

The Lovingkindness of God

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Introduce myself (Elizabeth dream funny)

Opening prayer

Our brains are amazing creations. When researchers dig deep into our brains to learn about human behavior, it's amazing what we can understand about the brain and the chemicals it produces under certain circumstances. Take stories for instance. Humans are wired to love stories, to be drawn in, to pay close attention, and to even experience sympathetic emotions to the characters in the stories. A certain chemical, called oxytocin, is released in the brain when we are drawn to trust others and to help them. Interestingly, researches have found that the same chemical is released when we hear stories about other people. We are created the tendency to get drawn into stories and to feel the emotions of the characters, and that's no accident. God has revealed Himself to humanity through many stories of His mercy and His powerful, saving redemption.

[information pulled from <https://hbr.org/2014/10/why-your-brain-loves-good-storytelling>]

The Psalm we heard today, Psalm 107, is a Psalm full of those redemptive stories, four of them, actually. This Psalm lifts our eyes up to the marvelous, lovingkindness and goodness of our God, found in the midst of the many horrible situations we may find ourselves in as humans. This is a Psalm of thanksgiving, based on the redemptive work of God in the lives of the Jews, but is also very applicable to God's redemptive work in us through Christ. This is also a Psalm of wisdom, calling its hearers to wise contemplation of the love of God. This Psalm has a lot to teach us about the nature of worship, namely that worship begins with God's actions, and ends with God's praise. Worship begins and ends with God. Our guiding statement reads: **[SLIDE]** *Because God has redeemed His people from evil, right worship begins with considering God's lovingkindness and ends with giving God praise.*

The Psalm begins with an opening statement of praise, then continues on to four snapshots of human adversity: a lost people, an imprisoned people, those sickened to the point of death because of sin, and despairing sailors. The groups of "people" referred to here can be defined as the people of God, either Israel, or us, the church. Each of the adverse circumstances are not directly related to events in Israel's past, but are meant to jog the memory of the Israelites to remember times of adversity and God's saving mercy. Each of these snapshots has a predictable pattern, coined by John McArthur in a memorable way: **[SLIDE]** a predicament (bad circumstance), a petition (crying out to God), a pardon (God's intervention), and a praise (the response of the people). Given this Psalm was most likely used in congregational worship of the Jews at some point, I wish to ask your participation in reading two key phrases together every time they repeat, so get ready to speak with me when I give you the cue!

The opening three verses of this Psalm point to where worship always begins: the faithfulness, goodness, and lovingkindness of God. **READ V.1-2** I want to focus your attention on one work in particular: lovingkindness. In Hebrew, lovingkindness is translated from the word *hesed*. **[SLIDE]** *Hesed*, as you might recall learning from pastor Ty, is a deep and meaningful descriptor of the covenant-love and faithfulness of God toward His people. *Hesed* is used 247 times in the Old Testament, and is translated in a few different ways in the NASB, like "devotion, faithfulness, lovingkindness, loyalty, and unchanging love, steadfast love." *Hesed* speaks of God's love as a faithful, eternal, and unchanging part of His nature. God cannot stop or change His *Hesed* love for His people, it is a core characteristic of who He is. In fact, when Paul quoted an early Christian hymn in 2 Timothy 2, he said "It is a trustworthy statement, if we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself." God's *hesed* love does not change, praise God!!

This *Hesed* love was first seen in the way God loved His chosen nation, Israel. It may seem like circular reasoning, but in Deuteronomy 7 God essentially says He loves Israel because He loves her.

[SLIDE] Deuteronomy 7: 7 **“The Lord did not set His love on you** nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, 8 but **because the Lord loved you** and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the Lord brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. [SLIDE] 9 Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments; 10 but repays those who hate Him to their faces, to destroy them;

[Show highlights, “drop the negative”]

So, to reference and bolster our guiding statement [SLIDE], *Because God has redeemed His people from evil, right worship begins with considering God’s **hesed** lovingkindness and ends with giving God praise..*

Worship happens when we, God’s people through Christ, experience God’s *hesed* love, and then give thanks, or “say so” as the Psalm describes. Right worship begins with God. God’s *hesed* love has another effect: the gathering of people from many lands. **READ V.2-3** We can take this verse to describe God calling Israel back from their Babylonian captivity, we can take this verse to describe God calling Christians from all the corners of the globe, and we can take this verse to mean that it is God’s love that calls together believers from Eyota, Elgin, Plainview, Lake City, Rochester and other cities. God has an amazing way of gathering a people for Himself through the faithful love of His character.

We now reach the first of four predicaments found in Psalm 107. **READ V.4-5** As I’m sure my family and wife can attest to, I may be the worst, or I suppose best, person to preach on what it means to be lost. I have a horrible sense of direction, and I first noticed my inability to navigate when I started driving. I had to first drive to my church in St. Cloud before I could figure out my way to drive to anything else. Thank goodness for phone GPS apps, because they have saved me lots of embarrassment and time. When I was without a phone for a few weeks when I first moved to Rochester, I had the most horrible time going the wrong direction on HWY 52. I set out to go north but took the south exit, or set out to go south but somehow ended up going north.

I can imagine, slightly, the feelings of the lost people in verses 4-5. It is a very hopeless and desperate feeling losing your sense of direction. Knowing your bearings, like knowing for-sure the direction of north, gives you a place to anchor your hope for figuring out where you are going. These lost people in the Psalm were not only lost in their directions, but they were without any support or supplies, hungry and thirsty in a desert. This is a very vivid picture of the nation of Israel wandering in the desert on their way to the promised land after being freed from Egypt. Without God giving them direction in the pillar of cloud and fire, or God providing them water from rocks, bread from heaven, or meat in random flocks of quail, they had no hope in a dry and thirsty land. God was their lifeline.

We can understand the “inhabited city” of verse 4 as either a city suitable for habitation, or a city with inhabitants ready to welcome the weary and lost. For the Israelites coming back from Babylonian captivity, they read this inhabited city as Jerusalem. Regardless, this city of Psalm 107 has the necessary supplies for life: food and water. It also has the necessary supplies for personal peace and

joy: a home, a destination, and rest. Without these physical and spiritual supplies the lost people in this predicament lift their voice to God in petition (read with me): **[SLIDE]**

“Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble; and He delivered them out of their distresses”

Think about this for a minute: what had these people to offer God? They were without any sort of supplies or direction or home base. Answer: they had nothing to offer God. They cried out to Him from their desperation, and in His lovingkindness, He answered their prayer: **READ V.7**

This is the pardon, where God delivers the lost people from their predicament. God gives them direction, God makes their way straight (or level), and God gives them a home, the destination of the inhabited city.

Friends, this is us. Without God we wander lost and aimless on this earth, looking for peace and rest and fulfillment. The world is a dry wasteland, it has nothing to offer that is truly nourishing for our souls. If you are in Christ, at some point God reached down from heaven to open your eyes to the feast of Jesus, giving you sustaining nourishment and life, and providing you a direction, the promised land of heaven. Praise God for His rich mercy!

Because God has redeemed His people from evil, right worship begins with considering God’s lovingkindness and ends with giving God praise. (praise God with me): **[SLIDE]**

“Let them give thanks to the Lord for His lovingkindness,

And for His wonders to the sons of men!”

READ V.9

Are you hungry, thirsty, generally unsatisfied with life this morning? Jesus can fill you to overflowing, He can change the desires of your heart to filled with good things (Psalm 37), and He can give you rest, both now in the midst of life’s trials, and forever in the promised city of heaven. Cry out to Him out of desperation, pray for a changed heart, and He will answer you.

The second predicament in Psalm 107 is that of prisoners locked in a horrible dungeon, surrounded by darkness and misery and death. **READ V.10-12**

The term “shadow of death” in verse 10 is a familiar one to those who know Psalm 23 (“though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and staff they comfort me”). This term is actually used 18 times in the Old Testament, and 10 of those times are found in the book of Job. I can imagine Job thought a lot about death through his horrible illness. Other translations of this term include death-like shadow, deep shadow or darkness, or black gloom. This situation in Psalm 107 is that of a prisoner literally stuck, chained, imprisoned, in the midst of death, in darkness, alone, without any hope.

This picture of prison and forced labor was a familiar one to the Israelites. Countless times they turned their back on the counsel of God, and God allowed captivity and imprisonment refine them and rescue their hearts back to Him. In just one Psalm prior to this one, 106, the Psalmist describes how Israel spurned or hated the counsel of God, and so they suffered the consequences:

[SLIDE] Psalm 106:13-15 They quickly forgot His works [Red Sea, plagues of Egypt]; **They did not wait for His counsel**, 14 But craved intensely in the wilderness, And tempted God in the desert. 15 So He gave them their request [quail meat], but sent a wasting disease among them.

We'll talk more about this story from Numbers 11 in a minute. In the time of the prophet Isaiah, Israel also decided to ignore God's counsel and turn to the country of Egypt for military refuge:

[SLIDE] Isaiah 30:1-2 "Woe to the rebellious children," declares the Lord, "Who execute a plan, but not Mine, And make an alliance, but not of My Spirit, In order to add sin to sin; 2 Who proceed down to Egypt Without consulting Me, To take refuge in the safety of Pharaoh And to seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt!"

Let's return to verse 12 of Psalm 107 **READ V.12** Here we can see the specific heart-level sin of this rebellious people: pride. In this case, it seems that God allowed the imprisonment and hard labor to "humble their hearts." Praise God it indeed had that effect, and created this petition from the prisoners (read with me): **[SLIDE]**

"Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble; He saved them out of their distresses."

What had these people to offer God? They had nothing, they cried out of desperation, with the pride of their rebellion broken through the difficult circumstances of prison and labor. They were empty-handed. This was a people God could work with!

READ V.14 Here we see what happens when God shows up. God is light, He banishes the darkness. God is life, He defeats the shadow of death. God is freedom, He breaks the chains of bondage. Pastor Ty once quoted to me a wise analogy: "the world thinks it knows what true freedom is, doing anything you want to do whenever you want to do it. It's like jumping out of an airplane with no parachute. In a sense you are very free, you have nothing hindering you from the free-fall. But is this person destined for death truly free? Or is the person who wears a parachute and lives after landing the free one?" Freedom, life, hope, it's found in the Lord alone. Our God can break any chain, descend to the deepest, darkest pits, and pull us out to freedom in Christ.

Because God has redeemed His people from evil, right worship begins with considering God's lovingkindness and ends with giving God praise. (praise God with me): **[SLIDE]**

"Let them give thanks to the Lord for His lovingkindness,
For His wonders to the sons of men!"

READ V. 16

Church, our pride, our sin; addictions, bitterness, lust, greed; they seek to chain us in bondage. We sold ourselves into that slavery when we spurned the counsel of God, thinking we could do it better. Yet the lovingkindness of God never changes, and if you would only cry out in desperation, pray that your heart might be changed, and that you might be free from the bondage to sin. Only God can do this work through the mercy of Christ Jesus! In Christ we free from any bondage or slavery to sin!

[SLIDE] John 8:34 Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. 35 The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. 36 So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

When we are set free by the son, we are a new creation with new, changed hearts and desires.

[SLIDE] 1 Corinthians 5:15 [Christ] died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.

17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. 18 Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation

Praise God for His lovingkindness, setting us free from the bondage to sin, and making us new creatures!

The third predicament of Psalm 107 is that of rebellious, sinful fools who are afflicted with a serious disease and are brought near the point of death: **READ V.17-18**

I want to take a minute to talk about a burning question that jumped out to me from this passage: is sickness really a result of personal sin? In this Psalm the writer says that it is “because of their rebellious way” and “iniquities” that “they were afflicted” in sickness. The answer, I believe, can be found between two stories of Jesus dealing with sickness and sin.

The first is John 5:14 “Afterward Jesus found [the man he healed] in the temple and said to him, “Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you.” In this story, Jesus heals an invalid man by the pool called Bethesda. From Jesus’ command to the man to “not sin anymore,” it seems like (in this case) the man’s sin was in some way connected with his sickness.

Contrast this with John 9: “As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. 2 And His disciples asked Him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?” 3 Jesus answered, “It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him.”

So is sickness a result of sin? Yes and no. At one level, sin is always connected with sickness in a general way. When Christ returns and the world is re-created to a perfect, sin-free state, there will be no more sickness. Sickness is a result of the sin that entered the world through Adam and Eve. On another level, sometimes God uses sickness in scripture as specific correction for people who have sinned rebelliously. This is the case of Psalm 107. This also explains why Jesus seems to have two different answers for the connection of sin and sickness.

There are other examples in scripture of God using sickness to punish sin. In Numbers 11, God strikes down many Israelites that complained and rebelled against God’s plan of leading them into the desert and out of Egypt. The people grew hungry and wished to return to their slavery. God gave them the quail meat they asked for, but He also struck down many with a severe plague. In Numbers 21, when again the Israelites complained bitterly against the Lord, He sent fiery serpents to their camp, and many were bitten and died. Moses was commanded to hoist a bronze snake on a pole, that anyone who looked at it would live, a preliminary picture of Christ on the cross. The prophet Micah spoke of the wickedness of Israel and God’s curse of sickness in Micah 6:12-13:

[SLIDE] “For the rich men of the city are full of violence, Her residents speak lies, And their tongue is deceitful in their mouth. 13 “So also I will make you sick, striking you down, Desolating you because of your sins.”

When you are afflicted with sickness, take the opportunity to search your heart and ask the Lord if there is any unconfessed sin in your life. God may be using the sickness to bring you to repentance. If your heart is upright before the Lord, simply trust Him and His sustaining and healing love as He guides you through the difficult circumstance. He may be giving you your own unique story of His faithfulness or miraculous healing through a sickness.

This fatal sickness caused by sin in Psalm 107 drove the people to turn to the Lord in desperation (let’s read together): **[SLIDE]**

“Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble; He saved them out of their distresses”

What had these people to offer God? They were completely stricken with sickness, emptied of pride, unable to do anything for themselves. Their entire hope was on the Lord, for they had absolutely no strength to save themselves. But God in His lovingkindness towards His people was faithful to act in this pardon: **READ V.20**

The Word of God referenced in this Psalm brings to mind the person of Christ, as described in John 1: “In the beginning was the Word,” says John, and “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” Christ’s presence on earth brought about the reversal of sin and sin’s effects: sickness, disease, and death. In Christ is healing, health, and life! In an ultimate sense, when Christ (the Word) returns, He will “heal us and deliver us from destruction” forever!

Because God has redeemed His people from evil, right worship begins with considering God’s lovingkindness and ends with giving God praise. (praise God with me): [SLIDE]

“Let them give thanks to the Lord for His lovingkindness,
And for His wonders to the sons of men!”

READ V.22

This healing wondrous act of God brings about the response found in verse 22: sacrifices and singing. Indeed, these things were commanded by God as a regular act of worship for the Jews, but here we see how they are meant to be fully expressed: as an organic overflow of thankfulness and gratitude for the saving acts of God. Sing for strength to remember the love of God in the midst of sickness, and sing for joy when God delivers you! Singing is a marvelous way to not only celebrate joyously, but also to remember the mighty acts of God in your life or the lives of others.

The fourth and final predicament we see in Psalm 107 is about sailors on the ocean, experiencing extremely fierce wind and waves in the midst of a storm: **READ V.23-27**

In the ancient world, the sea was an entity to be feared and respected because of its mighty, unpredictable, and chaotic power. Weather prediction skills were dismal, and humanity’s less-advanced ship-making technology made navigating the sea very dangerous. Sailors had a unique point of view on the mighty acts of God as portrayed through the ocean. In verse 25 God is exalted as mighty enough that He can control the raging sea with only the speaking of His voice. He is a sovereign Lord, and all creation does His bidding. The terror of the sailors is made plain in the language of verse 26 and 27; “their soul melted away,” and “they reeled and staggered.” Indeed, it has been said that facing imminent death while being caught in a storm at sea is one of the most fearful ways to die. You may have hours, days, or weeks to think about your cold, watery fate while the shipped is tossed about, uncontrollably.

This utter fear and dread and exhaustion can be seen in Paul’s experience with a shipwreck in Acts 27. Paul, as a prisoner being sent to Rome, and his entire ship were caught in a “violent wind” and “gave way to it and let themselves be driven along.” (verse 14) After two days they threw the cargo overboard to lighten the ship. After three days they threw the ship’s tackle overboard. No sun or stars were seen for many days, and the writer confessed “all hope of our being saved was gradually abandoned.” (verse 20) They went a long time without food, but after an angel appeared to Paul, Paul encouraged the sailors in the Lord, and they all survived on broken pieces of the ship, even after two weeks of fighting the storm. God was found faithful, promising that not a hair from any head should perish.

In the predicament of Psalm 107, the sailors were driven to “their wit’s end,” and prayed out of desperation (read with me): **[SLIDE]**

“Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, And He brought them out of their distresses.”

The sailors found the storm to be stronger than they could manage. They didn’t have the strength to continue, and they reached the point where their own strength failed. That precise moment is when they found God’s mighty mercy and lovingkindness to sustain them. God was enough, and He caused the storm to be pardoned: **READ V.29-30**

The Lord is the great calmer of storms. In Matthew 8 and Matthew 14 we see Jesus giving the disciples a glimpse of his authority over creation by causing violent storms to be stilled. If your life feels like the unpredictable, uncontrollable chaos of the stormy ocean, call out to Jesus, He will meet you in the midst of the storm and guide you to calmer waters. The “desired haven” of verse 30 speaks of protection, safety, and peace. Jesus *hesed* love will hold you and protect you if you ask. Look at Psalm 36: **[SLIDE]**

7 How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Your wings. 8 They drink their fill of the abundance of Your house; And You give them to drink of the river of Your delights.

As a side-note, with many of these situations in Psalm 107, we can see God accomplishing heart-level dependence and brokenness in His people through difficult circumstances. The circumstances do change eventually, but only after the heart-change was accomplished that God intended. When you pray in the midst of difficult circumstances, ask God to accomplish His work in your heart through the circumstance. Ask God for a soft heart, open eyes, and a humble attitude to see His holy purposes through difficult times. I need this, Lord help me! Only He can accomplish change in my heart, only He can deliver me from the worst circumstances.

Because God has redeemed His people from evil, right worship begins with considering God’s lovingkindness and ends with giving God praise. (praise God with me):

“Let them give thanks to the Lord for His lovingkindness,

And for His wonders to the sons of men!”

READ V.32

When God saves you and give you a story to tell of His marvelous provision through difficult circumstances, TELL PEOPLE ABOUT IT! Tell the congregation, this should be a regular part of what we do at church. Tell the elders, we are so blessed to hear about God’s work in your lives through testimonies. God has given you a unique story of His *hesed* lovingkindness and faithfulness, be faithful to tell that story.

At this point in Psalm 107, the word rhythm and topics change to bring concluding ideas about how God’s lovingkindness plays out to God’s people and God’s enemies. The redeemed people of God (whether ancient Israel or modern Christians) hold a special place in God’s favor. The enemies of God and God’s people also hold a special place in God’s wrath: **READ V.33-34**

For some reason, I picture the salt flats of Bonneville Utah in these verses. [SLIDE] Possibly representing a former rich and fertile land, like a large beautiful lake, it is now not able to sustain any sort of life, and its only use is racing record-setting cars on its dead, flat, salty surface. It's like the Old Testament cities of Sodom and Gomorrah; a rich, fertile place that was desecrated because of the great wickedness of the people. The same sort of wickedness is to blame for the death of this land in Psalm 107. The people who dwelled here once were filled with bounty and richness, but turned to wickedness and caused the judgement of a holy God to destroy their land.

For the people of God, their fate is exactly opposite. Notice the word play of verse 33 with verse 35. This specific poetic device is a form of parallelism called a *chiasm*, literally meaning the words form an X, showing opposing meaning. [SLIDE] [SLIDE] **READ V.35-38**

Here is an interesting point: the only word used to describe the people of God in v.35-38 is "hungry." Not "saints," "Israel," "God's people," but simply "the hungry." Reading this immediately reminded me of the beatitude Jesus spoke in Matthew 5:6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." "The hungry" are people who come to God without anything to offer. They come to God with empty hands, with a desperate hope, and with humble hearts. The hungry have grown discontent with the world, its riches and its delicacies, and have grown an appetite for only the best thing, the only thing that can truly satisfy. When the hungry accept the lavish feast of the Lord, amazing things begin to happen. The impossible becomes possible, a land of death becomes a land of gushing water and fruitful harvests. The hungry find a home in the provision of God, and as He blesses them, they praise Him.

Life not yet all easy for the hungry, though. V.39 says "They are diminished and bowed down through oppression, misery and sorrow." But when they are oppressed, God comes to their aid **READ V.39-42**

Friends, we who believe on Christ are the hungry and needy people of God, not able to offer Him anything He doesn't already have, but able to bask in His lovingkindness and feast on His rich provision and satisfying love. Is your allegiance centered on Christ, that the favor of the Lord may rest on you? That you may become part of His flock?

This Psalm concludes with a call to wisdom, which we all should heed: **READ V.43**

How practically do we follow this advice? Friends, the full story of God's *hesed* love towards His people is found between these covers [Bible]. Soak yourself in it, and when you read, ask the question "what does this passage speak about the character of God?" and similarly, "what does this passage show about the way God relates to His people?"

To conclude, consider this passage: the ultimate expression of God's lovingkindness to sinners who were dead; unable to save ourselves:

Ephesians 2:2 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. 3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

God has redeemed His people from the worst evil could muster, death as a result of sin. We can be alive and victorious over sin and death in Christ! Right worship begins with considering God's lovingkindness and ends with giving God praise. (praise God with me one final time): **[SLIDE]**

"Let them give thanks to the Lord for His lovingkindness,

And for His wonders to the sons of men!"

Pray

Benediction: May you experience the fullness of God's *hesed* love through Christ Jesus this week, and may you feast your heart on the delights of the Lord and His word. May God make you wise as you consider the lovingkindness of Christ, and may that truth lead you to daily worship and joy. Go in peace!