

KNOWING GOD

STUDY 3: GOD IS COMPASSIONATE AND LOVING

The Love of God (Verse 3)

*"Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made,
Were every stalk on earth a quill, and everyone a scribe by trade,
To write the love of God above, would drain the ocean dry.
Nor could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from sky to sky."
Frederick M. Lehman*

Ponder the words of the above hymn. When it comes to God's compassion and love, we struggle with how to accurately and thoroughly communicate it. We could talk about it for days and still not fully grasp it. We might be able to see God's love for the world as a whole; after all, we are probably familiar with John 3:16 as it explains that God loved the world this way — He gave His only son, Jesus. Yet, that this love is personal might be tougher to grasp. We might think we're getting in on a group rate — God loved the whole world and I am a part of that world so... lucky me... I am included. Yet God's love IS personal. For you. If you were the only human on the planet, Jesus would have died for you. And He did. No group rates!

READ TOGETHER:

- **Isaiah 30:18 (NIV):** "Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!"
- **Luke 15:20 (NIV):** "So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him."
- **Hosea 6:6 (ESV):** "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."
- **1 John 3:1 (NIV)** "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him."

Compassion restrained (Isaiah 30:18) In this text, God is described as waiting as He longs to show compassion. And it says that He will, in the future, rise up and take action to demonstrate His love. God has a strong longing, a strong desire to exemplify who He is in His actions. He isn't just compassionate within himself, He longs to GIVE compassion to each of us, His creations. Notice, also, that the verse ends by saying that we are blessed as we wait for him.

DISCUSS: Consider the context of this verse by looking into the surrounding verses. What is happening that causes God to wait even as He longs to show compassion to His people? What does His waiting tell us about His character? If time allows, look into a similar passage — Matthew 23:37 where Jesus is expressing His desire to move with compassion.

Compassion in action (Luke 15:20) Because compassion is not just an emotion, God moves. He moves with compassion toward humanity. In the parable that might be more aptly named "The Parable of the Loving Father" we see that the father is so compelled with love and compassion for his long-lost son that he MUST run toward him. That's the way compassion works; it MUST do something!

DISCUSS: Discuss the implications for you, personally, of God's compassion toward you. Also discuss what that means for the way we relate to our neighbours — those who are near us (physically or "on our minds") and need to be introduced to our compassionate God.

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DIG DEEPER: Love beyond words (Hosea 6:6) In the book of Hosea as well as throughout the Old Testament, the word hesed is often translated in a vast array of ways: mercy, lovingkindness, love, steadfast love, loyal love. This points to the value of checking a variety of translations when reading the Bible. Any time we see a Biblical word translated in many different ways in various translations, it could be an indicator of a word for which we have no English equivalent. Such is the case with hesed. *Check out the book background of the book, Hosea. Prophets were comfortable with metaphors because so much of what they spoke was poetic; so much was an important truth portrayed through a vision or picture. But God was saying that Hosea's marriage, in itself, was going to be a metaphor — an object lesson so that God's people would truly see His love for them. It's an amazing story on many levels: Hosea's obedience to God, is steadfast love for his wife, and the powerful lessons that point to God's love for us. It would be great to sit in the book of Hosea on your own until you gather as a Connect again.*

Love lavished (1 John 3:1) “Lavished” is a pretty extreme word. In Greek, the word could be translated “has given” but when combined with the other descriptors in the verse, “has given” is rather bland. Check out this verse in a variety of translations. Notice the versions that begin with “behold” or “consider” or “think about” rather than the simpler word “see”. And then consider the way various versions try to express this amazing kind of love that is abundantly given — versions like “Behold! What manner of love...?”

DISCUSS: *Discuss how you would explain God's love through Jesus Christ and the reality that we, those who follow Jesus, are children of God. Wrestle through the options until you each have a solid and expressive way to communicate this truth!*

DIG DEEPER: Love is and love does (1 John 4:7-12, 16-21) In many ways we need to SEE love to believe it. God's love, which has been very real throughout His relationship with humanity, has been revealed to us in Jesus. Jesus came to earth as Love incarnate. Jesus is Love that we can see and Love that we can observe in action. Love IS and love DOES. *Either print out a page with this passage to mark it up or mark up your Bibles. Choose one way to mark the word “love” (and loved, loves, etc.) as a noun (the idea of love) and a different marking for “love” as a verb (an action of love). [Note: You may choose to mark “showed His love” as a verb because it is a verb phrase and functions as a verb!] Discuss the implications of seeing love as both an idea and an action in this passage. How does this impact the way you live — as someone who is loved and receives actions of love and as someone who is called to love and give actions of love?*

RESOURCES:

- **Book:** Bob Goff, *Love Does: Discover a Secretly Incredible Life in an Ordinary World*
- **Book:** Oswald Chambers, *The Love of God*
- **Podcast:** The Bible Project, I am who I am 10-part series:
<https://bibleproject.com/podcast/i-am-who-i-am-part-1-yahweh-our-god/>
- **Video:** The Bible Project, *The Character of God series, Loyal Love:*
<https://bibleproject.com/videos/loyal-love/>