

Revealing God's character

Isaiah 40:25-28ESV

To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of his might and because he is strong in power, not one is missing. Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God"? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. (ESV)

Ezekiel 18:25-29

25 "Yet you say, 'The Lord isn't doing what's right!' Listen to me, O people of Israel. Am I the one not doing what's right, or is it you? **26** When righteous people turn from their righteous behavior and start doing sinful things, they will die for it. Yes, they will die because of their sinful deeds. **27** And if wicked people turn from their wickedness, obey the law, and do what is just and right, they will save their lives. **28** They will live because they thought it over and decided to turn from their sins. Such people will not die. **29** And yet the people of Israel keep saying, 'The Lord isn't doing what's right!' O people of Israel, it is you who are not doing what's right, not I.

Romans 5:8

8 But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.

John 3:16

16 "For this is how God loved the world: He gave^[a] his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

Introduction:

Have you ever noticed how people today try to change who God is?

This summer, I've been writing a youth Bible study series on trusting God. We will look at the lives of the big guys—Noah, Joseph, Moses, Gideon, Daniel, and a few more I haven't gotten to yet. Through this process, I've obviously learned a lot about how we can trust God in our daily lives. But more than that, I've been learning about **God's character**—who He truly is.

And the most important thing about His character is that **it never changes**.

Today, we're diving into the book of Ezekiel, where we see that **God calls His people to obey Him, and He takes sin seriously - all of which he still expects of us today**. So, if God hasn't changed— then today's problem is that people have tried to **reshape Him** into something softer, more convenient, and less demanding.

As I've been studying Ezekiel, I've felt convicted about these truths, and I want to expand on those convictions with you today.

We say all the time, *"God is the same yesterday, today, and forever"* (Hebrews 13:8). But do we really grasp the significance of this truth in our daily lives? Do we act as if God is truly unchanging? Do we really believe that the God of the Old Testament, who flooded the earth, who dispersed the people at Babel, who performed the Passover, who sent his people to exile and judged them continuously for their rebellion, is the same God we worship today? Not to mention stories like Sodom and Gomorrah or what he was going to do to Nineveh. Or do we sometimes view Him as being a bit different—perhaps softer, more tolerant than the God we read about in the Old Testament?

I want to take a few moments today to challenge us to rethink that, because what I've learned through this study is that God's character has never changed. And that reality should drastically impact the way we trust Him and live out our faith today.

1. The Israelites: A Cycle of Rebellion

As I've studied the Old Testament, one group of people has been constantly on my mind: the Israelites. God's people went through a heartbreaking and frustrating cycle throughout their history.

- **They started off trusting God.**
- **Then they compromised their faith and gave into sin.**
- **God sent discipline and judgment.**
- **They repented and turned back to God.**
- **God forgave them.**
- **And the cycle began again.**

It's easy for us to look back at these stories and think, *How could they not see it? Were they not eyewitnesses to the plagues, the parting of the sea, and food literally raining down from the sky? Not to mention constant deliverance from their enemies that they literally walked away from God to be a part of.* After all God had done for them, how could they continually forget His goodness and fall into the same sin? And yet, when I look at my own life—and our world today—I realize we're not so different.

We may not be worshiping golden calves or sacrificing to foreign gods, but we still compromise our faith in subtle ways. We've all been guilty of choosing convenience over righteousness, culture over conviction. God's people struggled with this in every generation, and we struggle with it too.

Something that is still true because our God is unchanging, however, is that his mercies are new every morning! That's an Old Testament reference that proves itself still in the New Testament in Romans, "there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ"! Be encouraged by this throughout our lesson! He is unchanging in standards, but also in mercy.

God's frustration with His people is evident in books like Ezekiel, where He repeatedly warns Israel about their sin. In **Ezekiel 18:25-29**, God tells the people, *"When righteous people turn from their righteous behavior and start doing sinful things, they will die for it. Yes, they will die because of their sinful deeds. 27 And if wicked people turn from their wickedness, obey the law, and do what is just and right, they will save their lives. . . You say that the way of the Lord is not fair, but it is your ways that are not fair."* God had been patient with them, but their rebellion continued, and they began to question His justice. How often do we do the same? When life doesn't go our way, do we question God's fairness?

God's frustration here is palpable. We act exactly like the Israelites—ignoring God's commands, doing what seems right in our own eyes, and then wondering why we face consequences? In chapter

24 of Ezekiel we see an illustration that basically says that they don't deserve to mourn their consequences because they did it to themselves when they had deliberate instructions from God not to do all the evil that they did. *But here's the incredible truth: Even in judgment, God's heart was for restoration (even though it takes him 30 or so chapters to calm down and even mention restoration - which was about 7 years). His discipline wasn't to destroy them—it was to bring them back to Him. And that same grace is available to us today - remember he is unchanging.*

I want to read a passage for you so you can hear God's loving frustration - it's almost like a parent who has watched their child continue to make mistakes, yet the parent is so patient and does not discipline them with anger and fury like he wants to, but does so with mercy:

(Read Ezekiel 20: [God revealed himself to Israel as their God and promised deliverance] 7-26 and 43-44)

This cycle is part of the human condition. And God's frustration, I believe, comes from seeing us repeat the same mistakes.

2. A Culture of Compromise

One of the biggest struggles for Israel was their desire to be like the nations around them. God told them, *"Do not follow the ways of the people of the land. Do not worship their gods."* But time and time again, they failed to listen. They compromised their beliefs to fit in with the world.

Fast forward to today, and we see the same struggle in our own lives. The world around us is redefining morality, truth, and righteousness. The culture of tolerance and acceptance has become so ingrained in our society that many Christians feel the pressure to compromise or redefine what God has already made clear in His Word.

The temptation to blend in with those around us is always there, and it can be subtle. Think about how often we justify our actions by saying, *"It's not that bad"* or *"I don't think God cares about this."* We minimize sin because it's easier than taking a hard stance.

It's easy to look at what other people are doing, to see others compromising, and think, *Well, it's not that bad.* But let's be honest—how many times have we heard that voice in our heads, trying to

convince us to do things that aren't honoring to God? And how often do we ignore the conviction of the Holy Spirit (another little voice in your head), and we choose comfort instead of holiness?

I'll be transparent with you and confess 2 things – because we've all been there. I used to love watching horror movies and thrillers. It was something I shared with my dad growing up, and I really enjoyed it. But as I grew in my relationship with Christ, I started to feel convicted. Is this really what I should be filling my mind with? Philippians 4:8 was always popping into my head. I would be watching some of my favorite horror movies and suddenly feel the need to look away or turn it off, but of course I ignored all of that - or rather I was ignoring the Holy Spirit. I had to wrestle with this conviction for a while. And then one day, while teaching a class of high school students, I said, *"If you're a Christian and you start to feel convicted about something, that's the Holy Spirit trying to keep you on the right path. Listen to Him."* But as soon as I said it, I realized I hadn't been listening to that conviction in my own life - about many things.

I don't know if watching certain things is a sin but I know that we are called to set our minds and hearts only on things that are holy, pure, lovely, etc. Another example from my own life that sticks with me still is this: when I was in highschool I invited my friend out to youth group here - it took a lot of courage actually, I'm usually very shy and I like to keep my youth group to myself. But her response was not a yes or no, it was, "you go to church? You're a christian?" I said yea why? And she said, "you swear so much I didn't think you went to church". That hit me hard. I did swear a lot, it was just the way I grew up. It took a very long time for me to break that habit and I am still not perfect. I went through phases of trying to speak better, and I went through phases of justification - oh swearing isn't that bad, in certain contexts it's fine and makes sense, intention is all that matters . . . etc.

These are more personal convictions of mine and some people debate whether they are sins, but maybe some of you compromise on lying or immoralities, or idols, things that are clear sins (I know idols is another one for me: when i finally have a moment to myself and i hear the Holy Spirit prompting me to pray or open my bible i deliberately choose to do what i want to do instead). I would encourage you to read Romans 14 vs Colossians 3:1-17 to help distinguish this matter for yourself.

We're called to be set apart. We're not called to blend in with the world. And when we ignore God's standards and choose to live just like everyone else, we're dishonoring His name. We're misrepresenting who He is - something that he takes very seriously as we saw in Ezekiel.

3. God's Unchanging Standards

Let's pause for a moment and think about this: *If God is unchanging, and His standards haven't changed, then what does this mean for us?*

It means that God still calls His people to holiness. He still expects us to live differently than the world. His Word is not just a book of rules—it's a guide to a full, joyful, and abundant life. He wants us to live in alignment with His will because He knows what's best for us.

Yes, God is loving and forgiving. Yes, He is patient. But He is also holy. And He calls us to be holy as He is holy (1 Peter 1:16). It's not enough to just "get by" with the bare minimum of faith. We can't treat God like a "get-out-of-jail-free card," using His grace as an excuse to sin.

God takes His name seriously, and so should we. In Ezekiel, God repeatedly tells the Israelites that their sin has slandered His name. When we claim to follow Christ but live like everyone else, we are doing the same thing. We are misrepresenting who God is to the world. So, on the contrary our lives should outwardly reflect the Gospel that we have internalized. Always be sharing the Gospel, and when necessary, use words.

I want you to think briefly about what is at stake for you: the people in the new church in Acts and all of the New Testament and people in certain countries today risk their lives to be set apart - what are we risking? Friends? Funny looks? Certainly not our lives at this point.

After all of that said: Some may object that these are Old Testament passages and they don't apply to believers today. Although there is clearly a distinction between Israel (in the Old Testament) and the Church (in the New Testament), unless Scripture itself says otherwise, we must assume that principles from the Old Testament carry over into the New. This would seem to include God's response to disobedient believers. For example, Jesus assuming the role as the New covenant over the Old is a clear change from the old to new testaments. But what we are talking about today, God's character, seems to still apply to us now.

The writer of Hebrews even warns his New Testament readers of God's discipline by way of the Old Testament example of the generation of Israelites who fell in the wilderness in the days of Moses: in Heb. 3:10,17; 4:3,13, and also **Hebrews 12:4-17 encourages believers to endure hardship as part of God's loving discipline. Just as earthly fathers discipline their children for their good, God**

disciplines His children to help them grow in holiness. Though discipline feels painful in the moment, it ultimately produces righteousness and peace.

The passage urges believers to stay strong in their faith, pursue holiness, and avoid sin. It warns against allowing bitterness or sin to take root, using Esau as an example—he traded his birthright for temporary satisfaction and later regretted it, but it was too late to undo the consequences.

The overall message is that God's discipline is an expression of His love, meant to refine us, not harm us. We should embrace it, pursue holiness, and remain steadfast in faith.

Basically saying that while we have access to God's grace and mercy we should still desire and strive to live up to God's standards.

I don't know of any New Testament principle that would prohibit God from having righteous anger toward believers when they persist in disobedience. **Now, hear me clearly, as we just said, His anger does not negate His unconditional love or our security in salvation**, but I don't see any reason why, in the New Testament or today, God would not experience righteous anger in situations when He rebukes us, just like in the Old Testament (Heb. 12:5-11). [The principle that changes is the man in Ezekiel 18 can lose his righteousness by doing evil, while we are under the New Covenant and nothing can separate us from God.](#)

Not conforming to the world as we are called in the New Testament is the same concept upheld through the whole Old Testament. Now, I am not preaching a works based faith, we know we are saved and forgiven through Jesus Christ's death as atonement for our sins. Obedience is the fruit of our salvation, not the basis of it (John 15:5, James 2:14-26). God's discipline is for sanctification, not condemnation (Romans 8:1, Hebrews 12:10-11).

4. Living Like We Trust an Unchanging God

So, what does it look like to trust a God who is unchanging? How can we live in light of the fact that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever?

- **First, we need to take His Word seriously.** God's Word is not optional. It's not just a suggestion, and it is not a pick 1 from column A and 2 from column B. It's His guide for our lives. When we pick and choose which parts of Scripture to obey, we're not truly trusting God.

- **Second, we need to listen to the conviction of the Holy Spirit.** If we're feeling convicted about something in our lives, whether it's a habit, a relationship, or a compromise, we need to take that seriously. The Holy Spirit is not trying to take fun away from us—He's trying to protect us and help us live set apart for God's glory.
 - **Third, we need to live in a way that honors God's name.** Our lives should reflect the character of God. We should look different from the world, not because we want to be better than others, but because we serve a God who is holy and worthy of our lives being set apart.
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Conclusion

Before we finish, I want to leave you with this: **God's unchanging nature should change us.**

We cannot claim to follow an unchanging God while constantly compromising with a changing world. His standards of holiness, righteousness, and obedience have not shifted, and neither has His love, mercy, and desire for us to live set apart.

Yes, God disciplines, but He does so **as a loving Father**—not to condemn, but to refine (Ezekiel 33-34). His discipline is not rejection; it's proof of our belonging. It's the mark of a Father who cares too much to leave us in sin - so when you feel convicted or like God is disciplining you, feel the love.

The Israelites' story is a warning, but it's also a mirror. Their cycle of rebellion is the same pattern we fall into today. But we don't have to stay in that cycle. God's grace through Jesus Christ has given us **everything we need to live differently**. The question is, will we? Jesus gave us the perfect model - which I will boldly say is not unattainable; not that you can be perfect but that you can rely on the Father and the Spirit in the exact ways that Jesus showed us. (**Romans 8**)

So, I challenge you:

- Where in your life are you compromising?
- What is the Holy Spirit convicting you about?
- Are you living in a way that reflects the unchanging holiness of God?

Conviction isn't about guilt-tripping—it's about God lovingly calling us to something better. If you feel the Holy Spirit nudging you about something today, that's a sign of His love at work in you!

Let's not just acknowledge that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever—**let's live like we believe it.**