



Many of you with younger children are probably familiar with *The Jesus Storybook Bible*. In that storybook Bible, we're given a definition for God's love. If you've read the stories, you'll probably be able to even say it with me. It's **"God's never stopping, never giving up, unbreaking, always and forever love."** To be more precise, I'll read from a Hebrew dictionary on this word for one of the words for love: "desire. . . , zeal, love. . . , kindness, benevolence. The sense is: **an unfailing kind of love, kindness, or goodness; often used of God's love that is related to faithfulness to his covenant.** While there are other terms for love, this is the love that God continually reminds his people that he has for them; so, we're going to focus on this kind of love.

What we have embedded into this Hebrew word for love, and even the Greek word for agape, is delight and commitment. And it's not that God delights in us *if* we can give him something he likes. He simply loves because he loves us. He delights in us because he delights in us. We aren't "loved" by him because he wants to use us. He works through us because he loves us! This is the idea of love, and God's love is intended to flow from him to us into this world. So, today, the main idea is: **God's love sustained his people and pointed forward to Love-in-the-flesh, who grants people God's love to be shared with the world for all eternity future.**

1. God's love sustained his people and pointed forward to Love-in-the-flesh.

A few years ago, I was slowly reading through Genesis, and for some reason, when I was reading the story of creation, my imagination soared as I thought about how majestic the creation must have been – and even thinking through how beautiful the Garden of Eden was. No sin. No brokenness. Just unrestrained, perfect growth and multiplication of all that was made. Beautiful stones. Beautiful metals. Life-sustaining rivers and perfect food. Adam and Eve living in glorious innocence. No victimization. No power-plays. No sin. We can only imagine this, especially because right now there are major wars around the world and we hear of terror and pain and families breaking apart daily. But that time, when I read the creation narrative, I longed to know what that must have been like – and I still wonder. As I thought of God's creative work, I saw God's grace and love. Behold what manner of love that God made all of this, and called Adam and Eve to enjoy this creation and image him forth as rulers under his rule.

We don't know how long it took for Eve and Adam to rebel, but they did. Eve longed for the fruit from the forbidden tree because she thought it would give her what she needed. Isn't that the essence of all temptation? We "can't believe" that God would keep something from us that we want to badly. We believe we're missing out. So, instead of trusting God's goodness and love, we trust ourselves. Adam and Eve trusted themselves, and immediately fear rushes in, and they lose their innocence. They realize their nakedness, and they sew fig leaves for themselves. I'm reminded of 1 John 4:18 that says, ". . . **perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been**

perfected in love.¹ Adam and Eve had experienced the perfection of love, but now, the awareness and communion with perfect Love had been lost. Why? Because they rejected perfect Love. They rejected God. Therefore, they experienced fear. They were facing punishment.

Yet, as many of us know, while God did punish, he also gave a promise of hope. And the foundation of that promise of hope – that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent, destroying death and sin. Now, let me ask you something: **Why would God promise a rescuer for humanity? Answer: God set his love on human beings.** I want to sidestep for a moment and ask you to think about this series on Advent. We've looked at hope, peace, joy. God is the God of hope. He is the God of peace. In his presence is fullness of joy. All of these are wonderful attributes of God and gifts of God. And the only reason why he would ever offer for humans to partake of these gifts is because he is Love. It's true what the apostle Paul says, "the greatest of these is love" (see 1 Cor. 13).

Now, let's get back to Adam and Eve. Just because Adam and Eve were given hope, and God showed love, doesn't mean everything was better. In actuality, many people after them trampled on God's love. They didn't consider it. They continued to trust themselves and reject God's love. We go from Adam and Eve's children: Cain and Abel. Cain murders his brother out of jealousy. We move further in Genesis, reading about Lamech who rejoiced in his power to get revenge. Then, by the time we get to Noah's day, we read this description: ⁵The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ⁶And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. ⁷So the Lord said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them."²

While the word "love" isn't in these verses, the idea is. When we read that God was *sorry* that he made humanity. That word for sorry refers to consoling oneself and having empathy. God saw the wickedness of humanity, and he was sorrowful for human beings. Why? They had rejected the One who is Life himself. They were pursuing death. And so the story continues. Even after the flood, the people continue in sin, but Genesis holds out hope that God is faithful to his promises and loves his people.

As we continue in the story of Genesis and then move into Exodus, we come to a familiar passage for us in Exodus 34: **"The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."**³ The essential character of God is steadfast love and judgment. In all he does, he reveals his mercy through judgment. And so, we eventually get to the songbook of Israel (Psalms), and discover there is over 100 instances where the word for "steadfast love" shows up. Do you think God wants his people to know his steadfast love? Do you think he wants people to turn from fear and judgment and turn to the Lord in faith? Absolutely!

There's one psalm that mentions God's steadfast love 26 times. One psalm. If you're a person who doesn't like repetition in songs, you might not like this one. Just kidding. I hope you love it. Psalm 136 starts with: **Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. ²Give thanks**

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 4:18.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 6:5–7.

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ex 34:6–7.

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

The psalm begins simply by declaring God's character. But notice the word "for." Give thanks to the Lord. Why? Because he is good. And why is he good? Because his steadfast love endures forever. God is good *because of his steadfast love*. Or, to put it another way, because his love is steadfast, we can be assured that he is good. So, give thanks to the God who is over all idols and over all rulers of the world. Why? Because unlike rulers who can die and idols who can't do anything, God has a steadfast love!

Then the psalm gets more personal towards humanity and also the nation of Israel. It goes on to say in verse 4-6: **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. . . .⁵** We begin with God's power in creation. No one else has created. He's the uncreated Creator! And his creation isn't to reveal how demanding or mean he is. We rejoice because with all this power, he is the God of steadfast love that endures forever. The psalm continues to speak of creation, and then we get to verse 10-11 to read, "**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. . . .⁶**" The psalm continues to speak of God rescuing Israel from Egypt and rescuing them through the Red Sea. Then the psalm moves beyond the wilderness wanderings and into when Israel entered the Promised Land: **¹⁷ to him who struck down great kings, for his steadfast love endures forever. . . .⁷**

What we see in this psalm is that God's steadfast love is foundational in all he does towards those he has saved. In other words, God's love sustains and empowers his people. And this psalm ends by reminding us of God's steadfast love continuing – thus pointing to the reality that his love will come. God will keep his promise. Notice that the psalm traces not only God's creation, but God's salvation of Israel. Even though the wilderness wanderings were long, and the people complained, God's steadfast love was there. Even though there were difficulties and disobedience, God's steadfast love was there. Now, the psalm ends with: **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. ⁸**

Savor this, Ventura! He remembered Israel's low estate. He rescued them from their enemies. He fed them. So, the psalmist writes, "Give thanks to the God of heaven, for his steadfast love endures forever." The implication is that it continues to today and will continue on! Keep in mind this was to be a song that the Israelites were to sing *always*. We continue to have this songbook even today! Whether Israel is under King David or in a divided kingdom or exiled under Babylon or back in Israel without God's presence in the Temple; God's steadfast love endures forever. And the reality of God's steadfast love was to sustain the people as they hoped in the serpent-crusher and Rescuer to come!

Then, 2,000 years ago, Love came in the flesh. All of this anticipation of the Old Testament, and finally (in relative darkness and obscurity) Jesus entered the world. No wonder the angels could hardly contain

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 136:1–3.

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 136:4–6.

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 136:10–11.

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 136:17.

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 136:23–26.

themselves and they rejoiced with great joy, declaring to shepherds the message of God! God's love was culminating in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago. We know this is God's love because John 3:16 puts it this way: ¹⁶ **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.** ⁹ God revealed his steadfast love most clearly by sending his great pleasure into the world: his Son. And he did this so that anyone who would believe on Jesus – meaning, anyone who would no longer trust themselves and what they think is best, like Adam and Eve – would not die, but have eternal life. Did you hear that? People who don't trust themselves but trust Jesus. This is something important to note because in our day, love means to so many “affirmation of me.” That's not love. Love is doing what is best for another, even at the expense of yourself, and you do this with care for the other. Love isn't simply saying, “you're right in whatever you want.” That's not what God said to Adam and Eve. And, many people despise God because he won't simply affirm them. But would you rather live in lies or live with Love and grace and truth? God sent Love in the flesh to reconcile people to himself and give eternal life.

Think of this: eternal life. How can life be eternal? Well, it's because his love is steadfast forever. Life must last as long as God's love lasts. Now, you may wonder, how can someone have eternal life? What must I do to get it? Well, because the eternal life is based in eternal love, then salvation and rescue can't be worked for by us. John continues that God sent Jesus to save people! Jesus came to live the life Adam didn't live. He's the Serpent-Crusher because while Satan attacked Jesus on the cross, Jesus crushed Satan through his death and resurrection. In his death, he took the punishment for our sins, and in his resurrection, he conquered death! The serpent is crushed! And, on the cross, Jesus cried out, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” So often in the Old Testament, forgiveness and steadfast love went together. Jesus cried out in love. Do you know this love? Has your heart been melted and moved by this Savior who came 2,000 years ago to put God's love on display? Do you have his steadfast love? Now, the only response God accept is a response that says, “I can't. He did! I need your love and mercy to transform me.” Isn't that glorious? Love came. Love gave all. Love conquers.

But now, if you follow Jesus, then you could be thinking, “Ok, so how does Christ's Love affect our lives now?” This is a perfect question because as we contemplate Jesus' first advent, we should think about this in-between time until his returns. This leads to the second part of the main point:

2. . . .who grants people God's love to share with the world for all eternity future.

I think we should contemplate two ways God's love shapes us:

- God's love compels our love.

1 John 4:9-11: ⁹ **In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.** ¹⁰ John is here simply reiterating what I just stated. The love of God was made manifest among us. How was it on display? Through Jesus. And Jesus satisfied the justice of God on the cross. Then John said God's love is further emphasized because God didn't love us because we loved him. He loved us first, most and best! Therefore, John says, since God loved us in this way, we should love one another.

⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 3:16–17.

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 4:9–11.

Do you understand the implications of Christmas Love? Because Love came in the flesh, and if you have been saved by Jesus, then you have been given the privilege to fellowship with God and to fellowship with other believers. This is what eternity will look like, so let's start doing this now! Let's imitate our Savior who loves us so greatly – and let's extend his love to one another.

Jesus has given us true, genuine, good fellowship that won't stop here, but go on forever in beauty and joy. And, it's even better than what Eden could have been because God doesn't show up on occasions to walk with us, but someday, we will forever be with him in his presence.

- **God's love casts out fear.**

John goes on in 1 John 4 to say, ¹³**By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.** Then he adds, ¹⁶**So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.** ¹⁷**By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world.** ¹⁸**There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.** ¹⁹**We love because he first loved us.**¹¹

There's so much in these verses, but I hope you see that instead of possessing fear of judgment, all who trust Jesus now have God's love abiding in them. Because we don't have the jealousy like Cain and because we don't revel in trusting ourselves and elevating ourselves like Lamech or others in history, we are now free to love like God has loved us. Fear is gone from us. In its place is God the Spirit. He perfects us in knowing God's love, and then we love others – not for what they do for us or give us – we love because God has loved us with a steadfast love.

But let's think even more deeply about these verses. Think about the people receiving these words from John – John, who will one day be exiled to the island of Patmos for being a Christian. To become a Christ-follower meant there were many fearful prospects. The Roman world could be a fearful world. The people joining in all types of sins. The people against Christians. Families were against families even. And, you know what, we experience some of these things in our day, too. I talk with many Christians who are fearful of what the government is going to do, or what might happen in public schools or what their children might end up doing or fill-in-the-blank. Oh, Christians, I know the fears. I can feel them, too. But do we have perfect Love? And, is perfect Love coming again? Then we have steadfast hope – assurance of full glory to come and that God is working all things together for our best for all eternity. We have Peace – because we are reconciled to God and await shalom for eternity future. We also now live in the joy of the Lord and await its fullness. We are eternally secured in their realities because of Jesus – who loves us and gave himself for us! Perfect Love should cast out our fears. That doesn't mean we can't be concerned, but that does mean those concerns do not rule, dominate, or overpower our assurance in the God who is over all the chaos that sin brought in.

So, Ventura, rejoice. God's steadfast love undergirds every aspect of your life – just like it did for the nation of Israel. Even if you feel you're in a wilderness, whatever the circumstances, they don't define God's love. Instead, **God's steadfast love ought to secure you in all of life. You have his love and you can look forward with confidence, knowing the Spirit will perfect God's love in you until the day that**

¹¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 4:13, 15–19.

Love comes again in all his glory, and we experience and live out his perfect love for all eternity future! Truly, God's love sustained his people and pointed forward to Love coming in the flesh, who grants people God's love to be shared to the world for all eternity future.