

His Mercy is More

Psalm 103:1-5

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Laboring in Prayer

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Have you ever caught yourself talking out loud when no one else was around? The truth is, we all talk to ourselves more than we realize. Some suggest up to 80% of people engage in some self-talk, with many doing it on a regular basis. Experts say we talk to ourselves to process information, organize our thoughts, solve problems, and make decisions. One guy I know says he talks to himself because it's the only way he can have an intelligent conversation! Another person said it's OK to talk to yourself, and it's OK to answer yourself. But it's sad when you need to repeat what you said because you weren't listening!

A few years ago, a baseball player was caught on camera between innings talking to himself. Later, when asked about it, he said, *"Sometimes I have to remind myself who I am and what I can do."*

David does something similar in Psalm 103 as he does some self-talk, or more accurately, some soul-talk with himself. Listen to verses 1-2: ***"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."*** David knew he needed to be reminded of who God is and what He has done. Because he was prone to forget God's goodness, he gave himself a talking-to by talking tough to his soul. It's like he's commanding his soul to bless the Lord. BTW, if you struggle with negative self-talk, Psalm 103 will help replace that destructive track in your mind with positive soul-talk.

- **Be intentional.** We're told three times to ***"bless"*** the Lord. This three-fold repetition speaks of the highest form of worship. The word ***"bless"*** means, *"to salute or bend the knee by speaking to and about the Lord in ways that bring Him honor and glory."* The title ***"Lord"*** is Yahweh, the unspeakable name of God used throughout the Psalm. We're to bless the eternal I AM.
- **Go internal.** Twice David refers to his ***"soul."*** He also uses the phrase, ***"within me,"*** which speaks of his insides. He's saying something like this, *"From the bottom of my heart and from my very soul, I will bless the Lord."*

- **Give everything.** I'm to bless the Lord with "*all that is within me.*" The word "*all*" is used five times in the first six verses and means, "*each, every, and entire.*" Nothing is to be left out and nothing is to be held back. To this point, the Psalm has 22 verses, which correspond to the Hebrew alphabet. Though not an acrostic like some of the Psalms are, the idea is that everything should be involved in praise, from A to Z.

That's why one of the most important impulses of genuine worship is to plead with our own soul to give praise to God. One pastor says it might sound something like this: "*Come on, soul, where are you? Why do you sleep before this God? Why are you dull and sluggish? Wake up! Look at what God has done! Look at what He is like! It's time to bless Him for all the benefits He has granted you.*"

We need to talk back to our feelings instead of letting them run our lives. Too many of us let our feelings drive the train when the Bible calls us to let the facts of God's Word be the engine of our faith. If you let your feelings run everything, you'll go off the rails. Instead of focusing on our burdens, we're to bless God for all the ways He has blessed us.

In the last part of verse 2, David is determined to remember all that God has done for him: "*...and forget not all His benefits.*" The word "*remember*" means, "*to recall, to mark, to set aside*" and is used over 200 times in the Bible. This is not just bringing something back to mind; it implies a change of behavior, so our lives line up with what we've been reminded of. We're to ponder and then put into practice by praising God for all the blessings He has bestowed on us. In short, we need reminders to remember because if we don't, we'll rebel.

The word "*benefits*" can be translated as "*kind deeds, dealings, or doings.*" Notice how we're called to remember "*all*" His benefits. During our time of worship through music today, we sang these lyrics: "*Your name is great, and your heart is kind. Ten thousand reasons for my heart to find.*" If you read through this entire Psalm, and I hope you will, you'll find over 20 marvelous and magnificent benefits for the believer, leaving only 9,980 more to discover!

We're going to focus on just five of those reasons from Psalm 103:3-5: "*Who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*" The word "*who*" is used five times to show these benefits come directly from God. In addition, all

five verbs (forgives, heals, redeems, crowns, and satisfies) are in the present tense, meaning these benefits are available right now and they are ongoing.

That leads to our main idea: *Since God blesses us with multiple benefits, we're called to bless Him with wholehearted praise.*

1. He sets us free from sin. David starts here because forgiveness is the foundation for everything else. We see this in the first part of verse 3: ***“Who forgives all your iniquity...”*** The word ***“forgive”*** means, *“to lift a heavy burden or debt and carry it away.”* The word ***“iniquity”*** represents a crookedness, deformity, or deviancy. It's the evil bent in our nature that pulls us toward sin. The image is of a gnarled and twisted tree. Notice how God forgives not just some, but ***“all”*** our evil iniquities.

Drop down to verse 10: ***“He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.”*** Verse 12 describes it this way: ***“As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us.”*** East and west go in different directions and never meet, showing the infinite distance God places between us and our sins.

2. He strengthens us in sickness. Look at the last part of verse 3: ***“...who heals all your diseases.”*** The word ***“heal”*** means, *“to restore.”* The Bible indicates that God has the power to heal all diseases, but whether He chooses to heal every individual or every disease in every instance is up to His wise will for our lives. He absolutely brings healing to us in this life through both natural and miraculous means, and He promises ultimate healing for all His people in the age to come.

Because God does heal, we should look for it, ask for it, and thank Him when He gives it. But the final promise of no more death and no more disease will come in the future. He often heals us now and when He doesn't, we'll get healed in Heaven, and that is even better. Ray Pritchard writes: *“Any healing in this life is limited and temporary. Our ultimate healing comes when we are raised immortal and incorruptible.”*

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Let's summarize where we've been.

1. **He sets us free from sin.**
2. **He strengthens us in sickness**

3. He saves us from the pit. We see this in the first part of verse 4: ***“Who redeems your life from the pit...”*** To ***“redeem”*** refers to, *“purchasing something back which was lost, sold, or enslaved.”* It also has the idea of, *“reclaiming and setting free.”* God is ready to rescue, reclaim, and restore you! The ***“pit”*** refers to a grave or a deep ditch with steep sides for catching a lion who becomes trapped. Perhaps you feel dead on the inside or you're in a ditch of despair and depression. God cares about you so much that He wants to pull you out of the pit you're in.

This week, I saw on Facebook that someone was looking for a recovery program that was not AA but was also not religious. I recommended Celebrate Recovery anyway, because the only way out of the ditch of addiction, is through the Redeemer.

*Jesus sought me when a stranger,
Wandering from the fold of God;
He, to rescue me from danger,
Interposed His precious blood.*

4. He surrounds us with steadfast love and mercy. This phrase is found in the second half of verse 4 and is pregnant with meaning: ***“...who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy.”*** The word ***“crown”*** has the idea of adorning, surrounding, or encircling. The phrase ***“steadfast love”*** is a covenant term, describing God's unwavering determination to bless His people. We could translate it as “loyal love” or “tough love.” The word ***“mercy”*** or ***“compassion”*** is a “tender love,” originally referring to the love a mother has for the child in her womb. Psalm 23:6 says, ***“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”*** Lamentations 3:22 says, ***“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to an end.”***

God's steadfast love and compassion occur multiple times in this Psalm.

- Verse 8: The Lord is ***“abounding in steadfast love.”***
- Verse 11: ***“For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear Him.”***

- Verse 13: *“As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows **compassion to those who fear Him.**”*
- Verse 17: God’s **“steadfast love”** is from everlasting to everlasting.

I appreciated this insight: *“God bestows His unfailing, loyal love and compassionate kindness upon us as a magnificent gift, like a king placing a crown upon a beloved subject to signify honor, dignity, and immense value.”*

5. He satisfies us with His goodness. Check out verse 5: *“Who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.”* During our study in Ecclesiastes last year, we learned the more Solomon hunted for happiness, the more unhappy he became, concluding that it was like chasing after the wind. We also discovered that *dissatisfaction is designed to lead us to find satisfaction in God alone.*

The more Solomon pursued pleasure, projects, possessions, prestige, and performance, the more he lost perspective on the purpose of life. *We will never find our purpose in life if we put the pursuit of our pleasures above God’s priorities.* When God satisfies us, He does so in a way that restores and renews us so we can soar like an eagle. The Hebrew reads like this: *“Who fills your mouth with good things...”* Matthew 14:20 says that after Jesus fed the 5,000, **“they all ate and were satisfied.”**

The result of God’s work, both in what He saves us from and what He saves us unto, is to bring true *satisfaction* to our lives.

Each of these benefits find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ who sets us free from our sins, strengthens us in our sickness, saves us from the pit of despair and death, surrounds us with steadfast love and mercy, and satisfies our deepest needs.

While we must do some intentional soul-talk to make sure we do not forget His benefits, this Psalm ends in verses 20-22 with an ever-widening circle of those called to praise Him, beginning with David’s own soul to a crescendo of adoration from the angelic hosts in Heaven to all of creation, in every place, for all time. And it concludes like it began with David doing some more personalized soul-talk: **“Bless the LORD, O you His angels, you mighty ones who do His word, obeying the voice of His word! Bless the LORD, all His hosts, His ministers, who do His will! Bless the LORD, all His works, in all places of His dominion. Bless the LORD, O my soul!”**

Worship is intended to be expansive and ever widening. We'll learn more about this next weekend from Psalm 67.

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