

1 Corinthians 13:4–8 - "*Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails . . . .*" (NASB 1995)

What is Love? In the English language, we have one word: "love." In the original languages of the Bible, there are a few different words that are translated in English as "love."

Eros is the ancient Greek word for romantic, passionate love—the desire and physical attraction that draws two people together. It is the root of our English word "erotic." *Eros* was a common Greek word for love in the ancient world but is not used in the New Testament.

Phileō is warm, affectionate love. It is the natural fondness and personal attachment that grows between friends and family members. This is the kind of love that feels close. It enjoys the other person. *Phileō* is rooted in relationship and affection rather than pure duty or decision.

Agapē is deliberate, self-giving love that seeks the true good of another. It is a choice of will more than a feeling. It continues even when the other person is undeserving or does not return that same love. This is the kind of love God has for us, and the kind of love He calls us to show one another. In the Bible, the word "love" most often refers to *agapē*.

The Object of a Father's Love – Who Is He to Love?

1. A Father Loves God

Deuteronomy 6:4–6 – "*Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall **love the LORD your God** with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart.*"

God's love for us is to be met with a forceful and unwavering love for Him. Love for Him leads to obedience and is the basis for the most significant responsibility of a father—teaching his own children that same love.

Deuteronomy 6:7 – "*You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them . . . .*"

2. A Father Loves His Wife

Ephesians 5:25–33 – "*Husbands, **love your wives**, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her . . . . So husbands ought also to **love their own wives** as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself . . . . Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to **love his own wife** even as himself . . . .*"

3. A Father Loves His Children

The one explicit command to love children in the Bible is in Titus 2:4, and it is not directed at fathers. Older women are instructed in Titus 2 to train younger women "*to love their husbands and children.*"

The Bible never directly commands a father to love his children. As a woman's love for her husband is assumed in the Bible, so is a father's love for his children. In the same way Christ's love for the church is a model for a man's love for His wife, there is a parallel of the father's love for his children with God's love for us.

Psalm 103:8 – "*The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness.*"
Psalm 103:13 – *Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him.*"

Love is assumed rather than commanded, and it is described here as compassion. There is a parallel construction in Psalm 103:13. The parallel construction is important. It is similar to Ephesians 5:25 - "*as Christ also loved the church*," so should a husband love his wife. When it comes to children, in the same way Christ has compassion, deep love, mercy, and tender affection towards dad, so a father has compassion on his children. The love and compassion of a dad for his children therefore is like God's compassion towards us, and that is the model and pattern a biblical dad follows in the home.

A man's love for his children is to be evident through his compassion. It should mark his character–who he is. A biblical man is a compassionate man, and the home is simply one expression of that characteristic

If a man's love for his children is to be marked by compassion, and it is to be like God's compassionate love for us, we must understand the compassion of God.

The Father's Love for His Children

Psalm 103:8–13 – "*The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness. He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him.*"

The LORD's love and care for us is remarkable. His love for us is rooted in His character. We live and die enveloped in His perfect compassionate love—not because of our worthiness of that love, but because His character and His decision to love us. He has made us the object of everything described in Psalm 103. The comparative construction here is striking. A father's love for his children is used to illustrate God's love for us. Psalm 103 rehearses and exults in God's revelation of his love for us at Mount Sinai.

Exodus 34:6–7 – "*Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.*"

The revelation of God's love for us in Exodus 34 is so foundational that it is repeated or referenced throughout the Bible (Num 14:18; Neh 9:17; Pss 86:15; 103:8 & 13; 145:8–9; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2). The Bible establishes the LORD's compassion first in His own self-revelation at Sinai (Exod 34). The Psalms and the prophets celebrate it, and then we see it fulfilled and illustrated in the life of Jesus.

The compassion of Christ put on very tangible display God's compassion for His creation. Some examples include:

- Jesus had dinner with "tax collectors and sinners," and when the Pharisees came to criticize, He said, "*It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners*" (Matt 9:9–13).
- "*Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd*" (Matt 9:35–37).
- Four thousand hungry people – *"And Jesus called His disciples to Him, and said, 'I feel compassion for the people, because they have remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way'*" (Matt 15:32–38).
- Two blind men – "*Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him*" (Matt 20:29–34).

The descriptions of Jesus Christ's compassion were a response to the vagaries of a fallen sinful world. Jesus had compassion and acted accordingly in the face of death (Lazarus), hunger, sickness, blindness, distress, and wandering without a leader (Shepherd).

Several elements of God's compassionate love are listed in Exodus 34. As God shows compassionate love to His children, so a father is to love his own children. His children better understand the love of their heavenly father because of the love displayed by their earthly father towards them.

Compassion is a deep, tender concern that moves God to care for people in their suffering or need. It is more than pity. It is a heartfelt desire to help and to relieve pain even when that suffering is the self-inflicted result of sin or foolishness.

Compassion joins mercy and grace. Mercy withholds deserved consequences. Grace gives the favor and kindness we do not deserve—forgiveness, peace, and blessing. It is the free gift of His love, given to people who have done nothing to earn it and who have often done much to reject or repel it.

Psalm 86:15 – *"But You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth*."

Slow to Anger means God is patient. He does not fly off the handle. He does not immediately give people what their sin deserves. Instead, He holds back His anger. He gives time and opportunity for people to turn back to Him. It is an expression of His patience and restraint.

Proverbs 14:29 – *"He who is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who is quick-tempered exalts folly*."

Lovingkindness is God's loyal, steadfast love. It is kindness and faithfulness bound together—love that remains committed regardless of worthiness. It keeps His promises and stays true even when people fail or are unfaithful.

Truth speaks of firmness and reliability. God's love is sure, stable, and enduring, and it never compromises His justice. His compassion is rooted in truth. His words are dependable, His character is consistent, and He never lies or changes. He maintains His justice without ever compromising His compassion.

Forgiveness means to lift, to bear, to carry, and to take away. God has released His people from the debt and the penalty of their sin. He chooses not to hold their wrongs against them. He restores the relationship, treating the sin as cancelled rather than kept on record. His forgiveness is so complete that He sees us as holy and blameless (Col 3:12 and Eph 1:4).

Exodus 34:7 says, *"He forgives iniquity, transgression and sin*." Nothing in the spectrum of human failure lies outside the willingness and reach of God's forgiveness. Not iniquity (distortion of character from long-term indulgence in sin), not transgression (deliberate rebellion against Him), and not sin (missing the mark–falling short of God's standard).

Application – A Dad's Response to the Sin of His Children
Hebrews 12:4–13

Throughout the Bible, the expression of God's love and compassion is nearly always in the context of addressing sin or the broader brokenness of a fallen world. In Exodus 34, God establishes and preserves His holiness and His standard even while speaking into the reality of Genesis 3 and the pervasive sin of an unrepentant people. He declares that He will "*by no means leave the guilty unpunished, and that the iniquity of fathers is visited on the children to the third and fourth generations*." We need to address that connection because there is no greater test of a father's compassionate love than in the context of the sin and disappointment of a child in sin.

Love does not ignore sin.

Proverbs 13:24 – "*He who withholds his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently*."
Hebrews 12:6 – "*For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives."*

The example of God's discipline of us is the model of how a father's discipline in the home is to look. His discipline is grounded in compassion, lovingkindness, patience, truth, forgiveness, and justice. Love is expressed in response to sin.

1. Hebrews 12:4–6 – Discipline Is Serious
"You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reproved by Him; For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.'"

2. Hebrews 12:7 – Discipline Is Personal and Intimate
"It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?"

3. Hebrews 12:10–11 – Discipline Benefits the Sinner
"For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness."

4. Hebrews 12:12–13 – Discipline Is Sacrificial
"Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed."

Biblical discipline is:

- **Purposeful –** It addresses the problem of sin—not personal preferences.
- **For the child's good –** There is the opportunity to learn (teaching, instruction, counsel), and it is productive: righteousness and holiness.
- **Positive –** For the good of the child—not dad.
- **Time consuming –** Band-Aids do not fix broken bones.
- **Mandatory –** A compassionate response to sin that does not compromise truth is not optional.

Questions for Discussion:

1. How have you experienced the kind of compassion described in Exodus 34?
2. How could God's compassion in Exodus 34 shape the way you love the people God has given you—whether a wife, children, grandchildren, or others He has placed in your life?
3. When someone close to you fails or sins, how do you typically respond, and what would it look like for that response to be more shaped by God's compassion?
4. Where in your life right now do you need to either receive God's loving discipline more willingly or practice that kind of purposeful, compassionate discipline toward someone else?

Additional Resources:

- Read/sing the words to the hymns, "*How Deep the Father's Love for Us,"* Hymns of Grace, page 80, and "*Amazing Grace*," Hymns of Grace, page 89.
- Read *Psalm 103* to reflect on God's love for you and the expectation of your love for Him, your wife, and your children.
- Read *"Leading with Love*" by Alexander Strauch.

Next week: November 18, 7pm: "*Ekklesia* – Prayer and Singing"