

## The Father Heart of God

You read about or know about a relationship between a father and their child that is so broken because of what the child has done, that the father declares that he no longer has a son or daughter. You wonder what they did that was so bad. Then when you find out, yes it probably was horrific or something that brought shame on the family, but is it bad enough to disown your own child? I might be disappointed in my children. I might be embarrassed by what they've done. I might even be ashamed and angry of what they've done, but they are still my child and I love them. Doesn't mean that I condone it, just that I love them and will always be there for them. God goes even further than that. His grace gives me hope in spite of my sin and the things that I have done.

### ***Ps 103:8-13***

***The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. 9 He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; 10 he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. 11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; 12 as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. 13 As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him. NIV***

The context for these verses is David celebrating the abundant love of God for His people. He recounts the sins of the people of Israel and how through being taken as captives He ransomed His people from Egypt. Then as they sinned in the desert how He sustains them and makes them a people, a community, and leads them to a land flowing with milk and honey which is to be their inheritance.

He then ties these blessings to their descendants and ultimately to you and me.

We tend to have this dichotomy when we look at the Bible and look at the God of the Old Testament as an angry God full of judgment, and the God of the New Testament as a God of love. As these verses will show, the God of the entire Bible is one of love. In a nutshell, that is the good news of the Gospel.

This is the beginning of four Psalms where David encourages us to "bless the Lord, oh my soul" but it is not individualistic, it is meant to be done in community.

### **God's grace is described with four characteristics in Psalm 103:8-13.**

When it comes to his love for sinful people, God's got a long fuse, a short memory, a thick skin, and a big heart. Let's take a look at each of these.

#### **1. He is Compassionate and Gracious**

Verse 8 describes God's patience with us: "***The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.***" He's got a long fuse. This is actually a

quotation of something Moses had written some 500 years earlier. Many other Bible writers quote this phrase, first recorded in Exodus 24.

While Moses was at the top of Mount Sinai conferring with God Almighty, the people were having a party. These people whom God had just delivered from bondage in Egypt were expressing their gratitude to God by worshiping an idol of a golden calf made from discarded jewelry. On top of that there was drunkenness and immorality.

The Scripture says that when God saw this he was angry. God told Moses to step back. He said, "Mo, I'm going to nuke these party animals." (That's the Living Bible paraphrase.) "I'll start a new nation with you. How about it?"

Moses fell on his face and appealed to God's grace. God agrees with Moses and withholds his righteous wrath. He forgoes punishing these folks, but he adds, "I'm through with them. I won't destroy them, but I will no longer go with you, Moses. You're on your own."

Once again Moses pleads with God to reconsider. Once again, amazingly, God agrees. He even promises to give Moses a new copy of the Ten Commandments. You'll recall from the story, Moses had shattered the original copy when he came down the mountain and found the people partying. This is the only case we know of in the Bible where all Ten Commandments were broken simultaneously.

God takes Moses back to the top of Mount Sinai, and before he begins dictating these moral imperatives a second time, Exodus 34 says that God passed in front of Moses proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness." That's the verse quoted by David in Psalm 103:8.

Yes, God gets angry. But God puts up with a great deal before reaching his boiling point. Over and over again, the Bible tells us the reason God exercises such great patience is that he's hoping we'll take advantage of this extension of his grace to turn from our sin, seek his forgiveness, and begin to obey him. Yet most of us make the mistaken assumption that God's patience really means that he isn't that concerned about our disobedience. And so, we abuse his patience. Thank God he's got a long fuse.

## **2. He keeps no record of wrongs.**

In verse 9 it says, "**He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever;**" A guy complained to his buddy that whenever he argued with his wife, she got historical. His friend said, "You mean hysterical." He said, "No, historical. She dredges up the past and reminds me of every time I've failed her in the past." We do that with our kids sometimes, don't we? Our kids do something wrong, and we remind them of the previous times that they did the same thing.

Father God will not always accuse nor will he harbor his anger forever. God chooses to have a short memory. Psalm 130:3 tells us that if God kept a detailed record of our sins,

none of us would ever be able to stand before him. In Isaiah 57:16, God says, "If I kept throwing up in your face your past failures, if I chose to retain an angry disposition toward you because of your sin, your spirit within you would grow faint before me. You would wither up and die."

Can you imagine this? I go to God for forgiveness because I've unleashed a torrent of curse words on the person who cut me off in traffic. I say, "I did it again, God. Oh, please cleanse me from this sin and give me the strength to manage my mouth." And God says, "You did it again? That's putting it rather mildly, Jay. This is the tenth time you've done it this week. And, Jay, I stop forgiving after five. Sorry, pal, but your punch card is all punched out." Is that how God operates with us?

Thank goodness, once I've sought his forgiveness, he doesn't keep on accusing. He doesn't keep on harboring his anger toward me. He chooses to have a short memory where previously forgiven sins are concerned.

In 1 Corinthians 13:5 it says that love keeps no record of wrongs. How can God be love and continue to bring up our past?

### **3. He doesn't treat us as we deserve.**

Verse 10 says, "***he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.***"

If God punished us every time we deserved it, we would be in a perpetual state of receiving retribution. Every time we turned around, God would be chastening us for a selfish attitude or hurtful words or prideful spirit or materialism or indifference to the needs of others or something. The Bible word for this thick skin of God's is forbearance. The Bible says, "Love covers a multitude of sins."

There are a lot of things that God never brings up to us because he's chosen just to ignore them. Love covers a multitude of sins.

When I worked at Metropolitan Ministries I told my staff was that in order to work there you needed two things. 1. A tender and compassionate heart; 2. A thick skin. Whenever things didn't work out with a client they would lash out at the staff and blame them for everything. They would question their professionalism, their Christianity and even their parentage. When I first got there, clients were being exited from the program for these infractions. I put a stop to that because I made a distinction between inconvenient behavior and exitable behavior. Our clients were at the lowest point in their lives, had little control over their own lives and depended on us for everything. It's no wonder they would get frustrated and lash out from time to time. Was it acceptable for them to yell at the staff and curse at them? No, but it was understandable, and we did our best to de-escalate and try to get at the root of the problem.

Scripture says God doesn't always treat us as our sins deserve. If God doesn't give you what you think you deserve, be grateful. God's got a long fuse. He's got a short memory. He's got a thick skin.

#### **4. He removes our sins from us.**

Verses 11 and 12 say, "***For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; 12 as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.***"

The psalmist tells us that when we ask God to forgive our sins, he removes them as far as the east is from the west. Do you know how far that is? Truth is, it can't even be measured.

I brought a globe to show you that the east and west are actually further apart than the north and south. If I start here in North America and go north, eventually I get to the top of the globe at the North Pole. If I continue the same direction, I start going south. Eventually the north meets the south.

But if I start here in Florida and keep going east, when will I start going west? Never. The psalmist says God will remove our sin from us—not as far as the north is from the south, but as far as the east is from the west.

If you ever wondered how serious God is about taking care of your sin, he has all sorts of metaphors in Scripture like this one to describe what he desires to do with your sin.

- ***Micah 7:19 says, "He will trample it under foot and throw it into the deepest part of the sea."***
- ***Isaiah 38:17 says he'll put it behind his back where he can't see it.***
- ***Isaiah 43:25 says he'll blot it out.***
- ***Isaiah 44:22 says he'll sweep it away just like a morning mist that gets burned off by the sun.***
- ***Jeremiah 31:34 says God will refuse to remember it; he'll just block it out of his memory.***

Have you ever experienced that sort of forgiveness? How big a heart does the Heavenly Father have for forgiven sinners? It can't even be measured.

#### **Conclusion**

***13 As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him.***

This morning he wants you to bask in his grace. He wants you to come, confess your sin, trust in Jesus Christ, allow the work that Christ did on the cross—the pain, the penalty for your sin—to be applied to your account, to be forgiven, to be cleansed, to be filled with his Spirit.