

Psalm 136:1-26 | Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

² Give thanks to the God of gods,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

³ Give thanks to the Lord of lords,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

⁴ to him who alone does great wonders,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

⁵ to him who by understanding made the heavens,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

⁶ to him who spread out the earth above the waters,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

⁷ to him who made the great lights,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

⁸ the sun to rule over the day,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

⁹ the moon and stars to rule over the night,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹⁰ to him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹¹ and brought Israel out from among them,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹² with a strong hand and an outstretched arm,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹³ to him who divided the Red Sea in two,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹⁴ and made Israel pass through the midst of it,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹⁵ but overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹⁶ to him who led his people through the wilderness,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹⁷ to him who struck down great kings,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹⁸ and killed mighty kings,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

¹⁹ Sihon, king of the Amorites,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

²⁰ and Og, king of Bashan,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

²¹ and gave their land as a heritage,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
²² a heritage to Israel his servant,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

²³ It is he who remembered us in our low estate,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
²⁴ and rescued us from our foes,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
²⁵ he who gives food to all flesh,
for his steadfast love endures forever.
²⁶ Give thanks to the God of heaven,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

Love | Psalm 136

At the beginning of this year I want to talk about love. Love is central among the Christian virtues. Paul teaches us in 1 Corinthians 13, *“Faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”* The command that we recite together each Sunday from Deuteronomy 6 is to *“love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.”* Jesus says in John 13:34, *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.”* Also recorded by John is this, *“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love” (1John 4:7-8).*

Colloquially love is a feeling of great affection for someone. But that just doesn’t seem sufficient for the above verses. Feelings of great affection towards God is the greatest commandment? God is feelings of great affection? Its so central to our faith but I’m afraid we’re equivocating. That is, you keep saying this word, but I do not think it means what you think it means.

Psalm 136 is a great hymn to the Love of God. But it is more than that, it is an argument, a case for the love of God and a deep insight into what the love of God is. Imagine if we became people fully informed by the love of God and seeking to be obedient to his command to love one another, and love our neighbor as ourselves.

1. The God of Love

Psalm 136:1-26 | Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever.
² Give thanks to the God of gods,
for his steadfast love endures forever.
³ Give thanks to the Lord of lords,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

The repetition is a little clunky to read in English but its punchy in Hebrew. כִּי לְעוֹלָם הַסֶּדֶד. The opening call to thanks is more of a call to *acknowledge the reality of*. And “steadfast love endures forever” is seeking to pull out two words with a world of meaning in them. You might have heard, *hesed*. It is the word for God’s covenantal love for his people. The other word, *Lolam*, is a word for everlasting, or from age to age, or eternal, or abiding. Our translation adds the word “endures.” The for is more of a *Yes, Indeed!* Acknowledge the reality of the Lord yes indeed he is good, for indeed his love is everlasting.

But rather than reading it as a mere sweet refrain I want us to catch the insight. The repetition is causing us to ground all of the glories and actions of the Lord in this reality of his steadfast love. This is an incredibly deep insight. Where do we grasp the goodness of the Lord that demands our gratitude? It is in his unending covenantal love. Where do we grasp his superiority to all other gods and lords? It is in his unending covenantal love.

This is teaching us what love is. You might go to power or sovereignty to describe God’s superiority to the other gods and lords. You would be right to do this. He is superior in all his attributes. But this scripture is teaching us to ground the reason for his superiority above other gods and lords in his inexhaustible covenantal love for his people. If you were to have a competition among the gods, Baal vs. Molech or Godzilla vs. King Kong, would you think to bet on the one who has unending covenantal love? I don’t think we would even think to use that metric, this scripture teaches us we’re thinking of love wrong.

When we’re talking about the attributes of God, we understand that God has no parts or passions. There is not the love part of God and the hate part of God. All that is in God is God. And all that God does he does in perfect unity with himself. He doesn’t do love things sometimes and power things other times. It’s all God. The scriptures teach us to understand love in light of him, because all that he does he does in covenantal love. The Psalm takes us through this in creation, redemption, conquest, and consideration.

2. Creation

Psalm 136:5-6 | to him who by understanding made the heavens,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
6 to him who spread out the earth above the waters,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

We’re giving thanks to God who by understanding made the heavens, who spread the earth upon the waters. Why did he do all these things, or what motivated them, or in what manner were they performed, they were because of and done of his steadfast covenantal love. Why does the ocean stop there and go no further? Why does the mountain go just this high, why is the earth not 60 miles out or in from where it is. It is because of his

steadfast covenantal love. Why the sun to rule the day and the moon to rule the night? You guessed it, his steadfast covenantal love.

Are you catching this? Why creation? Because of love. Love is the opposite of an accident. We have an odd upstairs closet. And my wife imagined it as cozy reading nook for the kids, with strung lights, and beanbag chairs, and little bookshelves. It fits them. It is made with love. Such is all of creation for you. And the wonder of this insight stretches into the deepest questions imaginable. Why is there something rather than nothing? Why was it made just so? It is because of his love, and his love is not arbitrary but covenantal. Therefore it demands thanks. See the land stretched out? Give thanks to the Lord, his love endures forever.

3. Redemption

Psalm 136:10-11 | to him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
¹¹ and brought Israel out from among them,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

Give thanks to him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt. And to him who brought Israel out from among them. What are these acts demonstrations of? God's unending covenantal love for his people. What was it that struck down the firstborn of Egypt? God's unending covenantal love for his people. What was God showing when he drew his people out of Egypt and parted the Red Sea? God's love kills on behalf of his people. God's love draws his people to himself. It is a consuming fire of love.

Psalm 136:17 | to him who struck down great kings,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
Psalm 136:21 | and gave their land as a heritage,
for his steadfast love endures forever;

Why does he drive out the inhabitants of the land, overwhelming the great kings. Why does he give their land to his people as a heritage? Steadfast love conquers and then distributes the spoils to his people.

Psalm 136:23-26 | It is he who remembered us in our low estate,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
²⁴ and rescued us from our foes,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
²⁵ he who gives food to all flesh,
for his steadfast love endures forever.
²⁶ Give thanks to the God of heaven,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

Why does the Lord remember you in your low estate? Why does he rescue you from your foes? Why does he give food to all flesh? Look at all we've seen flow from the love of God, consider than what it means to have steadfast love and faithfulness.

Creation: Why is that star there rather than there? Why were you born here rather than there? The Steadfast love of the Lord, makes and ranks and sorts and categorizes and organizes.

Redemption: The steadfast love of the Lord killed the firstborn of Egypt. But how much more do we understand the steadfast love of the Lord in Christ? It is in Christ that we see God's son killed that we might be saved. That even unto death God saves us. Why because of his steadfast love.

Conquers and provides: The love of God conquers and provides, and consider how Christ has conquered all his and our enemies, and he ascended into the heavens and from the heavens he gives to us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. And he sends us out to conquer the world, in his name under the proclamation of his gospel.

Considers: God remembers you in your low estate, rescues you from your foes, feeds all flesh. Christ gives us his body that we might be nourished forever.

Don't you see, you're surrounded by the particular love of God. It's all of his love.

To put the matter in language not easy for moderns, ... Christianity [is at its] center concerned with grace — if that word is given its literal meaning. Grace simply means that the great things of our existing are given us, not made by us and finally not to be understood as arbitrary accidents. Our making takes place within an ultimate givenness. However difficult it is for all of us to affirm that life is a gift, it is an assertion primal to Christianity. - George Grant