

The Steadfast Love of God

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[0 : 00] Good morning, friends. I'll be reading Psalm 36 for us in a moment, if you want to open up your Bibles to that. If you have a visitor's Bible, it's on page 465.

It's also page 465 in my Bible, which is not a visitor's Bible. It's probably just a coincidence. I'm going to pray, and then let's read the passage.

Father God, thank you that we have your word. We pray that you would let us listen well this morning. Please let me teach clearly. We pray that you would soften hearts, that your kingdom might be grown.

Amen. So let's read Psalm 36. We're starting from verse 1. To the choir master of David, the servant of the Lord.

Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart. There is no fear of God before his eyes. For he flatters himself in his own eyes, that his iniquity cannot be found out and hated.

[1 : 07] The words of his mouth are trouble and deceit. He has ceased to act wisely and do good. He plots trouble while on his bed. He sets himself in a way that is not good.

He does not reject evil. Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens. Your faithfulness to the clouds. Your righteousness is like the mountains of God.

Your judgments are like the great deep. Man and beast you save, O Lord. 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.

O, 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.

[2 : 13] There the evildoers lie fallen. They are thrust down, unable to rise. Let me add my welcome for everyone to 2025, and also welcome to church this morning.

Now, for those who don't know, if you were to measure at 2,025 seconds, that's 33 minutes and 45 seconds.

And hopefully I won't be talking for that long, but we'll see. Now, my background as a mathematician, 2025 is also a square number.

For anyone whose school was many, many years ago, or last week, a square number is one that's just a product of another number with itself. 2025 is 45 squared.

And it's probably just a coincidence, but 36 is 6 squared. Now, why am I talking to you about maths on a Sunday on school holidays?

[3 : 19] Well, it's because this is probably the only square-numbered year that most of us are going to be alive in. The last one was in 1936, and the next one will be in 2116.

Some of our oldest members might have seen the last one, and some of our youngest might see the next one. But for most of us, this is it. Now, you have seen many changes from the last square year, 1936, to this one, 2025, and we'll see many more from this one to the next one.

But one thing that hasn't changed in that time, or for many years before, or for many years after, is God's love. It's steadfast, it's enduring, it's unconditional, and it's faithful.

Now, I don't know why you're all here today, whether you're regular, whether you're looking for a new church, whether you're investigating Jesus, or the sign on the street looked interesting. But for those who are already acquainted with Jesus and know him, and for those who aren't, the best way to start any year, and this year in particular, is to reflect on the love of God and how it reflects our lives.

And that's what David looks at today. So let's look at Psalm 36, just to see one instance of David reflecting on God's love. So the psalm begins, to the choir master of David, the servant of the Lord.

[5 : 01] We know David's the author of the psalm, and suggested the choir master. I had to look it up, that's the conductor. What we don't know, though, is when the psalm was written, or what David's specific inspiration for it was.

Was he just reflecting on the general situation around him? The general sinfulness of man? Or a specific event with Saul or Absalom, or one of his other persecutors?

We just don't know, unfortunately. But thankfully, it doesn't affect how we understand the psalm too much. Another point to note here, is that David is given a title.

The servant of the Lord. Now, David wrote many psalms, and most of them start a psalm of David, or of David, or they describe the event that prompted the psalm, like that time he went into Bathsheba.

But in Psalm 36, and in Psalm 18, David does have a title to give him, given to him. And both times, it's the servant of the Lord.

[6 : 14] Now, I just want to make a short note here. If you look in your Bible, Lord is in all uppercase or small caps.

That's the personal name of God. So, here David's described as a personal servant of God.

Think in the same way that before he was a king, David was a personal servant of Saul. Saul. The closeness of that relationship, the love that David had for Saul, that's the same kind of relationship that we're picturing between David and God.

He was right there. It wasn't just like a servant out in the field, but he was right there. The servant of the Lord is a highly esteemed title.

Now, David could have been called a king, or a prophet, or a shepherd. He was all of those things, but he wasn't called that for a very good reason.

[7 : 16] Throughout the Old Testament, the man with the title of the servant of the Lord was someone God had specifically chosen to lead Israel. Think back to Abraham in Genesis 26.

He's called that. Moses, Exodus 14. Or even Isaiah in Isaiah 20. The other men in the Old Testament described as the Lord's servant.

And we see that come full circle in the New Testament, where the Lord Jesus is the true servant of the Lord. That's that same Jesus who we celebrate the birth of the other week, Christmas.

The one who was born in a shed in the back streets of Bethlehem. That one who grew up to be that guy who got crucified. The one we celebrate Easter. And to understand how any of this can make any sort of sense, this psalm gives us a window into the character of God.

Before we get there, though, thinking about God's love, David reflects on the wickedness of wicked people in verses 1 to 4.

[8 : 34] As I mentioned, it can't be determined if this psalm is written in response to a specific incident. or just general affliction. The cause of sin, i.e. transgression, from verse 1, and its widespread nature in a human, they're considered in all of their ugliness.

So, from verse 1, transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart. Transgression is just a synonym for the word sin. And this passage will show us that transgression, or sin, is more than just doing the wrong thing.

It's your way of life. And to understand sin, particularly from verse 1, we need to understand who are the wicked and what is the heart. And the wicked isn't that movie in the cinema.

Now, Psalm 1 describes the wicked in the contrast to the blessed. The blessed delights in the law of the Lord. The wicked man scoffs.

The blessed perseveres and prospers. The wicked is like chaff and is blown away. Nathan mentioned it last week. I will again, because very rarely in a city we see chaff.

[9 : 52] It's the husk on grain or crop. If you buy fresh corn and it has that green bit on the outside that you chuck out in the bin or in your compost, that green bit is the chaff.

It doesn't do anything. It protects what's inside, but it's useless in its function. So, the wicked person is someone who's blown away from the Lord and scoffs at the Lord's law.

And we all know what a heart is. It's that thing that Keith had operated on yesterday. It's that muscle in our chest that beats about 100,000 times a day. When the Bible talks about the heart, it isn't talking about that muscle in here.

It's talking about the innermost part of a human. From Proverbs 14, the heart is where wisdom dwells. From 1 Samuel 25, it's where life dwells.

From 1 Kings 10, it's what makes decisions in us. And in 1 Samuel 1, it's where emotions are felt.

[11 : 04] For an Old Testament Israelite, it's the center of a human being. It's the core of all of their human function. Nowadays, we call that our brain.

sin is speaking to the core of a person who scoffs at the Lord's law. And we also get a description of this person to whom sin is speaking.

There's no fear of the Lord in his eyes. Proverbs 1 tells us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.

And if we look at the context in Proverbs 1, we see that fear doesn't mean be afraid. Fear means to trust. So, this person that sin is speaking to, right into their innermost parts, is someone who doesn't trust God.

And then we see the effect of sin speaking to them and the practical outcome in the following verses. For he flatters himself in his own eyes that his iniquity cannot be found out and hated.

[12 : 20] The words of his mouth are trouble and deceit. He has ceased to act wisely and do good. He plots trouble while on his bed. He sets himself in a way that is not good.

He does not reject evil. Most of us probably know what flattery is. It's just insincere praise. when we tell someone something good that is just not true.

And this guy is doing it to himself. Look how great I am and he's made it all up. But we also know what this guy is praising himself over. He's done some sin that if other people knew and found out would cause them to hate him and he's praising himself that he's gotten away with it.

Now when he isn't praising himself the other words that he says are trouble and deceit. Like we saw in Psalm 35 last week his words are lies that cause harm to others.

We know the tongue can both bless God and curse each other. James 3 talks about that. Now this morning we've sung praises to God with our tongues.

[13 : 44] But this week just gone and this week coming up who will use their tongue to gossip falsely accuse someone mislead or deceive someone around them.

It's the same mouth that we use. And this wicked man he also plans out the evil that he do. Imagine you've got like your evil villain who's sitting in his lair like planning out whatever he's going to do to the hero of your story.

That's what this wicked man is doing when he gets up every morning. He's working out what evil he's going to do that day. He just doesn't consider what is wise or good.

God's God's picture that David's painted of this man is that he is fully opposed to God. He doesn't listen, he doesn't make decisions that are good, and he actively makes plans that he knows are harmful because they're good for him.

He doesn't just do wicked things, but that opposition to God shows that his relationship with God is fundamentally broken. Listen to Paul from Romans 3.

[15 : 06] No one is righteous. No, not one.

No one understands. No one seeks for God. All have turned away. Together they have become worthless. No one does good, not even one.

Their throat is an open grave. They use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. In their paths are ruin and misery.

And the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes. How well does our man from Psalm 36 fit that description?

He pretty much ticks all the boxes. people are not going to go to us. But the problem that raises for us is that Paul describes all people like that.

[16 : 10] And you. Now we, the societal we, not just us here, we like to point the finger because the problem's out there.

It's those CEOs who are pushing up prices. It's the government not providing for us. us. It's the youth that are out of control. It's the drugs that just cause problems.

And what that fails to realize is that we, humans, everywhere, we are the problem. And we are the problem because each of us has turned our back on God.

We rejected him. that is transgression. That is sin. It's a broken relationship with God.

And our broken relationship with God is the cause of our wickedness. Or to put it another way, the wicked things that we do are evidence that our relationship with God is broken.

[17 : 24] But because the core problem is a broken relationship, not specifically with our actions, there's nothing we can do to fix it. We can't force people to be in a relationship with us.

I can't make someone here be my friend. They have to freely choose those things. And more importantly, we can't force God to be in a relationship with us.

God to be in a relationship with God. And for the story finished there for the most part. We're done. We've got no chance.

But David didn't finish there. And neither did Paul. Because God didn't finish there. If we keep reading Romans 3, just skip ahead a couple of verses to 21.

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it. The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

[18 : 29] For there is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.

This was to show God's righteousness because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Much time can and has been spent studying this section of God's word. We're not going to cover it. We're barely going to scratch the surface. The key things to note here are that all people have sinned.

All people are wicked. All people have turned away from God. And yet, God's provided a way for people to come back to him. It's nothing they did that you or I earned.

God's gift. But it's given to us by grace as a gift through faith. And it's not even because we deserved it, but because God is righteous.

[19 : 53] If we flip forward to chapter five, we see God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. So we still had our back turned on God when he decided, yep, I'm going to act now.

And he invites us to turn back around to face him, even when we turned away and relate with him and others properly because he loves us so dearly, more deeply than a mother can to their child.

A man to his latest catch or a scholar in their library. Because of God's love, we can break the shackles of the wicked man and have a true relationship with God and with each other.

One way that the Bible describes this new relationship is to be a child of God. Like, he's your parent and your child. Now, back in Psalm 36, David's just finished reflecting on the wicked man and he turns to God's steadfast love and goodness from verse 5.

Just look at how God's love is described. It extends to the heavens. Ephesians 3 further alludes to the magnitude of his love as being endless.

[21 : 33] Now, endless or infinite things, they're pretty difficult for humans to understand and comprehend. We can imagine it, but we can't feel it, we can't touch it, because the world around us is finite.

Everything has an end. There's nothing here that we can do that's truly infinite. infinite. But as I said, we can imagine it, because God's given us our brains, and he is infinite.

infinite. The best place you're going to get a practical example is, I mean, I'm always going to promote math, so it's in maths.

And if you want to look up a practical example, just check out measure theory. So what it's like, it's like a walk along that long beach, but the beach just never ends.

Every beach I've ever been to has an end. This one doesn't. It's that fishing spot that never runs out of fish. You just keep catching them. Every place I fish, I never catch anything, but if I did, this place would never end.

[22 : 46] You just keep hauling them in. It's that scent or aroma in the candle that you have, that you really love, that you can't find in the shop anymore, that just never burns out.

It just keeps going and going and going. It's like the energizer bunny. And we can imagine all of this because God is infinite.

That's his reality. His love extends further than we can comprehend, all the way to the heavens.

love. And it's not that pithy love between teenagers infatuated with one another, or even older people infatuated with one another, nor the caring love of a parent to their child who genuinely has their best interest at heart.

But it's the sacrificial love that saw God the Father separated from God the Son for the sake of repairing the relationship with his people, with us.

[23 : 58] And David doesn't stop there. But he reflects on how God's love permeates through the rest of his character. God's faithfulness extends to the clouds.

Throughout the Old Testament, clouds are symbolic of the presence of God. It's where God is. And where God is, his faithfulness is there.

For some examples of that, we can check out Exodus 33 with Moses on Mount Sinai, or when God is hovering over the tabernacle in the wilderness, Numbers 9. God's righteousness, David describes, is like the mountains.

Now what are mountains? Well, they're immovable. but also they're visible from everywhere. Everywhere we look, we can see God's righteousness.

It's in his creation. God's judgments are like the great deep. Well, the great deep is first reference in Genesis 7, when it rains for 40 days and 40 nights.

[25 : 14] The great deep is where the water comes from. We also see the great deep or depth as it's described there in Exodus 14 and 15, when the Egyptians are drowned.

Or in Jonah 2, when he's in the belly of the fish. And each of those times, it's when God is standing in judgment over someone or some group of people.

people. And key in all of those situations is the judgment is measured and appropriate for the situation. But also, the result of those judgments is salvation.

In Genesis, for Noah and his family, it's salvation from the flood. In Exodus, for the Israelites, it's salvation from the Egyptians. In Jonah, it's salvation for the Ninevites, when Jonah finally listens.

God uses judgment in relation to moral standing in those cases. But he also uses judgment to determine what is sufficient for us, what we need to survive, what his creation needs.

[26 : 36] man and beast you save, O Lord. Now, the word save here, I'm not going to try and pronounce the Hebrew because I'm going to butcher it.

In this context, it's better translated as preserve. It's not strictly talking about salvation from sin here. So God protects his people and animals from evil and provides for their needs.

We see the same word in Exodus 2, when Moses cared for, or saved, the flock. We also see it throughout Judges, when the Lord raised up judges to save Israel.

And it wasn't save for salvation, but save from the nations around that were plundering them. God knows everything.

And we see it on the lips of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, when he teaches that God knows everything that everyone needs. We won't ever be sure.

[27 : 51] David also wants us to know how precious God's love is. God's love gives protection for his children.

God's love provides an abundance for his children to feast on. God's love provides life for his children.

And his love provides light to his children. Now the thing about light is that where there's light, there's no darkness.

And darkness in the Bible is a symbol for evil and wickedness. So within God's love, it's a place where evil and wickedness can't be.

And as people who love Jesus and who know him, we get to experience these things. Now, in a temporary and incomplete form, and eventually for eternity in a perfect and true form.

[29 : 09] And because they're based on God's character, not on our work, not anything we do, we know they're guaranteed. need. And knowing all of this, David is driven to prayer.

Oh, continue your steadfast love to those who know you, and your righteousness to the upright of heart. Let his love continue to those who know him, i.e.

his children, those who trust him, and his righteousness to the upright of heart. Again, those who trust him faithfully.

Let not the foot of arrogance come upon me, nor the hand of the wicked drive me away. David knows how insidious pride can be, and he's asking for God to keep it far away from him.

He doesn't want to think too highly of himself. And David's had many times in his life where he's been driven away by Paul, by Absalom, by Paul, by Saul, by Absalom, and by others.

[30 : 40] He wants to stay close to God. for protection and perseverance from his enemies. David also adds a note here on the place he doesn't want to be driven away to.

It's the place where the evildoers, the wicked, lay. It's their place of death. They were thrust down in judgment by God.

And in death, they cannot rise again to have the possibility to reunite with him. Just a place David doesn't want to go. Now, you can't get a much picture clearer of God's love than David did.

But we have it in Jesus. Jesus, because he showed his love for us in the person of Jesus. As followers of Jesus who trust him, that's what our model of love will look like.

By depending on Jesus, he becomes our role model for love. love. And that's what we look to mimic. Sacrificial love is what he showed us.

[32 : 12] And that sacrificial love for him was difficult, painful, and costly, if you really want to undersell it. What does it look like?

It means putting the needs of others before our own. it means forgiving those around us when they hurt us, intentionally or not.

It means considering the things that those who do around us, their actions, with the best of intentions. Don't go looking for ulterior motives. And without Jesus, that kind of love isn't just going to burn us out.

It's impossible. with Jesus, that kind of love is not only just possible, but it also glorifies God when we do it.

We've seen David reflect on just how wicked those are who don't trust him, and just how great the Lord's love is.

[33 : 31] God has given those who read this part of his word, so those who heard David's psalm sung and us here today, a picture of what this awesomeness is like to be a child of God and the joy of being united with him forever.

But it's a two-sided picture. Because on one hand, he's talked about how great God's love is. On the other hand, he's talked about how wicked people are, people like me and you.

And how without Jesus, what our fate will be. our relationship with God will continue being broken and our eventual fate will be separated from him.

If you don't trust God, you're still in this camp. You're in the camp of the wicked. And if that's you, please, please, investigate Jesus.

I was exactly like you in my early 20s. And investigating him was the best decision I made. And it can be yours as well.

[34 : 57] People who know God's love and God's goodness, who trust in his faithfulness and rest in his love, we have the privilege of representing God to those who don't have that certainty yet.

the job that we get to do for him is to faithfully depend on him so that his kingdom is glorified and his name is proclaimed. That's what reflects the love of God.

And that's how he reveals himself and glorifies himself. And it's best said from the lips of Jesus.

By this they will know you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. John 14 ish. For someone depending on God's love, and in contrast to the wicked man, we could rewrite verses 1 to 4.

So now we're thinking about a righteous person, how he might have written verses 1 to 4. Transgression entices the hearts of the faithful.

[36 : 19] the fear of God is in his eyes. My printing went absolutely awful here.

I don't know what this next line says. Oh, excellent. Thank you, Liz. Transgression entices the hearts of the faithful.

The fear of God guards his heart. For he sits under God's mercy and grace and confesses his iniquity. The words of his mouth bring unity and honesty.

He depends on God's instruction and does good. He plans peace while on his bed. He sets himself in a way that is good.

He embraces the love of God. How different is that to the wicked man? It's like polar opposite. Roy talked about New Year's resolutions before.

[37 : 19] that's what my aim is for this year. New Year's resolution, if you will. It's to continue to grow to be a man who when others look at me, they won't praise me, but they'll praise God for the work that he's doing in me.

And I hope that with all of you, we can join in this together and support each other to keep growing more and more like Jesus this year.

Please pray with me. Father God, thank you that you did send Jesus so that we do have a way to be reunited back to you and our broken relationship repaired with you.

please continue to teach us and grow us and change us to better depend on you and continue to trust in you and your word.

Please let that continue to affect our relationships with each other and with you. We pray that we might be a community who both loves you and loves each other and supports each other to build one another up in love because we want to see your name glorified.

[38 : 40] Amen.