



TIME OF GRACE®

Keep the Faith: GOD Endures

Study Notes

Summary

Too often in life, people move on. A protective father dies young. A talented teammate moves away. A close friend gets a new job. Thus, we are left with the fear that life will change in all the wrong ways. But what if there was someone who endured, who lasted from year to year and day to day? What would happen to our fear if we had faith that God endures?

- **Psalm 136:1-26:** ¹ Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good.

His love endures forever.

- ² Give thanks to the God of gods.

His love endures forever.

- ³ Give thanks to the Lord of lords:

His love endures forever.

- ⁴ to him who alone does great wonders,

His love endures forever.

- ⁵ who by his understanding made the heavens,

His love endures forever.

- ⁶ who spread out the earth upon the waters,

His love endures forever.

- ⁷ who made the great lights—

His love endures forever.

- ⁸ the sun to govern the day,

His love endures forever.

- ⁹ the moon and stars to govern the night;

His love endures forever.

- ¹⁰ to him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt

His love endures forever.

- ¹¹ and brought Israel out from among them

His love endures forever.

- ¹² with a mighty hand and outstretched arm;

His love endures forever.

- ¹³ to him who divided the Red Sea^[a] asunder

His love endures forever.

- ¹⁴ and brought Israel through the midst of it,

His love endures forever.
15 but swept Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea;
His love endures forever.
16 to him who led his people through the wilderness;
His love endures forever.

17 to him who struck down great kings,
His love endures forever.
18 and killed mighty kings—
His love endures forever.
19 Sihon king of the Amorites
His love endures forever.
20 and Og king of Bashan—
His love endures forever.
21 and gave their land as an inheritance,
His love endures forever.
22 an inheritance to his servant Israel.
His love endures forever.

23 He remembered us in our low estate
His love endures forever.
24 and freed us from our enemies.
His love endures forever.
25 He gives food to every creature.
His love endures forever.

26 Give thanks to the God of heaven.
His love endures forever.

- Big Idea: But GOD _____!

Points to Ponder

1. List four to six things from your past week that didn't "endure forever." How did their lack of endurance affect you spiritually?
2. Study Hebrews 13:5,6. What is the connection between contentment, God's enduring presence, and your personal confidence?
3. **Challenge:** Memorize the seven parts of this sermon series to help you "Keep the Faith"—GOD can. GOD cares. GOD controls. GOD knows. GOD's near. GOD's enough. GOD endures.

Homework for Next Week

Read Titus 1:1-4.

Time of Grace Ministry
Keep the Faith: GOD Endures
Psalm 136
September 13, 2020

Pastor Mike Novotny

And as I was opening up my Bible, I discovered something that I had never seen before. In fact, what I discovered that day was something I had never heard any other Christian even say before.

Fifty-nine percent of the time the word "give thanks" or "praise God" shows up, it's in that book. And so I asked myself, well, why would that be? Why in this part of the Bible would it say, "give thanks, give thanks, give thanks, give thanks, give thanks, praise, praise, praise, praise, praise God," and I think I found the answer. I found out that there are two other words that show up in the book of Psalms more than any place else and that when these ancient song writers saw them, when they put those two words together, the only logical, natural and spiritual reaction was to give thanks and to praise God.

So I texted Kim. I was gushing with spiritual joy. I told her, "I love my job! I can't believe I get paid for this! I got to tell you what I found," and I dropped all the numbers on her in the text, the percentages, and do you want to know how she responded? Let me show you a picture of how my beloved bride responded. Like this: "Nerd," she said. No disrespect to my wife and I'm not trying to be overly competitive, but I think when I share all of what I found with you, it won't just be some nerdy number; it will be your hope and it will be the thing that you run to for the days to come.

Because what I found in my research is the thing that all of us need and I say "all of us," even if I don't know you that well because I have a hunch that I know one of the number one things that breaks your heart and one of the number one things that causes you fear. What makes you frustrated, what keeps you up at night, I have a hunch it's this: That good things don't endure. You hear what I'm saying; this is the heartbreaking thing of life - that whether it's stuff or it's other people or it's us, these good lives that we want, we cling to, we pray for, they just don't endure.

And I think that's why you need the news that this nerd is about to share because what I shared with my wife that day is the answer to this problem. In a world where nothing lasts for long, even the best things of life, there is something that endures. There is something that we can hold onto and it's the something that we find in the most repetitive chapter in all of the Bible. Today, I want to take you on a whirlwind tour of Psalm 136. It's an amazing psalm because it tells us of the one thing in the whole universe that constantly and beautifully and gloriously endures. So if you have a Bible with you or just want to follow along on your screen, listen to these incredible words from Psalm 136: "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, His love endures forever." There's that word that I was talking about - give thanks or praise the Lord - and why would we do that? Well, because he's good. Well, why do you think he's good? Because his love endures forever.

Now look at verse two: "Give thanks to the God of gods." Well, why? "Because His love endures forever." Go to verse three: "Give thanks to the Lord of lords." Why would I do that? Because "His love endures forever." I'm kind of picking up on a theme. Why would I praise God? Why would I worship him? Why would I follow him? Why would I submit to him? Well, one, two, three times in a row, I learn because his love endures forever.

And I hope that's starting to sound like good news to you because this ancient song writer wants to tell you the same thing six more times. I'll read it fast. Verse four: "To him, to God alone who does great wonders, His love endures forever. Who by his understanding made the heavens, His love endures forever. Who spread out the earth upon the waters, His love endures forever. Who made the great lights, His love endures forever. The sun to govern the day, His love endures forever. The moon and stars to govern the night, His love," say it with me, "endures forever." "To him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt, His love endures forever. And brought Israel out from among them, His love endures forever. With a mighty hand and outstretched arm, His love endures forever. To him who divided the Red Sea asunder, His love endures forever. And brought Israel through the midst of it, His love endures forever. But swept Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea, His love endures forever. To him who led his people through the wilderness, His love endures forever. To him who struck down great kings, His love endures forever. And killed mighty kings, His love endures forever. Sihon king of the Amorites," ooh, Sihon! "His love endures forever. And Og king of Bashan, His love endures forever. And gave their land as an inheritance, His love endures forever. An inheritance to his servant Israel, His love endures forever." This is my favorite part: "He remembered us in our lowest state, His love endures forever. And freed us from our enemies, His love endures forever. He gives food to every creature, His love endures forever. Give thanks to the God of heaven, His love endures forever." The big idea for today is that this amazing God that we worship, he endures. Everything else might fall apart, no other kind of love might last, but God's love endures forever.

And that's what I found in my research. Remember when I told you that the psalms contain only seven percent of the total words of the Old Testament? And yet, they contain 59 percent of the give thanks and praise God? Well, I found out why: Because if you study the Hebrew word for "love" like "His love endures forever," it shows up 52 percent of the time in the book of Psalms. And then if you study the word "forever," the Hebrew word "owlam," it shows up 44 percent of the time in the book of Psalms. And so when these ancient poets, they saw this - love forever, love that lasts, love that endures - when it came up again and again and again, there was only one thing for their souls to do: To give thanks. To continually praise God. When they thought about how God's love did not have limits, how his forgiveness didn't come with an expiration date, how God's compassion was never past warranty, how there was not a single place on planet earth where the connection to God's limitless love would sputter and fail and drop out, when they thought about a love like that, there was only one thing that they could do: To give thanks and praise God because his love endures forever.

Maybe we could think about it like a sheet of stickers. Could you put everything down in your hands right now? Your pens and your pencils, your phones and your tablets, and I want you to hold up a pretend sheet that's filled with 16 circular stickers. Can you play along with me for a

second? And each one of those stickers has a big T written on it, which stands for "Temporary." If you look around the room that you're in right now, where could you put those 16 stickers? I think I could put one right here on this table. You think this table's going to last forever? No. A couple years maybe? Maybe 10? And then end up in a dump somewhere; turned into fuel for a fire? How about this church? How long do most churches stand before they're leveled to the ground? Two generations? Maybe four? Even houses of worship don't endure forever. You could take one of those stickers and put it on your muscle; no bad jokes about my scrawniness but it doesn't matter how skinny, how strong you are, as you get older, our glory fades, our bodies get frail, they don't endure forever. We could take another sticker and put it on our minds; as we get older, we forget. We struggle to find the words, our brains even, our memory starts to fade. It's like everything around us - good things, beautiful things, church things, personal things, relational things, family things - the truth is that they all come with a big T and they don't last forever.

But maybe the saddest sticker of all is the one we'd have to stick on our heart. If you're anything like me, you really want to be a good person; a person that reflects unconditional love to the people in your life. But the problem that all of us have, whether we feel like we're good people or not, is that our morality, our goodness, it doesn't last forever. You know, we set these character goals - I want to be a patient person - and it happens for a little bit but then it doesn't endure forever. We promise ourselves that we're going to let it go, that we're not going to get into it with that person again, we're going to let the stone alone, not be bitter, not take revenge, not be angry, but then we have a bad day, then they say the same thing again, and our supposed change in character, it doesn't last forever. We make resolutions at the start of a new year, we're going to read our Bibles, we're going to pray before bed, we're going to be better parents, we're not going to be so quick to judge the homeless or the impoverished, and sometimes things go well but like those gym memberships, sometimes even our own character, our own Christianity, it doesn't endure forever.

You see, this is why we cling to Jesus. It doesn't matter if you consider yourself a Christian person or not, the problem at the root of the very human heart is that all of these good qualities are like an internet connection. They might indeed be good but they just don't last long enough to impress God. And if we want to be with an eternal God whose love does not stop and start, we need something more than a temporarily good life and so we grab onto Jesus.

There's this thing about Jesus that blows my mind; that makes me stand in awe of him. To be so stunned by him, that a grab onto him, give thanks to him, praise him and worship him, and here's the thing - is that Jesus' love never got a little sticker with a T on it. No, we'd have to pull out a different sheet of stickers; maybe one big sticker with an E on it - enduring, everlasting, eternal - and we'd peel off that big sticker and we'd stick it to the very heart of Jesus because this is what he did. We often talk about the cross of Jesus and we should. Where Jesus suffered and he endured and he died for the forgiveness of our sins; that is what saves us and it's amazing. But here's the thing: That didn't even last a day. Arrested late Thursday night, dead by Friday afternoon; so something equally as amazing, maybe even more amazing, is not just the death of Jesus but the life of Jesus. To think that for 33 years, his entire life, Jesus was a walking, talking, living, breathing, Psalm 136. I mean, we see in verse after verse after verse after verse, my goodness, how long are you going to go on? His love endures forever. But maybe that psalm

was just preparing us for Jesus. That day after day, person after person, situation after situation, Jesus' love endured forever. He grew up with his mom and his step-dad and his love endured forever. You've got a bunch of bumbling disciples who got things wrong all the time but his love endured forever. He met Mary Magdalene possessed by seven dark spirits and his love endured forever. He saw a leper so dirty that people kept their distance and he reached out because his love endured forever. And he came across prostitutes who no one thought would make it into the kingdom of God and his love endured forever. And he saw Matthew the traitor, the tax collector, and he loved him because his love endured forever. And John the Baptist was killed and he grieved his loss because his love endured forever. And then the crowds pursued him, trampled him in his grief, and he looked at them and he had compassion because his love endured forever. And the Pharisees mocked him, tried to trap him, and he wept because his love endured forever. And Peter denied him but when Jesus rose from the dead, he sought him and named him because his love endured forever. Jesus, for every second, he expressed the eternal love of God. And that's why we love him. If you're not a Christian, you should know this; this is why we follow him. Because everything else in this world is so temporary and yeah, it can make us feel good for a little bit and it can show us warmth and inclusion for a few years, maybe a few decades, but only Jesus; only Jesus can give us the kind of love that lasts forever. It's Jesus who forgives our sins and puts a big sticker on our hearts so that we too can have a life in the presence of love that endures forever.

So I guess what I'm trying to say is that if you believe in a Jesus like that, you'll end up like the guy who finished last at the Omaha 10K. You ever heard of this classic pastor story from 1981? Back in 1981, just after I was born, there was a 10K race sponsored by Pepsi in Omaha, Nebraska. And a man signed up by the name of Bill Broadhurst and Bill wasn't going to win. In fact, Bill would come in dead last for a pretty good reason. Ten years previously, Bill Broadhurst had a brain aneurysm that left half of his body paralyzed. He couldn't walk well, much less run well, which meant that every step of that 10K would be like a marathon to him. And yet, he still signed up and here's why: Because there was another Bill that was going to be at that race; a famous runner named Bill Rodgers. Bill Rodgers had just won his third straight Boston marathon and I believe his fourth straight New York City marathon. He was one of the best runners on planet earth and he was going to be there in Omaha, Nebraska to run that race. And run he did! The starter pistol went off, Bill Rodgers took off like a lightning bolt, and that speed endured. He zipped all the way to the finish line, was first by leaps and bounds, but not Bill Broadhurst. Sprinting, Bill Broadhurst did not do. He shuffled with his crooked leg off the starting line and the pack almost instantly pulled away from him. Bill Broadhurst was so slow running that race that they started to close down the course before he was even done. It didn't take him 30 minutes or an hour or an hour 30 or two hours but nearly two and a half hours to run those 6.2 miles. His pace on the end was nowhere close to Bill Rodgers; he ran at about 24 minutes a mile. In fact, he was so slow that by the time he got to the finish line, the crowds were gone, they had taken down the decorations, and the race was officially over.

But when Bill Broadhurst swung his limp leg over the finish line, someone appeared. Guess who? Bill Rodgers, his hero, showed up with the first medal around his neck and he smiled big at the last place finisher, took off the medal, and said, "Here." The one whose strength endured forever gave an amazing gift to the one who didn't.

And that's what it means to be a Christian. We limp across the finish line of each day. We all want to run this perfect race where we follow God with all of our heart but we don't and sometimes it feels like we're dead last with our patience, our kindness, and our love. But just when we think that God's totally gone, guess who shows up? Jesus. The Jesus who ran the perfect race, whose love endures forever, he smiles at us and he says, "Here." And he gives us the prize that he won, this perfect connection to God, the God who can, the God who cares, the God who controls, the God who knows, the God who is enough, the God who is near. Jesus says, "Here." We've got a God who endures forever.

Now come on, if you could hold onto a God like that, would you praise him? Me, too. If you could walk every step of this race of life with a God that good, that loving, would you thank him? Me, too. If you realize that there was a God whose love endured for you, forever, would you fall on your knees and worship him? Me, too.

So I'm going to tell my wife that you agreed with me. The best news in all the universe is that there is a God and because of Jesus, his love, it endures forever.

Let's pray.

Oh God, I so wish I could see your face. I have seen glimpses of love in my children and my parents and my friends and our church and my wife but I have never seen love like yours but I read about it today. You repeatedly drum it into our hearts today so that we can get just a glimpse and think of just how good your love is. For anyone who's praying with me right now, God, that hasn't personally trusted in that love, I pray that you would stir in our hearts, give them faith to believe in a Jesus who would do that, love like no one else could. And for all of us who do know that, Lord, help that to be our rock in all the uncertainties of life. We can't always control our health and our finances, the news, our friendships, our jobs, our careers, the weather. There's a thousand things that will come and go but at the end of every day, because of you, Jesus, we know what we have: A love that endures forever and then endures forever and then, thank God, endures forever.

And so, we praise you today. We worship you for being our rock. We give thanks to you as the King of Kings, the God of gods, and the Lord of lords. You are the one that we follow, we trust, and we will do anything for you, heavenly Father, because you do this one thing for us. You, in all of your glory and love, you stick with us. You last. You endure forever. So we praise you today in the beautiful name of your son, Jesus. Amen.