

Grace to you and peace ... from Jesus Christ, ... who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood.

*He has remembered His steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. (ESV)*

Text: Psalm 98:3 A 4/7/19 5<sup>th</sup> Sun. in Lent Passion History, part 5 Psalm 136 Resp. Ps.: 98  
Hymns: 42, 172 (1, 4-5), 755, 723

### **REMEMBER GOD'S STEADFAST LOVE**

O Thou Love unbounded, Grant to eyes enshrouded, Even for earthly sight beclouded,  
Grace to see Thy patience, All the world enfolding, Thy long-suffering thus beholding.  
Low, its rays, To Thy praise, Joy to men bestowing, Like the sun are glowing.

All our words are feeble As the heart upraises For Thy patience, Lord, its praises.  
With untold transgressions Day by day Thou bearest, Many million sinners sparest!  
Daily new Lovest, too, All who here offend Thee. – Who can comprehend Thee?

Lord, no one has ever, Who on Thee believed, Justice here for grace received.  
All guilt Thou removest When we bow before Thee And in penitence implore Thee;  
For our smart, Moves Thy heart; Thou wouldst mercy show us And with grace endow us.  
(TLH #42:1, 3, 5)

Dear fellow believers in Christ,

We can all recite things we memorized when we were growing up. One of the ways we remember things is to repeat them over and over. If you read our preservice Psalm, Psalm 136, it looks as if God wants us to memorize those words. There are 26 verses, and the second half of every verse is *“for His steadfast love endures forever.”* The first part of each verse covers everything from the creation of the world to the exodus from Egypt to victory over enemies to the giving of daily bread. But the second half is always the same. The response to all of those gracious actions of God is for us to say *“for His steadfast love endures forever.”* God has us say that over and over so that we remember His *“steadfast love.”*

*“Steadfast love”* in the original text is one word. It’s a key word in the Old Testament, loaded with meaning. It’s used 248 times. Sometimes it’s translated *“steadfast love,”* as it is all those times in Psalm 136 or in our text: *“He has remembered His steadfast love.”* It can also be translated *“mercy,” “kindness,” “lovingkindness,”* or *“goodness.”* There is so much meaning in

that one Hebrew word that we can't find just one English word to express it all. God uses that word to express all the fullness of His "*steadfast love*" for us.

The word in the New Testament that comes closest to the word for "*steadfast love*" is the word "*grace*." "*Grace*" is from God – God's "*undeserved love*" for us sinners. Like the phrase "*steadfast love*," the word "*grace*" is also full of meaning. And like God's "*steadfast love*," God's "*grace*" also endures forever.

Since there are so many English words that can be used to translate the Hebrew word for "*steadfast love*," some Bible translations always use "*steadfast love*" when it's referring to God's love for us. They use other words when it's referring to our love for God or for another person. That's because, unlike God's "*steadfast love*," human love is often not steadfast.

The Bible says, "*Many a man proclaims his own steadfast love, but a faithful man who can find?*" (Prov. 20:6). "*All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field*" (Is. 40:6). There the word that refers to a flower's "*beauty*" is the one usually translated as "*steadfast love*." But when we see a flower we don't think of permanence and steadfastness. Flowers quickly fade and dry up, and their beauty is gone. That's the way it so often was with the God's Old Testament people, failing to remain steadfast in their love for Him. So many of them forgot God's "*steadfast love*" and, therefore, didn't "*[see]*," that is, they didn't receive the salvation God wanted to give them.

When we're troubled by our sin and guilt we can be tempted to forget God's "*steadfast love*," and wonder how God can love us and forgive us. The Bible says that "*God is love*" (1 Jn. 4:8, 16). Praise God, His love and forgiveness don't depend on how lovable and deserving of forgiveness we are. God loves and forgives us because "*God is love*." The Bible says that "*the kindness of God leads [us] to repentance*" (Ro. 2:4b). The "*steadfast love*" of God causes us to remember that He is merciful, and leads us to come to Him in repentance and receive His forgiveness. "*The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness*" – Lamentations 3:22-23.

God always remembers His "*steadfast love*" for us. Do we respond with steadfast love for God and toward other people? If you look up the definition of love in almost any dictionary, the first thing listed will likely have something to do with "a strong emotion." The emotion of love can be a wonderful thing. But love must also be an action. Real love is selfless and self-sacrificing. Emotions come and go, but selfless, self-sacrificing love stays.

We have to confess that our love is often not that way. But God causes us to remember Jesus' love – a love that is both deeply emotional and completely self-sacrificing. During Lent the reading of the Passion history – the things that happened to Jesus in His suffering and death –

begins with these words: *“When Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end”* (Jn. 13:1). Your Savior’s love for you is *“steadfast love”*!

We’re told, *“All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.”* John says, *In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins”* (1 Jn. 4:9-10). In His *“steadfast love”* God sent the world Jesus. The Bible says, *“Christ ... loved us, and gave Himself up for us”* (Eph. 5:2a). In His *“steadfast love”* Jesus allowed Himself to be betrayed, captured, put on trial and condemned, ridiculed and beaten and blasphemed against, and crucified, all for the salvation of the whole world – for you, and for me, and for everyone!

God assures us in His Word, *“I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness”* (Jer. 31:3a, NASB). In His *“steadfast love”* God has drawn us to Himself and given us faith in Jesus. In His *“steadfast love”* God has caused us to see and receive His salvation. In His *“steadfast love”* God forgives our sins each day, and helps us and blesses us and is faithfully leading us through life. And in His *“steadfast love”* God will finally deliver us from this sinful life and take us to heaven, where we will forever see and experience His salvation!

What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul!  
 What wondrous love is this, O my soul!  
 What wondrous love is this That caused the Lord of bliss  
 To bear the dreadful curse for my soul, for my soul,  
 To bear the dreadful curse for my soul!

And when from death I’m free, I’ll sing on, I’ll sing on;  
 And when from death I’m free, I’ll sing on.  
 And when from death I’m free I’ll sing His love for me,  
 And through eternity I’ll sing on, I’ll sing on,  
 And through eternity I’ll sing on. Amen. (WS #723:1, 4)