

Encountering the Heart of God

Week 4: 'Abounding in Love and Faithfulness'

Sermon Bible Passages Exodus 34:6-7 (focusing on 6c); Psalm 89:1-8

(*God has a Name* – chapter 5; *Gentle and Lowly* – chapter 16)

This week as we look in greater depth at the character of God, we are focusing on God 'abounding in love and faithfulness'. This phrase comes from an original Hebrew word that is hard to translate into English: 'hesed', or God's steadfast, unfailing love and covenant loyalty.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What do you think it means to be 'abounding' in love?

Watch the Bible Project short video on 'Loyal Love':

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UfbyFLgs_NM

This clip follows the thread of God's covenant 'hesed' love through the Bible, as God interacts with various different people.

Pause and recap in more detail if there are people mentioned here whose stories you may not have heard before.

- Which of these characters resonates the most with you, and why?
- Are there any people in your life who have demonstrated for you the love of God in abundance? If so, how has that helped you to flourish?

In the Bible God's love and faithfulness are described in terms of a covenant. Covenant is like a legal contract drawn up between two parties in which each side promises to be faithful to the other one in an enduring loving commitment. (Marriage vows are one example of a covenant at work today.)

In the Bible we find that God stays faithful ('emet' in Hebrew) to his side of the Covenant that he makes with people, even though they repeatedly let him down.

Read Genesis 12:1-7

- In this first Covenant that God made with Abram, who is God promising to bless?
- What is Abram's role in this agreement?
- How easy was this for Abram? (See Genesis 15:1-6)
- How difficult do you find it to believe that God is committed to you? Why do you think this is the case?
- What might help you to be committed to God?

Ultimately we know that God is committed in covenant love towards us today because he sent Jesus. Luke makes this clear at the start, and at the end, of his Gospel.

Read Luke 2:67-75 and Luke 22:14-20

- This is centuries after God's promise of blessing to Abram, but how do these passages show us that God is forever faithful to us, even when we are faithless?
- How does the life and death Jesus show us the depth of God's commitment?

Application

- Do you struggle to be faithful to others – eg. friends, family, work colleagues? Be specific!
- How far do you find your own background helps or hinders you in this?
- In what ways did Jesus live out 'hesed' love in his daily life? How might we be inspired by his example? What might God be calling you to do to be faithful to those you struggle to be faithful with?

RESPONSE

- Psalm 136 is a meditation on God's faithful love in which the phrase 'His love endures forever' is repeated 26 times! Try saying this together, with one person saying the first part of the verse, and everyone else joining in the chorus.
- Or, Psalm 136 looks back on things that God has done in the past that are tokens of his love. Speak out some of the things that you would like to thank God for, and allow others in the group to respond with 'His love endures forever'.

DAILY RESPONSE

However much we struggle, God's Holy Spirit is seeking to grow God's character in us.

- Ask for God to give you the fruit of the Spirit from Galatians 5:22-23: His 'love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control' towards those who you find difficult – and also for those you don't!
- Make a note of ways in which you have seen God answer your prayers for the relationships you find difficult.