

## THE DOOR THAT OPENS GOD'S LOVINGKINDNESS

Please turn once again to Psalm 63 and follow along as I read verses 1-6. This is the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday that we've looked at this Psalm—and we are only on vs 3! I promise we won't be looking at it next week, though, but only because I **won't be here**—and Pastor Buhrow told me he will be preaching from Deuteronomy 6 😊!

For the past couple of weeks, we have been zeroing in on the **discovery** David made as stated in the first half of vs 3—that **God's lovingkindness is better than life!**

Did David **really feel** that way? Yes, he did—even though when he penned these words, he was **on the run from his own son** who was leading a rebellion against him! He was in the wilderness...away from the city he had conquered... and the palace he had built... and the place he worshipped God. He most certainly felt **disgraced** that his own son was doing this to him—and **rejected** by the people he had so faithfully led and loved and served. On top of that, he had no idea what the future held and how all this would “shake out.”

And yet—in spite of these circumstances—he declared that God's lovingkindness was better than life! **How** could he make such a claim? **What had he learned** about God that led him to such a conclusion?

And **why did God** put this in the Bible? Is it in here **just for us to learn** something **about what David believed?** **No!** God put it in His Word because it is **the attitude** that He wants **us to have!**

He **wants us**—you and I—**to believe** the same thing: that God's lovingkindness is indeed better than life! But in order for us to believe that, we need to **know what** God's lovingkindness **is.**

Two weeks ago, I **attempted** to share with you a **definition** of God's lovingkindness. I say “attempted” because I don't think I explained it very well. So rather than sharing some more ways on **how** God's lovingkindness is better than life, I want to expand more on what **it is** first. Probably should have done this before, but in this case I certainly believe that “late is better than never.”

I want to start by mentioning something I said a couple of weeks ago: God's lovingkindness **is not a healthy, financially prosperous, care-free and trouble-free life!** I would be misrepresenting the Word of God to tell you that **once you become a Christian**, your life will always be wonderful. There **will be** trials and trouble—mark it down! Jesus said as much in **John 16:33** “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. **In the world ye shall have tribulation:** but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

Not only that, but Satan seeks to devour you more once **you are out** of his family than when you **are in it!**

Now that we know what God's lovingkindness **is not**, let's look at what **it is.** The lovingkindness of God is **like our Baptist Buffet dinner**—it is **loaded** with all kinds of good stuff! Or you can think of it as a storehouse **full of treasure!** David exclaimed in **Ps 68:19** “Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us **with benefits...**”

But **who** does God “daily load with benefits?” Does He load **everyone** with benefits? In one sense **He does!** Jesus said in **Mt 5:46** “...for He [God] maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain of the just and on the unjust.” In other words, **God's children**—and those who **aren't His children**—enjoy blessings from God!

The flip side, though—something I also mentioned a couple of weeks ago—is that God's lovingkindness **ends** if a person dies unforgiven. If a person dies unforgiven—“yet in their sins,” is how Jesus put it—their eternal soul will be **separated from God** in a place called hell. Although I gave you these descriptions before, I believe it is good for us to hear them again. These are the words that **Jesus used** to describe hell: **eternal** damnation (Mk 3:29); **everlasting** fire (Mt 18:8); place of torment (Lk 16:28); weeping, wailing, gnashing of teeth (Mt 8:12; 13:42); and **everlasting** punishment (Mt 25:46).

To avoid hell—and become a **permanent partaker** of God's lovingkindness—we need to **become His child.** To **enjoy the inheritance** of the King, we need to **become a child** of the King. The door, then, to enter **fully and permanently** into the lovingkindness of God, is to be accepted by Him; to be adopted by Him!

So let's dig into this concept of being **accepted** by God.

First let's consider... **1. Our desire to be accepted**

We have within our nature a desire **to be accepted**. We want to be appreciated and feel like we belong. I don't believe there is **anyone** who wants to be rejected by **everyone** 100% of the time!

**How strong** is this desire to be accepted? Consider the lengths that some **young men** will go through to become a **member of a gang**. They must agree to be beat up by the other members...or steal a car...or even kill someone! **Why** do they agree to do those things?

Because they want to be **accepted**...they want to feel **appreciated** and **desired** and **loved** and **welcomed**. Their **desire is so strong** that they don't stop to ask themselves what **good comes out** of being accepted by a **bunch of thugs** who will get them into more and more trouble and that will more than likely result in them losing their lives!

School started not too long ago. Sadly, in some schools, you have to be **mean** to one group of kids in order to be **accepted** by another group of kids. So kids will **do wrong** to be accepted.

College students will "party" to the point of passing out; adults will spend money they don't have, and young ladies—or young men—will **say things** they don't mean—or **do things** they shouldn't do—in hopes of being accepted by a person they have an interest in! I could go on, but I believe you get the point.

**2. God's desire is to accept us**

Let that sink in. God **desires** to accept **you**. The All-Powerful and All-Knowing Creator that spoke the world into existence...the Eternal One who always has been—and always will be... the high and lofty One, whose name is Holy... the Judge of all the earth... the Sustainer that keeps things going... and the Sovereign King of Kings and Lord of Lords that rules over every **one** and every **thing**, desires to **accept you!**

God **wants you!** Again, I say, let that sink in. God doesn't **need** you—you will not provide to God something He is lacking. Why? Because He **lacks nothing!** But He **loves** you because He is love... and **longs to accept** you because **you need Him** ... and wants to **make you His!** If that does not amaze you, you have a poor understanding of who God is—and how **undeserving you are!**

Not only does God **desire** to accept us, **3. God accepts us the way we are!**

Unlike **cliques and clubs and organizations** that demand you meet certain requirements to be accepted, God has none! He accepts us **just the way we are!** So many people **get this wrong!** Many people think that in order for God to accept them, they have to **clean up their lives first**—like Joseph did when he appeared before Pharaoh.

A. We don't have to "clean up" first like Joseph did

For those of you unfamiliar with what I'm talking about, Joseph was sold into slavery by his own brothers and ended up in Egypt, working for a man named Potiphar. Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him and when he refused her advances, she accused him of trying to take advantage **of her**. So Joseph ended up in jail—and was there until Pharaoh found out that Joseph could **interpret dreams**. Pharaoh had 2 dreams that greatly troubled him, so he called for Joseph to interpret them.

**Gen 41:14** "Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon: and he shaved himself, and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh."

Joseph was about to meet the most powerful person in the world at that time—the ruler of Egypt! So out of respect for his position, he shaved—and probably showered 😊—and put on clean clothes! I'm fairly certain Pharaoh would have "accepted" Joseph into his presence even if Joseph **had not** cleaned up.

But even if Pharaoh **was impressed** with Joseph's **outward** appearance, God is not! The Bible plainly states in **I Sam 16:7** "...for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the **Lord looketh on the heart.**"

I believe most people understand that God is more concerned **about their heart** than He is about their **outward** appearance. So instead of shaving **their face** and putting on clean clothes to be accepted by God, many believe they need to **"shave off"** some sinful habit in their life. Their thought process is, 'God cannot

**accept me** if I come to Him dirty and sinful—I need to get the sin out of my life. I need to stop doing drugs... I need to stop drinking... I need to stop cussing... I need to stop stealing... I need to stop looking at that which is sinful.'

They fail to understand that they can't clean up their sinful **habits** until they clean up their sinful **heart**. And **they can't** clean up their sinful heart—they **need a new heart!** And **only God** can give them that! And God **won't give us a new heart** until we stop trying to clean up the old one!

Thankfully, God accepts us just the way we are! He does not require us to "clean up" before accepting us. We come to Him **as we are**, and He **accepts us**—then cleans us up by giving us a new heart; a new nature!

There is another way that people "get it wrong" when it comes to being accepted by God. Some think they have to "**give up things**" to be accepted, others think they have to **give things to God** before He accepts them.

#### B. We don't have to "pony up" first like David did

To "pony up" means to **pay up**—to pay the money you owe for something or to pay off a debt. Before David—the writer of this Psalm—became king, he was a shepherd boy from a **poor family**. One of King Saul's daughters loved David and wanted to marry him, but David **couldn't afford** the dowry required for the king's daughter. He had to pay a dowry to get the girl—and be accepted into the king's family!

So King Saul made David a deal. Instead of wanting **money** for a dowry, he wanted David to **kill some Philistines**. How **many?** **One** hundred! How many did David kill? **Two** hundred! David went "over and above" to hopefully gain the king's favor!

King Saul kept his word and gave his daughter to David to marry. He did so reluctantly, however, because he had secretly hoped the Philistines **would kill** David! How would you like to have a father-in-law like that?

Now the application. Many people think that to be **accepted by God** and become a member of His family, they have to "pony up;" they have to **do something**. They think they have to be baptized...or join a church...or give money. Or they think they have to keep the Beatitudes...or the Golden Rule...or the 10 Commandments.

What they don't realize is that God does not accept us on the basis of what **we do**. What **we do**—or **attempt to do**—are called "deeds" or "works." Notice the verses I have on your hand-out regarding deeds & works. **Romans 3:20** "Therefore by the **deeds** of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin." What does that mean?

"By the deeds of the law" [by doing things and keeping OT rules] "no flesh" [meaning no person] shall "be justified" [meaning treated "just as if I'd never sinned"] "in His" [God's] sight.

Stated another way, rule-keeping does not make us acceptable to God!

What does make us acceptable God? **Faith!** We see that in the next verse!

**Romans 3:28** "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified **by faith without** the **deeds** of the law."

"Therefore we conclude that a man" [person; m/f] "is justified" [treated "just as if I'd never sinned"] "by faith without the deeds" [efforts; works] "of the law" [10 Commandments, rule-keeping, doing good].

Now for a few of the many verses where God declares **works don't work!**

**Romans 4:6-8** "Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, <sup>7</sup> Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. <sup>8</sup> Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin."

"Impute" means to reckon or attribute. God imputes—He reckons or attributes **righteousness**—meaning rightness with Him; in other words, "perfectness!" How? **Without works!**

**Galatians 2:16** "Knowing that a man is **not justified by the works of the law**, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and **not by the works of the law**: for by the **works of the law shall no flesh be justified.**"

--Three times—in the same verse—it says we are not justified—meaning treated "just as if we'd never sinned"—by works.

**Ephesians 2:8-9** “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: <sup>9</sup> **Not of works**, lest any man should boast.”

“If you could **work your way** to heaven there would be bragging in heaven. If there is bragging in heaven, heaven ceases to be heaven!”

Listen carefully; the message of God’s Word is plain—**and consistent!** **Deeds** don’t make us acceptable to God—and **works don’t work!** God accepts us just the way we are **on His terms**—not because we clean ourselves up and not because we do deeds or works!

So what is **the basis** of being accepted by God? If **cleaning up ourselves** doesn’t move God to accept us—and **doing certain things** doesn’t move God to accept us, **what does move** God to accept us?

#### **4. God accepts those who come to Him in repentance and faith**

So what does it mean to come to God in repentance and faith? Rather than try to explain the terms, we are going to look at an example. We saw **one example** this morning during the SS hour—the penitent thief on the cross. There’s another well-known example of repentance and faith found in the parable Jesus gave about the **prodigal son**. Let’s turn to Luke 15, beginning with verse number 11. We don’t have time to read the whole parable, but I want to read verses 11-14 to lay the context.

Jump ahead now to vs 17: “And when he came to himself...” I love those words! “The light bulb clicked” ...he “woke up and smelled the coffee...” He had an “Aha” moment. What did he realize in this “Aha” moment?

That his **sinful choices** had gotten him **into this mess!** What did he choose to do about it? He humbled himself... and repented.

##### A. The repentance of the prodigal son

We see that in vs 18-19. What did he do? He acknowledged his sin...and he went to the one he had sinned against to seek forgiveness. He also understood that he deserved consequences—“I am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.”

Repentance isn’t just **feeling sorry for your sin**—it is turning around...and heading the opposite direction and going back to the person you sinned against and seeking their forgiveness and accepting the consequences.

But what about the **faith** of the prodigal? We see the repentance; do we see any signs **of faith?**

##### B. The faith of the prodigal son

I believe we do in the first part of vs 20—“And he arose, and came to his father.” How does that show he had faith? If he didn’t think there was **any chance** his father would forgive him, he would have kept on feeding pigs! How **strong** was his faith? Not very—the best he hoped for was being made one of the hired servants!

##### C. The acceptance of the Father

Now vs 20 again. “And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.”

This, of course, is not a picture of just **any father**—this is a picture of **God the Father!**

--God is the One who is always waiting for sinners to come home!

--God is the One who takes us back as we are—broken, dirty, and humble!

--God is the One who has compassion on us—and runs to meet us and embrace us when we come to Him!

--God is the One who accepts our request for forgiveness. Look at verse 21.

What is the father’s response when the son says, “I am no more worthy to be called thy son.”

It is the same response that God has toward a broken, humble sinner that comes to Him for forgiveness!

“Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: <sup>23</sup> And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: <sup>24</sup> For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.”

This, my friends, is a picture of a person coming to God for forgiveness.

--There is an acknowledgement of sin: “I have sinned against heaven, and before thee”

--There is an understanding of consequences for sin: “make me a hired servant.”

--There is a turning to God—the One we have sinned against—to confess our sin  
--And there is no cleaning up...no attempt to hide or downplay the sin...no attempt to appease the father by doing good or making promises

Has there been a point in your life when you've come to God like this? If not, that is what you need to do!

--Just like the father in this parable, God is watching...and waiting...and wanting to accept you!

--He will take you as you are—broken, dirty, and humble

--He will throw His arms around you...and embrace you...and call you His child!

--And He will welcome you into His family by showering you with His gifts of lovingkindness.

But the buffet—the storehouse—of lovingkindness is not showered upon us until we become His child!  
Are you? **God wants you** to be? Will you come to Him today in repentance and faith and receive His forgiveness?

So what would God have us do in light of His Word this morning?

1. First and foremost, are you certain you are a child of God? Has there been a time in your life when you came to God like the prodigal did—broken and humble and seeking forgiveness?
2. Second, if you are a child of God, how grateful are you for being accepted by God? Are you thankful that He made you His child—and not just a hired servant?
3. How burdened are you for others, that they would become children of God and be accepted into His family? People need to know the danger they are in without Christ—and the blessing that it is to be forgiven. Are you telling others?