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# What Is God Like?

*“Your lovingkindness, O LORD, extends to the heavens, Your faithfulness reaches to the skies.  
Your righteousness is like the mountains of God; Your judgments are like a great deep.  
O LORD, You preserve man and beast. How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God!  
And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Your wings” (Psalm 36:5–7).*

A familiar story tells of a little boy who was busily drawing a picture as he sat at his small desk. His mother was doing housework near him. As she noticed how intense he was with his work, she stopped what she was doing and moved behind him to look over his shoulder. She gently asked, “What is my little artist drawing?” Without looking up, he said, “I’m drawing a picture of God!”

A five-year-old boy drawing a picture of God! What an imagination! However, this scene strikes a chord with us because we see ourselves in it. It reminds us that most of us, perhaps since childhood, have been asking a very important question. Deep within, many of us have pondered the query “What does God look like?”

Jesus said, “No one has seen God at any time” (John 1:18a). However, we can know about His gracious nature and the loving character of His amazing heart. In this world, everyone can come to know what His heart is like, even though no one has seen His actual spirit being. Jesus proved this fact with what He said next. He continued, “The only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him” (John 1:18b). Yes, Jesus has explained God, or has shown Him to us.

We can be confident of this fact: The highest and holiest portrayal of what God is like is given to us in Jesus’ earthly life, death, and resurrection. He told His apostles, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6).

Immediately, Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us” (John 14:8). Jesus responded, “Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” (John 14:9). Certainly, we get our most precise and most wonderful picture of God when we are looking into the face of Jesus.

Next to Jesus, perhaps the Book of Psalms gives us the clearest picture of God in the Bible. This Old Testament book takes us straight to the heart of God.

Scholars usually characterize the Book of Psalms as a song book. Regarding a modern song book, we might say, “This is a compilation, an anthology, of songs that were written in different places, by different people, and at different times. An editor has brought them together for us in one volume.” This is what the Book of Psalms is like. While this characterization can be used, it may be better for us to think of the Book of Psalms as a series of windows—windows giving us a view into the heart of God. Psalms, of course, is made up of songs, prayers, and wisdom poetry; but the Holy Spirit did not give us these psalms merely to sing, pray, or recite. No, they are not just words that we are to talk about, but they are windows that we are to look through. As we study the psalms, we find that they are like windows with the shutters thrown back, the blinds raised, and the curtains pulled aside, inviting us to look through them into the heart of God.

It has been said that the Book of Psalms is in the Old Testament and the Old Testament is in the Book of Psalms. One almost has to take in the whole Old Testament in order to read the Psalms with the greatest benefit. This is an Old Testament book and must be read and meditated upon with that fact in mind. Further, it has been said, "You need to read the Book of Psalms on your knees." That is, we should read as if we were sitting in the presence of God. As we read the Psalms, they carry us into the throne room of God; they lift us up in spirit and allow us to sit beside Him. They lift us out of whatever circumstances we are facing and permit us to look at our lives from God's vantage point. We are enabled to look at our troubles, dreams, enemies, victories, and fears from the viewpoint of His great heart.

For example, in Psalm 33:5a, we see the righteous integrity of God's heart. We are told, "He loves righteousness and justice." This window shows God's attitude toward sin, prejudice, hatred, wickedness, and the mistreatment of others. It reminds us that He will never overlook or wink at sin. He will never tempt us to sin, and we cannot tempt Him to sin. He will always be on the side of righteousness, justice, and truth. With the words of this verse, we are looking straight into His heart.

Roger Staubach, perhaps one of the greatest football quarterbacks of all time, said that his most embarrassing moment in his professional career was when he lined up behind the wrong teammate. The player yelled out at him, "If you want the ball, go over and call for it from your center. I'm your guard!" What about God? Does He ever make a mistake? Will He ever line up behind the wrong person? Will He stand behind the wicked? Will He ever change His nature or lower His standards? Absolutely not! As we look through the windows of Psalms into God's heart, we see that the love of His heart is righteousness and that His disposition can never change.

What does this mean for us? It means that He loves us as we are, but He loves us too much to leave us as we are. We should love Him too much to remain as we are. When He pulls us to His heart, His influence changes us. When we look into the glory of His being and enjoy His presence, we are re-created into His image

little by little. "Just As I Am" is a meaningful hymn, but now we should be able to sing, "Just as I Was"!

*Psalm 36:5 puts before us another window. It shows us the gracious lovingkindness that fills God's heart.* The psalmist wrote, "Your lovingkindness, O LORD, extends to the heavens, Your faithfulness reaches to the skies." A similar phrase is found in Psalm 33:5b: "The earth is full of the lovingkindness of the LORD."

The word that is used in these verses is the big word in the Book of Psalms, namely, חֶסֶד (*chesed*). It is rendered differently by various translations. The NASB has "lovingkindness," the RSV has "steadfast love," and the NIV uses "love" or "unfailing love" (see Psalm 33:5). It is a word that is similar to the New Testament word "grace."

What is the heart of God like? The Book of Psalms says that it is full of lovingkindness, and the New Testament shows that it is full of love (see 1 John 4:8). Within the confines of His covenant, He will always love you and me. When a sincere heart comes to Him, He will answer that person with His lovingkindness—not according to his or her sins.

We will give up on ourselves long before God gives up on us. In fact, His love is one certainty that we can always hold tightly. It is an everlasting love. The one thing that the prodigal son found when he returned home was that his father still loved him. Everything else had changed, but his father's love had not. The money he had been given was gone, his friends were gone, and his self-respect was gone—but his father's love was still present. One poet has said,

The fatted calf, the shoes, the robe, the ring  
All for me, unworthy son.  
But sweeter to me, the most wonderful  
thing,  
God ran to meet me. I saw God run!<sup>1</sup>

Here, then, are two truths on which we can always depend. (1) God's heart is full of righteous integrity. (2) God's heart is full of lovingkindness. These truths never bend, break, or change. We see them in the Book of Psalms,

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Charles B. Hodge, Jr., *Will God Run?* (Searcy, Ark.: Resource Publications, 2002), 20.

but they are fleshed out more completely in the person of Jesus Christ. God's righteousness and lovingkindness precipitated Jesus' death on the cross. His righteousness demanded the punishment of sin; His lovingkindness demanded the forgiveness of sin. These two great attributes united in the person and the sacrifice of Jesus. He bore the punishment for sin, and God ex-

tends forgiveness to those who come to Him in obedient faith.

Eddie Cloer



*The most poverty-stricken person on earth is the person who has never seen the heart of God.*