

How Precious Is Your Steadfast Love

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Date: 26 July 2026

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[0:00] Please take your Bibles and open them up this morning to Psalm chapter 36. We're continuing our series through the Psalms this morning.

And when you found that, Psalm 36, would you please stand in honor of the reading of the Word of the Lord. Psalm 36 is to the choir master of David, the servant of the Lord.

Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart. There is no fear of God before his eyes. For he flatters himself in his own eyes that his iniquity cannot be found out and hated.

The words of his mouth are trouble and deceit. He has ceased to act wisely and do good. He plots trouble while on his bed. He sets himself in a way that is not good.

He does not reject evil. Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens. Your faithfulness to the clouds. Your righteousness is like the mountains of God.

[1:05] Your judgments are like the great deep. Man and beast you save, O Lord. How precious is your steadfast love, O God. The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

They feast on the abundance of your house. And you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life. In your light do we see light.

O continue your steadfast love to those who know you. And your righteousness to the upright of heart. Let not the foot of arrogance come upon me. Nor the hand of the wicked drive me away.

There the evildoers lie fallen. They are thrust down, unable to rise. The grass withers and the flower fades. But the word of the Lord endures forever.

Father God, we pray now. Would you show us the greatness of your steadfast love for us in Christ? Help us not only to see it, but to marvel at it.

[2:09] And not only to marvel at it, but to be satisfied in it. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

You may be seated. With all the rain that we've gotten over the past week, every now and then, the lights at our house flickered on and off and threatened the possibility of a power outage.

And I remembered how much bigger a deal a power outage was when I was younger than they are today. I grew up in the time when we didn't have smartphones in our pockets with instant flashlights that you could press at any moment to provide light in the room.

And so I distinctly remember every now and then there would be a storm. The lights would go out and we couldn't see a thing. And so my parents would be scrambling in the dark to find a match or a candle or a flashlight.

And until that light was lit, darkness had complete control of the room. But once the light came on, the darkness was dispelled.

I wonder if you have ever been overwhelmed by darkness. darkness. And the world that we live in can often be described as dark.

[3:20] And I know that it's sometimes hard for us to remember that, especially where we live here in this beautiful place of the world here in Allendal or Mount Pleasant, often called Mount Perfect or Mount Plastic even.

But when you peel back the shiny, luxurious exterior, the world that we live in, even here where we live in a place of luxury, is dark.

And sometimes that darkness can be overwhelming. I remind you of what I mentioned last week. We live in a country where over a million unborn babies are aborted in this country legally by the law of the land every single year.

We live in a world where Christians are often persecuted, maybe socially here, but beyond this country, persecuted physically and even killed for professing their faith.

We live in a place where advancements in technology are a good thing, but now especially with the rise of artificial intelligence, financial scams have become all the more sophisticated with

AI-fabricated distress calls that mimic the exact voices of your loved ones and contribute to scamming the elderly out of billions of dollars every single year.

[4:38] It's estimated that here in the U.S. there are over a million people trapped in conditions of modern-day slavery and forced labor. I don't tell you all this to depress you, although it is disheartening, but to illustrate the fact that all of us are aware of, the world that we live in is very, very dark.

And sometimes you can wonder, well, where can we look when the darkness seems so overwhelming? Where can God's people look to find comfort and assurance, even hope or security in light of the great wickedness all around us?

And what hope do we have to offer others who are living here in the midst of this dark world? Well, here in Psalm chapter 36, David gives us the answer to all of these questions.

And he tells us that here in a dark world, we must cling to the light of the glory of God. In the midst of darkness, God's people look to Him and satisfy our soul in Him.

So let's take a look as we ask the question, how do God's people navigate the darkness? This will be our outline this morning if you're taking notes. How do God's people navigate the darkness?

[5:55] And we'll see it in three parts this morning. First, David shows us we must examine the wickedness of man. Examine the wickedness of man.

We see this here in verses 1 through 4. Look there with me. And here David shows us what it is like in the dark. This is the darkness when the lights are off. And here's my disclaimer. This picture of wickedness is not pretty.

This is a very blunt and honest, unattractive look at the sinfulness of man. This is not an attractive, popular message, but it's here before us and so we deal with it.

David gives us a full picture here of the wickedness of man. And what we see here is a picture of what we call total depravity. It's not that we're all as bad as we possibly could be, but rather that every single part of us, inside and out, has been corrupted by the darkness of sin.

Look at this description that he gives us here of the wicked man. He goes head to toe here in verses 1 through 4. He says in verse 1, Their heart is corrupt. Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart.

[7:09] Here transgression itself is personified, almost like wisdom is personified in the book of Proverbs. And transgression speaks to the wicked. It has this deep hold on the heart of the wicked.

It's not just empty words in his ears. It's resonating with him deep in his heart. The darkness, the wickedness begins here in the heart. And we should understand that the wicked actions and the sinful words and the sinful attitudes that we see coming out of the exterior, those are like warning lights on the dashboard that show us that something is wrong on the interior.

The human heart, left to itself, apart from the grace of God, is wicked. Jeremiah tells us the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick.

You should know, follow your heart is terrible advice. David says the wicked's heart is corrupt. Not only that, but his eyes are corrupt.

He says there is no fear of God before his eyes. This is someone who lives in open rebellion against God and simply does not care. He doesn't fear God's wrath.

[8:24] He laughs off all this religious talk about hell. He thinks all that religious talk of a God who sees every act and hears every word and knows every thought and can discern every intention of the heart.

That's just a bunch of nonsense. He cares nothing about the coming day of judgment when all will be exposed. All he wants to do is live free from all of this and so he suppresses it.

He has no fear of God in his eyes. In fact, he says he flatters himself in his own eyes. He convinces himself that his iniquity cannot be found out and cannot be hated.

This wicked man is self-deceived. And he's deceived himself into thinking, what I do in the privacy of my own home is my business.

It can't be found out. It can't be hated. It can't be dealt with at all. Now Moses warned the Israelites about this exact sort of attitude all the way back in Deuteronomy chapter 29.

[9:25] Listen to what he says. He warns the community of Israel, Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit, one who when he hears the words of this sworn covenant, blesses himself, flatters himself in his heart, saying, I shall be safe although I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.

This will lead to the sweeping away of the moist and the dry alike. The Lord will not be willing to forgive him, but rather the anger of the Lord and his jealousy will smoke against that man. And the curses written in this book will settle upon him, and the Lord will blot out his name from under heaven. The wicked man does not fear God.

He lives in open rebellion. And so, verse 3, The words of his mouth are trouble and deceit. His mouth is corrupt. Jesus tells us in Matthew 12 that a tree is known by its fruit.

He looks the Pharisees right in the eye and he says, You brood of vipers, how can you speak good when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

[10 : 38] The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment, people will give account for every careless word that they speak.

For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned. He says the wicked man's mouth is corrupt. He says his hands and feet are corrupt.

He has ceased to act wisely and to do good. His mind is corrupt. He plots trouble while he's on his bed. I mean, this is where all the AI scams and the abortion industry and the human trafficking and all the other evil in the world begins.

It's in those quiet moments where you're left with your own thoughts. What is it that your mind goes to? The wicked, David says, is plotting wickedness from a corrupt mind.

In fact, his very will is corrupt. Look what he says. He sets himself in a way that is not good. He does not reject evil.

[11 : 47] This is the will of a sinner. You know, we often maybe talk about free will, and what that means biblically is that people actually choose what they do.

That is true. You choose what you do. What it doesn't mean is that your will is neutral. All of us choose according to our nature.

There's a reason that birds don't swim and fish don't fly and dogs don't quack and ducks don't bark and the wicked don't reject evil. What is it? It's because we all act and choose according to our nature.

And biblically, David is telling us his very nature, the nature of a wicked man is that from head to toe he is ruled by sin. The biblical word for that isn't freedom.

It's slavery. It's a dark picture, isn't it? When we look around and we see the darkness of the world all around us, we should understand it for what it is.

[12 : 48] This is a world that is lost and enslaved by the powers of sin. But we should also understand that apart from the grace of God that liberates the sinful nature, that frees us from the power of sin, apart from the grace of God, friend, this is not just darkness out there around us.

This is us. This is the point that Paul makes in Romans chapter 3 when he quotes this exact passage and others and says, None is righteous.

No, not one. No one understands. No one seeks for God. Not even you. Not even me. All have turned aside. Together they have become worthless. No one does good.

Not even one. Their throat is an open grave. They use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.

Their feet are swift to shed blood. In their paths are ruin and misery. The way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.

[13 : 53] The picture that the Bible gives us is dark. The wicked are totally, absolutely consumed with evil. And friend, if the psalm ended here, we would leave here in absolute despair, wouldn't we?

But notice what David does next. David shifts the perspective back here in verses 5 through 9 to give us just about the greatest contrast you can possibly imagine.

Against this dark backdrop of sin, in the midst of this great darkness, he shows us the light of the glory of God.

And he calls us to fix our eyes there. This is our hope in the midst of darkness. This is what he shows us in verses 5 through 9. Look there. Second, David says, we must exalt our glorious God in the midst of the darkness.

Exalt our glorious God. Look there to 5 through 9. There could not be a more drastic contrast than what we see here. This is darkness and light, night and day.

[15:01] David draws our attention here to the covenant attributes of our God. He says, fix our eyes on the steadfast love of the Lord. Fix your eyes on the steadfast love of the Lord.

We've heard that term, but it's possible that you may not know exactly what that means. The steadfast love of the Lord. This is God's covenant love for His people.

This is God's faithfulness to the promises that He has made to His people. And ultimately, we know that this is God's love for His covenant people in Christ.

Isaiah says in Isaiah 54 verse 10, the mountains may depart and the hills may be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you.

This steady, rock solid, enduring love is ours in Christ's church. But even on His side of the cross, David's able to look at the steadfast love of God and marvel that His steadfast love extends to the heavens.

[16:09] His faithfulness extends to the clouds. He says, look there if you're overwhelmed by the darkness. But also, he says, fix your eyes on the righteousness of the Lord.

He is perfectly pure. I remember going to pick out Amanda's engagement ring, and you learn all sorts of new stuff when you go to buy a ring. All the four C's and all that.

Cut clarity, carrot, and I forget the fourth one. I don't know what it is. But where they really get you is in the purity of the diamond, right? They hold it out against this black cloth.

They slide it out to you. They put it under the microscope. You spin it around, and you can see every little minor imperfection. Not so with God.

Here, against this black backdrop of our sin, we see that there is not the slightest imperfection in our God. There is not the slightest hint of evil.

[17:06] There is not the slightest inclination to wickedness. John tells us, God is light. In him there is no darkness at all.

Our God is not just holy. He is holy, holy, holy. This is the refrain of heaven. Revelation chapter 4. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come.

His righteousness, David says, is like the mountains of God. It's strong. It's stable. It's towering. It's enduring.

It's beautiful. And again, the righteousness of our God, it shines forth most clearly in Christ Jesus, who is the perfect Son of God, who is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature.

He is the embodiment of holy God in human flesh. David says, would you just marvel at this faithful holy God? His judgments are like the great deep.

[18:14] All life owes itself to the work of this great God, man and beast alike. Who can comprehend the ways of God? And when we stand back and we just think for a moment, and when we zoom out of all the chaos of life and all the overwhelming darkness of day-to-day life here in a fallen world, when we think about God's works of salvation and creation and providence, but especially salvation, what He's done for us in Christ, we say with Paul, oh, the depths of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God.

How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable are His ways. You just marvel at the wisdom and the ways of this God. Can you imagine a greater contrast in what David shows us here?

Derek Kidner says, here is a whole world to explore, a broad place to be brought into, unsearchable, impregnable, inexhaustible, yet for all that, welcoming and hospitable.

He says, it is only man's world that is cramping. Human fickleness makes a drooping contrast to this towering covenant love and faithfulness. Human standards where all is relative are a marshland beside the exacting, exhilarating mountains of His righteousness.

Human assessments are shallowness itself in comparison with His judgments. David holds this diamond of God's glory in his hand against the black backdrop of the wickedness of man and he turns it every which way and says, would you just look and marvel at the glory of God?

[20:03] Church, do you ever marvel at the glory of God? Do you find yourself considering His attributes when you're overwhelmed by the darkness of this world?

David says, fix your eyes on Him. Remember who He is, but we can't stop there. We can't stop there.

Pay close attention to this church because this is absolutely crucial for us to get. David moves from talking about the glory of God in verses 5 through 6 to treasuring God in verses 7 through 9.

And this is just an incredible shift that takes place here. Look what he says in verse 7. How precious is your steadfast love, O God, he says in verse 7.

How precious is your steadfast love. The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. See, there is an eternity of difference.

[21:05] between knowing that God is faithful and knowing that God is righteous and knowing that God is just and knowing that God is wise, knowing that God is good, and actually experiencing these glorious truths for yourself.

There is an eternity of difference between being able to list off attributes and loving this great God for who He is. If you're freezing out in the dark, you don't need a lecture, a bunch of true facts about the heat.

You need to get up close to the fire and feel His warmth and see by His light. And this is what David's getting at here. He says God's steadfast love is not just true.

It is precious to those who love Him. God's people don't just know that He's able to save. They take refuge in the shadow of His wings. It is not enough just to be able to talk about this God.

You must treasure Him in your heart. No one has been more helpful for me in understanding this than my good friends John Piper and Jonathan Edwards.

[22:12] John Piper has famously coined the phrase, God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.

God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him. Church, this is why our mission as a church, what is it?

We exist to magnify the glory of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ. How? Way number one, by enjoying Him.

Do you realize that Christianity is a religion of joy? Christianity is a religion of unlimited pursuit of the deepest, most infinitely pleasurable, exhilarating source of satisfaction imaginable in all the universe.

Christianity is a religion of unlimited pursuit of pleasure. And we believe that there's nothing more satisfying to your soul than the God who made it.

[23:21] And the gloriously good news is that when you satisfy your heart in God, you can come and have as much as you want. This is what David says in Psalm 1611.

In your presence, there is fullness of joy. At your right hand are pleasures forevermore. Do you see the abundance language in this psalm? Do you hear this? We're not just fed by God.

We feast on the abundance of His house. We don't just sip from a faucet. We drink from the river of God's delights.

We don't just squint by candlelight. It says, When your heart is satisfied in God, in His light we see light. And so Edwards, he says, Persons need not and ought not set any bounds to their spiritual and gracious appetites.

He says, There is no such thing as any ordinariness in holy affections. There is no such thing as excess in longings after the discoveries of the beauty of Christ Jesus or greater degrees of holiness or the enjoyment of communion with God.

[24:39] Men may be as covetous as they please, if I may so speak, after spiritual riches. They may be as eager as they please to heap up treasure in heaven. They may be as ambitious as they please of spiritual and eternal honor and glory.

They may be as voluptuous as they please with respect to spiritual pleasure. In other words, he says, If you want to be satisfied, come and get it. As much as you want.

The table is set. He says elsewhere, in a sermon that has shaped my life, what is glorifying God but rejoicing in the glory that He has displayed?

Merely understanding the perfections of God cannot be the end of creation. God is glorified not only by His glory being seen but by its being rejoiced in.

When those that see it delight in it, God is more glorified than if they only see it. Friend, do you treasure God as the only and all satisfying source of delight for your soul?

[25:58] Do you see Him as the greatest satisfaction that your soul could possibly ever have? Friend, if you are overwhelmed by the darkness of this world, Christian, the invitation, come feast your soul on the glory of God.

And if you are discouraged by the sin in your own heart, Christian, come drink from the life-giving stream of the steadfast love of God for you in Christ. And friend, if you are the wicked man of verses

1-4 who has lived in rebellion against this great God, come all who are thirsty, He says in Isaiah 55. Come everyone who thirsts, come to the waters, come he who has no money, come buy and eat, and you will find life and satisfaction in Christ.

Come to Christ. find in Him full atonement for the greatest wickedness and full satisfaction for the hungry heart. Because of course, it is in Christ and only in Christ that we see the full expression of this psalm most clearly.

The Gospel of John most clearly, probably more clearly than anywhere else, sheds light on the language of this psalm. In fact, I've often wondered if John was reading Psalm 36 as he composed his Gospel.

[27 : 20] Because it's there in the Gospel of John that Jesus says, I am the light of the world. It is by His light that we see light. It is there in John that Jesus meets with a Samaritan woman and invites her, ask me and I will give you living water.

He says there in John, whoever believes in me as Scripture has said, out of His heart will flow rivers of living water. Church, ultimately, the steadfast love of God is shown towards His people in Christ. And no matter how dark the world around us gets, we take comfort to know we are safe and sheltered in Christ. Not only from the schemes of the enemy, but even from the wrath of God against our own sin.

Why? Because as ugly and dark and wicked of a picture of our own sin as we see in this song, Christ Jesus, the perfect Son of God became sin for us so that in Him we might become the very righteousness of God.

Jesus Christ bore the wrath of God against our sin and as God's righteous judgment fell upon Him in our place, it says, darkness covered the face of the earth.

[28 : 38] the very darkness that David describes here in verses 1-4 reached its peak at the cross of Christ as the light of the world was slain. But we praise God that the darkness could not hold Him.

He has risen from the grave in victory over the darkness, victory over our sin, victory over the enemy, and victory over the grave.

Christian, our comfort and our confidence in the face of darkness is the all-satisfying glory of Christ. Because of this, third and finally, we are compelled to express our desires to Him.

Look there to verses 10-12 and would you just notice here up to this point David has asked for nothing. He's just examined the wickedness and he has extolled the glory of God.

But now in light of all of this, David prays verse 10, continue your steadfast love to those who know you and your righteousness to the upright of heart.

[29 : 50] In other words, God, would you be who you are to those who are yours? Your steadfast love is so great, your righteousness is so precious, would you just cover your people with it and guard them with it and comfort us with your steadfast love and faithfulness?

And also, would you, verse 11, let not the foot of arrogance come upon me nor the hand of the wicked drive me away. There the evildoers lie fallen, they are thrust down unable to rise.

Again, we're reminded of the radical distinction between the righteous and the wicked. James Hamilton summarizes it perfectly.

He says, the wicked worship sin with its fleeting pleasure and lasting regret, and in the end, they gain eternal destruction. The righteous worship God with His lofty love and rooted righteousness, and in the end, they drink from the fountain of life and ever bask in His light.

Church, this is the certain end of all things. This is the light at the end of the tunnel. You remember our question? Where do we look when the darkness is overwhelming?

[31 : 13] Here's your answer, church. You look to the light of the world, Jesus Christ. If you are overwhelmed by evil in our world, take heart. Nothing can separate you from the covenant love of God for you in Christ Jesus.

In fact, He says, I have overcome the world. If you are discouraged by the battle with sin in your own heart, take heart. If you are in Christ, God is faithful.

He will complete the good work He began in you. Indeed, His own perfect righteousness is yours by faith in Christ. If you are facing the fierce attacks and temptations and accusations of the enemy, take heart.

Christ Jesus also has been tempted and tried in every way as we are, yet without sin. He also endured the darkness of this world so that He might bring us out of darkness and into His marvelous light.

And if you are longing for real, lasting satisfaction for your soul, church, remember that one day soon and very soon, Christ Jesus will return.

[32:24] And He will banish the darkness forever. And He will be our everlasting light. And all His people will drop to their knees and drink from the river of His everlasting delights throughout all eternity.

But until that day comes, church, guess what? You can begin feasting on His goodness right now.

So if you are thirsty today, friend, come to the waters.

If you are empty, friend, come to the feast. If you are terrified of the dark, would you turn to the light of the world and take refuge in the shadow of His wings?

And would you consider Him and would you treasure Him in your heart? Would you express the desires of your heart to Him and entrust your very life to Him? He is faithful and He is good.

Let's pray. Father, would you show us, God, that you are the all-satisfying source of joy for which we were made?

[33:33] God, would you show us the fleeting pleasures and destructive end of sin that we might repent and put our faith entirely in Christ and satisfy our soul in Him?

And we pray, Lord Jesus, would you come quickly and put an end to the darkness and usher in the age of eternal joys in your presence? We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.