



BibleProject Podcast

The Loyal Love of God Character of God E12

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Speakers in the audio file: Jon Collins, Tim Mackie, Carissa Quinn

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| Jon | Hey, this is Jon at BibleProject. Have you ever been in a situation where you're looking for a word to describe an idea, but you can't find the right word? In those situations, we oftentimes just go to another language. Like the feeling that this exact moment has happened before, French has a great word. Déjà vu. Or that pleasure that's derived from another person's misfortune, German has a great word for that. Schadenfreude. Languages are like this. Some languages have better ways of expressing very particular ideas. Now, there's a word in Hebrew, that is notoriously difficult to translate into English for this reason. It's an idea that combines being generous with being loyal, and it wraps it all up in the emotion of deep affection for another. This is the Hebrew word khesed. | 00:00:00 |
| Tim | There's no word in any language that quite does all the things that khesed is doing. So it's a challenge to render khesed in any language. It's a covenant partner. You're motivated by love and affection; you do concrete acts. And as you do so, you are fulfilling a promise you made. Khesed. | 00:01:00 |
| Jon | Now, khesed is a big deal in the Bible because it's the fourth characteristic that God gives to Himself in Exodus 34. But if there's no word in English that translates khesed well, what do we do with it? | |
| Tim | This word has been translated in a lot of different ways. The earliest English translation of John Wycliffe and William Tyndale uses the English word "mercy," whatever mercy meant to them. King James followed, in our own time by the New American Standard has gone with two words. Either mercy, sometimes it's translated mercy, or more often with a compound word lovingkindness. | |
| Jon | NIV simply translates it as love. ESV goes well further and they call it steadfast love. | 00:02:00 |
| Tim | When you notice these kinds of differences between translations that's usually a flag, like, hey, there's something interesting here. There's opportunity to learn. Because what these translation differences show is people are struggling to find the easy one for one correspondence between our language and concepts and the language and concepts of the Bible. | |

Jon So coming up today on the show, what does it mean that God is full of khesed? Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

We're walking through five characteristics of God found in Exodus 34:6. This has been a long series. It's been really great. We just got out of a whole conversation on anger.

Carissa Long conversation.

Jon Long conversation. It was great. We're going to move into the fourth attribute that God assigns Himself, which is translated different ways I suppose sometimes. 00:03:00

Tim Yes. Yeah, we'll explore that, given many different English translations.

Jon But I've heard you say loyal love over and over.

Tim Yes.

Jon So what's loyal love? We're going to talk about loyal love. I have with me, you have with you as you're listening along, Tim. Hey, Tim.

Tim Hello.

Jon Hello. And Carissa is here.

Carissa Hi.

Jon Let's get started.

Tim So loyal love is the English translation I've come to favor, but strong arguments can be made for other translations. We'll look at how some smart people throughout history have translated this word. The Hebrew word is khesed. This is where you got to clear your throat.

Jon Khesed.

Carissa Khesed. Okay. Is it khesed or khesed?

Tim Ah, khesed.

Carissa Khesed.

Tim Yeah.

Jon The emphasis is on the first syllable?

Tim Correct. Yeah, that's right.

Jon Then what's that Hebrew word there?

Tim The letter is called letter (unintelligible - 00:03:57)

Jon I've decided I'm going to learn the Hebrew. 00:04:00

Tim So often transliterated with the letter CH, like in the last name, Johann Sebastian Bach. But what I find is when you spell CH for most English speakers, they say "chuh".

Jon Yeah.

Carissa Right.

Tim So I've come to transliterate it as kh.

Jon Yeah, that makes sense.

Carissa Yeah, I think that's good. So if you've been pronouncing this as chesed for a long time, you cannot try and change to khesed.

Jon Khesed. Clear the throat.

Tim Khesed. This is a really interesting word. I have a lot of fun studying this word in Hebrew Bible. It occurs 245 times. Now the Hebrew Bible is a pretty big collection of texts. But that's a lot.

Carissa Yeah.

Tim That's a lot.

Jon I'm not to take your word for it.

Tim Yeah. So here's just some interesting things about this word. It appears most often in the Psalms. Hundred and seven times in the book of Psalms, and then 46 times in the big narrative stretching from Genesis to 2 Kings. Then it starts getting smaller. Twenty-six times in the Prophets, 13 times in the wisdom books. 00:05:00

Carissa You know, as we've been going through these traits, it almost seems like they have occurred most often in the Psalms. the gracious and compassionate. I think faithful the same too. Faithful occurs a lot in the Psalms.

Tim That's a good observation. The spirituality of the Psalms has been deeply shaped by Exodus 34:6. How the poets relate and talk about God is...yeah.

Carissa And the characteristics they rely on about God. Though I don't know about slow to anger, if that was more prevalent in the Psalms.

Tim Yeah, interesting. If I did search that, I don't remember off the top of my head. It is a very productive word. What's interesting is that in 75% of those 245 uses of the word, 75% of them are about God. So God's khesed is a major, major feature of the Old Testament portrait of God. But then also, there is one out of four occurrences that talk about humans doing this and showing this. So it's a really great opportunity to see how humans are an image of God, that humans showing khesed gives us a window into how God chose khesed. 00:06:00

So this word has been translated a lot of different ways. The earliest English translations of John Wycliffe and William Tyndale use the English word "mercy", and whatever mercy meant to them.

Carissa That's a surprising translation to me because I don't usually connect mercy and love in a one to one correlation. Like maybe a loving person is also merciful. But it's an interesting translation 00:07:00

Tim Where they were taking their inspiration from most likely is from the Greek translation of the Septuagint, which used the Greek word eleos, which is mercy or kindness. I think that's where they're coming from. But I...

Carissa Is that because there's not a good Greek term for khesed?

Tim Yes. Actually, there's no word in any language that quite does all of the things that khesed is doing. So it's a challenge to render khesed into any language. Actually, the translation of this word throughout the history of English Bibles is instructive. So the earliest English Bibles, Tyndale Wickliffe go with mercy. The King James, followed in our own time by the New American Standard has gone with two words. Either mercy, sometimes it translates mercy, or more often with a compound word lovingkindness.

Carissa Lovingkindness. 00:08:00

Tim Lovingkindness.

Jon Lovingkindness.

Tim No space.

Jon That is a very Bible word.

Carissa It is.

Tim Totally.

Jon I learned that word as a kid because of the Bible.

Tim Because of the Bible. Let me count. 14 letters.

Jon It's a good (inaudible - 00:08:14)

Tim Totally.

Jon Just put two words together and call it good.

Tim So many letters.

Carissa Though it is descriptive of the type of love maybe.

Tim Yes. Kindness. You can show acts of kindness, but not necessarily associated with the deep kind of pathos with love. So acts of kindness combined and motivated by love. Actually, this is not a bad translation. It's a pretty good one. But notice they had to merge two words to make it work.

Jon Now, when you say sometimes they did mercy, wouldn't King James have just one translation?

Tim No. For stylistic purposes, they might discern in a particular context.

Jon Oh, I see. Depending on the... 00:09:00

Tim Depending on the context.

Jon ...the context of that word.

Tim Yeah. Yeah.

Jon But in Exodus 34, they're going to have one.

Tim Lovingkindness. Yeah, that's right.

Jon But other times that it shows up, they sometimes say mercy.

Tim Correct. 20th century, the New Revised English Standard versions, they use a phrase. Two words. Steadfast love.

Jon They decided to keep those two words separate. "Let's not create new word."

Tim Yeah, totally. So not all spelled is one word. So two words.

Carissa But steadfast is also not that common.

Jon Sure.

Carissa Or is it? Is that a really Christianese word too?

Jon I've probably never used that word in any sort of normal situation.

Tim Yeah. Steadfast love. So what that translation brings out is both as act of pathos. It leaves out the kindness or mercy that you get with those other translations. But it introduces a new concept which is enduring, reliable through time, consistent. Steadfast. And that's good. That's a part of what's going on here. That is a part of khesed is enduring commitment. The New International Version sometimes just uses the English word love or sometimes translates it with the phrase unfailing love. 00:10:00

Carissa Just kind of like steadfast.

Tim Yeah, that's right. Like steadfast love. This kind of a little axiom or a rule of thumb that we've learned to develop, when you...this is why it's helpful to read with multiple English translations of the Bible throughout time. When you notice these kinds of differences between translations, that's usually a flag like, "Hey, there's something interesting here. This is an opportunity to learn." Because what these translation differences show is people are struggling to find an easy one for one correspondence between our language and concepts than the language and concepts of the Bible. 00:11:00

Carissa Yeah, it's an interesting word because it is describing this quality of love that goes beyond maybe the way...or I guess I'm curious how this word khesed compares with how we usually understanding love in general, or maybe even how we understand other kinds of love in the Bible, like agape or how it compares to faithfulness or compassion. Those kinds of ideas.

Tim Yeah. Actually, in the BibleProject video library, we have two word studies on love.

Jon Already.

Carissa Oh, yeah.

Tim One on the Hebrew word and then one on the Greek word. Ahava in Hebrew and agape.

Carissa So this will be the third.

Tim So this will be the third word.

Carissa Kind of.

Jon Second Hebrew word.

Tim Second Hebrew word. But it's loyal love.

Jon What was the other Hebrew word?

Carissa Ahava.

Jon Ahava.

Tim Ahava.

Jon Give me the quick...

Tim Ahava is affection.

Jon Affection.

Tim The emotional attachment and affection. Agape is about actions to seek another person's wellbeing. They're motivated by desire and affection for them. 00:12:00

Jon In the Septuagint, ahava usually translated as agape?

Tim Hmm, I don't remember that off the top of my head.

Jon Okay.

Tim So what sets khesed apart, the word khesed, if you study all of these occurrences—and we'll look at a whole bunch—it's the kind of love that someone demonstrates when they're keeping a promise and when a desire to be loyal to their promise motivates them to go above and beyond and be super generous more than what you would expect. That's khesed.

Carissa Yeah. So it differs from those other words and that it's inside of this commitment or perceived as commitment, even if it's not an explicit commitment.

Tim Yeah, that's right. It's almost always in the context of enduring relationship, either a family or covenant connection. It's one among a whole history of acts to maintain a relationship through acts of generosity. 00:13:00

Carissa And it's still an emotional or emotive word?

Tim Well, it's focused more on behavior and action.

Carissa Okay.

Tim So it's combining generosity, commitment, and affection all in one.

Carissa Interesting.

Tim The shorthand illustration that I came to use when this word would come up when I was in pastoral ministry and preaching is like an elderly man who's a husband and wife, they've been married 57 years. His wife gets really sick, and she can't care for herself anymore. So he dedicates himself to full time care, like wheelchair, feeding, bathing. Khesed. It's concrete. If you just sat on the couch and like, "I love you," but then doesn't help her, that's not khesed.

Jon But if he was just a nurse getting paid to do it with no affection... 00:14:00

Carissa Just the obligated.

Jon ...it will not be khesed

Tim No. It's of covenant partner, you're motivated by love and affection, you do concrete acts. And as you do so, you are fulfilling a promise that you made. That's khesed.

Carissa It's actually a really beautiful word.

Tim It's so beautiful.

Jon It is a beautiful word

Carissa Because it describes that kind of love that's a commitment and a choice and a desire all in one.

Tim Yeah.

Carissa And it's active.

Tim So all of these different English translations, I really sympathize. I'm just adding my opinion to the bunch now with the translation loyal love. But here's the thing is unfailing love of the NIV, I don't use the word unfailing. Steadfast...

Jon You don't use the word steadfast.

Tim But loyal, that's a normal English word.

Jon Yes.

Carissa And it also kind of has the connotation of like a friendship or a partnership. Loyalty. I think we think in terms of human partnerships when we talk about loyalty.

Jon A loyal love doesn't get across is...so we got the affection. It doesn't get across as generosity. 00:15:00

Tim I see. That's true.

Jon It could feel a little contractual. Like give me loyal love. Versus there's a sense of khesed, the way you guys have been talking about it, which is this like outflowing of generosity. Sorry for coercing your translation.

Tim No, that's all right.

Carissa So lovingly, kind, loyal love.

Tim Yeah. Loyal lovingkindness.

Jon Loyal lovingkindness.

Carissa One word.

Tim That would be the New King James. So that's the basic idea. First, let's take in some famous Bible verses. Like some that might be on bumper stickers or cross stitch patterns on people's walls. And then you'll see it. You'll actually see it displayed. Then I thought we could look at a bunch of examples of people showing khesed to each other in famous Bible stories. Then we can conclude by looking at example of God showing khesed.

Section Break

00:16:42

Tim Famous Old Testament Bible verses with khesed. Psalm 36:5-6. "Your khesed, O Lord, reaches to the heavens." [singing] "Your face O lord."

Jon Yeah, sing, Tim.

Tim [singing] "heaven to the sky". I don't remember what the verb is. That's the same song.

Jon Is that a worship anthem?

Tim Yeah. [singing] "Your righteousness it's like the mighty mountains." I remember this from Bible College. We had chapel at the Bible College.

Jon You know, it's funny is because there's only a small window of worship songs you're probably familiar with.

Tim From the mid to late 90s.

Carissa I think that one's stuck around for a while.

Jon Yeah, that's a long while.

Tim That one endured.

Carissa But yeah, you can't read this verse without getting a tune in it.

Tim Yeah, exactly. Yes. Yes. Are you looking it up?

Jon Third Day.

Tim Third Day. Shout out to Third Day.

Carissa I forgot about that.

Tim Third day. Well, there you go.

Jon They're getting in on those design patterns. Third Day.

Tim Yeah, totally. So you're khesed, O Lord, reaches to the skies. Listen, there's four poetic parallel lines here. So notice the attributes of God that are paired. Your khesed reaches to the skies. Your faithfulness to the heavens,

00:18:00

your righteousness like the mountains, your justice like the deep abyss below. Notice we just spanned the three-tiered cosmos of Genesis 1.

Jon Yeah, with the mountains in the mix.

Tim The skies. The mountains represent the land.

Jon Oh, the land. Okay.

Tim And then the deep is the waters under the land. God's character is what upholds every tear of the cosmos. Isn't that interesting?

Carissa That's cool.

Jon Yeah, God's character is saturated throughout the entire cosmos.

Tim I wondered if the certain character traits are paired with certain parts of the cosmos? That might be able...

Jon It's got to be in the rain. Right?

Tim So God's loyal love and then the word that you're going to take us on a tour through next, Carissa, your faithfulness, that's associated with what's above.

Jon Well, both of them are.

Tim Yeah, exactly. God's khesed and His faithfulness are associated with the sky. 00:19:00

Jon Now, is that two different words in this poem here? Because heavens and skies are the same word in Hebrew, right?

Carissa Seems like it should be two different ones.

Tim Oh, yeah. The first word is shamayim the traditional word heavens or skies. The second word is actually the word for clouds.

Jon Okay. Faithfulness in the clouds.

Tim Shechakim. Yeah, your clouds.

Jon That's fascinating that they translated clouds sky. Probably because they already translate sky "heavens".

Tim Yeah, totally. That's right. Yeah, that is interesting. But ESV of Psalm 36:5 has clouds.

Carissa It seems like it does the same thing either way. It starting up really high. Heaven, skies, mountains deep or skies, clouds, mountains deep.

Tim Yeah, that's right. So basically from top to bottom for the cosmos. God's character is what uphold it all. And this is in the larger context of a whole paragraph in Psalm about meditating on the stability of creation. 00:20:00

Jon Can I take us on a tangent?

Tim Sure.

Jon There's two other attributes of God in these two verses. Righteousness and justice. Why aren't those in Psalm 36? Why did God leave those out?

Tim Well, Exodus 36?

Jon Yes. Sorry, Exodus 36. Those are two great attributes that you would think God would want Moses to think about that. Righteousness and justice.

Tim So you're saying why are they absent?

Jon Why are they absent?

Tim Yeah. Oh, that's a great question.

Carissa It almost seems like justice is described in those verses.

Jon Anyways, it's a tangent.

Tim No, it's a good one.

Jon Just making an observation. They're missing out of...

Tim Righteousness is about doing right by somebody, and justice is about fairness and equity. One could argue that God is not very fair with Israel. 00:21:00

Jon Right.

Tim He gives them much, much more than what they deserve. In fact, that's what the next example of *khesed* is, is He doesn't give Israel what they deserve. But He is being just with them. You're not being unjust if you're being generous with somebody. I've never asked myself the question the way that you just did. So I need to take a long walk and think about that.

Jon I mean, there's tons of attributes and blessing. So, but these are pretty core.

Carissa Yeah. Yeah. And they're the verses that are repeated over and over. I think for me the question is whether this "yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished" is talking about His justice, or if the purpose there is actually to emphasize His graciousness. That His mercy extends to the thousand generations, and this punishment only goes to the third or the fourth. So maybe justice isn't being emphasized here. 00:22:00

Tim Yeah, it's interesting.

Carissa Yeah, it is interesting to think about what core characteristics of God really were important to the biblical authors and which ones weren't as important.

Tim Or just when they wanted to summarize the core of God's character, if you only get a list of five, the others...

Carissa What are the top five?

Tim What are the top five? Yeah.

Jon I would have guessed righteousness would have made top five.

Tim Yeah, that's a good point.

Jon It's my intuition.

Tim The apostle Paul shows righteousness. That's interesting. I need to think about that. You've stumbled upon a really profound question. I need to think about it. Psalm 103:11-12. "For as high as the heavens are above the earth so great is his khesed for those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." The parallelism between those lines is really illuminating, I think. Is that a worship song? 00:23:00

Jon No.

Carissa Yes, it is, guys.

Tim Is it really? I don't know.

Carissa As far as the east is from the west, that's how far he has removed our transgression from us. No, maybe I was later than this.

Jon I don't know that one. But I bet you there is a song or a hymn for most Psalms.

Tim Yeah. For sure.

Carissa We don't have to sing them all. It's okay.

Tim In Psalm 36, the first example, if God's khesed is there associated with the stability of creation, that's a part of God fulfilling His promise and fulfilling His word. Here, God's loyal love is expressed by forgiving people. Forgiving them.

Jon This is kind of like how much do you love me question. You play with your kids, and you're like, "I love you this much," and hands out by like six inches. And then they're like, "I love you this much." And they get to like a foot, and you keep going. This is the psalmist thinking about God's khesed and like how grand is it? 00:24:00

Tim How high and how far? Yeah.

Jon Yeah.

Tim It goes a vertical: High as the skies above land. And it goes horizontal: east from the west.

Jon Which is an impossible...

Carissa Yeah.

Tim Then what's pair is showing khesed is expressed through forgiving people when they wronged you. Specifically your covenant partners.

Carissa So that brings out the generosity, peace, and kindness.

Jon So forgiveness is core to khesed. Because you can't be in a loving, loyal, generous relationship with someone without constantly forgiving each other.

Carissa Yeah, that's a good point.

Tim Right. I guess unless you're in a covenant relationship with Jesus. But He's the one who is... 00:25:00

Tim Micah 6:8. "He has shown you, O human, what is good and what the Lord requires of you..."

Jon This is a song.

Tim "...to do justice, to love khesed and to walk humbly with your God." Now there because of the King James Version, the songs of Micah 6:8 that have become popular have retained the word mercy. Do justice, love mercy, walk humbly with your God.

Jon There's a song that I know.

Carissa I don't know the song.

Jon [singing] "He has shown you, O man, what is good and what the Lord requires of you."

Tim Wow.

Jon "But to do justly. But to do justly. To love mercy. To love mercy."

Carissa Well, you didn't know when you tuned into this podcast.

Tim You were going to get a solo verse.

Jon Yeah, Mercy. It's mercy.

Tim Okay. So NIV renders mercy here in Micah 6:8. ESV translates kindness. The New American Standard goes with kindness as well.

Carissa So how do you think these three terms are relating here? To do justice, love khesed, and walk humbly?

Tim Well, in Micah, he's railing against the leaders of Israel for not being loyal to the covenant with Yahweh. And then that's demonstrated by not doing justice for the needy and the poor in their cities, and throwing raging drinking parties. He just lays into leaders drinking way too much. So you can kind of see that reflected here. "Like do justice for the poor, keep your covenant with Yahweh, and don't think of yourself too highly."

Carissa Okay. So it's three significant things, not synonymous things or...

Tim Oh, I see.

Carissa ...mutually describing...

Jon They don't build on each other in some systematic way.

Tim Oh, interesting.

Jon I like your explanation. That makes sense to me.

Tim Yeah, it makes sense to me.

Jon It's love khesed?

Tim Yes. Yeah. Ahava khesed. Love of khesed. Make khesed.

Jon Make loyal love the thing you love.

Tim Yes, the thing that you have affection for. Love of khesed.

Jon Love khesed.

Tim Yeah, love khesed.

Carissa Like desire khesed maybe?

Tim Yeah.

Jon Yeah, desire. Ahava is kind of a desire word.

Tim Yeah, it is. It's to desire. 00:28:00

Jon Desire love.

Tim Desire loyal love. Remember, loyal love is concrete acts of...
It's not referring to a feeling. Khesed is not a feeling. Khesed is a visible action that shows your posture in relation.

Jon One thing that kind of keeps this together I think is a large view. I don't know if that the best way to say it. A large vantage point. So to love khesed you kind of have to think about the future. You have to think about relationships are like a long term thing. It's easy to love the immediate, like gratifications in life. But the love khesed is kind of like saying, "I'm going to commit myself to things that are going to be not always easy, sometimes challenging, but because I love this thing that's much broader than just here now." I feel like justice is kind of the same a lot of times. Justice often is when I feel wronged. But when you really love justice or you really are about justice, it's this big picture view of like I want society to be just. It feels like to love both those things you have to step outside your immediate context. 00:29:00

Tim Yeah, it's a good observation. Okay. Those are famous Bible verses. Let's dive into some Bible stories where people are showing khesed to each other to kind of fill out the portrait. At the end of the book of Genesis, Jacob the patriarch is dying. He has all his 12 sons around him. In Genesis 4, at the end, we read that the time drew near for him to die. So he takes his son that he lost and regained again, the son that he thought was dead but was really alive, Joseph, and he says, "If I have found favor in your eyes..."

Carissa Chen.

Tim Chen, for the word "gracious". "If I have found grace in your eyes, put your hand under my thigh, and swear an oath." 00:30:00

Jon That's how they did it.

Tim Yep, totally. "That you will show me khesed and faithfulness." Again, the two words are often paired. "Don't bury me here in Egypt. When I lay down with my father's carry me out of Egypt and go bury me where they're buried," which is hundreds of miles away. Remember, they didn't have cars. And Joseph said, "I will do it. I will do it." So

a son showing a father khesed is carrying his corpse hundreds of miles to go be buried with his ancestors. That's an act of khesed.

Jon Yeah. Because it's a lot to do. It takes an incredible amount of generosity to do something like that. He does it because he loves his father.

Carissa It's also loyalty without repayment because his father is obviously dead. He's carrying his bones. So it's not that he wants his father to reciprocate or... 00:31:00

Tim Great. That's exactly right. Yeah, without expectation. When you show somebody khesed that's living, you hope they show you khesed back. But khesed is about the one doing it. It's purely generated out of the character of the one doing it. You're right. Because here there's no return on investment.

Jon Maybe that's a reason why your other story was really great about the old man taking care of his wife because there's nothing you're getting back.

Tim Correct. Actually, the next story is a famous biblical story that makes the same point in another way. The story of Ruth. Oh, man. We have to make some more videos on Ruth.

Carissa It's amazing. Even in this video that you've just written the script for loyal love and the artists are in the process of making the video, it's already such a powerful scene—the scene with Ruth's khesed. 00:32:00

Tim Yes. Yeah, that's right. So the story in a nutshell is an Israelite family, in a time of famine, leaves the Land of Israel to go live among the land of their enemies. Moabites. Moab. Across the Jordan. Modern-day Jordan. All of the men die but the sons in the family had each married women. So you have an Israelite mom and her two Moabite daughters in law, Ruth, and Orpah.

Jon And the two daughters.

Tim The two daughters. So it's interesting. Naomi is going to move back home, and she says to each of her Moabite daughters, she says, "Go, return, each of you to your mother's house. May Yahweh do khesed with you as you've shown khesed to me. You've been good daughters in law. You've been loyal. So may the Lord do loyalty to you. You can go."

So Orpah goes back home but Ruth refuses. This is the famous scene. You got to read Ruth's words. Ruth said, "Don't urge me to leave you or turn back from following you. Where you go, I go, where you live, I live, your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die and there I will be buried. May Yahweh do to me and even worse, if anything, but death separates you and me." Oh, come on. That's like Shakespeare right there. 00:33:00

Carissa Yeah, it's amazing especially because in that ancient context, Naomi has nothing to give her. And it really makes those words just when you read them, "Where you die, I will die," it's almost like, "Well, yeah, you're probably going to die." Like two women traveling from Moab to Jerusalem on your own, you have nothing. These are really amazing words.

Tim	Yeah, totally. So when later on in the story, they go back and settle in Bethlehem. And when people hear about this promise that Ruth made, people like Boaz, an important person in the story, he calls this an act of khesed that Ruth did towards Naomi. So this fills out the portrait a little more. It is similar to the previous example, in that there's no expectation of return. It's a family bond or a covenant family bond, but she increases it. I mean, that she's almost swearing an oath. This sounds like vows.	00:34:00
Jon	You've used the word "covenant" a number of times around this word. It does feel like it's bound up in that oath-taking and commitment relationally.	
Tim	Yeah, totally. This is what Ruth does, and this is her act of khesed. There's many other examples. So after David kills Goliath but he's not yet the king of Israel, King Saul is still around. But Saul comes to hate David and tries to murder him. But problem: Saul's son, Jonathan becomes David's best friend. They're best friends and they make a covenant together. So I have that here.	00:35:00
	In 1 Samuel 20, Jonathan says to David: "May Yahweh be with you just like he was with my father. And if I am still alive, will you please show me khesed so that I may not die? Because my dad wants to kill you and he knows we're best friends, he might want to kill me. Show me khesed." Jonathan continues. "Don't cut off your khesed from my house. Not even when Yahweh cuts off all the enemies of David from the face of the land." So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David. So this is the ruling king's son says my dad's going to somehow be torn down from being king, and Yahweh's going to raise you up." It's actually a pretty smart move. They're best friends, but it's also a pretty savvy political move.	00:36:00
	So they make this promise to each other. And you read on in the story. Jonathan dies in battle. Sad. David cries, sings a lament. But then it's not till years and years later when David becomes king there's the story in 2 Samuel 9, where he asks someone in his court one day, "Is there anyone left among the descendants of Saul that I can show khesed to? Because Jonathan and I made that covenant?" And he learns, well, yes, actually, there is one descendant, a grandson of Saul, your enemy who's alive. His name is Mephibosheth.	
Carissa	Good name. Keep that one for future children.	00:37:00
Tim	Yeah, totally. Totally. Good boy name. Mephibosheth. So what he does is he adopts this grandson of his enemy. The son of his dead friend. He adopts him into his home, into his family. He basically says, "You can eat at my table for the rest of your life." His legs are injured. He can't walk. He's crippled. So he adopts this young boy into his family and cares for him for the rest of his life. Khesed.	
Jon	That's khesed.	
Carissa	That is really amazing. That it's his enemy's grandson and it's the rival king or the previous king's grandson that...	

Tim Yes, that's right.

Carissa ...somehow this previous king is still going to have a person that could potentially be David's rival in the future. Really amazing.

Tim Yeah. Yeah, that's good. Thank you for bringing that out. In a hereditary monarchy culture, this represents somebody who's rival. So there you go. There's many more stories. But you get the picture even just from these handful of examples. Loyalty, commitment, generosity, and love all kind of in one... 00:38:00

Jon And there's a theme of sacrifice, too. It's like a joyous sacrifice of like, I want to make this sacrifice.

Tim It's motivated by generous love. When you're doing something out of familial loyalty, there's a duty, there's an obligation. Like Joseph to his father, to bury him.

Jon Sure.

Tim The fact that something is done out of loyalty doesn't necessarily mean that you're doing it out of goodwill. But kheshed in these contexts is used to describe that abundance of goodwill and affection in addition to the behavior. 00:39:00

Carissa And it occurs often between friends and family or other kinds of committed relationships or making promises like with Rahab and spies.

Tim There's a handful where it's people who recently met. But usually what's surprising is because they're asking...Like Joseph asked the cupbearer that he meets in prison, Pharaoh's wine server, and he says, "Hey, I interpreted your dream for you. When you go back to Pharaoh's court, show me kheshed by remembering me, and getting me out of prison." So he calls it an act of kheshed. Even though he just met the guy, he's asking him to treat him like family. "Treat me like you would somebody you are in a covenant partnership with or family member."

We just looked at a few. You get the idea. Remember that number. This word occurs almost 250 times. Only one out of four does it describe people doing this. Three out of four times... 00:40:00

Jon 75%?

Tim Of 250?

Jon Oh.

Tim It's a lot.

Jon It would be 70?

Carissa Over 150?

Tim It would be describing God's kheshed. So what's cool is you can go through narratives and do the same thing, profile God's kheshed

with actual narratives about God doing it. I found this really enriching to kind of go through some stories. So, shall we?

Carissa Yeah.

Section Break

00:41:15

Tim There's a story in Genesis 24 where Abraham is old and about to die. Actually, he tells his head servant to make a promise by putting your hand under my thigh, he says to him. So essentially what Abraham says is, "Hey, my son, Isaac, he's not married, and God made a promise about blessing the nations through my descendants. So let's find a partner, find a wife."

So he sends one of his head servants back to the family that Abraham left behind. The servant doesn't have a name. She's called the servant in this chapter. In the history of Jewish interpretation, they named this figure Eliezer because that's the servant that Abraham names in Genesis 15. Eliezer. So the servant goes hundreds of miles back to where Abraham came from. And he prays. He goes to a well. He went to a well at the time when the young women came out to draw water.

00:42:00

Carissa Good place to meet a wife.

Tim Totally.

Jon It was like the singles club.

Carissa Yeah, totally.

Tim Apparently. We're told that he prays, and he says, "O Lord, God of my master Abraham, grant me success today and show khesed to Abraham. Here I am standing by the spring, there's young women coming out to draw water, may it be..." He basically sets up this elaborate sign. "I'm going to say this to one of these women, and if she answers me this, I'll know that she's the one."

So he calls this God's khesed to Abraham. So that what appears to be a chance meeting turns out to be an act of God's providence.

00:43:00

And he calls this khesed. So it's khesed because why? The story doesn't tell you. It's the context of God made a promise to Abraham. And this wife, this young woman he's going to meet will be the fulfillment of that promise. And that's what makes it khesed.

Abraham's grandson is a treacherous liar. His name is snatcher. Heel snatcher—Jacob. And God repeats that promise that He made to Abraham to Jacob. Jacob actually makes the same journey that the servant did in Genesis 24. But not because to fulfill a promise, but because he cheated his family.

Jon Escape plan.

Tim Yeah, escape plan. He comes back into the land 20 years after being exiled because of a stupid decision. What he says to God as he crosses the Jordan River is he says, "I'm unworthy of all the khesed and all

00:44:00

the faithfulness.” Again, notice. You know what I didn’t do? I didn’t count the number of times loyal love and faithfulness appear.

Carissa Yeah, it does a lot though. Even in that previous story with Abraham, faithfulness is used in two of those verses, too.

Tim That’s right. A very close synonym.

Carissa Yeah.

Tim Yeah, that’s right. This example is interesting, because, you know, in the story of David and Jonathan, Jonathan was kind to David and helped him. So David shows *khesed* to his son. Here’s an example of God showing *khesed* to somebody who clearly doesn’t deserve it. This guy doesn’t deserve...

Jon A second chance.

Tim ...loyal love. He didn’t show loyal love to his family, his father, or his brother, but God has shown *khesed* to him. What is it that motivates genuine *khesed*?

Jon My thought here is it’s only *khesed* when you desire, when there’s some pathos behind it. But if someone doesn’t deserve it, you’re probably not energized by pathos.

00:45:00

Tim That’s interesting. You’re just doing it because it’s the right thing to do.

Jon But it’s still called *khesed*.

Carissa So it’s not purely obligation or duty. But it’s...

Jon What keeps it from being pure obligation or duty at this point for God? It is described as *khesed*.

Tim If somebody doesn’t deserve it but you show it anyway, it’s called *khesed* here. You could say that Jacob presents a unique problem for God because Abraham was stupid but he ultimately passed the test. He showed himself faithful with Abraham and Isaac’s story.

Carissa And he had some promising qualities even in the beginning, following God’s promise to the new land.

Tim Yeah, that’s right. So Jacob has shown himself to be pretty unworthy of this whole promise deal. So it creates this unique dynamic or a conflict of interest, you could say. Should God be fair with Jacob, and give him what he deserves? But then that would mean violating God’s promise to this family. And God doesn’t violate His promises, as you discover about this God. So God gives generously to a guy who doesn’t deserve it. And that is a part of the profile. *Khesed*.

00:46:00

Jon That begs a question, though, why didn’t he say, “I’m unworthy of your generosity and faithfulness?” I imagine is a good word for that. Or *khesed* seems to have emotion involved of love, of pathos.

Tim Yeah. But it refers primarily to the concrete expression. So what he says is, “I crossed the Jordan River with only a staff

in my hand and now I've become two huge camps of people and animals and kids and stuff." He calls that khesed.

Jon Okay.

Tim So he's not just primarily referring to you have warm fuzzies for me. What he's saying is, "I had nothing, and now I have a lot. And the only thing I can attribute it to is that you made this promise to my grandfather and my father and you're giving it to me. 00:47:00

Jon But what makes khesed here more than just generosity then?

Carissa Commitment to the promise.

Jon Commitment to the promise and generosity. Where does love fit in, then?

Tim Well, that is love.

Jon I guess what I'm saying is you can decide to be generous to someone because of an oath but despise the person.

Tim Yeah, right. Totally. Yeah, that's right.

Jon I don't think you would use the word khesed there. Right?

Carissa Maybe within a commitment...I don't know. If you make a commitment to somebody and momentarily despise them for something, you can still choose to exercise love or I'm going to choose to love this person regardless.

Tim We've probably all had moments where there's somebody that in a moment you find it difficult to find any affection for them, but you still do right by them. And then maybe your actions kind of pave the way for that affection to follow. Sometimes a lot later. I don't know. Interesting. Again, what we're trying to do is take our experiences and map them on to what we think God's experience working with Jacob might be. 00:48:00

Carissa Your question John has kind of about whether khesed always involves this desire or emotional...?

Tim Yeah, affection.

Jon Yeah. This Venn diagram was created in my mind, where it was like you need to have love, you need to have generosity, and you got to have loyalty. And then when you got those three things, you've got khesed. You take one of those out, it's no longer khesed.

Tim I see

Jon So you can love someone and be generous but just in a moment of passion, but you have no commitment. And that's not khesed. You could be committed to someone and love them... 00:49:00

Tim Never show generosity.

Jon ...and never show generosity. Would you call that khesed?

Tim I don't think so.

Jon But here, what I think we're saying is there is situations where you're not feeling any pathos, any love, but you are being loyal, and you are being generous, and it still is khesed.

Tim Yeah. I guess I should just say this is God. He says this is God. So I think as a Christian, what it means to believe about God's motivations here is that God loves Jacob. That he also loves him. Because I believe God loves me and I'm not sure I'm...

Jon I see what you mean. Even if He's not pleased with his decisions in the past few decades, He still loves him.

Tim No. In fact, everything Jacob did to his family, God providentially brings back on Jacob's head. He deceives his father and brother and so his uncle deceived him. So Jacob sits for 20 years in the mess of his choices and God allows that. But God doesn't leave him in that. And when he comes back to his family and land with two camps of animals and people, he says, "You've shown me khesed even though I'm unworthy." That's the story. 00:50:00

Jon Cool.

Section Break 00:51:11

Tim In the Exodus story, when God trump's on Pharaoh, destroying him in the waters, the song that Miriam and Moses sing, they call it an act of God's khesed to lead the people that you've redeemed out of Egypt. It's all called an act of khesed. It kind of make sense intuitively in that it's fulfilling God's promise to Abraham. But here the way that the khesed was demonstrated was on bringing a severe justice on the tyrant.

Jon But it seems like the focus isn't on the justice as much as it's on the fact that God was loyal and did something incredibly big and generous for them. That seems to me like khesed.

Tim Yeah. Although it took a couple of centuries. That exodus story begins by just fast-forwarding for generations and suffering. They cry out to God and wondering if God's ever going to do anything.

Carissa I also remember seeing the ideas of compassion really strongly here in this narrative. That the people are crying out, and God is compelled by their cries to rescue them. So maybe there's also some overlap with khesed and compassion and deliverance. Because compassion was really connected to deliverance and forgiveness too.

Tim Oh, I see. Correct. That's right. Like they bundle together. God showing compassion and forgiving and rescuing is about focusing on the emotion God feels when He sees people suffering and He wants to help them. Here, it's about the loyalty to His promise.

Carissa Right. But there are still elements and khesed here of forgiveness and deliverance. Well, deliverance here. 00:53:00

Tim You're saying in the exodus story?

Carissa Yeah, that it involves rescue.

Tim And the bringing down of oppressive rulers. That's a fulfillment of God. Actually, this sets an important design pattern that the prophets will bring up a lot. When God brings down the mighty from their thrones, it's bad news for Babylon or Assyria or the leaders of Judah but it's good news for the poor and the oppressed. And they experience it as an act of God's *khesed* when citadels fall.

Carissa So does God's *has said* have to do with or does it exist more often between God and the marginalized throughout Scripture or the oppressed?

Tim Oh, yes, for sure. But that's true of the whole Hebrew Bible. Because the whole Hebrew Bible was written by a minority oppressed group.

Carissa So God's promises, His faithfulness, His compassion, His *khesed*, they're all extended toward the oppressed and the marginalized?

Tim That's a great way of articulating that. Let's look at one more. So we've seen Abraham, Jacob, the Exodus, these are all about God's fulfilling His ongoing covenant promises. In the wilderness stories, the story of the spies, Moses and Joshua, they send the spies into Canaan. Ten come back and say, "The giants are going to kill us." So the people are like, "No way. Let's go back to Egypt." It's what they say. Actually, they threaten to kill Moses and appoint a new leader to take them back to Egypt. That's how bad it gets. So Moses steps up, God's angry, and what He says in Numbers 14: How long will these people show contempt for me? How long will they not trust in me despite everything I've done? I'm going to strike them with plagues. The thing I did to Egypt I'm just going to do it to them. And Moses, I'm going to make you into a nation even greater than they are." And if you've been reading the Torah, you're like, "I've been here before."

Carissa "It sounds familiar."

Tim The golden calf part two. We've actually talked about the story I think in this series.

Carissa Right.

Tim So Moses speaks up, he uses the same tactics as he did with golden calf. "The Egyptians will hear about it; it won't reflect well on your reputation." Here's what's interesting. This is Numbers 14:17. Moses says, "Please, let the power of Yahweh be great. Listen, you declared, quote, 'Yahweh is slow to anger, great in *khesed*, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, but he will by no means declare innocent, the guilty visiting the iniquities of the fathers on the children and the children.' So please pardon the iniquity of this people according to your great *khesed* just as you have already...You forgave them once, so keep doing it." The logic of this is so interesting. Forgive them because of your *khesed*. That's the logic.

Carissa Yeah, it's almost he says, "Forgive them because of your khesed. I know you said you won't clear the guilty. So would you forgive these people according to your khesed?" 00:56:00

Tim Oh, that's good. Good job. Great. He's highlighting the fact that you have these two traits. You won't declare innocent the guilty, but you also never give up on your promises. Is that's what you're saying?

Carissa Yeah.

Tim He's noting the tension.

Carissa Because it's interesting he just brings up this line. You will visit the...

Jon You think he'd skip that line.

Carissa Yeah. Maybe support the argument a little better.

Tim That's a really good point. He notes that there's a tension between Exodus 34:6-7.

Jon Yeah, right.

Tim He says, "I know this. But if you go back on your promise, you won't be showing khesed." And that's not the kind of God that you are. You show khesed." Now, as the story goes on, God will let this generation die in the wilderness and bring their children into the promised land. God hasn't violated His khesed custody by doing that because he stays faithful to the family. But to just walk away from the family of Abraham is such that would be to violate khesed. So all we've looked at are stories in the Torah about God. It's truly instruction. Torah. It's God's character. 00:57:00

So notice, it's multi-generational. God's promise over the course of a whole history of a family, it's not based on the worthiness of any given generation. In fact, sometimes it seems excessive. It puts God in awkward situations where He asked to be more generous than people would deserve. But this long, enduring commitment to generosity and love and commitment is a core character trait of God. It goes right on through the stories of David.

You can see now why it appears 127 times in the book of Psalms. Because I think to be a part of this family in the story, in some later generation with all...you know, the Hebrew Bible doesn't spare any punches in terms of showing the flaws of our ancestors. 00:58:00

Carissa Representing humanity and what humans are like.

Tim Yeah. So to show so many flawed ancestors, and yet God continues to be committed to us. God khesed is...you can see why it's such a prominent trait.

Section Break 00:59:22

Tim We begin with some famous Old Testament Bible verses with khesed. Let's conclude with some famous New Testament Bible verses with this word. Now the New Testament is written in Greek.

Jon So khesed doesn't show up.

Tim Khesed doesn't show up. But the Septuagint translation made a couple of hundred years before Jesus of the Hebrew Bible into Greek use the Greek word eleos, which is a standard word for mercy. This is a good example of where they were using the Greek language...

Jon Speaking in Hebrew.

Tim They still clearly have the Hebrew concept. Here's a great example. The song that Mary sings when she finds out she's going to give birth to the Messiah, The Magnificat is its Latin name, look at how she uses the word mercy. I'm going to use the English word mercy and you're going to see it doesn't make a lot of sense.

Jon Okay. Mercy being the English word of when you - what?

Tim Mercy. It's usually when you extend or overextend yourself to show kindness or pity to someone in need. Am I right there?

Carissa Yeah. Or you extend mercy instead of maybe...

Tim Oh, show me mercy

Carissa Instead of punishment or what somebody deserves. I mean, that's a common more modern understanding. I don't know if that's biblical understanding.

Tim Merciless.

Jon Merciless means perilous and cruel.

Tim Dictionary.com says compassion or forgiveness to someone that it's within your power to punish.

Jon You have the power to bring the pain and you don't. That's mercy.

Tim Okay. All right.

Carissa So not bringing the negative. 01:01:00

Tim You'll just see this doesn't quite fit. This is what Mary says, "My soul glorifies the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God, my Savior." Down to verse 50. "His mercy extends to those who fear him from generation to generation." He could punish us from generation to generation. "He has scattered those who are proud. He's brought down rulers from their thrones. He's lifted up the humble. He fills the hungry with good things but sends the rich away empty. He's helped a servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever just like He promised." I guess you still could retain that standard meaning of merciful.

Carissa Or it's one aspect of khesed but not the full aspect.

Tim Yeah, that's right. Because the two ways she uses the word here, she's emphasizing "from generation to generation to fulfill the promise you made to our ancestors." 01:02:00

Jon You can kind of see how khesed works really well in the place here.

Tim It's exactly the meaning of khesed. Over the whole history of our family, you keep doing surprising things to fulfill your promises to us.

Carissa So does that mean when we see mercy in the New Testament we should run through that question of whether this is the idea of khesed?

Tim Here's an example. I actually tried to do just that. This would be a good way to conclude our conversation. Famous paragraph in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. In chapter 2, he begins by saying, "You all were dead in your transgressions and sins and you used to live under the principalities and powers" and so on. Verse 4. "But because of his great love, His agape, God who is rich in mercy..." There's that Greek word eleos. Again, the Septuagint translates khesed. "...he made us alive with the Messiah even though we were dead in our transgressions. It is by grace that you have been saved." So he named three attributes of God. 01:03:00

Jon Love, mercy, and grace.

Tim Love, mercy, and grace. So because of His love, God felt affection for dying people. It's by grace that you've been saved. It goes on to say, "Not of works." So it's a gift. It's not something you earned. It's a gift given to you. Then in the middle of love and grace is mercy.

Jon I think what's interesting is mercy works really well because mercy...it can be a form of khesed very easily. Right?

Tim Yeah. To forgive someone.

Jon Yeah, because it's forgiving. It's not bringing the consequence on to someone that they might deserve. And why would you do that? Well, a very good reason would be your khesed. But is the reason why mercy was used in the Septuagint, or eleos or whatever the word is here? Because there just isn't a good Greek word? 01:04:00

Tim Yeah, that's a good question. That's my hunch because that's been true in the English tradition as well. So what they did was use a word and then over time, somebody immersed in the Greek Bible...

Jon They just realized that word really means khesed.

Tim Yeah, that's right. Because to forgive someone is one way to show khesed. But by burying your father is another way to show. Or taking care of your mother in law is another way.

Jon Now the context here in Ephesians 2 is about how there's consequences to our disobedience. We're dead.

Carissa So mercy really works.

Jon So mercy could fit really.

Tim Yeah, that's right.

Jon But then you could also see how with mercy is just one aspect of khesed. And it's rich. It's a rich mercy. And khesed is so much richer than just mercy.

Tim Yeah, that's right. Yeah, totally. There you go. So loyal love. It's the best I can do right now. I think it's pretty good. 01:05:00

Carissa It's good.

Tim It gets you there.

Jon I like it.

Tim I like it too. This is core. This is a unique part of the biblical portrait of God. That across generations He remains faithful to His promises and keeps fulfilling them and surprising in generous ways. That's core to the biblical portrait of God. The word is also often paired with faithfulness. So let's look at that.

Carissa Faithfulness.

Jon Thanks for listening to this episode of BibleProject podcast. We're almost done with this series. We've got one more episode with one more characteristic of God to discuss. And that is God's faithfulness.

Carissa So "emet" means trust, trustworthy, faith, belief. So it encompasses all of those ideas. In this verse, it was translated as faithfulness but it's kind of rooted around this idea of trust or trustworthiness. This is really important word for the Christian faith. If we think about what it means to trust and God that's usually how we define what it means to be a Christian. 01:06:00

Jon If you'd like to submit a question for upcoming question and response episode, our deadline is coming up. It's 10 a.m. Pacific on November 9th. Record yourself asking the question. Try to keep it around 20 or 30 seconds and email it to us at info@bibleproject.com. It really helps if you also give us a transcription of your questions so that we can sort them quickly and easily. Don't forget to tell us your name and where you're from.

Today's show was produced by Dan Gummel, our show notes are from Lindsey Ponder, and our theme music is from the band Tents. Bible project is a crowdfunded nonprofit organization. We're in Portland, Oregon, and we exist to make free resources so that we can all experience the Bible as a unified story that leads to Jesus. Everything we do is free because of the generosity of many people all around the world. Thank you for being a part of this with us. 01:07:00