

God's Steadfast Love

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Preacher: Lindon Nairn

[0 : 00] Please turn in your Bibles to Psalm chapter 86.! Psalm 86 says, What in the soul of your servant?

For to you, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you.

Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer. Listen to my plea for grace. In the day of my trouble I call upon you, for you answer me. There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours.

All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name. For you are great and do wondrous things.

You alone are God. Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth. Unite my heart to fear your name.

[1 : 24] I give thanks to you, O Lord, my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever. For great is your steadfast love toward me.

You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol. O God, insolent men have risen up against me. A band of ruthless men seek my life, and they do not set you before them.

But you, O Lord, are a God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

Turn to me, and be gracious to me. Give your strength to your servant, and save the son of your maidservant. Show me a sign of your favor, that those who hate me may see and be put to shame, because you, Lord, have helped me and comforted me.

The word of the Lord. There's one thing that I can say about all of us without fear of being contradicted.

[2 : 32] and it is that all of us are walking through one challenge or the other, or that all of us have walked through one challenge or the other.

And if the Lord spares our lives, we will walk through one challenge or the other.

Some event, some circumstance, it seems overwhelming. It seems insurmountable. And we ask ourselves, where is the Lord?

Today's message is intended to encourage us to view life's challenges through the lens of God's love.

His steadfast love. His abiding love. I'm going to ask you question up front. How do you view the world?

[3 : 45] And how do you view circumstances in your life? Do you view them through the prism of God's love?

Do you see the circumstances in your life, the challenges, the disappointments, the hurts, the pain in your life the same way a non-believer does?

Is there no difference? If someone were to get into your heart and into your mind and examine how you interact with disappointment, would it be the same as a non-believer?

Does your faith, does your faith inform the way you interact with pain and with disappointment and with suffering?

I'm trying to get you to focus on your perspective. Perspective matters.

[4 : 54] And much of the scriptures is focused on helping us to frame perspective so that we see things as believers differently. A non-believer looks at something and he sees one thing.

A believer looks at the same thing and he sees and he ought to see something completely different. That's how it ought to be. Two of us standing here looking at the same picture are likely to see completely different things.

That is so because what we see is informed by our life's experiences and even our biases. Ultimately, our understanding and embrace of God's love informs the way we view and the way we interact with the world and how we live in it.

Our understanding and embrace of God's love informs the way we live, the way we view and interact with the world and how we live in it.

If we think God hates us, then we would have much to fear. If we think he's indifferent towards us, that he does not care, we would have much to fear.

[6 : 24] But, knowing that he loves us should positively shape our lives, every aspect of our lives, even when there is pain, even when there is disappointment, even when there is hurt.

And if that's not true for you, if that's not true for me, then we ought to do introspection and ask why is it.

God's steadfast love is the lens through which believers must view blessings and challenges and everything in between.

Let us pray. Father, Lord, we thank you for your word and we thank you for this privilege to share your word. Lord, we pray that you would speak through and to us.

Cause your word to come alive in our hearts. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen. The psalm that was read, Psalm 86, is a prayer that David prayed.

[7 : 45] David found himself in very challenging circumstances. men had risen up against him and were plotting to kill him.

David opens this psalm with these words. David says, Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy.

Right away, David sets up what's happening in his life. David says, I am poor needy, I need the Lord. And he says, Lord, condescend to me.

Hear my prayer. Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me. And David repeats this request.

In verse six, he says, Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer. And in verse 16, he says, turn to me, and be gracious to me.

[8 : 50] David was a man who needed the Lord. The truth is, we always need the Lord. We always need him. When things are going wonderfully, we need the Lord.

When things are not going so right, we need the Lord. Because the fact of the matter is, we don't know what's around the corner. And even beyond that, our eyes should not be on what is temporary, but what is on eternal.

eternal. But here, David says, men have risen up against me, and they're plotting to kill me. I'm doubtful that any of us find ourselves in a similar situation where men are plotting to kill us physically.

Yet it's true that our lives are not a bed of roses, as one might say. Indeed, heartaches and disappointments are a part of life.

We constantly deal with difficult situations like death, the death of a loved one, personal injury, illness, business failure, divorce, injustice, crime, uncertainty, rejection, betrayal, and unemployment, just to name a few.

[10 : 15] Many of us, indeed all of us, can relate to the words of Job where he says, man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble.

Is there anyone who can relate to that this morning? Full of trouble. And perhaps you say right now, things are looking rosy in your life, and thank God for that.

But you know, all of us ought to have a good memory and think of those days when things were not going as well. How many of you know believers are not exempt from having bad days, having bad weeks, having bad months, having bad years, and even bad decades.

David here represents exhibit A of what we're talking about. A man after God's own heart. David was pained by the circumstances in his life, and he cries out to the Lord, incline your ear, O Lord, and answer my prayer, for I am poor and needy.

Of course, the trials of life do not exist in isolation or by themselves. For some, they are expressed in various ways, including sleeplessness.

[11 : 49] And some of us, we get a little grouchy. Some of us, we become, we turn away from trusting others in circumstances of difficulty.

We withdraw from friends and loved ones. And there is sadness, extreme at times, and envy, sometimes anger, and oftentimes long-term physical and mental deterioration.

pain. The pain that we endure often has consequences. But what should be the distinctiveness, the mark of a believer in the face of life's challenges?

And I believe that David answers that question for us. He points us in the right direction. The question is, what should be the mark? What should distinguish us from unbelievers?

Here's the hint. The believer should view life's challenges through the lens of God's love. That's it. The believer should always view the challenges that he or she sees and has through the lens of God's love.

[13:15] And we're going to explore that truth, through three simple responses that we find in Psalm 86.

And they are, we're going to consider the nature of God's love, the expression of God's love, and the power of God's love.

love. Let's consider the nature of God's love. You will know that much has been written about the nature of God's love.

However, we don't intend to explore this to any significant degree. As we read Psalm 86, perhaps you noticed the number of times David mentioned God's love in this Psalm.

Here is a man who finds himself in a very difficult circumstance. And in these short verses, this very short Psalm, 17 verses, he uses the word love three times.

[14:44] This is what David says about love. In verse 5, David says, For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you.

How amazing is that? In the midst of his challenges, David is able to say, For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you.

And in verse 13, David says, For great is your steadfast love toward me. So despite his challenges, despite his difficulties, David writes, for great is your steadfast love, your steadfast love towards me.

And I want you to pay attention to that word steadfast love. Those words, steadfast love. And in verse 15, David says, An abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

apart from the fact that David used the word love three times. Notice also that he uses the adjective steadfast to describe God's love.

[16:06] Moreover, he says that God's love is abounding. It's abounding in steadfast love, modifying it even further.

Here is a man going through tremendous challenges and he is focusing on the love of God.

What am I trying to say to us? I'm saying to us that as we go through difficulties in our lives, that we ought to do as David did and remember and to focus on the love of God, the abounding and the steadfast love of the Lord.

What is the Holy Spirit through the inspired writings of David telling us? When David refers to God's love as abounding, I think he means that it is great, it is without end.

God's abounding love might be better understood if we considered what it means to have little, a little bit of love, and to contemplate love's practical opposite.

[17:28] How many of you know that if we could measure God's love, we would be miserable indeed? Because if you could measure a thing, it means that it has a beginning and an end.

If his love were finite, if it could be measured, it would mean that he's keeping score of how much we draw from his love well, if you will.

You and I could run out if it were finite. But the scriptures tell us in Psalm 103 verse 17, the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him.

I don't know about you, but I find tremendous comfort in knowing that God's love is abounding, in knowing that God's love is everlasting, in knowing that God's love is eternal.

That is so because as often as I mess up, I know that I can draw from the well of God's love that never runs out.

[18:43] You see, the abundance of God's love is not dependent on me, but it's dependent on him. We get a better appreciation of the abounding characteristic of God's love when we consider its practical opposite, which is indifference.

Indifference is like, whatever. Indifference means it does not matter. One way or the other, you hear, good.

You're not here, same thing. You're feeling fine, okay. You're not feeling fine, I hear you. One cannot get indifference out of abounding.

God's love propels him to act. He is not a casual observer, unconcerned about our circumstances.

He is not indifferent. His love, David refers and calls his love abounding, steadfast love. Without end, brothers and sisters, today, you and I ought to be glad that his love is abounding.

[20 : 04] David says about this abounding love, he says, it is steadfast, meaning that it is unwavering.

It is firm. It is unmovable. It cannot be shaken. David says that this abounding, steadfast love that I look to, that I draw from in times of difficulty, in times of pain, in times of hurt, no matter what it is. When I am poor and when I am needy, I draw from the abounding, the abounding, steadfast love of the Lord.

David says in other words that it is unconditional and it will not change. God's love for us is not based on anything we do or say.

In other words, it is not performance based. It is without condition. How amazing is that. And some of you, you know, we get a glimpse into that when you have a child.

[21 : 29] You get a glimpse into what it means to have unconditional love. And how many of you know your child can mess up time and time and time and time again.

And as often as you say, boy, I'm not going to help little Johnny. I can leave him on his own. The minute he comes back and he says, mama, help me, forgive me. And your heart just turns to little Johnny.

And how many of you know that if you're able to do that, that our heavenly father who knows and sees all and whose son died already for your sin and for mine is able to forgive us and able to love us even beyond that.

There is no comparison. Can you imagine? So we can always run to the well. Now then we have a clear picture of a bounding, this bounding and steadfast love through which we can engage the world and consider our circumstances.

In a moment we are going to consider the power of that love, but before we do, let us see from Psalm 86 how the Lord's love is manifested in our life.

[22 : 50] Let's consider the expressions of God's love. By expressions of God's love we mean the manifestation of God's love.

What does it look like? In other words, what does it produce? this is what I mean. If you love me, tell me.

That's okay. If you love me, tell me. And if you love me, don't just tell me. You got to show me. have you ever been in a relationship with someone, a spouse, a child, a friend, anyone, and you say, I just can't feel you.

I just, you know, you hear, you, I can't, you know, I can't feel you. I just, have you ever been in a relationship like that?

You know, somebody that's just indifference, there is, the person is there, but you just can't feel them. Well, David understood that God's love is not like that.

[24 : 05] It is tangible. It is real. It is full of expression. As we consider these manifestations of God's love, I want us to remember the context.

Here is a man who is otherwise challenged by life's circumstances, and now he prays to God with expectation, mindful that God's love is eternal and steadfast.

It's abounding right out of the gate. In verse one, we see that David's love is founded on communication.

God's love is to be heard. And all the women say, amen. David expects to be heard, even perhaps more so when things are difficult.

You know, there is no substitute for being able to talk with someone who has a listening air when things are difficult. And you and I ought not to take it for granted, that we can take our burdens to the Lord and leave them there.

[25 : 20] But he has a listening air. David says, incline your air to me, O Lord, for I am poor and needy.

Give air, O Lord, to my prayer. Turn to me and be gracious and be gracious to me. When one approaches another whom he loves with transparency, humility, and vulnerability, and finds a listening air, one is comforted.

But the Lord's care for David extends beyond just listening, includes answering. We can take comfort in the fact that during times of difficulty, when we cry out to the Lord, he will both listen to us and grant to us wisdom and grace.

There's a bonanza of blessings David references in this psalm. In verse two, David speaks of the preservation of life, preserve my life.

In verse three, grace is the meat of the downhearted. In verse four, a gladdened heart he asks for the distressed.

[27 : 01] In verse eleven, wisdom and holiness are fruits and so is gratitude. In verse twelve, strength.

And in verse seventeen, to the one who is feeling the weight of a broken world, the Lord gives help and comfort.

Time does not permit us to consider all of these blessings to which David refers, but I do want to consider a few of them.

In verse four, David prays for a gladdened soul. gladdened the soul of your servant, for to you, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.

Is there anyone here who can relate to this verse? Who can relate to this request that David makes to the Lord? David says, gladden my soul.

[28 : 12] Here, David doesn't ask for riches. Start in this verse. David says, gladden my soul.

Have you ever had a moment in life when you needed the Lord to gladden your soul, where there was such sadness, where there was a weight of sadness, it was palpable as it were.

Gladden my soul, O Lord. Notice that David is not here asking for a ten step plan to happiness or the latest fad.

Instead, he asks the Lord to supernaturally intervene and grant him joy. This is a request that David makes of the Lord.

David says, Lord, would you, would you, Lord, gladden my heart. I want you to think carefully about that request. David makes clear in the second part of the verse that he lifts up his soul to the Lord to be gladdened.

[29 : 28] He lifts up his soul to the Lord. One sees the imagery of someone holding up a cup and asking the Lord to fill it in times of challenges as in old times.

We should lift up our soul to the Lord and to him alone and ask the Lord to fill us with joy to gladden our hearts.

Let's not turn to things that perish or things that take sight to give us happiness to give us temporary joy but let's turn our hearts to the Lord and say Lord in this difficult hour in this circumstance that seems overwhelming that I've been going through for all these days and months and even years would you gladden my heart father I can turn to this way or that way indeed I've considered it and perhaps even tried it but it didn't work it didn't allow would you gladden my heart in verse 11 it's most instructive listen to what it says if it says teach me your way oh

Lord that I may walk in your truth unite my heart unite my heart to fear your name those are the words of one who is humble whose heart is postured to hear from God so that his actions might be adjusted David not only prayed for his walk to be adjusted he asks that his heart be aligned also we also know that very often we can know what is right to do but find little pleasure in it this is David's point you can know what is right to do but we can find little pleasure in it but

David here asks that our loving Lord would adjust both his walk and his heart so that he finds the light in his walk Lord make the walk of holiness sweet I know that you expect you require me to be holy but cause it to be sweet Lord cause it to be desirable cause me to long to please you and to find great joy in that make forgiveness of the one who wronged me a delight cause my heart to leap for joy as I turn the other cheek to the one who scolds me affect me so that I pray earnestly!

[32 : 51] for the granting of salvation and success to the one who but for grace I would despise O Lord that I may walk in your truth unite my heart to fear your name teach me your ways O Lord in this section we observe in verse 17 that David has expectation that the Lord's love will be expressed in his ultimate comfort on help yes the Lord is our comfort in trouble let's see what verse 17 says David says show me a sign of your favor that those who hate me may see and be put to shame because you

Lord have helped me uncomforted me the Lord indeed is our comfort in the time of trouble David looks to the Lord to bring him comfort because he is our refuge and our strength a very present help in the time of trouble I need to continue what the psalmist says in verses 2 and 3 of psalm 46 to highlight the point therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea though its waters war and form though the mountains tremble at its

swelling what's David's point here David says that the Lord is able to bring comfort to me David says that the Lord is able to bring comfort even in the midst of my enemies because of his pounding and steadfast love show me a sign David says of your favor that those who hate me may see me and be put to shame finally I want to talk to us about the power of God's love it's one thing to know the nature of God's love and even the intent of his love but if he has no power then his love is of little use in the circumstances of our pain consider our minor children little children they love us daily as we love them and no doubt they desire that we do well however their love will not translate into good health overcoming financial distress for example because they don't have the power to do anything for us but David amplifies the fact that the one whose love is abounding and steadfast and whose intentions are favorable is uniquely qualified to cause those desirable things in our lives to be realized cause us to have the right perspective on life to cause us to see life's challenges through the lens of his love to cause us to focus on the things that will remain and not the things that are temporary listen to verses 8 and 9 of the psalm there is none like you among the gods oh lord nor are there any works like yours all nations you have made shall come and worship before you oh lord and shall glorify your name david makes clear that there is none like god there is none like jehovah who loves us there is none like him he alone is all powerful he alone is all knowing he alone is all loving there is none like him among the gods there is no god as powerful as he everything is within the scope of his control and power why am

I saying all of this to us I'm saying this to us because when we consider our circumstances and our challenges we are to remember that he alone that there is none like our god he the one who is abounding in steadfast love he's able to care for and to take care of his own indeed he made the nations and the universe and everything and everyone in it we all subjected to him in the midst of David's trials he understood that the plans of the Lord could not be thwarted it made sense therefore for him to engage with the Lord David engaged with the Lord David's reasoning meant something like this

[39 : 17] I'm in trouble God loves me no matter what I'll take my concerns to him and certain he will hear me and he will do whatever pleases him whatever pleases him I gotta tell you that requires a lot of faith to sometimes the Lord's response is not precisely what we want to hear he doesn't respond he doesn't give us the response that we want to hear and he doesn't answer when we want to hear when we expect him to answer sometimes he doesn't bring the healing that we pray for!

sometimes he doesn't restore the relationship that we have asked him to restore sometimes he doesn't cause the financial distress to go away as we pray but we ought to have comfort confidence faith in knowing that the Lord does everything well he knows our frame he knows our beginning and he knows our end you and I ought to view all of these circumstances all of these situations through the prism of God's bounding steadfast love the church clarity of and confidence in God's love believers should be able to rest you and I should ought to be able to rest in the truth of his love come what may when we see through the prism of God's love and his power we can take our burdens!

Whatever they are to the Lord and leave them there leave them there! Charles Tindley the son of an African American who was regarded by society as an enslaved person wrote the song Leave It There Having no formal education history still recognizes him as one of the most eloquent preachers and hymnologists of his day Listen to the words of the popular and timeless song that Mr. Tindley wrote in 1906 Listen as he deals with financial challenges If the world from you withhold of its silver and its gold and you have to get along with meager fear just remember in this world how he feeds the little bird take your burden to the Lord and leave it there and here's Mr.

[43 : 24] Tindley dealing with sickness if your body suffers pain and your health you can't regain and your soul is almost sinking in despair Jesus knows the pain you feel he can save and he can heal take your burden to the Lord and leave it there and if you have enemies like David did but the Tindley wrote when your enemies assail and your heart begins to fail don't forget that God in heaven answers prayer he will make a way for you and will lead you safely through take your burden to the

Lord and leave it there and in moments of physical decline Brother Tindley wrote when your youthful days are gone and old age is stealing on and your body bends beneath the weight of care he will never leave you then he will go with you to the end take your burden to the Lord and leave it

there leave it there leave it there take your burden to the Lord and leave it there if you trust and never doubt he will surely bring you out take your burden to the Lord and leave it there brothers and sisters as we conclude this message today we might sum it up this way because of God's everlasting everlasting unending firm immovable unshakable love we can face every situation every challenge every disappointment with the confidence but God's plans will come to fruition allow God's love to inform your responses to life's challenges you cannot end without being reminded of the greatest expression of God's love we were once enemies and without any hope and he demonstrated his love for us in that while we were yet sinners he sent his son to die for us without hope love and he showered us with his abundant love in the person of his son Jesus Christ so today we have joy beyond words let us pray oh lord thank you lord for your steadfast love your abounding steadfast love father we are mindful of the fact that as these words were preached today that some heard them while they are going through challenging circumstances difficulties difficulties that they could not even have imagined just months perhaps years ago or maybe even weeks ago and others lord just because of the fallen fallenness of this world will experience challenges that they could not have imagined today we're not unmindful lord of those truths of those realities father we pray in the name of jesus that each one lord will come to you that indeed all of us will come to you as david did humble and declare the truth of our circumstances declare oh lord that we are unable to handle it ourselves that we are poor and needy lord in the name of jesus we pray as a community and ask oh father that you would incline your ear to our prayer lord that you would hear the prayer that you would hear the cry of the one oh lord who is hurting the one oh lord who is in the midst of a financial crisis the one oh lord who is in the midst of an emotional circumstance! The one oh lord who endures a relational condition that we can only imagine! The one oh lord who's broken oh lord show forth your mercy and your grace to each one father we pray that you would cause each heart to be gladdened even in the midst of these trying pain and difficult circumstances help us oh lord to view each condition each circumstance through the truth through the prism of your love love until oh lord each one of these blessings that we have prayed about is manifested lord whether it happens here or whether it happens in eternity lord we give you praise and we give you glory father we just thank you lord that you have caused us to know you as an almighty god as an all powerful god and as a loving god who condescends to us what a mighty god we serve in jesus name and all god's people say amen amen