



Sunday, April 26, 2026

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Hosea Excursus

The Meaning and Significance of *Hesed*

The word *hesed* (חֶסֶד) encompasses three primary aspects: love, loyalty, and mercy. *Hesed* is based on a relationship where parties possess affection for one another. Because of this affection, the parties are devoted to one another and choose to be loyal in the face of hardship—sometimes even making a covenant. The loyalty of one party creates the expectation of loyalty from the other party (mutuality). The merciful aspect of *hesed* is based upon feelings of compassion for another. When one party has been unfaithful, loyalty and compassion spur continued faithfulness. Hosea (God) exemplified *hesed* to Gomer (Israel) by faithfully redeeming her. Hosea's (God's) *hesed* cultivates gratitude and love which motivates obedience. The Old Testament believer, sometimes called a "loyal one"—*hasid* (חַסִּיד), was motivated to obey God's law by meditating on God's *hesed*. Similarly, the New Testament believer cultivates affection for the Lord by meditating upon His grace/mercy. Genuine faith obeys God's law out of desire more than demand.

***Hesed* in the New Testament**

Jesus demands *hesed*:

Jesus quotes Hosea 6:6 in Matthew 9:13; 12:7 encouraging his disciples to possess *hesed* for Him alone. They should take up His yoke (Matt 11:29–30) and refuse to dance to the Pharisees hypocrisy (Matt 11:16–17).

Are you loyal to Jesus?

***Hesed* as a motivation for Christian living** (Rom 11:29—12:1)

^{ESV} Rom. 12:1 — I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

How has the Lord evidenced *hesed* toward you?

***Hesed* as love** (NIV, HCSB, Message)

"In the twenty-first century, 'love' is a word that means virtually nothing anymore. We use it of everything, so that it refers to nothing. . . . It used to be the case that we 'liked' things (cars, movies, BBQ), and saved 'love' for those things we cherish most (family, God). Not anymore. We love everything and anything" (Barrett, *None Greater*, 220–21).

^{NIV} Psa. 136:1 — Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good.
His **love** endures forever.

^{MESSAGE} Psa. 136:1 — Thank GOD! He deserves your thanks.
His **love** never quits.

^{ESV} Hos. 12:6 — So you, by the help of your God, return,
hold fast to **love** and justice, and wait continually for your God."

Definition of love: "To love is to will the good of another" (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I–II, q. 26, a. 4).

How did God demonstrate love toward rebellious Israel?

^{ESV} Hos. 2:6 Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns,
and I will build a wall against her, so that she cannot find her paths.
⁷She shall pursue her lovers but not overtake them,
and she shall seek them but shall not find them.
Then she shall say, 'I will go and return to my first husband,
for it was better for me than now.'

How should you demonstrate love toward others?

***Hesed* as loyalty** (NET), **steadfast love** (ESV, NRSV, JPS), **faithful love** (NLT)

Bibliography:

- Clark, Gordon R. *The Word Hesed in the Hebrew Bible*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 157. Sheffield Academic Press, 1993.
- Nelson, Karen. *Hesed and the New Testament: An Intertextual Categorization Study*. Eisenbrauns, 2023.
- Routledge, Robin. "Hesed as Obligation : A Re-Examination." *Tyndale Bulletin* 46.1 (1995): 179–96. <https://doi.org/10.53751/001c.30408>.

^{NET} Psa. 136:2 — Give thanks to the God of gods,
for his **loyal love** endures.

^{ESV} Psa. 136:3 — Give thanks to the Lord of lords,
for his **steadfast love** endures forever;

Hesed is demanded of those covenantally obligated to one another. When one party acts in *hesed*, it is expected that the other party act in *hesed*. Jonathan and David's relationship exemplify a non-marital *hesed* relationship.

Covenant: ^{ESV} 1 Sam. 20:8 — "Therefore deal kindly with your servant, for you have brought your servant **into a covenant** of the LORD with you. But if there is guilt in me, kill me yourself, for why should you bring me to your father?"

Mutuality/Obligation: ^{ESV} 1 Sam. 20:14–15 — If I am still alive, show me the **steadfast love** of the LORD, that I may not die; ¹⁵and do not cut off your **steadfast love** from my house forever, when the LORD cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth."

Love: ^{ESV} 1 Sam. 20:17 — "And Jonathan made David swear again by his love for him, for he loved him as he loved his own soul."

Loyalty: ^{ESV} 2 Sam. 9:1 — "And David said, "Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him **kindness** for Jonathan's sake?"

"While 'covenant' is not a prerequisite for the demonstration of *hesed*, where a covenant exists it provides a firm . . . basis for *hesed*" (Routledge, *Hesed as Obligation*, 183).

^{ESV} Hos. 4:1 — Hear the word of the LORD, O children of Israel,
for the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land.
There is no faithfulness or **steadfast love**, and no knowledge of God in the land.

^{ESV} Hos. 6:4–6 — What shall I do with you, O Ephraim?
What shall I do with you, O Judah?

Your **love** is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away.

⁵Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets;

I have slain them by the words of my mouth,
and my judgment goes forth as the light.

⁶For I desire **steadfast love** and not sacrifice,
the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

A *hesed* life is a righteous life.

^{ESV} Hos. 10:12 — Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap **steadfast love**;
break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the LORD,
that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.

With whom are you "covenantally" obligated? How do you treat that relationship?

***Hesed* as mercy** (KJV, NKJV, LXX ἔλεος), **lovingkindness** (NASB, LSB)

Because *hesed* is closely connected to relationships, its meaning spills into love/compassion [*rahāmim* (רַחֲמִים)] and goodness/kindness [*tov* (טוֹב)].

^{NKJV} Psa. 136:1 — Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for *He* is good!
For His **mercy** (*hesed*) endures forever.

^{NKJV} Hos. 2:19 "I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me
In righteousness and justice, In **lovingkindness** (*hesed*) and mercy (*rahāmim*).

^{ESV} Hos. 2:19 — And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me
in righteousness and in justice, in **steadfast love** and in mercy.

^{ESV} **Isa. 54:7–8** — "For a brief moment I deserted you,
but with great compassion (*rahāmim*) I will gather you.
⁸In overflowing anger for a moment I hid my face from you,
but with everlasting **love** (*hesed*) I will have compassion (*rahām*) on you."

"*Rahāmim* can be seen as a motivating force that leads to the expression of
Yahweh's *hesed* (Isa 54:7–8)" (Clark, *Hesed in the Hebrew Bible*, 148).

The Book of Psalms contains over half of the uses of *hesed* (127 of its 245 uses) and nearly all of the uses *hasid* (25 of its 32 uses) reflecting the Psalter's purpose of cultivating one's affection for the Lord.

"Having struggled to find one suitable noun to render *hṣd*, those translating the Revised Standard Version of the Old Testament most often use a two-word phrase: 'steadfast love.' But alternative translations emphasize kindness, love, loyalty, faithfulness, mercy, devotion, godliness, goodness, righteousness, or favor, depending on the context and/or the words with which *hṣd* is combined" (Nelson, *Hesed and the New Testament*, 5).

Putting the pieces together

"*Hṣd* takes place within trusting interpersonal relationships, and the *hṣyd* is one party in a *hṣd* relationship" (Nelson, *Hesed and the New Testament*, 19).