



The God We Worship, Part 4: He is The God of Steadfast Love

Series: The Wonder of Worship

Psalm 36

February 15, 2015

Pastor Nick Shaffer

Beloved, I hope that you have been seeing in these early stages of this sermon series on worship, as we have been coming face to face with the God we worship, that the revelation of the character and person of God is meant to evoke a response from our hearts. These are not dry descriptions or musty theological propositions. The attributes of God are not like the nutritional tables on the side of a cereal box – necessary but not particularly moving. I have never read one of those and rejoiced at the cereal that I was eating or thought that it made the cereal taste better. The character and the attributes of God are meant to be known and experienced. They are not academic facts to be catalogued and quantified, but personality traits and descriptions that are meant to give definition to the glorious person of God, to give explanation of the revelation of Himself to us. God gives Himself to be known and knowing Him and worshipping Him is life. That much is made abundantly clear by the text we are looking at this morning.

This psalm is written by David, the man after God's own heart, the sweet singer of Israel, the author of so many of the worship songs of Israel and of the church. He was a man who knew God – knew God experientially and personally, not as an impersonal deity defined by a number of theological truths and propositional statements only, but as the God who can be described by words like holy, sovereign, just, loving but who is far more wonderful than even these words, as true as they are, can convey. He is the God who must be known. He must be known. He has revealed Himself to us as the Holy God, the Sovereign God, and as we saw last week, the God of Just Wrath. And having looked at the black backdrop of God's wrath against sin, let's turn our focus today to the beautiful diamond of God's love as described in Psalm 36.

This psalm has an interesting construction. David pictures for us, first, the man who is utterly ignorant of God – who does not tremble at His holiness nor joyfully submit to His sovereignty, who dismisses His justice, who ignores His wisdom, who scoffs at God's compassion, and who is

woefully absent the experience of God's steadfast love and abundant mercy – a man who will eternally perish. Then having described the man without God, David moves into a personal confession of the joy of knowing God and especially the experience of knowing the God who steadfastly loves His people. But first we must see the man who has no true, spiritual, soul-changing knowledge of God and it's a frightening picture. What does David write about the man who doesn't know God?

The Man Who Does Not Know God (1-4) Pick it up in verse 1: "Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart; there is no fear of God before his eyes." (Psalm 36:1, ESV) David says regarding the man who does not know God is that what appeals to his heart, what he desires and longs for, the voice he heeds is not God's voice; he has no desire for worship, no desire to know God more and more and to know his ways. What appeals to his heart, what moves him is sin and transgression. His heart is enflamed with and passionate about sin. It's the thing that he loves – unrighteousness, wickedness, and godlessness. There are the things that move him and to which his heart responds – envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice, gossip, slander, pride, boasting, foolishness, faithlessness -- all the things in Romans 1:29-30 that typify those who do not know God. These are the things that appeal to his heart.

And the reason this is so is because he does not fear God. Because he does not know God, neither does he fear Him. In other words, he lives his life without reference to God – to His holiness, His glory, His majesty and worth. He lives his life without reference to God, without reverence for God, and without any awareness of his own accountability before God. As a result he totally lacks any wisdom at all -- "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight." (Proverbs 9:10, ESV) More than that, "The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him..." (Psalm 25:14a, ESV) and so he finds himself at enmity with God. But that's not all.

"For he flatters himself in his own eyes that his iniquity cannot be found out and hated." (Psalm 36:2, ESV) Because He does not know God, he thinks far too highly of himself. He cannot see the burning purity of the Lord and so he becomes completely desensitized to his own sinfulness, cannot see it and cannot hate it. He cannot see his own character because he has never examined himself in light of God's character. As a result.

“The words of his mouth are trouble and deceit; he has ceased to act wisely and do good.” (Psalm 36:3, ESV) The man who doesn’t know God in truth, becomes a source of falsehood and trouble to those around him. Like Paul said in Romans 1: “Claiming to be wise, they became fools,” (Romans 1:22, ESV) because he doesn’t know God or fear God, he cannot and does not do good. Perhaps he lived with some sort of an awareness of God in the past, but now he has sort of cast off all restraint.

“He plots trouble while on his bed; he sets himself in a way that is not good; he does not reject evil.” (Psalm 36:4, ESV) The final focus of the man who does not know God is that he spends his time meditating on and planning trouble, meditating on ways to please his flesh. He puts himself in the way that is not good and rather than rejecting evil, makes his home with it. Those who do not know God are in terrible peril, whether they know it or not. Psalm 1 says: “The wicked...are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.” (Psalm 1:4–6, ESV) Their lives are a waste, and they will perish because they do not know God, they do not know God’s holiness, His sovereignty, His glory, His majesty, His justice, or His love. This is a terrible picture of a wasted, worthless life and it stands in sharp contrast to the confession of David that we have in the rest of this psalm, a man who knew God deeply.

Remember that this psalm is written by a man that knew the holiness of God – who knew His worth and His majesty. He was a man who had experienced the sovereign hand of God to choose him to be king over Israel, not because David was the greatest of his brothers, but because of God’s own sovereign choice of him; a man who was willing to defend the honor and glory of God before a giant that made the rest of the nation of Israel quake. He knew the power and faithfulness of God to preserve him in the wilderness, to provide for him, and to deliver him from the sword of Saul and to bring him to the throne. He knew the mercy of God to forgive him great sin and transgression, to deliver him from the just wrath that his transgressions deserved, to grant to him repentance and to restore him from failure. This psalm is written by a man who understood who God is – the God who is holy, the God who is sovereign, the God who is supreme, the God who is just, the God who is merciful, the God who is a refuge for those who trust in Him -- and, in this psalm, what moves him and grips his soul, as we see repeated three times in the next few verses, is the steadfast love of God for his own, sinners though we are. What brings forth praise and worship from his heart is the steadfast love of God. David confesses that God is the God of steadfast love.

The Confession of Man who Knows the God of Steadfast Love (5-9) Look at what David writes starting in verse 5: “Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds.” (Psalm 36:5, ESV) These are the words of a man who knows God and what is so wonderful to him, what is so glorious to him, what is so astounding to him is the steadfast love and faithfulness of God to a sinner like him, like all of us. He knows the character of God and he knows what he is in himself and so what is so amazing to him is that God would love him. Now there are a lot of aspects to God’s love – entire books have been written to describe and analyze the love of God. We do not have time for that this morning. Instead, our focus is going to be on that aspect of God’s love that brings forth praise and adoration from the heart of David and that aspect of God’s love is His specific love for His own, for believers, for those who know Him, for OT saints and for the church. God is the God of steadfast love.

The word that is translated here as “steadfast love” is one of the most beautiful and expressive and weighty words in all of Scripture. It is the word “hesed” and it is so rich and so multifaceted that it defies a full expression in just one phrase. Hesed is the faithful covenant love that God has for those who are His, for His children, that we cannot earn and do not deserve. It is not the expression of generic love of everyone, but a love that is specific and particular, a love that is like that of a husband for his wife. Hesed is the consistent, ever-faithful, relentless, constantly-pursuing, lavish, extravagant, unrestrained love of our Father God by which He binds Himself to us for our good! Hesed is a word for life-long love that is richer and deeper than any word in English has ever conceived of. Hesed is a steadfast, rock-solid faithfulness and loyalty that endures to eternity: “For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you.” (Isaiah 54:10, ESV) Hesed, God’s love for his own, is a love that is so enduring that it persists beyond any sin or betrayal to mend brokenness and graciously extend forgiveness. Like I said, hesed, God’s steadfast love, cannot be translated with one English phrase. It comprises love, faithfulness, mercy, grace, kindness, loyalty -- acts of devotion and loving-kindness that go far beyond any concept of duty.

God’s love for us, His hesed, is an initiating love. He loved us and pursued us when we did not love him at all. Like John said: “We love because he first loved us.” (1 John 4:19, ESV) God’s love for us, for me, for each of His own, was entirely independent of anything in us. What was there to love? Nothing. On the other hand there was everything to repel Him. There was nothing in us to call forth God’s love. God’s love is free and spontaneous and finds its source in His sovereign will. Like he said to the Israelites: “It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you.” (Deuteronomy 7:7–8a, ESV) God’s love for

His own is eternal, unchanging, without limit and without end. It is a love that pursues His people to redeem them from sin and make them His own, that labors with them to make them holy, that provides for every need, that really does pursue what is best for those whom He loves, that is the source of every good thing from His hand.

Just listen to the glories of God's steadfast love: "But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house. I will bow down toward your holy temple in the fear of you." (Psalm 5:7, ESV) It is because of God's love that we are bought near to Him and made able to worship Him.

"I will rejoice and be glad in your steadfast love, because you have seen my affliction; you have known the distress of my soul, and you have not delivered me into the hand of the enemy; you have set my feet in a broad place." (Psalm 31:7–8, ESV) It is God's steadfast love that moves God to see our afflictions and hardships and act in order to relieve our distress and deliver us from the enemies of our souls.

"O my Strength, I will sing praises to you, for you, O God, are my fortress, the God who shows me steadfast love." (Psalm 59:17, ESV) It is God's steadfast love that makes Him a fortress, a refuge, the One to whom we can flee and find a welcoming heart.

"For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you." (Psalm 86:5, ESV) His love is the foundation of His forgiveness to all who call upon Him.

"For great is your steadfast love toward me; you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol." (Psalm 86:13, ESV) It is God's steadfast love that has delivered our souls from the pit of death.

"Deal with your servant according to your steadfast love, and teach me your statutes." (Psalm 119:124, ESV) Because of His steadfast love, He teaches us His commands, His ways, and the path of blessing.

“But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.” (Psalm 86:15, ESV) His steadfast love is a fount of mercy, of grace, of patience with His people. He is gracious and loving Father who holds fast to His people.

“The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.” (Psalm 138:8, ESV) Even when we stumble and fall, when we fail, He remains faithful, correcting us, chastening us, remaining faithful to us, laboring with us, continuing to shape us to bring to completion the good work He has begun in us.

“When I thought, “My foot slips,” your steadfast love, O LORD, held me up. When the cares of my heart are many, your consolations cheer my soul.” (Psalm 94:18–19, ESV) When we feel overcome, when it seems we cannot go on, it is the Lord, in His steadfast love that holds us up and carries us through, relieves our worries and fears and gives hope to our souls. And this is the effect that knowing the steadfast love of God has on His people. David wrote:

“Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.” (Psalm 63:3–8, ESV) That is the language of a worshipper. Do you see it? David had experienced his steadfast, immovable, unfailing love – His love poured out on him and God’s unfailing faithfulness to him. For that reason, David is determined to bless God the rest of His life - to honor and serve and obey God the rest of his life. He is all in. Because of God’s faithful love, David’s lips would praise God, openly so that God’s glory would be made known. While he lived, he would continue to bless and praise and glorify God. He would lift up his hands in joy and thanksgiving, in labor for God’s glory and in confidence of His steadfast love. There is in the experience of God’s steadfast love, a richness, a satisfaction, a fullness of soul filling joy, comparable to the richest food with which the body can be nourished. God’s steadfast love led David to say in essence, “I am stuck on you. I am glued to you Lord. I am never letting go.”

Hesed is a remarkable love, a love that intervenes on behalf of His loved ones and comes to their rescue, and makes them lovable, transforming them from the ugliness of sin and into the

beauty of holiness. Nowhere is that seen more clearly than in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for us. Paul said: “For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” (Titus 3:3–7, ESV) The Apostle John wrote how this love displayed by God should profoundly affect our lives: “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us.” (1 John 4:9–19, ESV)

It is this love, this hesed, demonstrated through the life and death of our Savior Jesus Christ, which has shaped our lives and made us who we are today — a saved people, a people filled with joy, filled with confidence, a people who can be certain of God’s love toward us, who know the promise of His faithfulness, who know the source of life, who are can live life the way it was meant to be lived. Hesed is love that can be counted on, decade after decade. It’s not about the fleeting nature of romance, but the security of faithfulness. God has bound himself to us in hesed, in steadfast love. It is an infinite mystery that God has chosen to love us as He has, despite the unworthy sinners that we are. But praise Him that He does. And for that reason, we can confess: “Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!” (Psalm 115:1, ESV)

It is this steadfast love of God that causes David to exult in this Psalm – “Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds.” That is the confession of a man that knows what it is to be loved by God and the rest of his words here show that reality.

“Your righteousness is like the mountains of God; your judgments are like the great deep; man and beast you save, O Lord.” (Psalm 36:6, ESV) Because David knows God’s steadfast love, he is confident of God’s unchanging righteousness – that He always does what is right – in general, yes, but specifically in his ways toward him. He is confident that though God’s judgments – His reason for what He does – may not be readily apparent to him – they are like the great deep – still He can trust God’s love for him. God’s purposes toward Him and toward His people are always loving.

He says: “How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light.” (Psalm 36:7–9, ESV) Do you feel David here? God’s steadfast love is precious to him. He values it deeply. He has meditated on it much and it is treasure to his soul. It’s priceless to him and here’s why. He has found refuge for his soul in God, as all do who come to him in humble faith and love. He has known satisfaction as God’s son like no other – that is meaning of feasting in the abundance of His house and drinking from the river of His delights. He has found joy and satisfaction without measure. In fact, the word for delights is derived from the word for Eden. David finds in God the communion and the joy and the pleasure that marked Eden before the Fall. Life as God created to be lived, real life, and light for that kind of living, is found in communion with God who has loved us with a steadfast and enduring love. That’s the testimony of David and of all who have known the love of God personally. And it leads him to this one request.

The Longing of the Heart that Knows God’s Steadfast Love (10-12) He writes: “Oh, continue your steadfast love to those who know you, and your righteousness to the upright of heart! Let not the foot of arrogance come upon me, nor the hand of the wicked drive me away. There the evildoers lie fallen; they are thrust down, unable to rise.” (Psalm 36:10–12, ESV) What is David’s plea? Keep loving me like that Lord. Keep loving me and all who know you – keep loving us as you have loved us. This is not the plea of fear, as if David is fearful that God will remove His love from David. It is the plea of confidence – that God does love Him, will continue to love Him with a steadfast love, and that David will experience more and more of the love of God in His own life.

He prays that God would not allow his enemies to triumph over him, nor that he would allow the sins of others, the wickedness of others, to dampen his own affection for God or to drive

him away from delighting in and treasuring the Lord with all of his heart. He prays this because he knows the end for those who do not know God, who do not love God. There the evildoers lie fallen; they are thrust down, unable to rise.

David treasures the steadfast love of God -- a love that literally will not let us go, but pursues us, overtakes us, saves us, guides us, protects us, keeps us near to Him, and brings us ultimately into His eternal presence. God's steadfast, loyal love. There is simply no other love like this -- not the love of a spouse, not the love of a parent, not the love of a child, not the love of a friend. It is incomparable love.

Charles Spurgeon said: "Oh, you are not dealing with trifles when you are dealing with the love of God to you. It is not a spare corner of the heart of God that He gives to you, as you may give a little love to the criminals in the jails, but the great, inconceivably vast heart of God belongs as much to every Christian as if there were not another being in the world for God to love! Even as Jehovah loves His Only-begotten, so does He love each one of His children."

How Do We Respond to Such Glorious Love? How do we respond to this glorious truth of God's love for us Christian?

By loving Him in return. How could we not love such a God who loves us like this? What other response could there be to this thought: God loves me, personally. He desires me for himself. He desires my fellowship and love and for this reason the Savior died for me personally, and I am very dear to him. That must draw my heart out to seek communion with Him. The only reasonable response of a redeemed sinner to the love of God is to love Him in return. That means that just as we are his beloved so he is to be our beloved. He must ever be foremost in our affections. He is to be our first love, our life, the total joy and satisfaction of our hearts, our all in all. How do we express that?

We do it through worship. Zephaniah writes: "The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing." (Zephaniah 3:17, ESV) Just as our Lord delights in his own and rejoices over us with singing and gladness of heart so we must delight in Him and sing to Him

with gladness and thanksgiving. What other response could we give but that of the Psalmist: “Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands.” (Psalm 63:3–4, ESV)

We do it through obedience to His holy commands. He is to receive from us expressions of our love – obedience to His commands and holy lives as an offering of praise. Like Jesus said: ““If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”(John 14:15, ESV) This is one of the most basic ways of loving the God who has loved us.

We love God by making His name known and calling sinners to faith and life in Him. We show love for God by loving what He loves and He loves Jesus and He loves what Jesus has done to redeem lost sinners, and He loves the lost and seeks them to be His own, pursuing Him with His love. We love God by loving the lost.

And we do it by loving those whom He has loved. We should love all who love Christ. Scripture says: “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.” (1 John 3:16, ESV) “And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.” (1 John 4:21, ESV) We should love all who love Christ, but particularly the members of the household of God into which He has placed us by His sovereign will.

In the modern church today, the marketing of the church has taught us to see ourselves as consumers. Most Christians today are markedly absent the hesed love of God when it comes to their church. The promise of a more entertaining preacher, a more talented praise band, personality conflicts, an unwillingness to seek forgiveness, to grant forgiveness, or to receive forgiveness, a new start encourages us to wander from fold to fold, like lost sheep.

But loyal love, hesed love, remains faithful to God and the people of God. Loyal love looks to the church not as a provider of religious services, but as the body of our Lord, our family. Family is not just some passing commitment, some religious organization, some group that we affiliate with for a time, which can come and go. Family is binding. Family is commitment. Family requires loyal, faithful, relentless, pursuing, forgiving, persevering, enduring, unwavering, laboring, peacemaking, believing, correcting, good-desiring love.

But here is the truth. The only way to experience the joy of God's love like this, to love God and His people like this, is to be absolutely confident of God's love for you. Sinclair Ferguson says: "If we have deep-seated fears that God does not really love us (as many Christians have), we can only go so far in growing nearer to God. There will come a point at which we will fear to trust Him any further because we cannot be sure of His love. When we look at ourselves, or our own faith, or our circumstances we will never be free from those lurking fears. Satan will see to that. But when we lift up our eyes and look on the cross we find the final persuasion that God is gracious towards us. How can he be against us when all His wrath against us fell upon Christ? How can He fail to care for us when He gave the only Son He had for our sake? How can we doubt Him when He has given us evidence of His love sufficient to banish all doubts?" To love like this, you have to know that you have been loved by God like this. The love of God for His people is one of the most glorious truths in all of Scripture. That the Holy God, the Sovereign God, the Just God, is also the God who loves sinners and redeems them despite all of their wickedness is the most amazing mystery and most blessed truth in all of creation.

Let me close with these words from Paul. Believe them beloved. "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:31–39, ESV) Amen and amen.

God loves you, beloved little flock...believe it.

© West Salem Baptist Church, 2015

Permissions: You are free to reproduce and distribute this material but you may not alter its contents in any way or charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. If you are posting online, a link back to this original document is preferred. Anything beyond these guidelines will require prior approval by West Salem Baptist Church.