



## Hesed

**Simply Put by Barry Cooper**

“Hesed is another one of those biblical words—in this case a Hebrew word—that translators have struggled to capture in English. And yet it’s vital for understanding the way God relates to his people. It occurs some 250 times in the Old Testament.

In different versions of the Bible, you may see it translated as “mercy,” “kindness,” “goodness,” “faithfulness,” “loyalty.” There’s no single English word that quite gets it, which is why some translators have used more than one word: “steadfast love,” “loyal love,” “loving-kindness.”

Usually, as one scholar puts it, “the word describes something that happens within an existing relationship, whether between two human beings or between God and man. In human relationships, hesed implies loving our neighbor, not merely in terms of warm emotional feelings but in acts of love and service that we owe to the other person simply because he is part of the covenant community.”

You hear that sense of the word in verses such as Micah chapter 6 verse 8: what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness [hesed], and to walk humbly with your God?

And by the way, Jesus’ parable of the good Samaritan shows that we’re obliged to extend this kind of love to all, as we have opportunity—not just other believers.

But we can only love like this, with hesed loving-kindness, when we know, at the core of our being, that this is how God loves us. As 1 John chapter 4 verse 19 says, “We love because he first loved us.”

That’s why it’s vital to understand the extent of God’s hesed love for his covenant people. Listen to Exodus chapter 34, verses 6 and 7:

The Lord passed before [Moses] and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love [hesed] and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love [hesed] for thousands. . . .

What’s even more remarkable about the Lord’s assurance of hesed here is that He says these words shortly after his people have committed the grossest idolatry by worshiping and sacrificing to a golden calf.

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, according to the writer of Lamentations—not even when his people rebel against Him. Even then, they can appeal to His hesed. “His mercies never come to an end; [he writes], they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” All the more stunning when you consider that he writes these things as Jerusalem was being destroyed (in 586 BC) as a judgement on their wickedness. But, says the writer, if His people turn back to Him, “the Lord will not cast off forever. . . . He will have compassion according to the abundance of his [hesed] steadfast love.”

Read [Psalm 136](#) and you begin to see just how deep and wide God’s hesed loving-kindness is. According to that psalm, in which every phrase ends with “his hesed endures forever,” God even made the heavens, the sun, the moon and the stars, because of His hesed. He gives food to all flesh for the same reason. He delivered His people from slavery,

overthrew kings who opposed them, and gave them land to live in—all because of His hesed. He remembered His people in their low estate, because of His hesed. And Christ went to the cross because of His hesed. His loyalty to His people, His kindness and mercy toward them, was so unshakable that He endured the very worst that we could devise for Him, so that we could be clothed in his perfect hesed faithfulness, and be credited with it, as if we have lived out his perfect life of hesed ourselves. Having entered a covenant relationship with His people, God binds Himself to act toward them with hesed, and He is utterly faithful to His own self-commitment. To put it another way, our hope that God will love us to the uttermost, and forever, is not founded on our ability to keep His commands but rather it's founded on God's ability to keep being God. Are you confident that God can do that? If you have trusted in Christ alone, turning from sin to faith in Him, then you can be sure that the Lord's goodness and hesed will follow you all the days of your life, and you shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

### The Other Half of the Church Podcast

In this episode, Jeremy discusses with Jim Wilder the importance of the Hebrew word hesed. Jim describes this word as enduring love or secure attachment, and describes how important it is to spiritual growth and healthy community. Michel Hendricks explains how the church can intentionally cultivate hesed through joy in safe ways that lead to vibrant communities of faith.

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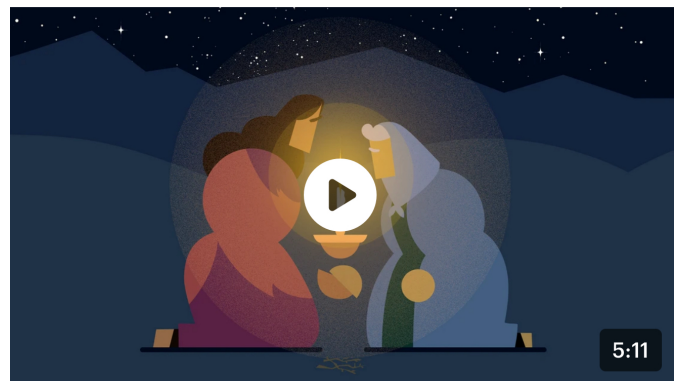


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### Bible Project Video Loyal Love

In the Bible Project video series Character of God Word Studies, you learn about the foundational description of God's attributes found in the book of Exodus. Episode 5 is about loyal love. They say "The Hebrew word "chased: is one of the most common descriptions of God in the Hebrew Bible, and it's almost impossible to translate into any other language! This word combines the idea of love, loyalty, and generosity. Meditating on the meaning of this word can shape our understanding of God's character."



Episode 5

**Loyal Love**

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