

Identity Crisis: Loyal Love

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Introduction

Until we recognize that we were created in the image of God, we will suffer from an identity crisis. As we learn about the characteristics of God, we can begin to understand who we were created to be. God revealed His character to Moses saying “The Lord, the Lord God, **compassionate and gracious, slow to anger**, and abounding in **loyal love and faithfulness**” (Exodus 34:6-7). But what is loyal love?

More than Love

The Hebrew word ‘*khesed*’ used in the original passage in Exodus is what we translate to ‘loyal love.’ It combines the ideas of unconditional love, generosity, and enduring commitment. God’s *khesed* is expressed by maintaining the stability of creation that sustains life, by forgiving the sins of His people, by showing ‘goodness,’ and by not allowing His people to be destroyed.

Khesed is almost impossible to directly translate into any other language because of its particular and compound meaning. It goes far beyond having an emotionally-based feeling toward someone else. It is understood in Hebrew to represent a standing agreement and relationship between both parties. It is an unselfish, loyal, and benevolent intention and commitment that is not based on the faithfulness of the other side of the agreement.

Rebellion in the Wilderness

God had led the Israelites and provided for them in the Wilderness for nearly two years. They had reached the border of Canaan, the Promised Land that God said He would give them.

God instructed Moses to select a leader from each of the 12 tribes to go into Canaan and learn about the land. After 40 days, they returned and reported back that the land was beautiful and bountiful but the people who lived in it were large and powerful and the cities were well fortified. As the news spread throughout the camp, the people began to mourn for Egypt... the place where they had been slaves (Numbers 14:1-23).

Moses pleads with God to forgive them, not because they were worthy but because it is consistent with His character. In verse 19 we read: “In accordance with your great **love**, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now” (Numbers 14:19). But it is not just ‘love’ Moses is appealing to God for. He is pleading for God’s *khesed* to be shown to these rebellious and unworthy people. Moses is reminding God of their covenant agreement and is asking for God to honor it by showing them unconditional love, generosity, and enduring commitment. And God once again commits Himself to people that are not committed to Him. His faithfulness is not dependent on their faithfulness.

The Marriage Covenant

One of the best examples of loyal love is marriage. Many times throughout the Old Testament, God uses this comparison and calls Himself a husband to Israel. Think about typical marriage vows... “to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness, and in health, to love and to cherish, forsaking all others, till death do us part...” Through the good and the bad, these vows are designed to pledge loyalty, love, and faithfulness to one another.

The covenant agreements between God and the family of Abraham were designed to work the same way. However, just like in a marriage, when one party is not faithful to keeping

their promises, the relationship starts to break. It is hard to remain faithful to someone who is not faithful to you, but God's loyal love remained faithful despite the numerous times that Israel broke their vows.

Hosea and Gomer

The book of Hosea is part of the prophetic books that were written during the time of Israel's Exile. God told the prophet Hosea to "Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the Lord" (Hosea 1:2). So Hosea marries a woman named Gomer. God works through this broken marriage to show how He will chase after the heart of Israel and offer reconciliation despite their unfaithfulness. His loyal love is consistent.

Israel has rebelled and God will allow the consequences... but God's loyal love and mercy are more powerful than Israel's sin. God could easily end the covenant He made with the Israelites. They had consistently been unfaithful to Him. But instead, He decides to renew the covenant and seek reconciliation with them. He tells Israel, "I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness and you will acknowledge the Lord" (Hosea 2:19-20).

Time for a Change

After thousands of years of showing loyal love to the Israelites despite their countless times of rebelling against Him, God decided it was time for a new kind of covenant agreement. The author of Hebrews looks to a prophecy in Jeremiah to explain how the New Covenant that was established by Jesus is superior to the Old Covenant (Hebrews 8:6-13).

The Old Covenant and the Law that held it all together could only connect Israel to God in an outward way. The Law could teach them God's character but unless they could feel it or experience it for themselves, there was still a disconnect. God wanted to create a New Covenant that would connect the heart of His people to Him through relationship, not just knowledge and rules. The best way to experience God's character of loyal love is to be in a relationship with Him.

God's Loyal Love for Us

The magnitude of God's loyal love for His people was displayed in the sending of His Son, Jesus. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:16-18).

Jesus wasn't sent to punish or judge the world but to offer a way for reconciliation. But the new covenant went beyond the family of Abraham, it included the entire population of the world then and forever. Anyone who believes enters into this new covenant with God. And we never have to doubt that God will keep His side of the covenant relationship and consistently show us loyal love.

Further Study:

- Bible Project: Hosea Book Overview -

https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/hosea/?utm_source=web_social_share&medium=shared_video

- Bible Project: Loyal Love -

https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/loyal-love/?utm_source=web_social_share&medium=shared_video

Discussion Questions:

- The Hebrew word “khesed” combines the ideas of unconditional love, generosity, and enduring commitment. What are some examples of God’s loyal love in the Bible?
- God’s loyal love internally motivates Jesus’ followers to generously share what they’ve been given. What do you think it means for God’s love to be inside of a person?
- How should God’s love affect our actions toward those in need?