

Love and Worship God

Lesson 3: December 16, 2018

Bible Background • PSALM 103:1–17, 21–22

Printed Text • PSALM 103:1–17, 21–22 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 86:1–7

People feel anxiety and confusion when they remember their personal failures and as they continually face life's trials. What consolation is there? The psalmist lists the many reasons God's steadfast love inspires enthusiastic thanksgiving rather than dismay.

Words You Should Know

- A. Iniquity *avon* (Heb.)—Sin.
- B. Hosts *sabaoth* (Heb.)—Angel armies.

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: EXAMINE what it means to praise the Lord with our whole heart and mind and soul; APPRECIATE His righteousness, compassion, and grace; and give THANKS for His mercy and goodness.

In Focus

As he stood at the altar waiting for Sherri to come down the aisle, Darryl's heart swelled with joy. He knew that God had brought them together from the moment he saw her across campus one Friday night and followed her into the chapel for services. Not only did he meet the one who would pledge to be by his side, Darryl heard a message that night that transformed him and opened his heart to God's goodness. Before long, Darryl and Sherri were regular attendees at chapel services.

Soon they were both volunteering for the campus food pantry and delivering bags of groceries to needy families in the community. But it was a mission trip to Appalachia, which he joined at Sherri's invitation, that really showed Darryl the spiritual rewards of steadfast faith. During that week, Darryl met people in poor health who lived in grinding poverty and had little but the certainty that God was with them through their struggles.

On the ride back to campus, Darryl prayed. He gave thanks to God for giving him the opportunity to be in college, and for the reminder that things are different for many people. That night, Darryl proposed and Sherri said yes to marrying him. Now, in the chapel before family and friends and God, Darryl said another prayer of thanks that their lives would forever be bound.

Are we grateful for how God has blessed us, including all the ways He has shown us mercy and forgiven our sins?

Keep in Mind

"As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV

Psalm 103:1 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 forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases;

4 Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies;

5 Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.

6 The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.

7 He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel.

8 The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

9 He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever.

10 He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

11 For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.

12 As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

13 Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.

14 For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.

15 As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth.

16 For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.

17 But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children.

21 Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure.

22 Bless the LORD, all his works in all places of his dominion: bless the LORD, O my soul.

NLT

Psalm 103:1 Let all that I am praise the LORD; with my whole heart, I will praise his holy name.

2 Let all that I am praise the LORD; may I never forget the good things he does for me.

3 He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases.

4 He redeems me from death and crowns me with love and tender mercies.

5 He fills my life with good things. My youth is renewed like the eagle's!

6 The LORD gives righteousness and justice to all who are treated unfairly.

7 He revealed his character to Moses and his deeds to the people of Israel.

8 The LORD is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.

9 He will not constantly accuse us, nor remain angry forever.

10 He does not punish us for all our sins; he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve.

11 For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth.

12 He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west.

13 The LORD is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him.

14 For he knows how weak we are; he remembers we are only dust.

15 Our days on earth are like grass; like wildflowers, we bloom and die.

16 The wind blows, and we are gone— as though we had never been here.

17 But the love of the LORD remains forever with those who fear him. His salvation extends to the children's children

21 Yes, praise the LORD, you armies of angels who serve him and do his will!

22 Praise the LORD, everything he has created, everything in all his kingdom. Let all that I am praise the LORD.

People, Places, and Times

Psalms. The name of the book that is a collection of poems, prayers, and praises directed to the God of Israel by various individuals. The book begins with “Blessed is the man,” or, as some may have it, “Blessed be the man,” and ends with “Praise the Lord.” Thus, it begins with a blessing directed toward human beings and ends with praise directed toward God. The Hebrew Bible places this book in part of a section called Ketuvim, or “the Writings.” At least 20 of the psalms deal directly and solely with praise. The psalms are grouped into five books: Book 1: Psalms 1—41, Book 2: Psalms 42—72, Book 3: Psalms 73—89, Book 4: Psalms 90—106, and Book 5: Psalms 107—150. Some psalms are imprecatory (calling God to punish His people’s enemies) while others are an exclamation of praise. The psalms have served throughout the ages as devotionals.

Background

The book of Psalms is often referred to as a collection of prayers or songs, which creatively express and recount ancient Israel’s experiences with God. There are multiple psalm types evidenced within each of the five books in Psalms, including prayers for help (laments), songs of thanksgiving, psalms of trust, and hymns. Psalm 103 is a hymn of praise, which exhorts us to praise God individually and collectively in all circumstances. The psalmist David begins by admonishing himself to bless (praise) God with the totality of his being as he recalls the blessings God bestows upon individual believers. The mere thought of such blessings calls the psalmist to give God praise. The scope of this hymn broadens from an individual perspective to one that includes a reflection on God’s action on behalf of the ancient Israelite people. God’s action is not reserved for individual believers but extends to the corporate body of believers, most notably the oppressed. The dynamic nature of God’s character is shown through the Creator’s merciful, gracious, loving, compassionate, and forgiving actions toward those who revere God. The psalmist ends by calling even the angels and other universal beings to bless the Lord, because God reigns over us all. God has dominion over all of the universe; therefore, all that has been created ought to give praise to God for His goodness.

Is there a time in your personal life, throughout the history of African Americans, or within your congregation where God’s care was evident and caused you to respond with worship and devotion?

At a Glance and In Depth

At-A-Glance

1. Bless the Lord Individually (Psalm 103:1–5)
2. Bless the Lord Corporately (vv. 6–17)
3. Bless the Lord Universally (vv. 21–22)

In Depth

1. Bless the Lord Individually ([Psalm 103:1–5](#))

“Bless the Lord,” means to acknowledge God with praise and thanksgiving. It means to speak well of God, to declare God’s goodness. The fullness of our gratitude is shown when every aspect of our being is completely engaged and devoted to worshipping God. We offer God our whole self when giving praise because God cares for each part of us. We bless the Lord as individuals for two reasons. First, we offer God praise simply for who He is in our lives. We revere God as the Holy One. Out of our own might and actions we cannot be holy because of sin. We need God to work on our behalf, so that we may become holy. Second, we offer God thanksgiving in response to all He has done. The psalmist reminds us of six benefits God shares with us, including physical healing (v. 3). God heals our physical bodies from sickness and disease. God also heals our heart and soul from sin. We give God praise because of all the benefits we receive from Him.

How have you benefited from God’s healing power in some aspect of your life?

2. Bless the Lord Corporately (vv. 6–17)

When offering praise and thanksgiving unto God, we must remember God's activity in the world around us. We cannot become consumed with our individual relationship with God, because we experience God's goodness, care and comfort corporately, too. The opportunity to go through life with others is a gift, especially as trouble arises. God is a refuge for us collectively in times of trouble. The ancient Israelites sought God's comfort during their captivity in Egypt. God was a liberator in freeing the oppressed. The ancient Israelites saw God's character as He extended mercy and grace to them in spite of their iniquities.

God's love abounds even when we show our worst sinful selves. He does not remain angry when we sin but instead shows compassion by moving those transgressions from us (v. 12). Our humanity is marked by its temporal nature. We all enter and will leave this world on dates determined before we were formed in our mothers' wombs. God's love extends beyond our lifespan, from the beginning to the end of time. It is comforting to know that God knew we would sin before the Creation. Yet He still loves us. This is another reason we should offer praise and thanksgiving unto God.

What are the benefits of praising God corporately during times of trouble?

3. Bless the Lord Universally (vv. 21–22)

God is the Creator of all existence, including the divine assembly. Angels, mighty ones, ministers, and the heavenly hosts exist within the realm of the Lord's kingdom. No one is excused from blessing the Lord. The psalmist reminds us even the angels must offer praise and thanksgiving unto the Lord and obey His spoken Word. In essence, all of creation is called to worship the Lord universally.

Why do you think the psalmist ends with "bless the Lord, O my soul?"

Search the Scriptures

1. Why do you think the psalmist emphasizes the importance of and reasons for individual, corporate and universal offerings of praise to God?
2. How does the metaphor in verse 13 help us better understand how God views and treats our transgressions?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Psalm 103:21 calls for blessings on all those servants of God who carry out His will. How does working with others bring greater glory to the Lord?
2. The psalmist declares that the Lord has removed our sins as far as the east is from the west. Share how knowing we are forgiven through Jesus Christ causes you to feel about God.

Lesson in Our Society and Make it Happen

Liberating Lesson

Unfortunately, we live in perilous times. Black and brown people are violently killed by state-sanctioned violence; incarceration rates for minorities are disproportionately high; and poor people are systemically oppressed. It often seems like people and systems in our society are not held accountable for the actions, decisions, policies, and laws that negatively affect oppressed people. Where is the justice?

Fortunately, the text reminds us of God's activity, character, and nature. God sides with and seeks justice for the oppressed. As many of us protest the injustices on this earth, we should not forget to praise God for all the Lord has done in the past.

Application for Activation

As God gifts us with life each day, we must give credit where credit is due. Offering praise through worship and devotion is the least we can do to express our gratitude for all God has done, is doing, and will do in our future. Suggested below are two ways we can respond to the Psalmist's exhortation.

- Start a gratitude journal or list. Record what God does in your life daily and why you are grateful.
- In your local congregation, start a "Wall of Gratitude" so people can publicly give God praise for God's activity in the world.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light On The Text

Psalm 103:1–17, 21–22

The inscription on this psalm of praise is attributed to King David. However, the time and the occasion for the composition of this song is unknown. Several scholars suggest that David wrote this psalm toward the end of his life. The psalm is one of the four that conclude Book Four of the book of Psalms (90-106). Each psalm emphasizes the praise of the Lord for different reasons. Psalm 103 praises the Lord for His benefits to His people; Psalm 104 talks about God's care for His creation; Psalm 105 praises the Lord for His wonderful acts on behalf of Israel; and Psalm 106 praises Him for His longsuffering with Israel's rebelliousness.

As we study Psalm 103, we discover that there is no petition or plea for anything, only praise. We are reminded that God's blessings to Israel are dependent on their obedience to God's covenant (vv. 17–18). Believers today, although under grace, likewise should understand that to enjoy God's best requires obedience to His will. It appears that the psalmist is soliloquizing as he reflects on the goodness of the Lord to him and to Israel. Overwhelmed with the Lord's benevolence, he bursts into praise and worship. David begins the psalm with personal praise (vv. 1–5), moves to national praise (vv. 6–19), and concludes with a call to public or universal praise (vv. 20–22).

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:

David begins this psalm with a summon to his “soul” to “bless the Lord.” The word “bless” is the Hebrew *barak* (baw-RAK), which can also be translated “praise.” To praise or bless is to speak good of something or somebody. When applied to God, “bless” means praise as an expression of our gratitude, worship, and adoration for who He is and for what He has done or does. When it is applied to humans, it means a prayer that they be blessed or happy. The phrase “God bless you” is a common greeting among Christians. In churches, we often conclude services by giving a blessing to the congregation (cf. Numbers 6:23–27).

The word “soul” is a translation of the Hebrew *nephesh* (NEH-fesh), which refers to the total person, life, or mind. The psalmist summons the entire makeup of his person to bless God. This means heart, soul, mind, and all his faculties and intellect are to be focused on praising the Lord. This calls for a total commitment to God and worship of Him. Unless everything within us is engaged in praising the Lord, our worship is a mere religious ritual. Praise must come from our whole being.

David repeats the call for his soul to bless the Lord, emphasizing its importance, and adds “forget not His benefits.” In other words, remember all the good things God has done. As humans, we often tend to focus more on our problems and needs instead of on what God has done in our lives. Moses knew how prone people are to forgetting their blessings, so he reminded Israel to endeavor to remember and never forget all that Lord did for them (Deuteronomy 6:12; 8:11). David reminds us, too.

3 Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases 4 Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; 5 Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

David now lists six benefits (blessings) he received from the Lord: forgiveness, healing, redemption, love and mercies, satisfaction, and renewal. The verbs used here to describe these blessings are in the present continuous tense; they are continuous actions that never stop. God’s blessings and dealings with His people are a continuous process. They portray God’s mercy and love to His people.

Of chief importance to David is that the Lord “forgives all... iniquities.” There is no limit to God’s mercy, and there is no type or degree of sin God cannot forgive. Elsewhere David prays, “Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity” (Psalm 51:9). David’s sins found in Scripture are great. He orders Uriah’s murder so that he can sleep with Bathsheba. He ignores the sexual assault on his daughter. He isolates his son Absalom. Yet God still loves David and could forgive his sins.

The second blessing mentioned here is God’s power to heal. The word “disease” is the Hebrew *tachalu’* (tah-khah-LOO), which means “sickness” (Deuteronomy 29:22) or disease (2 Chronicles 29:22). Some believe that this phrase is a parallelism to the previous clause, that is forgiving iniquities is like healing diseases. Sin is often regarded as a disease of the soul or spiritual sickness. Although this is true, it is equally probable that David is referring to healing of physical ailment.

The Lord promised to heal Israel’s diseases (Exodus 15:26); Christ healed people who were spiritually sick (Luke 5:31), physically sick, or a combination of both (Matthew 9:2, 6). No matter how healing is effected (through a doctor, medication, prayer, or miracle), all healing is of God.

The next blessing in David’s list is redemption. The word redeem (Heb. *ga’al*, gaw-AHL) means “to deliver, to save or to ransom from danger or bondage.” The word “destruction” (Heb. *shachath*, SHAH-khath) is also rendered corruption, pit, or grave (Psalm 6:5; 16:10; 28:1). It depicts God rescuing someone from the pit of death or grave (Psalm 56:13). Here David recalls several times God delivered him from the hands of his

enemies: from King Saul (1 Samuel 19) and from his own son Absalom (2 Samuel 15). This is also a reminder to the children of Israel of the Lord's act of deliverance from their bondage in Egypt.

Included in this catalogue of blessings is God's "lovingkindness and tender mercies" for humanity, described here as a crown. Among its other uses in the Old Testament, a crown symbolizes a bestowing of honor (Psalm 8:5; cf. 2 Kings 11:12; Psalm 65:11). Here David experiences God's love and compassion as an honor. The word for crowneth (Heb. 'atar, aw-TAR) in other contexts means "to surround." The picture comes to mind of God surrounding us, honoring us, and beautifying us with His abundant lovingkindness and mercies.

Another reason David's soul ought to bless the Lord is because the Lord "satisfieth [his] mouth with good things; so that [his] youth is renewed like the eagle's." Here David refers to physical or tangible things. When one has enough, the degree of stress is reduced. Nothing weakens the body and ages one more than poverty and stress. As king, David was usually not short of worldly goods (2 Samuel 12:8; Psalm 23:1). The final clause refers to the Lord's act of strengthening and maintaining believers' youthfulness even in old age so they are able to soar like the eagle (Isaiah 40:31; cf. Psalm 92:12–14; 2 Corinthians 4:16–18).

6 The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. 7 He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel.

After reflecting on his personal blessings and his praise to the Lord, David turns to communal or national praise (vv. 6–19). He recalls God's blessings and merciful dealings with His people, Israel. As a righteous and just God, the Lord executes "righteousness" (tsedaqah, tsedaw- KAW), and "judgment" or justice (mishpat, meesh-PAWT) for the oppressed. He sees that the oppressed receive fair judgment from their oppressors. Israel was delivered from slavery in Egypt and experienced justice on several occasions on battlefields as the Lord rescued them from the hands of their oppressors.

African Americans were enslaved in the United States for almost two and a half centuries. However, injustice against African Americans is still alive and ongoing in many places today. A day is coming when God will complete His work of liberation and execute righteousness and judgment on our behalf.

Verse 7 recalls God's dealings with Israel. He manifested Himself to His People by His acts and His ways. He spoke to Moses directly and revealed His plans and the reasons for His actions (Exodus 33:13–14). As the Lord used Moses to rescue Israel from its oppressors, He uses Christ to liberate those who believe in Him from the bondage of sin and Satan. Christ shall finally deliver us on His return.

8 The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. 9 He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever. 10 He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. 11 For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.

Verses 8–11 capture the essence of God's character of grace, mercy, and unfailing love toward humanity, the crown of His creation.

The Hebrew for the word "merciful" is rachum (rah-KHOOM), which means compassionate. The Hebrew translation for "gracious" is channun (khan-NOON), which comes from a root that means "to bend or stoop in kindness to an inferior; to favor." The Lord is full of all these traits. He is patient with His people; He restrains His anger. He does not always rebuke or chastise us (cf. Isaiah 57:16), nor does He pay us back according to our sins (Psalm 78:38–39). If He did, there would be no hope for sinful humanity. The psalmist presents us with a glimpse of the greatness of God's mercy. He compares it with the height of the heavens (cf. Psalm 57:10). Just as the distance between the heavens and the earth is great beyond our thoughts, so great and limitless is God's mercy toward His people—those who fear (love or reverence) Him. In spite of how sinful we are, God's forgiveness and mercy toward those who love Him is limitless and eternal.

12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. 13 Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.

God's mercy is demonstrated in His forgiveness of our sins. In this psalm, David uses a directional metaphor to describe the extent of God's forgiveness—the distance between east and west. They are opposites, the implication is that our sin is the complete opposite of our place in God. That's how far our sins have been removed. There is no end to His forgiveness; it never ends.

Using a parental metaphor, David demonstrates God's love, grace, and compassion for His people, playing on the affection a father has for his child. In the Bible, God is often compared with a father or a parent, a portrait that excellently depicts the concept of God's character. Teaching His disciples to pray, Jesus refers to God as "Our Father" (from Matthew 6:9), and again He compares how God cares for His people to the way a father cares for his son (7:9–11). A father is always ready to care for the child's needs and willing to forgive when the child does wrong or commits an offense.

This is a perfect portrait of God's love and compassion for us, His children. The father's response to the prodigal son accurately depicts the Lord's fatherly response to those who repentantly come to Him (Luke 15:22–24). No matter how sinful we are, God's grace never wears out; nothing we do can alter God's loving grace and mercy for those who fear Him. This is the kind of God we worship and who should be praised.

14 For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust. 15 As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. 16 For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. 17 But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children.

The Lord shows us mercy because of our relationship with Him and because of our weak and feeble makeup. David declares, "For He knoweth our frame..." The word "frame" is the Hebrew yetser (YAY-tsehr), from its verb yatsar (yaw-TSAR), which means to shape or work into a form, and is used several times in pottery analogies. God is often portrayed as the potter and humanity as the clay (Isaiah 45:9; 64:8; Jeremiah 18:6). As our Creator, the Lord knows us well: He knows what we are made of because He made us. As our designer, the Lord remembers and does not forget our framework. He created us out the dust (Genesis 2:7; 3:19). He knows how frail we are and how easily we can crumble and disintegrate.

The psalmist applies agrarian and horticultural motifs to describe the brevity of our lifespan and the temporal nature of humanity on earth. David compares us to the grass or the flower that quickly grows up and blossoms but easily fades and is blown away by the wind and is gone (cf. Psalm 90:5–9; Isaiah 40:6–8). Because God is aware of our makeup, our weak and feeble nature, and the shortness of our lives, He deals gently with us, and extends His love, mercy, and compassion to us.

David says that God's mercy is "from everlasting to everlasting." That means that God's love, His mercy and grace toward humanity, have their foundation in eternity—even before the foundation of the earth and lasting beyond the end of the earth. God's mercy has no beginning and it has no ending—it has ever been and will ever be. These blessings, the psalmist says, are for those who fear Him and for their posterity; from generation to generation (see Exodus 20:6; Acts 2:39).

21 Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure. 22 Bless the LORD, all his works in all places of his dominion: bless the LORD, O my soul.

David begins this psalm with a personal call to praise the Lord. He recounts the benefits he has received that make it imperative for him to bless the Lord. He then stirs up a national praise and urges the entire world, especially the nation of Israel, to praise. He instructs all created beings to join in the praise of the Lord. All the powerful and obedient angels who listen and obey the Lord (v. 20), the heavenly armies, and all the ministers

that serve the Lord and do His will (v. 21) should join in praising the Lord. That means all angels in all their ranks and duties should continue to praise the Lord.

The psalmist concludes with a call to all God's creation everywhere to praise and bless the Lord. No creation, animate or inanimate, is exempt from praising the Lord (cf. Psalm 148). Finally, David ends the psalm the way he started by calling on his soul to praise the Lord. As part of God's creation, the psalmist again reminds himself to join other creatures in singing praises in worship to the Lord.

When we remember who God is, we will have no reason not to praise the Lord. Try to grasp the magnitude of what He has done and does for us: His love, compassion, mercy and grace, forgiveness, and salvation. Everything we have would not even be enough to praise Him. We need to heed the psalmist's call here to show our love to God by praising and giving Him thanks with all that is within us at all times and in all circumstances.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Nothing Separates us from
God's Love (Romans 8:31–39)

TUESDAY

An Answer in Time of
Trouble (Psalm 86:1–7)

WEDNESDAY

Let Me Walk in Your Truth
(Psalm 86:8–13)

THURSDAY

Acts of God's Steadfast Love
(Nehemiah 9:16–21)

FRIDAY

God Abounds in Steadfast
Love (Exodus 34:1–7)

SATURDAY

God Forgives and Loves
People (Numbers 14:13–20)

SUNDAY

The People Bless the Lord
(Psalm 103:1–17, 21–22)