

[00:00:00] *hope: Welcome to the Hope Church Glasgow Sunday podcast. We pray you encounter God's love afresh today. Find out more about us@hopechurchglasgow.org or find us on Facebook and Instagram. Now, please enjoy. This week's podcast

[00:00:18] Mark: is a very famous quote. In fact, this is the most quoted line, certainly in the Old Testament, I think in the whole Bible.

And this is a quote from a time when actually God spoke to Moses and actually said to Moses. This is what I'm like. This is the first time that God actually spoke to somebody and said, this is what I'm like.

So that's perhaps why it became such a famous quote in the Bible. And then you find in lots of other places in the Bible it gets quoted, and one of them is in Psalm 103. So why don't we read this out together, shall we? Okay, let's go. God is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and overflowing with loyal love.

Okay, so you might see that there are four different kind of characteristics that God actually says about himself originally. He's compassionate, he's gracious, slow to anger, and overflowing with loyal love. Okay, and so what we're going to do with our time this morning is we're going to take just a few minutes to think about each of these four character traits of God. Okay? So I'm going to do my best to do only about two minutes of talking about each one, and then we're going to do something to, like, respond or to kind of like help us engage with that idea. Okay? Does that sound all right?

And I do need to just give a quick credit to the Bible Project at this point because they have amazing videos on YouTube on all of these four character traits. And I would encourage you, if you've, if you've not seen them, look it up on YouTube, because they're really good. And I, I have drawn on those quite a bit, which you'll probably realize if you go and watch them after listening to me this morning.

But all good. Okay, so first word is compassionate. Okay?

So you may, you may or may not know that the Old Testament was written in the Hebrew language.

And so the original word was a Hebrew word, and it was actually a word that was very closely connected with the word for a womb, the place where an unborn child is carried by its mother. And so it speaks of this idea of nurture and protection.

It invites us to think of a mother's tender feelings for her vulnerable unborn child, and to consider how intimate and close that is.

That is the kind of compassion. That's what it means that God would have compassion.

In other places in the Bible, the same word is actually translated as deeply stirred. And so actually it's quite an emotional word as well. This is God's heartfelt response. It's not just something that he feels like he has to do.

It's an emotional thing.

And actually the biblical pattern that we often see is that compassion is God's response when people cry out to him, whether or not they've behaved well or badly. And so it's not just an emotional response.

There's actually a response which God has because of his compassion. And it's a response of forgiveness and rescue and restoration.

And so this is what God's compassion still means for us today, is that when we're hurting or in pain, we can be sure that God not only cares, but that he's deeply moved and that he's there to meet us and to respond.

Okay, so, Mark, I'm just going to invite you, if you can, just if you're going to come back, just to play a few background vibes, if that's allowed to say that in church.

And so I've got a couple of questions that I just want us to think about, and I'm going to put them up on the screen. But I know that this idea of God's compassion can sometimes actually be quite a painful thing for us to consider because we think about God's great compassion. But then what if we're, like, not fully connecting with that? What if we're not fully experiencing that ourselves? And that can be difficult. And I really felt as I was preparing this morning that God actually wants to meet us afresh this morning.

And for the. For the adults and teenagers, I just want you to kind of stay where you are and consider these couple of questions that I've got here.

And these questions, they might sound like they're in the negative in terms of, like, are there any areas? But they're actually invitations, these questions. They're invitations to experience God.

And so maybe you've identified something there where it's. Which might feel uncomfortable, but actually that's exactly where the Holy Spirit wants to meet us. He's one of the names of the Holy Spirit is the comforter, isn't he? So he meets us. He meets us in our places of discomfort. And sometimes it's. That first step is actually just to identify and be honest with ourselves.

Okay. But I encourage you not to leave that hanging in that place. And if there's something that's been painful for you. As I say, please do ask someone you trust to pray with you at the end. He really wants to meet with us this morning, I believe.

Okay, but we're going to move on now to this next word, which is gracious. Okay, thanks, Mark.

So in English, we have these two words, don't we? Gracious and graceful, which sound similar but have slightly different meanings. Interestingly, when you look back at the Hebrew language, you can see that there is essentially one word which is used in what we would consider to be those two different contexts. So, for example, if you imagine a beautiful, elegant deer skipping through the woods, we might describe that as a graceful deer.

And in this context, if the Hebrew language was speaking, it would be using that idea of grace to describe something that is delightful, that is worth paying attention to.

You know, maybe I would even go and pay money to see it in the zoo.

Something that has valuable, something that has value.

And in fact, often in the biblical examples, when we see something that is described as having this characteristic of grace, there is this connection with the giving of a gift. It's something that is where there's an appropriate response of giving a gift.

But what is controversial about the biblical idea of grace is that this verdict of value and worth

and delight often gets applied in sort of unexpected contexts. And especially we see this with God.

It's the overflow of his generous heart.

So if we're to say that God is gracious towards humanity, it's to say that he is constantly seeing people as delightful and worth paying attention to.

If you were an animal in a zoo, then God would pay money just to come and see you think about that.

And in fact, he wouldn't just pay the entrance price, he would want to give you a gift when he found you as well.

Okay, so this is something of the idea of what it is to say that God is gracious. So what I want us to do in response to this word, to this is going to be a bit more inter relational.

So I want you to find.

I said two or three people.

Start with one. But I want you to get onto your feet and circle around and find two or three people and tell them what you see in them. That is delightful. Remembering that God sees every person as valuable. His heart is overflowing out of this generosity. We've seen now that God is compassionate, like a mother's nurturing care for her unborn child. And we've seen that God is gracious, that he actually considers there to be value and something of delight in all people, which is incredible. Even if we don't feel like that ourselves or don't deserve it, even when we don't deserve it. And then the third one says that God is slow to anger. Okay, so. So if you look at the actual Hebrew way this is written, it's very interesting because it actually says that God has a long nose.

But to explain, the Hebrew language actually often uses the idea of having a hot nose as a way of describing anger. Okay? So when it says, you know, so the thing about God is that he doesn't have what we might call a. A short fuse, but actually he has a long nose. Okay, so there's something for you to take away from today. Okay? So yes, there are certain things that make God angry. And you know what? We actually wouldn't want a God who never gets angry. It would be terrible, wouldn't it, if God didn't care about evil.

And in fact, what we see in the Bible very often is that God's anger is connected to his intense desire to have connection with his people. He just can't accept things that get in the way of that.

And do you know, the thing about God's anger is that it never disconnects him from those other character traits that we looked at. It never disconnects him from his love, his grace, his compassion. And in fact, we could even say that anger isn't really an inherent part of God's character.

What it is is it's a response to wrongdoing, really. God's anger, when it happens, is kind of an outworking of those deeper character traits of love and justice.

And that is why when we see this character trait described here, it actually says that the trait is that he is slow to anger.

And when we look carefully in the Bible, we see that, that God is the God who gives multiple chances to people. He's slow to anger. In some older translations, it uses the word long suffering, which is an interesting word to think about, isn't it? God is long suffering. Or we might say he's incredibly patient.

You know, I sometimes have to apologize to my children for having a short nose.

But God, he has an incredibly long nose. He's slow to anger. He's a patient God. If there, if there are. Again, if there are things that. That's kind of just brought to your mind or kind of questions, because there are lots of questions about this character trait of God. I think it's a big topic.

Speak to somebody that you trust. Like, you know, ask your small group leader or somebody who you who, you know, who you think, Scott, some might have some. Some helpful thoughts on this.

It's a big topic.

Okay. And then the last one, it says that God is overflowing with loyal love. So I've kind of tried to capture that somehow with the fountain. Okay, so this is. This is the Hebrew word hesed, okay. Which actually is a word which kind of captures and joins together the ideas of love, but also of enduring commitment.

This is a word which is almost always used in the context or sort of inside of a relational commitment, for example, a marriage or family context. It's the kind of love that somebody would demonstrate by having a desire to be loyal to their relational commitments, but something that motivates them to go above and beyond. There's a generosity of spirit in this word as well.

For example, imagine an old man who's been married to his wife for 50 years and then his wife gets sick and she's no longer able to care for herself. And so the husband takes it upon himself to basically become a full time carer. You know, washing her, feeding her, dressing her, everything that she needs. That's the kind of thing that could be called hesed. It's loyal love in the context of this relational commitment, but it's going above and beyond.

And although a response might be nice actually, this kind of loyal love doesn't actually require anything back.

Now, some of you might remember the story of Lassie the dog.

I don't know how well this is known, but Lassie came. When I was thinking about this and preparing Lassie the dog came into my mind.

I enjoyed watching Lassie. Here's Lassie. There's a film, a film of Lassie that was on when I was a kid. And I remember finding this quite an emotional story.

If you don't know this is a story of a dog.

I just have to look this up again to remind myself. But I think I've got this right. A story of a dog who is sold by a boy called Joe when his family fall on hard times. But the dog keeps on finding ways to escape and to come back to Joe.

Eventually, the new owner, who's this rich guy, decides to move from where they are, which I think is in Yorkshire or somewhere up to Scotland, actually.

And then the main bulk of this story is about how Lassie the dog managed to escape again and goes on this huge epic journey all the way from Scotland down to Yorkshire, enduring storms and long stretches of their eating, like meeting other wild dogs and difficult humans and all sorts of obstacles. But it's all out of this loyalty for Joe.

And so how much more is the Bible a story about God's overflowing loyal love for us, for humanity, despite our disobedience and weaknesses? And ultimately, as John was praying earlier, we see this in God choosing to bind himself to humanity in Jesus. That is the ultimate expression of this hesed, this loyal love.

[00:14:08] Speaker C: Yeah. Father, we're gathered in your presence.

We know that you are here and we thank you for the reminder of your character, of who you are.

And we just, we're just blown away by that reality. And yet we can't help but feel like of everything that we've tasted of your character, we know there's so much more.

And Lord, we are, we really are hungry and thirsty for you to just minister to our hearts.

And so I just want to ask Holy Spirit that you would increase our faith, increase our sensitivity to the truth, help us to minimize distractions.

Just think about our computers. When somebody has 50,000 tabs open at the same time trying to get something done and we just have to like, close them all out. Sometimes just close the whole browser and open up a fresh window.

That metaphor is probably not working for many of you.

I just want to pray right now that there would be a moment where we would be able to just bring things into simplicity of your presence.

All those other distractions would melt away.

We ask that you would facilitate this in Jesus name.

[00:15:48] *hope: Thank you for listening to this podcast from Hope Church Glasgow. There are loads more to listen to wherever you normally find your podcasts or from our website, hopechurchglasgow.org if you'd like to know more about us, we are on Facebook and Instagram. Just search for Hope Church Glasgow. Have a hopeful day.