

God is Love

God is... (Part 5)

Exodus 34:5-7

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Exodus 34:5-7

Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. And he 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."¹

Review: context of Exodus 34 + characteristics of God already discussed

- Ask: In 30 seconds or so, please describe the context leading up to God disclosing His character to Moses in *Exodus 34:5-7*.
- *Compassion* - a feeling word, a word used to describe the feeling a mother has towards her nursing baby
- *Grace* - God's favor towards His people, people who do not deserve God's favor and can never repay Him for His favor
- *Slow to anger* - literally translated as "long of nostrils." God is patient, but eventually, He will get angry because of the evil and suffering in the world.

The God of Love

- Love, in English, is, at times, an unhelpful word.
 - For example: I love *The Office*. I love my new niece Rosie. I love Lunch Box spicy chicken fingers. I love my truck. I love my wife. I love my dog, Topper. I love chilly weather.
 - We have one word to describe the deep feeling one has for a child or spouse and one's preference of food.
- What does *love* mean in the Bible in relation to God and His people?
 - First we'll discuss the love of God in the Old Testament and the Hebrew word to describe love, and then we will discuss the New Testament on the love of God and the word(s) describing love in Greek.

¹ All biblical references in this document are taken from the New International Version (NIV). *The Holy Bible: New International Version*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011.

- Love is mentioned here twice back-to-back, emphasizing the importance of this characteristic. God's love is one of the most important things to know about Him. You can not even come close to understanding God if you don't lean into His love. Love is an essential element of His character.
- *hesed* is the Hebrew word that is translated as love in *Exodus 34:6-7*.
- *hesed* can be translated to "steadfast love," "unfailing love," or "covenant loyalty."²
 - We will discuss covenants more at length next week when we discuss the faithfulness of God
- Hebrew scholar Daniel Block - "The Hebrew *hesed* cannot be translated with one English word. This is a covenant term, wrapping up in itself all the positive attributes of God."³
- *Deuteronomy 6:4-5* - Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.
- The Hebrew word *hesed* is used 126 times in the psalms alone.⁴
- *Psalms 89:1-2* - I will sing of the Lord's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations. I will declare that your love stands firm forever, that you have established your faithfulness in heaven itself.
- Love of God in the New Testament + Greek words for love
 - 4 Greek words for love used in the New Testament⁵
 - *Eros* - the word used to describe romantic love
 - *Philia* - the word used to describe brotherly-sisterly love shared between peers
 - *Storge* - the word used to describe a parent's love for a child
 - *Agape* - the word used to describe the love of God
 - *Eros* is used 54 times in the New Testament. *Agape* occurs 259 times.
 - *Agape*
 - So often in our culture we think of love as an uncontrollable emotion.
 - "Fall in love" or "fall out of love"

² John Mark Comer, *God Has a Name* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 193.

³ Comer, *God Has a Name*, 193.

⁴ Comer, *God Has a Name*, 196.

⁵ Jen Wilkin, *In His Image: 10 Ways God Calls Us to Reflect His Character* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 34.

- Agape “is an act of the will, ‘an intelligent, purposeful attitude of esteem and devotion; a selfless, purposeful, outgoing attitude that desires to do good to the loved one.’ In other words, agape does not merely feel; it acts.”⁶
 - Agape love is action, not just a feeling.
- *John 3:16* - 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.
- *Romans 5:8* - But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
- *1 Corinthians 13:4-8* - Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. **5** It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. **6** Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. **7** It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. **8** Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.
- Love is an action word (verb).
- The love of God is not affection that comes and goes.
- Love is at the core of who God is.
 - God can not be unloving. It’s at the core of His being and character.
- Even when God gets angry and enacts justice, He does it out of love.

How does Jesus exemplify love?

- We’ve pointed this out every week of this study on the characteristics of God: Jesus is the clearest picture of God we’ve got. “[Jesus] is the image of the invisible God...in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (*Colossians 1:15, 19*). God is like Jesus. Jesus is like God. If you want to know what God looks like, look at Jesus. This means that if God is a God of love, Jesus perfectly exemplifies the love of God.
- Jesus is the most loving person ever.
- When Jesus on the Greatest Command
 - *Mark 12:28-34* - **28** One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” **29** “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. **30** Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’

⁶ Wilkin, *In His Image*, 34.

31 The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." **32** "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. **33** To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." **34** When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

- The greatest sign of love in history was Jesus laying down His life for us.
 - *John 15:12-14* - My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.
 - Jesus laid down His life for us, His friends.

Our Response to the God of Love

- Rest in God's love.
 - *Exodus 33:13-14* - [Moses speaking] "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."
 - When Moses asks to understand more about God (*Exodus 34:5-7*), God responds to Moses and says He will give Moses rest.
 - When we see who God really is, our response should include rest. Rest in the character of God. Rest in the love of God. God loves you so much.
 - There's nothing you can do to make Him love you more, and there's nothing you can do to make God love you less.
 - God loves you. This means He values you. You are valuable to Him.
- We respond to God's love by loving Him back. He loves you, and He wants you to love Him back.
 - Ask God to reveal His vast love to you.
 - *Ephesians 3:14-19* - **14** For this reason I kneel before the Father, **15** from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. **16** I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, **17** so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, **18** 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, **19** and to

know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

- Sometimes it's hard to be aware of God's love, especially when things aren't going the way you wish.
 - Why am I single if God loves me? Why am I suffering if God loves me. Why did God let my grandmother suffer if He loves me and her? This is very difficult.
 - God never says life will be easy and free of suffering. In fact, He promises the opposite. Jesus says there will be suffering of Christians. (*John 16:33*)
 - But God does promise to always be present with us wherever we are.
 - Sometimes suffering will make God's love most evident.
- We've pointed this out each week in this study on the characteristics of God: God created humanity in His image (*Genesis 1:27*). This means we are to be like Him. This means we're to strive to love like Him.
 - Fruit of the Spirit
 - *Galatians 5:22-23* - But the fruit of the Spirit is **LOVE**, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.
- We respond to God's love by loving one another.
 - *1 John 4:7-12* - **7** Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. **8** Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. **9** This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. **10** This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. **11** Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. **12** No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.
- According to Jesus, the defining mark of a Christian is love. People will know we belong to Jesus by our love.
 - *John 13:34-35* - A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.