

GTW Online: The Blessing of Lament

Week 1: Who Is God? A Word Study on $\tau\omicron\eta$ (*Hesed*)

September 9, 2020
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- Opening Remarks
 - Welcome
 - Walk Through Syllabus
 - Small Group Sign Up

Week 1 Framework: The first step to learning about Christian lament is to build a framework for understanding the character (*hesed*) and intention of God (right relationship).

Week 1 Big Idea: God primarily reveals Himself to humanity as one who is marked decisively by the attribute of *hesed*, which overwhelmingly defines God's character throughout Scripture and is the backbone attribute that draws us into relationship with God.

“The cause for all lament is an inconsistency between the perceived action of God and the revealed character of God as defined by the word *hesed*.”
– Michael Card

Small Group Discussion Guide

(Refer to the syllabus on how to join a small group immediately following each week's teaching.)

- 1) For week 1, begin your small group time by getting to know each person in your small group.
 - a) What one word comes to your mind to describe this year thus far?
 - b) Why did you sign up for this class? In what way are you hoping to grow?
- 2) We are spending Week 1 learning about the “*hesed*” of God. What stood out to you in this week's teaching? Why is it important to understand the *hesed* of God at the outset of this class on Biblical lament?
- 3) In the application of tonight's teaching, it is noted that “we are never meant to passively receive חסד. Rather, our proper response to God's חסד is to live out חסד as best as we can through the empowering grace of the Father, by the sacrifice of the Son, and with the strength of the Holy Spirit.” Identity one way in which you desire to grow in your ability to emulate the *hesed* of God this week.
- 4) According to each participant's comfort level, close your small group time praying together. Spend 5 minutes receiving prayer requests and 5 minutes lifting these requests up to God.

- Word Study, חסד (*hesed*)
 - חסד is primarily used to describe God’s relationship to humans and is most often used to refer to an attribute of God.¹
 - In addition to חסד generally appearing in its positive nominal form, חסד is usually intended to be an action-oriented concept with חסד more often than not being the object of a verbal idea [i.e. God sends his חסד to humanity (c.f. Ps. 57:3), God’s people are satisfied by his חסד (c.f. Ps. 90:14), etc.].
 - One primary observation of Kohlenberger’s translation is that the translation of “love” [129] is primarily seen *inside* the Psalms (several modern translations translate חסד as “steadfast love”) while the translation of “kindness” is primarily seen *outside* the Psalms.²
 - Humanity:
 - *Finitude.* Humanity’s constancy and beauty (חסד) are described in polarizing effect to God’s constancy and beauty (חסד). Isaiah 40:6 likens humanity’s חסד to a flower that so quickly fades. Whereas God’s חסד is everlasting in every capacity, humanity’s ability in their fallen state to be described as חסד appears to be nothing short of opposite.
 - *Trust.* God’s people place their trust in God’s חסד (c.f. Ps. 36:5).
 - *Prayer.* God’s people pray eagerly for God’s חסד to sustain them (c.f. Ps 90:14; Ps. 143:8).
 - *Gratitude.* When God’s חסד is brought to bear of the life of the believer, gratitude is the natural result (c.f. Ps. 106:45).

¹ David Clines, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*. Vol. 3 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 277-282.

² John Kohlenberger III and James Swanson, *The Hebrew-English Concordance to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998) 559-561.

- *Example.* God's people model their behavior from God's חסד (c.f. Pro. 3:3).
 - *Salvation.* Because God rescues his people through his חסד (c.f. Pro. 16:6), humanity ought to most desire God's חסד (c.f. Pro. 19:22). The proclamation of salvation combined with humanity's continuation in rebellion reflects a characteristic of sin that entangles humanity from clearly recognizing that which matters most, the offer of reconciliation through God's חסד.
 - *Illustration:* A child who is being protected from danger by a parent, but the child perceives the parent's action as irritating and unwelcome.
 - *Characteristic.* God's people are called to be like God and as they imitate God they grow in their חסד (c.f. Hos. 10:12).
- God:
- The majority of Biblical uses of חסד place God as the source of true, undiluted חסד. For God to be known as a being who is the fullness of חסד is for God to be, in part, *forever overflowing in loyal, relational love for his people*. The most common meaning of חסד refers to an attribute of God that directly affects how God interacts with humanity.
 - *Rule.* God leads his people in his חסד (c.f. Ex 15:13).
 - *Salvation.* God's people are saved according to God's חסד (c.f. Ps. 109:26).
 - *Loyalty.* God forever keeps his covenant with his people according to his חסד (c.f. Micah 7:20).
 - *Quantity.* The חסד of God is abundant (c.f. Lam 3:22; Is. 63:7), great in extent (c.f. Ps. 145:8), everlasting (c.f. Jer. 33:11), and good (c.f. Ps. 109:21).

- *Quality.* God's חסד is something that God sends forth to his people for their nourishment. God's people praise him for sending them his חסד (c.f. Ps. 57:3).
 - c.f. Matthew 4:4, "Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"
- God's great self-disclosure (Exodus 34:6):
 - God's חסד is something so great that often throughout Scripture another attribute or string of attributes is placed alongside God's חסד for the full meaning around the use of חסד to begin to take shape. A great refrain of Scripture is the perfect illustration to this concept: The LORD is *merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in חסד*. This refrain occurs throughout Scripture (c.f. Ex. 34:6; Neh. 9:17; Ps. 86:15; Joe. 2:13, et. al.) and can be used as a premier indicator of the character of God.
- The Incarnation sets our vision for the fullness of חסד.
 - The חסד of God reconciles humanity back to God. This reconciling love is completed in the person and work of Jesus as described in the New Testament.
- Defining חסד:
 - The relational component of חסד and its everlasting characteristic of always being a defining mark of God's nature are the two most significant themes from Stoebe's commentary on חסד. Scripture uses חסד to describe God in the sense that חסד is a prerequisite, "specific content" of God's identity.³

³ E. Jenni and C. Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997), 452.

- Stoebe further illustrates that *חסד* cannot remain in the abstract, but it must translate into action within relationship. To merely talk about *חסד* is not true *חסד*; *חסד* must be acted out.
- *חסד is the culmination of God's goodness, kindness, and mercy that is qualitatively timeless, abundant, loyal, and salvation-initiating.*
- *Stoebe argues that חסד must be understood not as a spontaneous attribute that God at some point in time chose to instill in himself, but rather חסד is an eternal "mode" of God's relational being, it is an essential part of God's character.⁴*

For God to be known

as a being who is the fullness of חסד is for God to be, in part, forever overflowing in loyal, relational love for his people.

- Defining God's Intent (Eternal, righteous relationship)
 - Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?"

(Genesis 3:8-9)
- Application
 - The fallenness of humanity prevents humanity from faithfully acting out *חסד*, but the child of God is called nonetheless to model his/her character after God as the covenant relationship of God's *חסד* is made manifest through relating actions between God and His children. Whereas God's *חסד* is a part of his very nature, humanity's *חסד*, even at its best, is fragmented and falls

⁴ Jenni and Westermann, *Theological Lexicon*, 449-451.

condemningly short of the ideal that is only seen through the pure חסד actions of God.⁵

- In VanGemeran's theological dictionary D.A. Baer and R.P. Gordon emphasize that in order to fully comprehend the depth of the meaning of חסד one must understand how חסד operates within relational covenanting. Baer and Gordon stress, "there is an expected reciprocity and mutuality that demands service, fear, and even a corresponding exercise of חסד in return."⁶ This highly integrated relational component is the foundation to understanding חסד. Individuals display their acceptance of God's חסד by desiring and carrying out חסד themselves.
 - c.f. Genesis 3:8-9 above.
- We ought to strive to understand God's חסד for us by internalizing how God's nature of חסד offers reconciliation to each one of us, no matter how much of God's wrath we deserve.
- We are never meant to passively receive חסד. Rather, our proper response to God's חסד is to live out חסד as best as we can through the empowering grace of the Father, by the sacrifice of the Son, and with the strength of the Holy Spirit.

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(see page 2 for the Small Group Discussion Guide)

⁵ Ibid. 453-455.

⁶ W. VanGemeran, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997). 213.

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