

Pursuing God

In Step with the Psalms

Lesson 21: Psalm 103

One Magnificent Obsession

Stay on the Path ~

All that believers are in response to all that God is—this constitutes the essence, expression, and experience in worship as God intended it to be. Becoming occupied with God is the aim; it is body, soul, mind and spirit actively engaged in adoration of the Creator, and such is the substance of Psalm 103. One of the reasons Christians love the book of Psalms so much is that the songs artfully and majestically verbalize what we often feel inside but cannot find the words to express. Nowhere is this more visible than in Psalm 103, for within its cadences of praise and thanksgiving, we find our own deepest emotions and gratitude mirrored.

At the time this psalm was written, David had come through a perilous trial that brought him physically and emotionally to the brink of death (Psalm 102), but the Lord had intervened. David responded in Psalm 103 by using all his capacities to bless the Lord's holy name and all His benevolent benefits. David's use of the phrase, "all that is within me" actually means "all my inward parts." The result was a renewal of body, soul, mind and spirit that brought a rejuvenated experience to David's life. What this psalmist discovered at a time of great crisis and blessing discloses a power that can bring about the same renewed exuberance to our spiritual lives as well.

Did you know ~

The Hebrew poetry of Psalm 103 is replete with the use of comparisons, similes, and parallelism. Verses 3 through 5 each have statements that are first presented and then repeated or amplified by illustration for emphasis. The second statements in these verses amplify the blessings of forgiveness, redemption, and satisfaction or fulfillment. The end result of these divine blessings is that there are no petitions or supplications in this prayerful psalm—only gratitude and praise!

Psalm 103

Praise for the Lord's Mercies

A Psalm of David

1 Bless the Lord, O my soul;
And all that is within me, bless
His holy name!

2 Bless the Lord, O my soul,
And forget not all His benefits:

3 Who forgives all your iniquities,
Who heals all your diseases,

4 Who redeems your life from
destruction,
Who crowns you with lovingkindness,
and tender mercies,

5 Who satisfies your mouth with
good things,
So that your youth is renewed like
the eagle's.

6 The Lord executes righteousness
And justice for all who are oppressed.

7 He made known His ways to Moses,
His acts to the children of Israel.

8 The Lord is merciful and gracious,
Slow to anger, and abounding
in mercy.

9 He will not always strive with us,
Nor will He keep His anger forever.

10 He has not dealt with us according
to our sins,
Nor punished us according
to our iniquities.

11 For as the heavens are high above
the earth,
So great is His mercy toward those
who fear Him;

12 As far as the east is from the west,
So far has He removed our
transgressions from us.

13 As a father pities his children,
So the Lord pities those who
fear Him.

14 For He knows our frame;
He remembers that we are dust.

15 As for man, his days are like grass;
As a flower of the field, so
he flourishes.

16 For the wind passes over it, and
it is gone,
And its place remembers it no more.
17 But the mercy of the Lord is from
everlasting to everlasting
On those who fear Him,
And His righteousness to children's
children,
18 To such as keep His covenant,
And to those who remember His
commandments to do them.

19 The Lord has established His
throne in heaven,
And His kingdom rules over all.

20 Bless the Lord, you His angels,
Who excel in strength, who do
His word,
Heeding the voice of His word.
21 Bless the Lord, all you His hosts,
You ministers of His, who do
His pleasure.
22 Bless the Lord, all His works,
In all places of His dominion.

Bless the Lord, O my soul!

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Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.

Read Psalm 103.

Listen to the psalm ~ First impressions

What is the *tone* of Psalm 103? What stands out to you from your initial reading?

Put a psalm in your heart ~ (Memory verse) **Psalm 103:1–2**

(Write out the verse in the spaces below. Practice it each time you open your lesson.)

*Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name!
Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits . . .*

Learn the lessons of the psalm ~

Selah (Think about):

David had just experienced real disappointment, discouragement, depression and danger but he called upon himself to praise and bless the Lord. Even though life at times proved to be tough, God proved Himself to be faithful, and David had every reason to praise Him.

I. He is generous with His gifts. vv. 1–5

David lists six important blessings from the Lord in verses 3–5, which are also given to *you*. Look up the corresponding verses that accompany each blessing and note what you learn about it. As you do your investigating, personalize your answers by putting them in the first person.

1. *He forgives me:* Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 2:13–14; 1 John 1:7, 9

2. *He heals me:* Malachi 4:2; Isaiah 53:4–5; Luke 4:18

3. *He redeems me:* Ephesians 1:7; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 1:18–19; Psalm 107:1–2a

4. *He crowns me:* Psalm 92:2; 1 Corinthians 9:24–25; Titus 3:4–7; Hebrews 4:16

5. *He satisfies me:* Isaiah 55:1–3a; Psalm 107:8–9; Psalm 90:14; Psalm 17:15

6. *He renews me:* Psalm 51:10; Isaiah 40:31; 2 Corinthians 4:16; Ephesians 4:20–24

Pause & ponder ~

Why should believers bless God with our praises? His blessings to us are the outflow of His character. We will have all of eternity to discover the fullness of who he is and what He has done but, for now in light of Psalm 103, we bless God because our relationship with Him has resulted in benefits for which we should remember to give Him thanks.

II. He is our merciful Savior. vv. 8–12

God's love in providing His astonishing plan of salvation is indescribable and immeasurable. In the next few verses, we learn some facets of His love in His dealings with mankind.

1. What do you learn about God's justice in verse 6?

God took Moses aside (v. 7), sharing His plans and purposes with him and the people of Israel were witnesses to the outworking of them.

2. What did God reveal to the people about Himself? v. 8
3. God will not always strive with man; and when there comes the time that He must chasten His children, what does God *not* do? v.10

His mercy is steadfast and unfailing no matter what the response from His people. It is evident in the fact that He does not give us what we deserve; rather the penalty for our sin was paid by Jesus Christ on the cross! When a person trusts in Christ, there is pardon for their sin.

- a. How does the psalmist speak of God's mercy? vv. 11–12

As far as the east is from the west is speaking about infinite distance—it cannot be measured—never the two shall meet! And similarly, the believer and their sins will never meet; once they are forgiven they are also forgotten.

4. To what does the psalmist liken God? Why? vv. 13–14

We all too often forget what God always remembers—that we are frail, helpless, weak human beings. The Lord looks down in pity at our condition when we act on our own. Not only are we *dust*, but we soon return to dust. We are born to live for a brief period of time but then, like the flower of the field, we soon pass away.

5. In contrast, what does the psalmist say about the Lord's mercy? v. 17

- a. His mercy is limitless and endless; to whom does it extend? vv.17b–18

III. He deserves our universal praise. vv. 19–22

The Lord is King, His throne is in the heavens and His authority is over all—it is universal. Beginning with His holy name (v.1), God deserves our praise simply because of who He is. David lists the universal choir that collectively comprises this congregation of praise.

1. Who is first on the list and what does David say about them? v. 20

a. Who is next in line to add their harmonies and what is said regarding them? v. 21

b. Who is also mentioned to join in the crescendo? v. 22

Lastly, David enjoins his voice to this Hallelujah choir, adding his own praises to *bless the Lord, O my soul!*

Touchpoint~

Do *you* ever find yourself struggling to find words to praise the Lord? Have you perhaps lost your joy, finding it hard to go to church or even turn on the praise music in your own home to worship? Do your words more often sound like grumbling than they do gratitude? Maybe God is trying to get your attention to look at Him and rekindle your first love. Charles Spurgeon said: “We write our blessings in the sand, and we engrave our complaints in the marble.” How sad that is and yet how true!

The key to staying on course and maintaining a vibrant devotional life with God is continuing to *behold Him*: in the Word, in worship, and in the world. Look around—through the pages of Scripture, or the old hymns of faith, or God’s creation, everything sings His praises! All around you is the testimony to the majesty and beauty and goodness of God.

Rejoice in His holy name . . . recount daily His benefits . . . remember to praise Him!

Live the psalm ~

Being occupied with God comes by practicing His presence each and every day. Now that you've walked the path with Him leading the way, what has He revealed that will help you in the future? Is there a "life lesson" He has taught you this year?

Pray the psalm ~

Lord, forgive me for what is too often shallowness in my praise and worship of You. Help me to praise You in every situation of life—good or difficult. Help me to continue to stay on the path as I look to You for my every need. I want to behold You in your wonderful Word, in my worship, and in this world! Make this the prayer of your heart today and please share your thoughts.

I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth.
Psalm 34:1

