

Bible Study on Psalm 103:1–22
“Our Heavenly Father’s Love For Us”

Opening Prayer

Merciful and gracious God, as we open your word together today, remind us that you already know us and what we are carrying. You know the records we have been rehearsing, the failures we have not forgiven ourselves for, and the distance we have quietly placed between ourselves and you. Give us the courage to stop consulting our own record long enough to hear what you say about us. Give us the honesty to admit where we have made you into a scorekeeper rather than our loving Heavenly Father. And give us the faith to receive your abounding in steadfast love for us. Through Christ our Lord, who took our record to the cross so we would never have to carry it again. Amen.

SERMON SUMMARY

Psalm 103 is a psalm of praise written by David who had lived long enough to carry both high victories and deep regrets. This is later-life David—the man who knows what it means to fail God and fail his family, and who still chooses to worship. The point of this psalm and sermon is that our Heavenly Father remembers what we forget (that we are dust), and forgets what we remember (our sins). Why? How? Because God’s love is not built on our record of wrongdoings but anchored in His covenant and steadfast love that runs from everlasting to everlasting.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU QUESTIONS

INSTRUCTION: *Choose one or two*

- What is one thing you remember a father or father figure in your life saying to you—positively or negatively—that has stayed with you?
 - When you think of the word “father,” what is the first emotion that comes to you and why?
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INTO THE BIBLE

INSTRUCTIONS: *You do not need to cover every question. If in a group, read the passage together, then select the questions that best fit you or your group. The goal is depth, not speed.*
Read Psalm 103:1–5

David opens this psalm by commanding his own soul to bless the Lord and to forget none of God’s benefits. He then lists seven things God does for us: forgives, heals, redeems, crowns, satisfies, renews, and vindicates.

1. The phrase “Bless the Lord, O my soul” appears three times in this psalm. Why do you think David has to command himself to praise God rather than just doing it? What does that tell you about the kind of psalm this actually is?
 2. Verse 2 says “forget not all his benefits.” Why is forgetting God’s goodness such a specific danger for people who genuinely believe in God?
 3. David lists seven things God does—forgives iniquity, heals diseases, redeems from the pit, crowns with steadfast love and mercy, satisfies with good, renews strength, and works vindication. Which of these seven do you most need right now, and why?
 4. The word “crowns” in verse 4 is the image of a king placing a crown on a subject’s head. What does it mean to you that God would crown you specifically with steadfast love and mercy rather than celebrate you for your performances or achievements?
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Read Psalm 103:6–10

David shifts from the benefits of God to the character of God. Verse 8 is a direct quotation from Exodus 34:6, which is the moment God defined Himself to Moses right after Israel’s worst covenant failure when they made and worshiped a golden calf.

1. Verse 8 says God is “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.” Mercy means not receiving the punishment you deserve. Grace means receiving the blessing you don’t deserve. Which of those two is harder for you to accept personally and why? If you could only have one, which would you choose and why?
2. The sermon pointed out that David is quoting God’s own words from Exodus 34:6, which was spoken immediately after Israel built an idol while Moses was still on the mountain receiving the 10 Commandments. God chose to define Himself as one who gives abounding love even in the face of Israel’s worst moment. What does it mean to you that God introduced Himself that way?
3. Verse 9 says God “will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger forever.” And verse 10 says “he does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.” We live in a world of record-keeping systems—credit scores, reputations, social media histories, etc. How much of that record-keeping mindset have you brought into your understanding of God and His relationship with you and others?

Read Psalm 103:11-14

David uses three images to describe how far God's love goes: as high as the heavens are above the earth, as far as the east is from the west, and as a father has compassion for his children.

1. "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." East and west never meet, ideally. What would it mean for you to actually believe your sins have been removed like that from God's memory? The memory of others?
 2. Verse 13 uses the word "compassion", which in Hebrew is *racham*, and comes from the root word for "womb." It is the same word used of a mother's instinctive, visceral love for a child she has carried. David describes God with both *paternal compassion* (v. 13, "as a father") and *maternal womb-love* (v. 4, 8). How might that image of God change anything about how you see, understand, or approach God as a loving parent?
 3. Verse 14 says "he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust." God is not surprised by our breaking points, our limits, or our failures. He knew the material He was working with when He made the covenant with us. What does that mean to you? How might that affect your parenting or mentoring or caring for children placed in your care?
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Read Psalm 103:15–18

David is ruthlessly honest about human fragility when he says that our days are like grass and flowers, here for a while and then gone. Then, beginning verse 17 is the word "But" that quickly changes the emotional tone.

1. Verses 15–16 are brutally honest about how temporary and fragile human life is. Why do you think David includes this in a praise psalm? What is he setting up?
2. Verse 17 begins with the conjunction word, "But." Everything before the word "But" are words like: dust, grass, frailty, failure, and wind. Everything after it are words like: steadfast, love, everlasting, righteousness, and covenant. Where in your life right now do you most need to find the "But"—the place where God's faithfulness meets your fragility?
3. Verse 17 continues "and his righteousness to children's children." David declared that God's covenant is not just for you but it extends to succeeding generations. What does it mean to you that the faithfulness you live today has a generational reach?

Read Psalm 103:19–22

David closes by expanding the lens — from his own soul to all creation. Every angel, every host, every work of God is called to bless the Lord. And then David circles back to where he started: "Bless the Lord, O my soul."

1. David opens and closes the psalm in the same place of commanding his own soul to bless the Lord. Why do you think he ends where he began? What has the journey of the psalm done to that opening command by the time he says it again at the end?
2. The psalm is both deeply personal ("bless the Lord, O my soul") and expansively communal (all of creation praising God). What is the relationship between your personal experience of God's steadfast love and the corporate worship of a congregation?

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. The closing story of the sermon was a young woman calling her father from the highway after years of silence and distance, and his response was: "I'm already on the way." Is there a place in your relationship with God where you have been delaying the call because you were certain the record would determine His response?
2. What is one way the character of God as Father in Psalm 103—abounding love, slow anger, covenant faithfulness, and compassion like a parent—could change the way you relate to the children or people you are responsible for?

GOING DEEPER

(For those ready to push further)

- The sermon pointed out that David is fighting to praise in this psalm and convincing himself as if he is pushing against something; it is why he has to command his own soul three times. Authentic praise is sometimes costly praise, not easy praise. What is the difference between worship that is chosen under pressure and worship that is performed when everything is fine?
- John Wesley believed that God's most essential attribute is love and that God's love "sheds an amiable glory on all of God's other perfections." If that is true, how does it reframe the way we understand God's justice, God's holiness, and God's wrath?

- Verse 14 says God "knows our frame", and David uses the Hebrew word *yada*, meaning the deepest covenantal intimacy. God is not surprised by our limits. He did not look at you in your lowest moment and say, "I did not see that coming." What do you do with a God who knows your breaking point in advance and chose to covenant with you anyway? How do you honor such a God?
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FOR SPECIFIC SEASONS OF LIFE

The questions below are written for specific life experiences and stages. These questions may open doors that general questions do not. Choose to use them for group discussion or for personal reflection.

For Young Adults (roughly 18–35)

- The world tells you that your value is built on what you can perform, achieve, and become. Psalm 103 says God's love for you was running before any of that existed. How does that truth push back against the pressure you feel to have your life figured out?
 - Many young adults carry wounds from fathers who were absent, conditional, or damaging. How does the portrait of God as Father in Psalm 103 speak into what fatherhood was (or was not) for you?
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For Married Couples

- *Hesed* means a steadfast, covenantal love that does the best in and makes the best of a relationship. It is the word used to describe God's love in Psalm 103. Is that word a fair description of the love in your marriage? What would it take to make it more so?
 - The sermon described fathers as those who shape children either by presence or by absence. As a couple, how are you shaping the emotional and spiritual lives of the people in your home together?
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For Parents

- The sermon described God as the prototype and archetype of fatherhood. Where in your parenting do you most clearly reflect the Heavenly Father's character? Where do you most need to grow into it?

- Verse 17 says God's righteousness extends to "children's children." What specific things are you doing, or could you begin doing, to pass a legacy of covenant faith to the next generation or two, and not just heirlooms to keep or a set of rules by which to live?

For Those in Midlife (roughly 40–60ish)

- Later-life David writes this psalm carrying both his highest victories and his deepest regrets simultaneously. If this is where you find yourself, what does it mean that David's response was not silence but praise? Why praise and not prayer?
- Verse 5 says God "satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's." In a season of life where physical and relational things are changing, where do you find renewal? Is God part of that answer?

For Seniors (60ish +)

- You have lived long enough to have experienced God's *hesed* (steadfast love) through decades. What is the clearest example in your life of God's steadfast love outlasting some trouble or circumstance that you were not sure you would survive?
- Verse 17 speaks of God's righteousness extending to "children's children." What covenant legacy are you leaving? What do you most want the people or family coming after you to know about the character of God you have witnessed and demonstrated in your lifetime?

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, search us and remind us that what you find has already been covered by your covenant love. Bless us to live this week as people who are no longer carrying what you have already forgotten. Help us to remember your many benefits to us as your children, and that your steadfast love for us is from everlasting to everlasting. Amen.