

Parents, I hope you see how this applies to you. We feel this pressure to give our kids everything they want. To let our kids do whatever they want. That's not love! The Bible says, "*He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him.*" What's God saying? If you love your children, you will be upset with them when they do something wrong. It's a lot easier to be indifferent. To sigh and let them sin. But real love means not putting up with sin. It means correctly and rebuking and training in what is right. Like God does with us!

God loves us. He loves us unconditionally. And God is angry with sin. Sin is never okay. But do you see a problem? God loves us. God hates sin. But we're sinners! How can this make sense? Which will God choose? To just give in and accept the sin in our lives or to stop loving us? Neither! This only makes sense at Jesus' cross. At the cross, we see God's righteous anger over sin. Sin is serious! But as he punished sin, God showed unbelievable love. He didn't punish you. He punished Jesus. There at the cross you see God's love: Anger for sin and compassion for sinners.

Here's the greatest sign of God's love: Jesus stayed! The food is cold at the restaurant, and we complain. We go through a rough week in a relationship, and we want to run. On the cross, Jesus was suffering all the pain of hell. He had the power to make it stop. But what did he do? He stayed! If Jesus he didn't abandon you when hell itself was on him on the cross, do you think a bad week is going to make him abandon you? No way! Nothing can separate you from God's love, because he loves you just because he loves you. Nothing can change that. It's inexplicable love!

Can you see how we are the last people on the face of the earth to have the right to complain against God? Do you know what the solution to discontentment is? Gratitude. What we need isn't more stuff. It's to realize what we have been given. Gratitude changes your life. It allows you to see God's blessings everywhere. God's inexplicable love for us isn't limited to the forgiveness of sins. It's your dishwasher. It's your car. It's a cell phone. We're surrounded by God's inexplicable love. God has saved you, completely by grace. But he certainly hasn't stopped there. He has blessed you with everything that you need, completely by grace.

Nothing in your life is because of you—your strength or your effort. Everything in life is a result of God's grace. If you had been born in the middle of Afghanistan, it wouldn't matter how hard you work. You would still be poor. If you had been born in the middle of Iran, it wouldn't matter how smart you are, you wouldn't know the truth about Jesus. For some reason that I cannot explain—it's inexplicable—God let us be born here. He let us have what we have. And he allows us to believe in Jesus. May your life be filled with gratitude for God's inexplicable grace!

Numbers 21:4-9
Pastor Nathan Nass

Fourth Sunday of Lent
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⁴They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; ⁵they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!" ⁶Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. ⁷The people came to Moses and said, "We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us." So Moses prayed for the people. ⁸The LORD said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." ⁹So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived.

Inexplicable Love

We got to celebrate Samuel's birthday this past Wednesday. He had lots of presents to open—from mom and dad and grandmas and uncles and cousins. I sat there thinking, "We are so blessed! There are too many!" After he opened them all, we said, "Samuel, what do you say?" hoping for a "Thank you!" Instead, he said, "More presents." "No Samuel, that's it. That's all the presents. What do you say?" "More presents?" How young we train ourselves to never be content! It's part of our human nature from birth. Think of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden—all the trees in the garden, but they wanted one more! It's like this is the theme of life, "More presents?"

We see a perfect example of that today. The Israelites were on their way to the Promised Land, but it was taking way too long. God's plans were too slow. So, "*the people grew impatient on the way; they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!'*" To a certain extent, we could understand. They had walked for 40 years in the desert. It was hot! Think of how you feel on that scorching day when your air conditioner goes out. They ate the same food every single day. Who could put up with that? "*We detest this miserable food!*"

Except, here's the reality: The Israelites should have been the last people on the face of the earth to complain against God. Just think of what God had done for them. He used the 10 plagues to rescue them from slavery in Egypt. He split the Red Sea and let them cross on dry ground. He personally gave them the 10 Commandments. He made water come out of rocks. He gave them food every day—manna and quail in middle of the desert. When you really understand who you are and what God has done, you can't complain! But what did they say? "God, what have you done for us lately?" As in, "I haven't seen your

love in the last five minutes, what's the deal?"

This spirit of discontentment clouded their minds and lives. It blinded them to God's blessings. Isn't that what we see today? A spirit of discontentment drives our world. It's the driving force behind politics. It's the driving force behind social change. Just think of the transgender movement. "I don't want to be a boy!" "I don't want to be a girl!" What about you? What's your discontentment lately? Discontent with our jobs. Discontent with our cars. Discontent with our looks. Discontent with the weather. "It's been 40 and not 45 like it's supposed to be, how can we survive!" We always feel we have a right to complain.

So what does God think? "*Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died.*" Is complaining against God a big deal? Yes! You see in the Israelites this familiar progression. It starts with impatience. Impatience quickly turns into discontentment. Discontentment is really a direct attack on God and his grace. "God, you haven't done enough! God, you aren't good enough!" That's a big deal! My impatience and discontentment with God show how sinful my heart really is.

In the middle of their complaints, the Israelites asked a very ironic question: "*Why have you brought us up out of Egypt?*" Forgetting all of God's blessings, they asked, "God, why did you bring us here?" It's ironic, because God had every right to ask the same thing. Can you see God saying, "Good question! Why did I bring you up out of Egypt?" The Israelites had no redeeming qualities. They caused endless problems for God. Why had he chosen them? It didn't make any sense! There's a word for that: Grace. Grace is God's inexplicable love.

What's amazing is that the Israelites actually got it. Venomous snakes can help you think clearly! They realized that they were wrong and that there was only one thing to do. The Israelites give us a beautiful example of repentance. They said to Moses, "*We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us.*" "*We sinned,*" they said. No excuses! They turned to God—not to themselves. They changed their tone—they stopped their sin. They threw themselves onto God's undeserved grace. The snakes had served their purpose.

So what did God do? He saved them. "*The LORD said to Moses, 'Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.'*" Doesn't that sound kind of foolish? Too easy? "Look at the snake on the pole, and we'll be saved? That's it?" Yes! Here's why: God wanted his people to know that they were saved by faith in his grace. "Just trust me! Trust me enough to believe me, and you'll be saved!" Sound familiar? A snake on a pole is just as foolish as a man dying on a cross. Because "*it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, ... not by works, so that no one can boast*" (Ephesians 2:8-9). We're saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus.

But what if someone doesn't want to believe that? I mean, "I've got a right to believe whatever I want, right? You don't mean that Jesus is the only way to heaven, do you?"

Do you know what people's greatest discontentment is today? Discontent with God's plan salvation. "I want to do it my own way! Is God really opposed to that?" Let's think this through. It's true that the Israelites didn't have to look at that bronze snake, but if someone refused to look, what happened? It's simple: They died. If someone refuses to believe in Jesus, what happens? Let Jesus himself tell you. We know John 3:16. Here's John 3:18 – "*Whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.*" There's only one way to be saved, and it's God's way by God's love in Jesus.

But here's a question we don't ask enough. Why does God love us? That's harder to answer than you think! Picture this in a marriage. A wife goes to her husband and asks, "Do you love me?" "Yes, I love you!" "Why do you love me?" What's the answer? Wrong answer #1 is to hesitate! Wrong answer #2 is to say, "Because you're beautiful. Because you're smart. Because of your apple pie." Here's why that's the wrong answer: That women's identity immediately becomes tied to that one factor. "I've got to be pretty. I've got to be smart. I've got to make apple pie." No, that's not good! Here's the answer: "I love you because I love you." I can't explain it. Pretty or not. Good cook or not. I love you because I love you. Understand? Real love is inexplicable.

Just like God's love: "*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*" (John 3:16). Why did God so love the world? Well, God loves you because he sent his Son to save you. Why did God send his Son? He sent his Son because he loves you. That's circular reasoning, right? But it's true! You can't explain it. It's grace. The love of God doesn't depend on how good you are or how smart you are or how faithful you are. God loves you because he loves you. Grace is inexplicable love.

But if God loves us like that, why does he get angry—like he did with the Israelites? We're told that anger is the opposite of love. If you love someone, you won't get angry, right? You'll accept everything about them without ever getting upset at them. That's wrong! The opposite of love isn't anger. The opposite of love is indifference. If you really love someone, there will be anger at whatever harms your relationship. Think of a marriage again. If a man's wife is unfaithful, how should he feel? Angry. Why? Because he loves her! If he doesn't get angry, if he's just indifferent, what does that mean? He doesn't love his wife! The opposite of love isn't anger. It's indifference.

This is important to understand. When we sin, what do we want? We want God not to care. We want him to look the other way. We want God to let us do whatever we want to do. Except, if someone lets you do whatever you want, what does that mean? They don't love you! Is that the God you want? The Israelites complained, and God said, "I love you too much to let you do that!" "I love you too much to stand back and not care as you destroy your life." God gets angry when we sin. God gets angry at whatever harms our relationship with him. Because he loves us!