

## The Love of the Father

*“For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him”* (Ps. 103:11-13). The psalmist clearly likens the love of God to the love of a Father towards his children. What can this teach us?

The God of the Bible has chosen to communicate with us in ways we understand. He employs multiple metaphors to reveal the nature and scope of His love; one of the most common of which is a Father. How does God love us as a Father?

**God loves us with a Father’s compassion.** *“As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him”* (Ps. 103:13). The English translation does not do justice to the Hebrew word translated “compassion.” The Hebrew word conveys a deep, visceral, overwhelmingly passionate love. *“Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you”* (Is. 49:15). God’s compassion for us is comparable to the love a mother has for her newborn child as her breast milk supplies nourishment.

Why does God love His people with such a passionate love? Is it because we fear Him? Verse 13 reflects a literary device called Hebrew parallelism. The verse is not saying God loves those who literally *fear* Him. The verse is stating the same truth twice; fearing God and being God’s child are one and the same. Where does this kind of love originate? We certainly do not deserve it. *“For he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust”* (Ps. 103:14).

God does not love us because we are valuable. We are valuable because He loves us. We have no intrinsic value that merits God’s response of love and compassion. We are frail, broken, and sinful. *“We are dust.”* And yet, we who are frail children of dust are masterfully created by the Divine Craftsman. *“What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor”* (Ps. 8:4-5). Loved by God, we are “His Something Beautiful.”

**Second, He loves us with a Father’s anger.** *“The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever”* (Ps. 103:8-9). God’s anger is a function of His holiness; thankfully His anger is not retributive. *“He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities”* (103:10).

There are two extremes of poor parenting. They are the permissive parent and the abusive parent. The permissive parent refuses to discipline his child. On the other hand, an abusive parent’s discipline is rooted in a “pay-back” kind of anger. God’s paternal discipline is not retributive; it is not a pay-back. He is slow to anger and does not seek to shame or manipulate us with His anger. His anger is like the anger of a loving parent; purposefully committed to bringing out the best in us.

God gets angry, because He is holy and because He created us for His delight and glory. What kind of Father would allow his children to live anyway they please, to their own demise? However, our modern religious sensibilities get easily offended when one supposes that God actually gets angry. We can be assured that He demonstrates anger because of His unfathomable love. Thank God our Father that He loves us enough to be angry with us. *“The Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son. Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?”* (Heb. 12:6-7)

**Third, God loves us as a Father by giving us a place.** Homelessness is not just a condition of being without a place to sleep and eat. Homelessness is the absence of identity and dignity. All of us need a place. I love my home; I really do. But I do not particularly care about the architecture or aesthetics of my house. There are times when I wish I appreciated beautiful things more. Someone once said of my marriage to Roxanne, “It is

like a 5-star restaurant uniting with a burger joint.” But while I do not always value the outward aesthetic or the inward furnishings, I still love my home. It just fits my family. A home is a place intended to give us a sense of identity, significance, and security—a place that just fits.

People long for such a place. That’s why after nearly 1900 years the Jews wanted to return to their homeland. It is why many people sit in the same place at church and want to sing the same songs. We long for things that give us a sense of belonging and security, even if it is often offered up in the spirit of nostalgia.

God created us to be a people of place, a people who long for a home that just fits us. Many of us have these homes and yet the best of our homes, filled with the highest expressions of human love, do not endure. The real place of home that gives us lasting significance and security is not a geographical place. It is the Father’s love. *“As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord’s love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children’s children”* (Ps. 103:15-17).

The Father’s place is where the home-fire will never be extinguished nor the pilot light of hope and destiny darkened. Jesus, spending His last hours with His disciples, all of whom would live itinerant and difficult lives, promised to them and us: *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am”* (Jn. 14:1-3).

The Psalmist exhorts us, *“...consider the great love of the Lord”* (Ps. 107:43). Consider and revel in your Father’s love. Through faith in Christ, we have the spiritual realities of a Father’s compassion, a Father’s anger, and the promise of a Father’s place for eternity.

Great Peace in the Lord,

Eddie