

# Summer Bible Study 2020 - Psalm 136

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Date: 26 August 2020

Preacher: Pastor Cathy Hall Stengel

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[ 3 : 22 ]    Let's go.

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[ 5 : 52 ]    Let's go. Let's go. Let's go. Let's go. Let's go.

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Let's go. Let's go.

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[ 7 : 46 ]    Let's go.

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Let's go. Let's go. Let's go. Let's go. Let's go. Let's go. Let's go.

[ 9 : 23 ]    Let's go. Let's go. Let's go.

Let's go. Let's go. Let's go. Let's go. Let's go. Let's go.

Let's go. Let's go. We're going to some of the again it's interesting the things that kind of get on each other's nerves when we just live and are in life together and in this time of isolation and frustration and a loss of control I think people feel those feelings a little bit more often than they usually do which reminds me why is it that this psalm does this so we are going to read this and think about the that the expression in it and we're gonna read it in chunks so we're gonna begin with first of all understanding that when it comes to the Bible repeating yourself is not a bad thing and bringing up the past is not a bad thing God's love and mercy are unchanging and our thankfulness for that unchanging love in the midst of everything should be an unceasing gratitude because no matter what we lose no matter what we're afraid of no matter our frustrations or anger about the state of the world and our work and our lack of work sometimes when people are no longer employed there's one thing that stays the same God's unceasing love and so it's okay to bring up the past and to repeat yourself in fact it's essential so we're going to start with the first five verses of Psalm 136 give thanks to the Lord because he is good God's faithful love lasts forever give thanks to the God of all gods God's faithful love lasts forever give thanks to the Lord of all lords

God's faithful love last forever give thanks to the only one who makes great wonders give God's faithful love last forever give thanks to the one who made the skies and the stars God's faithful love lasts forever when we hear those words words we think about this song now we don't know exactly who wrote it but we know that they wrote an incredible song one that I hope is in some way ingrained in our hearts the structure isn't the same as other Psalms could because while other words are the same as other psalms could be because while other Psalms might have a part that's repeated or you might see a part of one Psalm repeated in another Psalm this one is line after line after line coming back God's faithful love lasts forever it was actually written to be sung by two choirs one line and the other line choir one would sing the verse and the other line and the other line choir one would sing the verse and choir two would respond with the same chorus for his steadfast love lasts and endures forever different versions of the Bible say different things when it comes to last forever endures forever

One of the terms when we look at this psalm is repeat and respond. It's called antiphonal. And that means this, then this, then this, then this. Back and forth.

[ 14 : 27 ] Kind of like a leader and response. Or like I said, two choirs. One sings one part, the other one sings that repeated phrase. Then this, then this. That is understood as being antiphonal.

And this is a long psalm. And some people might get impatient with the fact that it repeats itself over and over. But why is it beneficial?

Well, I think I can respond to, to that with some accuracy because the truth is we forget. We forget.

And it's been said that we have to hear something about 20 or 30 times sometimes to have it ingrained in our head. To have it stick, at least for a while.

My experience is it requires repeating and repeating and then maybe another week or another month, more repeating and repeating until it becomes internal in a way that isn't easily lost or forgotten.

[ 15 : 42 ] The second reason that repeating is important is because this is so important. God's steadfast love will endure forever.

I think that there are a lot of people who need and want and hope to be reminded of that over and over and over again.

It's not a one and done. Because our lives are not one and done. We do not stay in the same place forever and ever.

We're in this place and then we experience something great and wonderful and we are reminded God's love is steadfast and endures forever.

And then we get to a place where we experience great loss and in our sadness and anxiety and maybe even despair.

[ 16 : 48 ] What is it we need to know? God's steadfast love endures forever. God's camp for freedom ofimon Good to do don't you ever be, somehow from your myself, you ever be born in life in June, the park of Moon.

In my experience of being a pastor, one of the reasons that I welcome the opportunity to be in ministry with people who may not yet have ever visited I think we are called to walk on a journey with people from the point of curiosity and maybe a feeling of I need something and then we might be with them at another time. So let me give you an example. A very special family came to me at one of the churches that I was serving and I had not met them before and they came because they wanted to get married. Okay, let's do that wedding.

And then a year, two years later, now they, I hadn't seen them. They wanted to have their baby baptized.

That was wonderful. And then we didn't see them for a little while. And then there was a tragedy in their family. A family member was shot and killed and they needed a funeral. Not only did they need a funeral, it wasn't a get to be 98 years old and die peacefully.

It was a tragedy. And it wasn't until after that funeral that I learned that they had claimed our church as their church from the time they got married until the baptism, until the funeral.

[ 18 : 52 ] The fact that they didn't actually attend the funeral. That's okay. Because God's love endures forever. It is steadfast. And so as we as people of faith extend that love, it's our belief that God is doing that work. And so it's such an important truth that if I say in a wedding, you never have to worry about one thing. And that is that God's love, no matter what happens in your marriage marriage, no matter what happens in your marriage, no matter what happens in your marriage, and we are reminded that even though that sign of the cross on a baby's forehead will dry and you will not be able to see it, God's steadfast love endures forever. For that child, for that child's parents and family marked with the sign of Jesus Christ, endures forever. And then in death, reminded again that even death will not separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Look at Romans 8. But people need to be reminded. So it's important that we repeat it and remember that we repeat it in times of joy and fear and loss.

Because it is because it is because it is because it is that important. Because when it's remembered and believed and realized in our heart, when we are reminded in the times when we're lost or angry, or we don't like what's happening, we don't like change, if we can repeat it and name it and own it and believe it, then you know what? We can't help but repeat it.

We may not remember the exact words of the psalm, but we will remember that God's steadfast love endures forever.

Okay, so we know that it's important to repeat ourselves. So going back to the psalm itself, we read that God's steadfast love endures forever.

[ 21 : 46 ] Why? Well, there is a very important Hebrew word that's called chesed. Chesed. And that word is used 245 times in the Old Testament, 127 of them in the Psalms.

Chesed can sometimes refer to a kindness or mercy. It can also refer to faithfulness and loyalty.

Most often, though, chesed is translated into steadfast love. Steadfast love. And then there's the other part, endures forever.

When we look at those first five verses and we think about, well, what is it that God's word says in these first five verses?

What does it say about God? It says, because he is good. It says that this is the Lord of all lords, the God of all gods.

[ 22 : 56 ] There is no greater God. That's what it says. The only one who can make great wonders. We live here near one of the greatest, considered to be one of the great wonders of the world, which is Niagara Falls.

And we do take it for granted. And yet, who can make such things? Who can create the mountains and the rainbows? Who can create the depths of the ocean where you see incredible things?

God's faithful love comes from the God who made the skies just the way they were supposed to be.

And if you go to verse six, it says, the one who shaped the earth on the water, God's steadfast love endures forever.

A true sense. The truth and the worth in these words is remembering and repeating.

[ 24 : 10 ] Our God is an awesome God. That's a song and scripture. Powerful and best of all, his love and his mercy for his children never end.

And the writer proves it with historical facts. So let's read. We're going to go to verses 10 through 15.

Give thanks to the one who struck down the Egyptians, oldest offspring. God's faithful love lasts forever. Give thanks to the one who brought Israel out of there.

God's faithful love lasts forever. With a strong hand and an outstretched arm, God's faithful love lasts forever. Give thanks to the one who split the Red Sea in two.

God's faithful love lasts forever. Give thanks to the one who brought Israel through. God's faithful love lasts forever. And toss Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea.

[ 25 : 19 ] God's faithful love lasts forever. Those are some of those historical facts that we look at.

We know that Israel escaped, the people of Israel escaped through the Red Sea. We read about the sea parting and them being able to pass through on the earth through the Red Sea.

And then the Red Sea closing back in as the Pharaoh and his army try to follow them and hurt them. And God's steadfast love endures forever.

Why is remembering that story in the Psalms so important? Why is remembering the story of the people of Israel so important?

Why is repeating it? Why is remembering that story in the Psalms so important?

[ 26 : 43 ] Why is keeping this story in the Shaunabaree church? Why is remembering that story in the New York City actually compelling? Why is remembering that story in Chiun purposely living in the Luxury and in apostolic? Why is influencing the world to the Jews? Why is avoiding expression■■■■? demon.

You? Why is approaching in the Chiunetities? Why is facing of Israel? Because we are in the ridowns so important. That story cabeça is main- phenyl means... singing Lega and Owen carrying them for men. People of Israel can talk about the embarrassed Här charger is forced end at ouro. And in verse 7w illustrate. There are some true characteristics in our cult and spiritual Valentine. country. The spiritual songs and the Old Testament passages were so important because life sometimes didn't get any easier. So even while slaves were working in the fields or in the barn or wherever they could be, you would hear when they sang and when they worshiped, you would hear the retelling of the Old Testament stories of Israel escaping slavery. Why? Because it gave them hope that they would escape. It gave them hope that they would find a way to freedom because they read in the Psalms and in the scriptures of the Old Testament that God provided for the people of Israel to escape, being held hostage and worked, sometimes to death.

When I was privileged to visit the Holy Land, one of the places that I went was the Holocaust Museum and Yad Vashem is what it's called. And on the entrance and these beautiful walls that you go through when you go into Yad Vashem reads, and I'm not going to be able to quote it forever, or I'm not going to be able to quote it exactly because I don't have it in front of me.

But the gist of it is, don't forget. Don't forget. Keep telling the story. Because if we keep telling the story, then maybe, maybe it won't happen again. So the people of Israel remembered their escape from slavery and captivity. They remembered it on their way to freedom because they didn't want to forget. They didn't want to begin to take their freedom for granted. As it was with the people who were brought from the continent of Africa and other places to become slaves in our country.

They didn't want to forget, not because they wanted to stay in misery, not at all. They remembered because they believed in the stories of the scriptures that God will bring us through whatever it is we're going through. And we remember so that we stay grateful. We remember so that we can not take our lives and our freedoms for granted. This particular psalm is that repetition. God's steadfast love endures forever. Or we might remember in this other version, God's faithful love lasts forever. Either way, it's that the wording and the repetition that helps us to cement it in our reality so that we don't forget. And the story of the people of Israel is embedded in this song because we can see what did God do for us along the way.

[ 30 : 38 ] I wonder if maybe in some of your time, you might use that. Just take that phrase, God's steadfast love endures forever. And you write your story.

You write the story of your life in just those one-liners. You can write your own Psalm 136. It won't be the one that's in the Bible. But imagine if you write the story of pieces of your life and the response to whatever you write is God's steadfast love endures forever.

So you remember a celebration of life. It might be a time when you felt so strong in your faith and you reminded God's steadfast love endures forever. It might be standing at a parent's graveside and trying so hard to remember in that moment that God's steadfast love endures forever.

As parents, as parents, as we live with our children as they grow and through whatever it is they encounter or are challenged by, and sometimes our inability to fix it for them, we are invited to take a breath and be reminded God's steadfast love endures forever.

One of the things that I remember when our daughter, we have son, daughter, son. And when our daughter was attending a Christian event with the youth group and I was the pastor at the time, her pastor, and I was going with the youth to this event.

[ 32 : 42 ] And she would hear these testimonies of people whose lives were transformed in their faith, how their life used to be this. And then when they came to faith in God and Jesus, then it became that by the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Maybe it was addiction. Maybe it was an abusive home. Maybe it was a terrible, life-threatening experience, a car accident, an illness. And now they're whole.

And they claim that in the name of Jesus Christ. So our daughter, she comes to me and she was, her words were, Mom, I don't have a testimony.

And I said, well, what do you mean by that? I've never had anything terrible happen to me. I've never been lost.

I've always been found. My response, because I feel like I do have a testimony, was standing here before me, was the evidence of God's steadfast love enduring forever.

[ 33 : 54 ] Because, thank God that a person can sometimes come to faith, not out of a testimony of terrible suffering, but simply because of the goodness of their lives.

And my response to her was, Thank you, Jesus, that you don't have that kind of testimony, and yet you still believe. Isn't that amazing?

It's not a tragedy or a trauma or pain or anything. It was the love of God enduring and a young woman being reminded that she has it.

Because when the time comes that something hard should happen, she will remember. And while I don't want her to have a testimony of suffering, we all do at some point in our lives.

We just pray that it's endurable. God's steadfast love endures forever. So, we think about how this works.

[ 35 : 12 ] And if you look at 2 Chronicles 17, verses 3 through 6, it says, But Jehoshaphat didn't stay on course.

And he made an alliance with King Asa of Israel, who was not very godly at all. Asa was killed, and Jehoshaphat barely escaped with his life.

Soon, Jehoshaphat's faith in God to deliver them would be tested again. An alliance of nations decided to come after Jehoshaphat and Judah.

So, in 2 Chronicles 20, we see that there is the connection to Psalm 136.

Psalm 136 was written several hundred years before King Jehoshaphat resigned. I can't prove that he ever sang it in worship.

[ 36 : 52 ] But look at verse 21 of 2 Chronicles. Chapter 20, verse 21. And when he had taken counsel with the people, he appointed those who were to sing to the Lord and praise him in holy attire as they went before the army and say, Give thanks to the Lord, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Verse 22 says that then, when the worship people from Judah started singing this chorus, the Lord set an ambush for the enemy armies, and they started killing each other instead of killing the army of Judah.

And how did that story end? 2 Chronicles 20, verse 24. When Judah came to the watchtower of the wilderness, they looked toward the horde, and behold, there were dead bodies lying on the ground.

None had escaped. I'm not fond of the whole dead bodies part of it. That was a time and a culture that was so different from ours.

But what we remember is from Psalm 136, as they went into this time, they sang, God's steadfast love endures forever.

[ 38 : 20 ] And then they witnessed God's love for them as people of faith in that moment. Have you ever had a story of deliverance like that?

Do you periodically or every day or once in a great while bring to your mind, I need to give thanks to the Lord for what he did to me proves, not just indicates, but proves that his steadfast love and mercy endure forever.

So one person decided they were going to do this exercise of kind of rewriting their own version of Psalm 136, which doesn't take away from what's written in the Bible.

Sometimes it just gives that reinforcement. This person decided to call it the fill in the thanks psalm.

And what he did was he took an index card that was small enough to keep in his Bible. And he wrote at the top, give thanks to the Lord for his steadfast love endures forever.

[ 39 : 42 ] And then write, because he, and then fill in the blank. give thanks to the Lord for his steadfast love endures forever because he, how might that be for you?

Could you write that on a card and put it as a bookmark, perhaps somewhere in your Bible, maybe right in there with Psalm 136. and then after you write, because he, dot, dot, dot, fill in the blank.

And then you write, his love endures forever. I might be reminded of a time when one of my children was particularly lost and then found.

When we didn't hear from that child for sometimes weeks or months at a time, and we didn't know. And so we prayed and we remembered his baptism where we gave him into the care of God.

And then we could write, give thanks to the Lord for his steadfast love endures forever because he, God, stayed steadfast with us as we waited and prayed.

[ 41 : 15 ] And yes, we did find our son. But more importantly, God never lost him. And God never lost us because his love endures forever.

So, maybe you could make your list. Maybe we could each make our list. Maybe you could write more than one card or write it all on one card front and back.

the people of Israel. The author of Psalm 136 felt it was important to go back and remember what did God do for us?

How can I look back and see examples of God's steadfast love enduring forever? Oh, look, it's there and it's there and it's there.

And even if you're experiencing a day where you don't feel it, sometimes you can look back at your life and be reminded that you did know it and you did feel it and maybe you can be on your way to reclaiming that gratitude for that steadfast love that endures forever.

[ 42 : 29 ] forever. So you see, bringing up the past, the escape, the safety, the triumph in many ways of the people of Israel and be reminded God's steadfast love enduring forever.

God's steadfast love endures forever. God's steadfast love endures forever.

The things you lost, God's steadfast love endures forever. the people you lost. God's steadfast love endures forever and nothing shall separate us from the love of Christ from in Christ Jesus, from the love of God in Christ Jesus, not death, not any kind of evil or anything shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus because God's love endures forever.

forever. Jobs, friendships, companionship, being able to be in church, so many things.

Here they are in our recent months and then we be reminded that God's steadfast love endures forever. So repeating ourselves isn't a bad thing when it comes to being reminded of how much God loves us and cares for us.

[ 44 : 08 ] So in verses 23 to 26 of Psalm 136, it is he who remembered our low estate for his steadfast love endures forever and rescued us from our foes for his steadfast love endures forever.

He who gives food to all flesh for his steadfast love endures forever. Give thanks to the God of heaven for his steadfast love endures forever.

God's love and mercy are unchanging. Even when we step away, it still comes with us. You can't outrun the love and the mercy of God.

And when it comes to remembering God's love, it's okay to bring up the past and repeat yourself. In fact, through this passage, we're reminded it's essential so that we can really plant those words in our hearts.

God's steadfast love endures forever. It's unceasing. unceasing. And our gratitude in all the chaos of life should also be unceasing.

[ 45 : 30 ] Not should as in do your chores, mow the lawn, go to work, pay your bills, but should because the hope and prayer is that your heart is so full of that gratitude when you take the time to think about it that it's full.

and we are reminded of that fullness over and over again. And so it is one of those places and I do invite you to write your own fill in the blank Psalm 136.

and maybe as we are reminded give thanks to the Lord for he is good. His steadfast love endures forever and at the top of the list of every follower of Christ we should list our own version of the Passover story which is the escape of the people of Israel.

we should give thanks for the blood of Christ shared on the cross and the power of his resurrection and so we are reminded by these acts of God we are reminded that God's steadfast love endures forever.

We can claim the words of verse 23 he remembered us in our low estate which means that when we were buried in our own sinfulness or separation from God when we were face down really or metaphorically speaking that he remembered us and he remembers us and he will remember us no matter how low it goes his steadfast love and mercy endures forever.

[ 47 : 35 ] I hope that you will spend some time this coming week being reminded of just that and we think about what is the message God's steadfast love endures forever God's steadfast mercy and love endures forever forever why is it repeated because we sometimes don't have very good memories because it's that important because the message is that important and because of that steadfast love and mercy mercy if we can plant it and own it and name it then not only will our mouths proclaim it but the words maybe not in those exact words how often do you steadfast in your everyday life if you're talking to someone who's not familiar with the

Bible would they think in terms of steadfast do they know about the love of God and God's mercy perhaps when someone is sharing with you their story of being in a tough place instead of saying it will be okay or I'm sure you'll find your way or it's not that bad those things don't always help but what might help I know that God loves you I know that God will love you forever no matter what I know that God cares about you maybe because you can say because this is how God cared for me so rather than simply quoting scripture which sometimes people have no understanding of maybe what we do is we share our version of



Psalm 136 God's steadfast love endures forever God's steadfast mercy endures forever but that might sound like God never abandoned me in my own struggles God never left my side not at the grave not in the hospital not in the funeral home and not in watching church on a phone or a tablet because even in this way God's steadfast love endures forever and so we repeat it to ourselves we tell it by using our own experiences to other people not that their experiences should be like ours but we can demonstrate we're all human just because I'm a person of faith doesn't mean I'm exempt from suffering but one of the things I know we all get is the steadfast love and mercy of God and because we're

New Testament people resurrection people we know how God brought that to us in person through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior let's pray oh God may we read over and over again that your steadfast love endures forever through all the stories of people of Israel through all the stories of slavery and oppression that we see even today let us be reminded that your love is steadfast your mercy is steadfast today and forever Lord help us to turn that into loving and endurance and mercy for all of those we encounter those who are like us and oh Lord please those who are not because everywhere and all the time with all the people we are reminded in this psalm that your steadfast love endures forever your steadfast mercy and care endures forever we give thanks in the name of Jesus

Christ amen may it be so and we'll be talking soon about what it is we're going to do next and I know that this summer was kind of strange kind of interrupted and I wasn't here last week and was only able to be with you for a few minutes my hope is that we will continue to study the Bible together but we will find a way that we can be in conversation about it I sure don't need to talk for 50 minutes and I sure do value your words and your responses and your understanding of what it is that God is saying to us and we'll look forward to finding a way to do that soon I hope in the meantime be well be safe and if you are thinking of coming to worship this coming Sunday make sure that you make a reservation so that we can be prepared to have you and I just invite you in this time of coming to worship whether you're watching on the screen because it will be different or whether you're here in person as we look to our brothers and sisters in this different way of leading worship let us be reminded as it is that

[ 53 : 47 ] God's love and mercy is remaining with me forever so may my love and grace and acceptance of this new way be forever in its difference let us rejoice in our ability to be together in any way we can let us rejoice rejoice even in wearing masks and having to be seated apart and not singing that doesn't change the fact that we can rejoice and celebrate the everlasting eternal faith and love and mercy of God and where we praise the Lord the Lord is praised and let us give thanks thank you so much for being here thank you for me because in me you for your week and because we have word and the ng■■■i in the anniversary we would you as a a