



Daily Devotionals: God Is Love | August 15, 2021

Day 1 – Devotional

“He loves me. He loves me not.”

The dreamy-eyed girl plucking flower petals one by one, playing the familiar game, taking a chance on love often depicts the way we view love, doesn't it? Hopeful, but not certain. Wondering, but not assured. Ultimately, when we describe and define love, it's relegated to a “feeling” and those can just be downright unpredictable.

A.W. Tozer wrote, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. For this reason the gravest question before the church is always God himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like.”

Often our understanding of God's character is rooted in powerful emotional experiences. How we view God—how we think and feel about him—can at times be distorted by what we've experienced. In *Healing for Damaged Emotions*, author David Seamonds writes, “Most of us developed our concepts and feelings about our heavenly Father from our earthly mothers and fathers, and these feelings become intertwined and confused. But the guilty and contradictory feelings are not the voice of God. They are often the continuing voice of Mother or Dad or Brother or Sister, or something internalized that puts pressure on us. Most of our basic patterns for relating come from the patterns of the relationships of our family.”

Our *images* or distorted views of God's nature and character affect both how we feel about God and how we live in relationship to God. Tozer goes on to say, “Our real idea of God may lie buried under the rubbish of conventional religious notions and may require an intelligent and vigorous search before it is finally unearthed and exposed for what it is. Only after an ordeal of painful self-probing are we likely to discover what we actually believe about God.”



So then, what comes to mind when you think about God’s love? Do you find yourself hopeful, but not certain? Wondering, but not assured? If you do, I can assure you, you’re not alone.

This week, we’re going to be focusing on the reality that *God is love*. We are going to be investigating, and hopefully better living in, the unwavering nature of God’s steadfast, unending love. Does God’s love extend to us? Of course, but it certainly doesn’t begin there. It begins with who he is. We’ll be looking at the Hebrew word for God’s loyal, steadfast love—*khesed*—and how that word informs our understanding of who God is.

Read through Psalm 103 below.

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—
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.
The LORD works righteousness
and justice for all the oppressed.
He made known his ways to Moses,
his deeds to the people of Israel:
The LORD is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in love.
He will not always accuse,
nor will he harbor his anger forever;
he does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities.
For as high as the heavens are above the earth,



so great is his love for those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion on his children,
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;
for he knows how we are formed,
he remembers that we are dust.
The life of mortals is like grass,
they flourish like a flower of the field;
the wind blows over it and it is gone,
and its place remembers it no more.
But from everlasting to everlasting
the LORD's love is with those who fear him,
and his righteousness with their children's children—
with those who keep his covenant
and remember to obey his precepts.
The LORD has established his throne in heaven,
and his kingdom rules over all.
Praise the LORD, you his angels,
you mighty ones who do his bidding,
who obey his word.
Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts,
you his servants who do his will.
Praise the LORD, all his works
everywhere in his dominion.
Praise the LORD, my soul.

- Circle all of the things the Psalmist gives thanks for in verses 1-8. Which of these gifts of God are you especially grateful for right now?
- What do these verses reveal about God? What does the Psalmist say about God in verses 9-14?
- How does this Psalm display the love of God?



Read through the lyrics to this hymn by Frederick Lehman. Circle any words or phrases that stand out to you.

The love of God is greater far
Than tongue or pen can ever tell;
It goes beyond the highest star,
And reaches to the lowest hell;
The guilty pair, bowed down with care,
God gave His Son to win;
His erring child He reconciled,
And pardoned from his sin.
When hoary time shall pass away,
And earthly thrones and kingdoms fall,
When men who here refuse to pray,
On rocks and hills and mountains call,
God's love so sure, shall still endure,
All measureless and strong;
Redeeming grace to Adam's race—
The saints' and angels' song.
Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made,
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade;
To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry;
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky.
Oh, love of God, how rich and pure!
How measureless and strong!
It shall forevermore endure—
The saints' and angels' song.



- What is your current understanding of God's love? In what ways does it match the poetic lyrics to this hymn? In what ways is it different?
- In what ways would you like to fully know that God is love? Write a prayer today inviting God to show you his love this week.



Day 2 – Look at the book

Today we continue to further explore how God is LOVE and what that really means. We're going to engage a bit differently today, so you'll need a device to watch this video from The Bible Project to begin. Simply scan the QR code (or you can google "the bible project video loyal love).

Before you watch this video, grab a pen and paper as you might want to jot down some notes. Before you hit play, take a deep breath, asking God to settle your mind and show you something new about his nature.



<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/loyal-love/>

- If the nature of *khesed* is that it is not conditional or based on our worth, why do you think this quote is true?

“...a dominant narrative among many Christians (and non-Christians): God only loves us when we're good. Many people live with the assumption that God's love is conditional. Our behavior, it's assumed, determines how God feels about us. Consequently, God's love is constantly in flux.”

- Do you sometimes feel that God's love depends on your behavior? Has the performance-based narrative been part of your experience? Can you think of an example of this in your own life?



- How do you think our pride and self-focused nature can skew our understanding of God's love for us?

In the video, they shared that “God is loyal and loving for no other reason than it’s just who God is...Of course he wants his people to respond with *khesed* in return but even when they don’t, God’s *khesed* remains.” In **Romans 5:6-7**, Paul shows us how much God’s *khesed* remains through the gift of Christ’s sacrifice.

- How have you seen God’s love demonstrated in this way in your own life? When have you rejected him and he still showed you love?
- Have you ever been in a position to love someone who rejected you? Or have you ever been loved by someone you have hurt? Describe what that was like.

With the explanation of *khesed* from the video in mind, **read I John 4:8**.

Keeping in mind that *God is love*, take a few moments to walk through the *lectio divina* Scripture reading practice below using I Corinthians 13:4-8. Remember that love is defined as “love, generosity, and enduring commitment all in one.” Allow this to be the framework for your reading. Replace the word “love” for “God” as you read (the passage below is written out that way for you).

Take a moment to breathe, inviting God to settle your mind, heart, and body. Ask him to show you something new about his love as you read the scripture.

First reading:

Read the passage through, one time, slowly. Pause between each phrase (for example, “*God is patient,*” [pause] “*God is kind,*” [pause]. . .) After you finish this first reading, be silent for a minute or two.

God is patient, God is kind. God does not envy, God does not boast, God is not proud. God does not dishonor others, God is not self-seeking, God is not easily angered, God keeps no record of wrongs. God does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. God always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.



God 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.

Second reading:

Read the text slowly once again, pausing between phrases. This time pause even longer, paying attention to any of the words or phrases that catch your attention or seem to stand out in some way. Make a note of these. After you finish the second reading, write down those special words or phrases.

Third reading:

Reread the passage up to the word or phrase that stood out to you. When you reach that word or phrase, stop and repeat it a few times. Reflect for a while on that phrase. Let the words interact with your thoughts, your memories, or any other Bible passages that come to mind. Let it speak to your heart, your desires, and your fears. Ask yourself, *what might God want to say to me specifically?*

Turn that last question into a prayer, asking God, “What is the word you have for me in this passage? Is there anything you want to say to me today?” Listen. Write down anything you sense God might be saying to you.

Rest:

Be still and silent for a moment. Enjoy being in the presence of God. In this step you move from doing to being. Simply be in God’s presence.

Response:

Ask yourself and God, *What am I being called to do as a result of the word I have been given?* Perhaps you are feeling challenged to love God more, or to accept some aspect of who you are, or to serve someone you know, or to begin changing some aspect of your character. Whatever it is, write it out, “Today God is calling me to...”

Thank God for the word he has given you today.



Day 3 – Scripture Survey

As we look at how “God is love” this week, we want to see what the whole story of Scripture has to say about this particular topic. Where else in Scripture can we go to read about God’s love?

Take a few moments to slowly read through the passages below. As you read, take some time to ask yourself these three questions:

- What does this passage teach me about God’s love—specifically viewing the passage through the lens of the Hebrew word *khesed*?
- What questions do I have about this?
- God, what are you inviting me into as I read and look through these verses?

Exodus 34:6-7; Numbers 9:17; Numbers 14:18

Psalm 86:1-17

Psalm 136:1-26

John 15:9-14

Ephesians 3:16-19



Day 4 – Story Work

We keep coming back to the quote from A.W. Tozer who said that, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” Today, we want to reflect on how God’s loyal love intersects with us personally, to see how his great love has done or could do something in us.

To begin today, read **I John 4:8**, **I Corinthians 13:4-8**, and **Psalms 103:1-14** thinking of this week’s character trait of God’s loyal love (*khesed*). Then, respond to each of the questions below with this specific trait in mind.

- Reflect on the times in your life when you have experienced God’s love. What was that like? How did God show his love to you in those moments?

In his book, *Surrender to Love*, psychologist and author, David Benner writes, “

“The single most important thing I have learned in over thirty years of study of how love produces healing is that love is transformational only when it is received in vulnerability.”

Suppose that with God’s help I am able to love my son unconditionally. But if he is desperately trying to please me, the unconditional nature of my love will not be noticed. And there will be no deep experience of knowing himself deeply and unconditionally loved. Receiving love while he is trying to earn it will only reinforce his efforts to be lovable. Far from being transformational, this will only increase his efforts to earn love. And any love he receives will only be experienced as the fruit of these efforts.

Genuine transformation requires vulnerability. It is not the fact of being loved unconditionally that is life-changing. It is the risky experience of allowing myself to be loved unconditionally.”



- Is it easy or difficult for you to trust in the unconditional loyal love of God? How do you see vulnerability playing a part? Do you see God as loving unconditionally? If so, what has contributed to that understanding? If not, what has kept you from living in the reality of God's love for you?
- What relationships have affected (positively or negatively) the way you view God's love for you? What would God want to say to you about those relationships? How do you view God's loyal love toward others?
- *"The love we receive from others is always limited by their brokenness and finitude. And the love we give to others is always contaminated by our self-preoccupation." ~David Benner*
- Understanding our limited ability to show truly unconditional love, how have you shown loyal love to others throughout your story? What makes it easy to show love? What makes it difficult? How might God be inviting you to live in response to his loyal love?



Day 5 – Response

For this last day, let's slow down and pay attention to what God has been inviting us into as a result of our work this week. Find a quiet space. Silence any technology around you. Spend some time reviewing your devotions this week. Allow God to bring to mind the places where he's been showing you his character in his love.

Jot down your thoughts to the following reflection questions:

As you look over this week, what words, phrases, Scriptures, etc. have stood out to you? What was the most significant thing? Why?

How have you seen God's loyal love over the course of this past week? How have you loved him in response? How have you shared God's love with others? Where have you not?

What is God inviting you to DO as a response to this week's reflections?

Consider some of these suggestions as possible action steps as you step into living this week's truths:

- Use the Practice of Being Known for the next week and see how it impacts your understanding of God's *khesed* love for you.



- Write out I Corinthians 13:4-8, replacing the word *love* with *God*. Place it somewhere you can read it every morning. Invite God to show you his love throughout the day.
- In the evening before going to bed, jot down three places you saw God's *khesed*, loyal love show up throughout the day. Find someone to text and share what you've noticed about God's love that day. Invite them to share with you as well.
- Spend some time talking with your family over dinner about what loyal love looks like in your family. Brainstorm some ways you can show loyal love to one another.

Practice:

The Practice of Being Known from Curt Thompson's Anatomy of the Soul

A prayer exercise based in the story of Jesus' baptism in Luke 3.

Find a quiet place where you will not be distracted or interrupted. Allow yourself to get comfortable with your eyes closed.

Take a deep breath and begin to imagine yourself in a physical environment that is peaceful and calm. You may visualize yourself beside the ocean or a lake, in a forest or a meadow, or surrounded by mountains—anywhere that exudes beauty and tranquility. Allow yourself, now, in your imagination, to take a few moments to become aware of your surroundings. Simply take it in. What do you see? What do you hear? What do you feel around you?

Next, allow yourself to sense God's presence. There is no right or wrong way to do this. You may just sense his presence or you might even "see" him in bodily form there with you.

Now, if you are a woman, imagine hearing God clearly say to you directly, calling you by name, "You are my daughter, and I do so love you, I am so *pleased* with you and am delighted that you are on the earth." Or if you are a man, you would imagine hearing something like, "You are my son, and I do so love you, I am so *pleased* with you and am delighted that you are on the earth."

Sense, if you can, God looking you directly in the eyes as he says these words. Do not turn away from his gaze. Do not resist his voice. Allow yourself to be in his presence for several minutes. Do not leave this place in your mind quickly. What do you feel? What do you feel God feeling as he looks with tenderness and strength into the windows of your soul?



The author of this prayer practice, Curt Thompson, is a Christ-follower and a neuroscientist. He suggests engaging in this meditation with God each day for six weeks. He writes this, “If you [engage in this prayer], remember that you are not simply engaging with some abstract dimension of your mind; you are in fact, changing the neural networks of your brain. Practically, this exercise may lead you to a deep awareness of being known and cared for by your Father. Initially, this may take place only during the meditation. Eventually, however, you will find that you can quickly access the positive images, feelings, sensations, and words you hear during moments of discomfort in everyday life, altering your response to an anxiety-provoking event.”

What did you notice and experience as you engaged in this practice?

As you finish out this practice, read these words from Henri Nouwen’s book, *Life of the Beloved*.

Invite God to remind you of his *khesed* toward you.

“We are the Beloved. We are intimately loved long before our parents, teachers, spouses, children, and friends loved or wounded us. That’s the truth of our lives. That’s the truth I want you to claim for yourself. That’s the truth spoken by the voice that says, ‘You are my Beloved.’ Listening to that voice with great inner attentiveness, I hear at my center words that say: ‘I have called you by name, from the very beginning. You are mine and I am yours. You are my Beloved, on you my favor rests. I have molded you in the depths of the earth and knitted you together in your mother’s womb. I have carved you in the palms of my hands and hidden you in the shadow of my embrace. I look at you with infinite tenderness and care for you with a care more intimate than that of a mother for her child. I have counted every hair on your head and guided you at every step. Wherever you go, I go with you, and wherever you rest, I keep watch. I will give you food that will satisfy all your hunger and drink that will quench all your thirst. I will not hide my face from you. You know me as your own as I know you as my own. You belong to me. I am your father, your mother, your brother, your sister, your lover, your spouse...yes, even your child...wherever you are I will be. Nothing will ever separate us. We are one.’”