

This is the second Sunday in our series on the character of God. Who is God? According to theologian Stephen Charnock, "The name of the Lord is the sum of His attributes".<sup>1</sup> His attributes are descriptive words that inform us of His makeup (Psalm 138:2). Each attribute or characteristic we find perfected in God (Deuteronomy 32:4). In fact, all other expressions of an attribute are partial reflections of the fullness of that characteristic seen in God. There are faithful people, but if we want to see real faithfulness we look at God. Faithfulness is one of God's attributes (1 Corinthians 1:9). There are good people, but if we want to see real goodness, we look at God (Psalm 119:68). The best things we see in people are just a portion of the perfection of all the good that is God.

All the characteristics of God are perfect and in perfect harmony. The facets on a diamond could serve as an illustration. Each cut makes a surface on the diamond, and light goes in and out of all the surfaces making a sparkle. If one surface is marred, you do not have a perfect diamond and it will not sparkle like a flawless diamond. Each perfect surface is one of the attributes of God. This week we will just take a brief look at His steadfast love. It is the most frequently mentioned attribute. It is the Hebrew word *chesed*. In the King James translation it was most frequently translated as "mercy" or "loving-kindness."

If God was faithful but He was not totally righteous, what is it that He would be faithful to? If God is love but is not just, then what does He love? You can see how the attributes of God interact and are perfectly balanced by the other attributes? Each adds to the beauty and perfection of the others. If one were missing or askew, none would be perfect (2 Samuel 22:31). In this series we will look at today's topic, steadfast love, and Lord willing, in the coming weeks we will look at the other facets of the diamond of His character, mercy, sovereignty, immutability, grace, love, holiness, justice and perhaps a few others.

It is very important that we understand God's character. It is His character that sets the standard for right and wrong. It is because He expresses steadfast love that we should express this attribute toward Him. Have you ever thought about what makes a thing right or wrong? It is not just because God says so. It is right because it is godly. In other words, it is like God. This concept is almost lost in postmodern culture. Abortion isn't wrong just because God says "Thou shalt not kill" (Exodus 20:13), but because in Him is life. Lies are not wrong just because God tells us not to lie, although that is reason enough (Exodus 23:1). The greatest reason is because God is true. We should determine right and wrong by God's word which is consistent with His perfect character.

**Commented [notes1]:** Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*

**Commented [notes2]: Psalm 138:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> • I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word.

**Commented [notes3]: Deuteronomy 32:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> • "The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.

**Commented [notes4]: 1 Corinthians 1:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> • God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Commented [notes5]: Psalm 119:68 (ESV)**

<sup>68</sup> • You are good and do good; teach me your statutes.

**Commented [notes6]: 2 Samuel 22:31 (ESV)**

<sup>31</sup> • This God—his way is perfect; the word of the LORD proves true; he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him.

**Commented [notes7]: Exodus 20:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> • "You shall not murder.

**Commented [notes8]: Exodus 23:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> • "You shall not spread a false report. You shall not join hands with a wicked man to be a malicious witness.

As we enter this subject we are standing on holy ground. We are not looking at the disputable opinions of men, but rather on the declaration of Scripture. The steadfast love of God brought you here this morning to worship Him (Psalm 5:7). How do we know God's love is steadfast? The Word of God tells us He is, and that He cannot lie (Numbers 23:19). He has proven His steadfast love in the lives of the characters throughout Scripture. Listen to the declaration of Scripture and hear the truth about God's revelation of this part of His character. You will see that when His steadfast love is mentioned often another characteristic of God is mentioned alongside it.

*<sup>5</sup> The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. <sup>6</sup> 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, <sup>7</sup> keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin..."* Exodus 34:5-7a This is the LORD'S self-description. He said of Himself that He abounds in steadfast love and keeps steadfast love for thousands, forgiving our sins.

Hasn't He proven His steadfast love with you? Has He answered your prayers and provided for your needs (Philippians 4:19)? Have you found Him to be reliable? Then you have experienced His steadfast love. I can certainly tell you He has shown steadfast love toward me. Even when I was faithless, ignoring His warnings, fighting His Holy Spirit, His steadfast love was ever present (2 Timothy 2:13). His steadfast love disciplined me (Hebrews 12:6), continually convicted me when I walked in rebellion, provided a way to escape (1 Corinthians 10:13), brought brothers and sisters to help, and taught me. He has shown nothing but steadfast love to me.

*<sup>5</sup> Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds. <sup>6</sup> Your righteousness is like the mountains of God; your judgments are like the great deep; man and beast you save, O LORD. <sup>7</sup> How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings.* Psalm 36:5-7 The steadfast love of God for those He is in covenant with is so great that the psalmist describes it as reaching to the heavens (Nehemiah 1:5). In other words, we can't climb out of it. We are living in an ocean of steadfast love. But that is not to deny the fact that God is just and judges sin (Exodus 34:7b). We will look at this seeming conflict in a moment.

The psalmist goes on to say that steadfast love is precious. When we realize the steadfast love of God is upon us, we become overwhelmed with gratitude and love for the One that could love us so in spite of thoroughly knowing us. This is the kind of love that a couple should commit to when they are engaged. It is a commitment love that promises to endure. It makes you want to sing! *<sup>1</sup> I will sing of the steadfast love of the LORD, forever; with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations. <sup>2</sup> For I said, "Steadfast love will be built up forever; in the heavens you will establish your*

**Commented [notes9]: Psalm 5:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> • 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.

**Commented [notes10]: Numbers 23:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> • God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?

**Commented [notes11]: Philippians 4:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> • And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

**Commented [notes12]: 2 Timothy 2:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> • if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.

**Commented [notes13]: Hebrews 12:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> • For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."

**Commented [notes14]: 1 Corinthians 10:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> • No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

**Commented [notes15]: Nehemiah 1:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> • And I said, "O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments,

**Commented [notes16]: Exodus 34:7b (ESV)**

<sup>7b</sup> 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."

*faithfulness.*" Psalm 89:1-2 The psalmist is so assured and blessed by God's steadfast love that he would sing of it forever.

It made a whole nation want to sing. It was one of the two chief subjects of the national chorus of Israel. <sup>34</sup> *Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!* 1 Chronicles 16:34 They had so much conviction that it was true, that they sang it when they went into battle (2 Chronicles 20:21). It impacts our daily lives. It changes us.

This love guides us. <sup>13</sup> *"You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed; you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode.* Exodus 15:13 We can trust in God's steadfast love being there in every circumstance. <sup>5</sup> *But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.* Psalm 13:5

Think about the steadfast love of God to His people in Scripture: Abraham and Sarah in a foreign land, Abraham's servant seeking a wife for Isaac, Joseph in a military prison, Moses with a million people in a barren wilderness, the conquest of Canaan, the restoration of Israel after the captivity, the coming of the Messiah, His sacrifice for our sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and on and on. We could sing of the steadfast love of the Lord forever. The Bible is the story of the steadfast love of God to those who will enter into covenant with Him (Deuteronomy 7:9).

You might say, "Wait a minute pastor, if you could walk in my shoes you would not be so sure of that steadfast love." Allow me to ask if you are in covenant with Him? Have you accepted the salvation He came to give you and put your life in His hands? Sometimes people will come to Jesus for salvation, and then continue to live like they did before. They just want a free ticket to heaven without a relationship with God. It doesn't work that way (1 John 4:20). If you enter into the new covenant of giving Him your sins in exchange for His righteousness, your life will change (2 Corinthians 5:17). It may not be instantly, but the presence of the Holy Spirit will make you uncomfortable when you live like you used to live.

If you are in covenant with Him and you still can't see His steadfast love, I'd like you to consider a few people in Scripture whose circumstances weren't enjoyable, and yet they knew God's steadfast love was upon them. Job lost everything, including his children, yet he could say, <sup>12</sup> *You have granted me life and steadfast love, and your care has preserved my spirit.* Job 10:12 Joseph had been sold into slavery by his brothers, imprisoned because of a false accusation, and yet it was written, <sup>21</sup> *But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.* Genesis 39:21 David was under attack from men that wanted to see him dead, yet he could pray, <sup>14</sup> *O God, insolent men have risen up against me; a band of ruthless men seeks my life, and they do not set you before them.* <sup>15</sup> *But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love*

**Commented [notes17]: 2 Chronicles 20:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> • And when he had taken counsel with the people, he appointed those who were to sing to the LORD and praise him in holy attire, as they went before the army, and say, "Give thanks to the LORD, for his steadfast love endures forever."

**Commented [notes18]: Deuteronomy 7:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> • Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations,

**Commented [notes19]: 1 John 4:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> • If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

**Commented [notes20]: 2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> • Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

*and faithfulness.* Psalm 86:14-15 And while the whole nation of Israel was in captivity, Ezra could write, <sup>9</sup> *For we are slaves. Yet our God has not forsaken us in our slavery, but has extended to us his steadfast love before the kings of Persia, to grant us some reviving to set up the house of our God, to repair its ruins, and to give us protection in Judea and Jerusalem.* Ezra 9:9

You might not think that I understand the pain you have experienced, and you are right. We each have our own experiences of the fallenness of this world. At nine-years-old my father tried to kill my mother. Then he took his own life. I thought I would be an orphan. After high school I thought I was following God when I joined a group that turned out to be a cult. At one point, I woke up to my true condition and attempted to take my life. Was God's steadfast love with me through it all? Looking back I can say, "Absolutely!" God guided me through all the confusion and pain to the other side. Even when I tried to give up, He kept me. I can say, "His steadfast love endures forever!"

Our circumstances should always be viewed from the assurance that God's steadfast love can never fail. How could God remove that love from us after paying such a high price that it might forever be ours? We worry because we realize that we didn't do anything to deserve it. Jacob realized that. When he was scared to death that his brother was going to kill him, he prayed to God invoking that steadfast love he knew was upon him, but confessed was completely undeserved (Genesis 32:10). We are correct to acknowledge that we don't deserve it. We deserve judgment. Which is greater, God's desire for justice or His steadfast love?

Norman Snaith comments on this Hebrew word for steadfast love, *chesed*, in contrast with God's desire for justice in *The Theological Word Book of the Bible*. "...when we try to estimate the depth and the persistence of God's loving-kindness and mercy, we must first remember his passion for righteousness. His passion for righteousness is so strong that he could not be more insistent in his demand for it, but God's persistent love for his people is more insistent still. The story of God's people throughout the centuries is that her waywardness has been so persistent that, if even a remnant is to be preserved, God has had to show mercy more than anything else. It is important to realize that though the Hebrew *chesed* can be translated by loving-kindness and mercy without doing violence to the context, yet we must always beware lest we think that God is content with less than righteousness. There is no reference to any sentimental kindness, and no suggestion of mercy apart from repentance, in any case where the Hebrew original is *chesed*. His demand for righteousness is insistent, and it is always at the maximum intensity. The loving-kindness of God means that his mercy is greater even than that. The word stands for the wonder of his unfailing love for the people of his choice, and the solving of the problem of the relation between his righteousness and his loving-kindness passes beyond human comprehension."<sup>2</sup>

**Commented [notes21]: Genesis 32:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> • I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps.

**Commented [notes22]:** Norman H. Snaith, *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, edited by Alan Richardson (New York: MacMillan, 1951), pp. 136-7.

I agree with Snaith that it is beyond our comprehension, and yet we have been given a display of it in the cross of Jesus. There the justice of God was poured out on the sins of the world that Jesus took upon Himself that we might freely receive the steadfast love of God (Psalm 130:7). Justice was met. Steadfast love did not have to compromise the justice and righteousness of God. I believe it was so beautifully described by the psalmist. <sup>10</sup> *Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other.* Psalm 85:10 God's faithfulness to His own nature met with steadfast love. His righteousness was exhibited on His judgment against sin, yet through it we are blessed to have peace with God. Jesus paid it all! The cross was the solution to the dilemma.

Jesus expressed this attribute of God so perfectly when He restored Peter on the shore of Galilee. He didn't tell Peter, "I told you that you'd deny me!" Instead, He lovingly invited Peter to examine the depth of his love for Him and then gave him a recall notice, "Follow me" (John 21:22). Jesus didn't withhold His presence or the Holy Spirit from those men who forsook Him and fled after promising to stay by His side (Mark 14:31). They were still to be His witnesses. And Jesus doesn't give up on us when we stumble and are unfaithful. That steadfast love convicts us, causes tears of remorse, but it also encourages and assures us. We recognize the price that was paid and look to His steadfast love. Far from being upset with us for looking to this gracious attribute, He takes pleasure in those who hope in it. <sup>11</sup> *but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.* Psalm 147:11

And just in case you are worried about that steadfast loving coming to end, remember this verse. <sup>17</sup> *But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children,* Psalm 103:17 I'll close with one more verse that reminds us how important it is for us to know this wonderful attribute of God. <sup>43</sup> *Whoever is wise, let him attend to these things; let them consider the steadfast love of the LORD.* Psalm 107:43

#### Questions

- 1 Why should we study God's attributes?
- 2 How can we learn about them?
- 3 What has God's steadfast love meant to you?
- 4 Why do we want to sing about it?
- 5 What was Israel's national chorus?
- 6 Give some scriptural examples of it?
- 7 Give examples of steadfast love in the midst of difficulty.
- 8 How can we have it?
- 9 How did God solve the dilemma of steadfast love and justice?
- 10 How should it change us?
- 11 Give examples of the demonstration of God's steadfast love in your life.

#### Commented [notes23]: Psalm 130:7 (ESV)

<sup>7</sup> • O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption.

#### Commented [notes24]: John 21:22 (ESV)

<sup>22</sup> • Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!"

#### Commented [notes25]: Mark 14:31 (ESV)

<sup>31</sup> • But he said emphatically, "If I must die with you, I will not deny you." And they all said the same.