
The Lovingkindness of the Lord

By David Wilkerson

March 25, 1991 God's lovingkindness is one aspect of the Lord's character I know very little about. I believe few Christians do.

During my lifetime, I have experienced and preached much about God's righteous judgments, holy fear, justice, holiness and hatred for sin. But I haven't understood or preached very much about His lovingkindness. While in prayer recently, the Holy Spirit spoke very clearly to my heart: "David, the road is indeed straight and the gate is narrow that leads to salvation. But don't try to make My way straighter and narrower than I have made it!"

That hit me. I got out my concordance - and I soon discovered how much the Bible says about the lovingkindness of the Lord. From Moses, David and the prophets, we hear these wonderful words again and again: "Your God is merciful, and, gracious, anxious to forgive, full of lovingkindness, slow to anger."

Moses was a prophet who thundered warnings to Israel, preaching that if they didn't walk in righteousness they would be judged. Yet this man of God also had a revelation of the Lord's lovingkindness. In the cloud of God's presence, the Lord revealed to Moses His nature:

"And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin"(Exodus 34:5-7).

Beloved, I must confess: I have never really seen the Lord in this way. This knowledge of Him is in my head - it always has been - but I've never truly experienced it in my heart.

In all of the warnings of judgment that Moses preached, he always remembered this important aspect of God's character. Moses said, "When thou art in tribulation, and all these things come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to the Lord thy God, and shalt be obedient unto his voice; (for the Lord thy God is a merciful God;) he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee"(Deuteronomy 4:30-31).

Nehemiah 9 is an amazing passage, describing a powerful revelation of God's lovingkindness toward His people throughout their history. Time after time the people forsook God and each time He restored them and gave them incredible blessings. The Lord had every right to give up on Israel, yet He remained faithful to them.

Verses 28 and 31 sum up this wonderful revelation: "But after they had rest, they did evil again before thee... yet when they returned, and cried unto thee, thou heardest them from heaven; and many times didst thou deliver them according to thy mercies.... For thy great mercies' sake thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for thou art a gracious and merciful God."

Isaiah preached often about God's vengeance against sin. He told of the dark day of doom and despair coming upon those who live in rebellion. Yet in the middle of one of his most frightening messages about the Lord's day of wrath, Isaiah stopped and cried out:

"I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all

that the Lord hath bestowed on us... according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his lovingkindnesses" (Isaiah 63:7).

In the midst of all the sin, apostasy and rebellion in Israel, Isaiah looked deep into his own heart and recalled a revelation of what God was truly like. He cried, "Lord, save us again by Your pity. We have rebelled against and vexed Your Holy Spirit - but stir up Your bowels of mercy to us. You are full of lovingkindness."

The prophet Joel warned of coming days of thick darkness, the likes of which have never been seen: devouring flames, earthquakes, reelings to and fro, the sun and moon darkened. But suddenly the prophet stops - and in the midst of dire warnings about wrath and judgment, he says:

"Therefore also now, saith the Lord, Turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil" (Joel 2:12-13).

"Repenteth" means that God wants to change His mind about the judgment he has planned; He doesn't want to judge! He hopes we will mourn over our sins and turn to Him for forgiveness.

I'm Learning Important Lessons About God's Lovingkindness.

For years I have prophesied concerning the body of Christ, and I'll continue to prophesy until Jesus comes, if He will allow me. But I've felt the Lord saying to me, "You first have to understand My lovingkindness. Not one prophet in the Bible could prophesy until he first had a revelation of My lovingkindness."

LESSON #1 -The Foundation of Complete Victory Over Sin Is To Understand That God Is Tender and Full of Lovingkindness."Thus saith the Lord, Let not the man glory in his wisdom neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth for in these things I delight, saith the Lord" (Jeremiah 9:23-24).

I have never had trouble confessing my sin - I've always run to the Lord right away. And to the best of my knowledge, I've not tried to excuse or hide my failings. Yet whenever I fail the Lord and know I've grieved Him, I become overwhelmed with shame, guilt, condemnation and unworthiness.

I preach to others that the Lord is gracious and forgiving. But when I fail God it suddenly becomes different. I have to work my way through the terrible burden of guilt and shame.

You ask "Aren't we supposed to experience those feelings when we sin?" Yes - but we are

not supposed to continue for days and weeks thinking God is mad at us. The guilt and condemnation must be lifted quickly.

You see, even after I repent, I feel I have to make it all up to the Lord. But like the Prodigal Son, I can have the Father hugging my neck kissing my cheek putting rings on my fingers and a robe on my back, telling me to forget the past and to come into His house and enjoy the feast He has prepared for me.

Yet inside I'm saying "I can't go in - I'm not worthy! I've sinned against You. Let me pay You back. Let me grieve and carry the guilt a little longer." It's easy for me to believe God forgave Israel, Nineveh, the heathen, the dying thief. But I find it hard to understand how, the very moment I turn to Him with all my heart, He so quickly and lovingly accepts me as if I had not sinned!

David gives us a promise that it is possible to understand the lovingkindness of the Lord. "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord" (Psalm 107:43).

The verse clearly states that the key to understanding this aspect of God's character is found in this particular psalm. This key is simple and uncomplicated, and it is repeated four times: "Then they cried..."

David received the revelation of God's gracious, forgiving heart by simply looking at God's past record of dealing with His beloved children.

"Hungry and dusty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses. And he led them forth by the right way... Oh that men would praise the Lord for his wonderful works to the children of men!" (verses 4-8).

When they wandered away from the Lord, hungry, thirsty, lost because of sin, "Then they cried unto the Lord... and he saveth them out of their distresses" (verses 3-8).

Again they rebelled and backslid. They fell so low they were at the very gates of hell. "Then they cried... he sent his word, and healed them" (verses 17-20).

Once more, God's people came to their wits' end. A storm was raging and trouble had melted their soul: "Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm so that the waves thereof are still" (verses 23-29).

Here is what the Lord was teaching David: "Take a look at My record. Look at all My dealings with the children of Israel. They've failed Me and failed Me, as I've shown you four times in this revelation. But then they cried.

They reached out to Me. And I'm of the nature that My heart is touched by tears and moved with compassion when My children return to Me. I am touched by the feeling of their infirmities."

David is saying in this psalm, "Look how easily God's heart is moved., how quickly He responds to the cry of His children - There is no end to His mercies."

Beloved, you don't have to run to a counselor or telephone a friend; you don't have to carry the agony

and guilt. Just go to the Lord and cry out and confess to Him! He is a tender Father who is touched by your cries.

A time came when David needed such a revelation of the Lord's sure mercies. As you know, King David fell into horrible sin - committing adultery and then covering it with murder.

This man was full of the Holy Spirit, so we know he had to be miserable, because the Spirit reproves of sin. I am confident David wept in sorrow the very night he fell into adultery and as he continued to commit other sins.

There is no way such a Spirit-filled man of God could operate day after day without an agonizing burden of shame, guilt and fear. I've been in the room when pastors or church members who truly love God have been confronted, their sin exposed. Those who are close to the Lord nearly always break down crying. "Yes, yes! It's true! How could I have done it? My sin has been ever before me - I haven't slept. Oh God, forgive me. I want help!"

That's what I believe happened when Nathan confronted David. But it's one thing to be forgiven, yet quite another to be free and clear with the Lord. Understand that David had committed not only adultery but murder! He was the king of Israel, and God told him "You have brought reproach upon My name." Yet even as he wept, Nathan said to him, "Your sins are forgiven."

But that wasn't enough for David. He knew that forgiveness was the easy part; now he wanted to get things clear with God to be able to get his joy back. He cried, "Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me" (Psalm 51:11).

Psalm 51 is all about David remembering the longsuffering and mercy of the Lord. In the very first verse, David appeals to the tender, forgiving mercies of God: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions."

David knew what to do: he cried! "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles" (Psalm 34-6). "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry" (Psalm 34:15). "The righteous cry and the Lord heareth and delivereth them out of all their troubles" (Psalm 34:17).

Dear saint, this is your victory over sin: the absolute confidence that no matter how grievously you have sinned or fallen, you serve a Lord who is ready to forgive, anxious to heal, and who possesses more lovingkindness toward you than you could ever need.

The devil comes to you and says, "No! If you get off the hook too easily, you'll jump right back into sin" He'll make you feel miserable, unworthy to lift your hands in praise to God or even to pick up His Word!

But here is your weapon: Cry! Cry out as David did, with all of your heart! Go to God and confess your sin. Appeal to His lovingkindness. Say, "Lord, You love me. I know you're ready to forgive me. I confess!"

At that very moment, you are clear with God. You don't have to pay for your sin. God loves you so much that He gave His son Jesus, who has already paid for it. A merciful, loving advocate is yearning

to help and deliver you: "My little children these things I write unto you, that ye sin not And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous" (1 John 2:1).

When I was with my young granddaughter recently, she wanted to walk atop a low concrete wall. As I held her from behind, she tried to knock my hand away. I let go - and eventually she fell (but without hurting herself).

When she fell, I didn't desert her. I didn't say, "Look at what you did You're not mine anymore!"

The Lord said to me, "David, you allow yourself such love for this child. But you won't allow Me to love you in the same way. You swell with pride over your children - but you won't allow Me to do so on your behalf!"

The Lord spoke a tender word to my heart recently. He said, "David, you bless Me - you bless My heart!" No one has ever said anything better to me in my life. And it's true - the Bible says God takes pleasure in His children!

LESSON #2 - God's Lovingkindness Is To Be Enjoyed.

Jonah was a prophet who fully understood the lovingkindness of the Lord, but he could not enjoy or appropriate it. Instead, it was a burden to him. When God commanded him to go to the wicked city Nineveh and prophesy its quick destruction, Jonah ran away in haste. Later, he told the Lord why he had run away: it was because of the lovingkindness of the Lord!

Here was Jonah's argument, "Lord, You've commanded me to walk up and down the streets of Ninevah, prophesying they have only forty days left before it's all over... But I can't do that because I know You, Lord You are easily touched. Tears and repentance soften Your heart. You'll change Your mind. Instead of sending judgment, You'll send a revival and I'll end up looking like a fool.

"For I knew that thou art a gracious God., and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil" (Jonah 4:2).

Finally, Jonah did go, but only by way of the belly of a giant fish, who spit him up onto dry ground. Jonah proclaimed the judgment of God and, sure enough Nineveh did repent, even though the prophet's message mentioned nothing about repentance, only destruction.

These people wept, fasted, mourned and put on sackcloth, even on their animals! It was one of the most sweeping revivals ever recorded in the Bible.

Yet in the midst of all this, Jonah became very angry. He must have prayed. "What happened, Lord? You were ready to destroy them. You sent me out on those streets crying "judgment, bloodshed, fire!" Then they called on You; and as soon as You saw the first tear fall, You changed Your mind. I knew all along this would happen! Because I know You! You are slow to anger, ready to forgive, ready to send peace and blessing instead of calamity."

I confess - I know how this feels! I recently felt a little egg on my face, as Jonah must have. Our

ministry warned America that God might judge us on the battlefield of Kuwait and Iraq, echoing Lincoln's belief that all war is a sign of God's judgment. We warned that America had not repented nor had our leaders called for nationwide repentance - and we feared a great effusion of blood.

During one of our Friday night prayer meetings, I said, "How can God be with our armies when we have so much blood on our hands? The Bible is full of accounts of God giving up on His armies when they sinned as we have. We face judgment!"

Instead, victory came swiftly. After only 100 hours of ground fighting, it was all over - one of the most lopsided wars in history. It ended faster than Israel's Six-Day War against Egypt. Soon I got a letter from someone who used to attend our church. It said, "You lied! There was no judgment. God was with our armies, and there were not thousands dead. Your warning was not from God."

Here is what I believe happened: Once again the Lord's gracious heart was easily moved. Multiple thousands of soldiers and believers around the world cried out to God: "Help us! Give us one more chance!" Churches all over the world held prayer meetings, crying out, "O God, forgive us! Cleanse us from our sin!"

One reporter in Saudi Arabia said, "Never have I heard so many soldiers praying or singing spiritual songs. Never have I seen so many reading the Bible. It was like church!"

I believe God was moved with compassion. He was moved and touched - because He is so ready to forgive! Like Jonah, I should have known that He is "slow to anger, of great kindness, and repentest of the evil." Instead of pouring out judgment on America, He used our army as His rod against Saddam Hussein. God was with America!

If we had gotten what our nation deserved, we would be burying tens of thousands of our troops right now. We would be weeping and wailing, ashamed! Yet our gracious Lord took pity and changed His mind, as surely as He changed His mind about Nineveh. The tears and repentance of believers brought forth His great lovingkindness.

Jonah didn't enjoy God's lovingkindness. I pray that the church doesn't make the same mistake. We need to thank Him for His great mercy toward us, and that He heard the cry of our nation - and answered!

LESSON #3 - God's Lovingkindness Must Be Proclaimed.

We are to preach about the Lord's lovingkindness to all mankind. David said: "I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation; I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation" (Psalm 40:10).

David not only appropriated this wonderful message for himself. He knew it was sorely needed by the whole congregation and by a hurting world. David was grateful to God for such great love, because he was surrounded by his own failings: "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me" (verse 12). It doesn't matter how badly people have sinned - God still loves. That's why He sent His Son. And that is what we should be preaching to the world!

Can you say with David, "I have not concealed thy lovingkindness from the great congregation"?

Perhaps one of the most quoted and sung verses in all of God's Word is this: "Thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee" (Psalm 63:3). You may ask, "What do you mean, His lovingkindness is better than life?" Life is short! It fades like the grass, which is here one season and gone the next. Yet His lovingkindness will endure forever. A billion years from now, Jesus will be as tender and loving to us as He is now. Others can take your life from you but they can't take away His lovingkindness.

The greatest proclamation of His lovingkindness is joyful praise. Stop and think for a moment: God is not mad at you anymore. If you're ready to forsake your sins, you can be forgiven and restored this very moment.

The Word says nothing can come between our Lord and us: no sin, no guilt, no condemning thoughts. You can say, "My life is a blessing to the Lord, and I can rejoice and praise Him. I am clean, free, forgiven, justified, sanctified, redeemed!"

If you really understood how tender He is toward you - how patient, how caring how ready to forgive and bless - you would not be able to contain yourself. You would shout and praise Him until you had no voice left!

Beloved, Jesus is coming - and we're clean. We're ready to go. You have a loving, tender Father who cares about you. He's bottled every tear you've ever shed. He's seen every need. He's known your every thought - and He loves you!