they are new every morning! How great your faithfulness!
 Lam 3:21-23 CJB

Did you ever wonder if God’s patience would run out? Did you ever wonder if God’s love would turn cold because of your rebellions? Here is the answer. The love of God is inexhaustible. He may discipline us as a parent discipline their children. But he will not stop loving us.

# God's love is reliable

## We can trust in God’s love

Not only is the love of God bountiful and inexhaustible, but it is also reliable.

Back in the days when radio and telephone communication was not what it is today, David Sorensen was halfway around the world from his home in Minnesota. One night he waited 10 hours to make a radio-telephone call home. Atmospheric static made the conversation only about 70% intelligible. Things faded fast at the end. He writes, “I could hear my mother’s voice but none of the words.” He yelled, “I can’t hear you,” another garbled transmission. He yelled again, “I can’t hear you!” Suddenly a gruff male voice cut in somewhere between Thailand and Minnesota: “She said she loves you.” Whether the communication channels are good or not, you can always rely on a mother’s love. But even more reliable than a mother’s love, is the love of God for us. As David put it in the 27th Psalm,

If my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up. Ps 27:10 NRSV

We can depend upon God’s love and trust in it. It is so reliable that we can find a shelter in the love of God.

How priceless is your unfailing love, O God! People take refuge in the shadow of your wings. Psalm 36:7 NIV

When Jesus was near death on the cross he quoted from Psalm 31:5;

Into your hands I commit my spirit;

Just two verses later, we see that in quoting that Psalm, Jesus was resting in the love of his heavenly Father. Psalm 31:7 says,

I will be glad and rejoice in your love, for you saw my affliction
and knew the anguish of my soul.

In Psalm 13, David brings both the bountiful love of God and how much he could rely on God’s love together.

But I trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.
I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me. Psalm 13:5, 6 NIV

## We can trust in God’s love forever

Related to this is the idea that God’s love is reliable forever. Paul speaks in Romans eight about how nothing can separate us from God’s love. He mentions that neither life nor death can separate God’s beloved children from him. So, God shows love to his chosen family.

As for mortals, their days are like grass; they flourish like a flower of the field;
for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.
But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him,
and his righteousness to children's children, to those who keep his covenant
and remember to do his commandments. Ps 103:15-18 NRSV

What an awesome blessing for which we give thanks this season and for which we worship our God every day of the year.

# God's love is life-giving

Finally, I want to suggest to you on the basis of Scripture that God’s love is life-giving.

In Psalm 36, as David continues to expound the blessing that we receive because of God’s love, we read;

For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light. Ps 36:9 NIV

This is far from the only place in Psalms that the love of God is connected with life.

Think how God renews our lives as described in Psalm 103

Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—
who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion,
who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.
 Ps 103:2-5 NIV

Three times in Psalm 119, the Psalmist prays for God to preserve his life because of

God’s steadfast love. For example;

Hear my voice in accordance with your love; preserve my life, Lord, according to your laws.
 Ps 119:149 NIV

But this idea is only a precursor of the fuller revelation that comes to us in the New Testament. Think of the foundational verse that we all learned in Sunday School. It will remind us that it was the love of God that brought Jesus to earth to make the great sacrifice that enables us to have eternal life.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16 NIV

In one of the last epistles to be written that we have included in our New Testament, the message is the same.

But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. Jude 20-21 NIV

# Conclusion

I close today with the story of someone who put their hope in the love of God. It is good for us to be reminded that sometimes God does miracles in our day as well. “A God Nearby” Grace Givers p. 133