



Bless the Lord
Psalm 100:1-5

MAIN POINT

Part of our worship should involve remembering and reflecting on God's faithful love.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What kinds of things are you most likely to remember?

What kinds of things would you forget most often?

We are all quick to forget one thing or another. Today we will look at how we remember the things we should forget, and often forget the things we should remember, such as the faithful love of God. In Psalm 103, the psalmist points us back to what's most important.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Read Psalm 103:1-6

What picture of God is painted in these verses?

Why were these works of God "good"? Why might David have singled these out?

The first things David noted were God's forgiveness of sin and His physical healing (v. 3). God brings spiritual healing, which is the core of true wellness, no matter what physical state our bodies are in. David

had personally received spiritual healing and restoration from God, and he was clearly grateful.

How would you describe the feelings that come with God's forgiveness and healing?

Why do you think we so quickly forget that God has forgiven us?

David also praised God for redeeming him from "the Pit" (v. 4). Have you ever been in a figurative pit you couldn't get out of without help? Describe what that experience was like and how you saw God at work in your life.

Where in Psalm 103 do you see references to the larger story of God's plan for humanity?

The Pit referred to Sheol, the place of the dead. It is from this Pit of death that God redeems—buys back—our lives. David illustrated God's love with a beautiful contrast. God finds us in the bottom of the pit of death, utterly helpless. He buys our freedom, but He doesn't leave us sitting on the edge of the pit shivering. He stands us up, embraces us, and surrounds us with His presence. The picture David used is the placing of a crown—no doubt David knew what that felt like. The people of God are adorned with "faithful love and compassion" like a wreath of honor or esteem presented to a dignitary or king. David's words foreshadowed the price Jesus paid when He died on the cross to redeem us from our sin and death. Not only did He save us from the punishment we deserve, but He gave us eternal life in God's presence.

David stated that God "satisfies you with goodness" (v. 5). How would you define satisfaction? What kinds of things lead us to forget that only God truly satisfies us?

How does your relationship with Christ bring satisfaction to your life?

Spend a few minutes discussing how each of the benefits David listed are present in your lives today.

Read Psalm 103:7-12

David continued to outline the benefits we receive as God's children. Verse 8 begins with God's name as verse 1 did. God—who spoke the world into existence, who saved humanity from flood judgment, who cut the covenant with Abraham based on His own faithfulness and perfect

integrity, who rescued generations past with frightening miracles, who sustained His people in the desert 40 years, who is mighty in battle and the definition of power—He is the one who is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and full of faithful love. He is obligated to no one, but He chooses to relate, to listen, to understand, to forgive, and to rescue us.

What impact does the truth of these verses have on your relationship with God? What evidence of His faithfulness do you see in your daily life?

What are the keys to “faithful love” (v. 8)?

How does God’s unique and unequalled love compare with the way we express love?

Everything God does in relationship with us is motivated by love; a more genuine, pure, deep, and steady love than we can wrap our minds around. Even when He disciplines us, or perhaps especially when He disciplines us, He demonstrates that love. God is patient with us beyond what we can understand.

What are the keys to compassion? How is God’s compassion illustrated to you?

If asked to help someone understand God’s faithful love, how would you begin?

Many people live a lifetime knowing only counterfeit love. The faithful love of God is the original—authentic and pure in every way. Describing this love is difficult. We just don’t have words that do it justice.

What visual images did David use to describe how completely God removes our sin from us? Why is it important that God removes our sins?

What keeps you from remembering that God has removed your sins through Jesus’ work on the cross?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Which of David's words in Psalm 103 do you resonate most with at this season of life? Which are the most difficult for you to echo? Why?

What struggles are keeping you from daily declaring, "Bless the Lord, O my soul"?

What are some practical ways we might encourage one another in our pursuit to forget the negatives and sins that God has forgiven, and instead to remember the true character of God?

PRAY

Encourage your group members to take a few minutes to write out a prayer in the form of a song, paragraph, or statement telling God what you're thankful for from your past and what you're looking forward to about your future with Him. Close your time together by praying that each member of your group would daily meditate on the goodness of God.

COMMENTARY - Psalm 103:1-12

103:1. The traditional view is that David wrote Psalm 103. In verse 1, he called on himself (his "soul") to praise "Yahweh." In poetic parallelism, he repeated the summons to himself in different words. The phrase "all that is within me" referred to his total self, and the words "His holy name" referred to God in His separateness from humans, His exaltation.

103:2. David continued to encourage himself to praise the Lord. The repetition of the words my soul in verses 1-2 mark the psalm as deeply personal and has prompted the view that David designed it for people's personal worship. David urged himself not to forget all God's benefits. The Hebrew term rendered benefits means "deeds" or "dealings" and refers to God's gracious, merciful acts (deeds of undeserved love) on His people's behalf. David knew the danger of taking God's provisions for granted or of willfully disregarding them and wanted to retain a keen awareness of the undeserved blessings he and his people enjoyed.

103:3. In verses 3-5, David recounted some of God's gracious acts for him and his people. David began listing God's merciful acts with His forgiveness. With the statement, He forgives all your sin, David continued to address himself. David wrote from experience and celebrated God's incredible mercy. The Hebrew word translated forgives means "to send away, let go" ("to pardon") and conveys continuous action. The term translated sin means "moral crookedness," "going astray," or "guilt." David declared that God is ready to forgive people's wrongdoing with the implication that they repent as a condition of pardon.

Next, David reminded himself that God healed all his diseases. Most likely David had physical, mental, and emotional healing in mind. The word diseases could indicate sickness or general affliction, both inward and outward. One suggestion is that because people in David's time viewed diseases as God's punishment for sin, His forgiveness resulted in healing. Even in New Testament times, people generally considered physical impairments to be the result of sin. Some physical problems can be traced to sinful choices and habits, but not all can. Yet in a real sense, no matter the cause of physical, mental, or emotional difficulties, God is the Source of healing. He also gives peace of mind, serene confidence in His loving care. Thus, we pray for recovery from our own suffering and we intercede for others.

103:4-5. God acted as David's kinsman-redeemer, his Next-of-Kin who rescued him from bondage. The term redeems could convey the senses of protection and restoration. It has the idea of liberating someone through payment of a price. The Israelites were redeemed from slavery in Egypt through God's mighty acts. To celebrate this truth, they redeemed their firstborn sons by offering sacrifices, reflecting their sons' being spared during the tenth plague. God had delivered (rescued) David from the Pit. The phrase the Pit was a designation for Sheol, the place of the departed dead. An alternate view is that the Hebrew term rendered Pit means "destruction"—anything that could have taken David's life. Either way, David stressed that God had pulled him back from the brink of death so that he continued to live. The

emphasis is on God's granting recovery, not effecting resurrection, as one interpretation suggests.

Not only had God pulled David from the clutches of death, but He also related to David with faithful love and compassion. The Hebrew verb translated crowns literally means "to surround," "to compass." The noun means "crown" or "wreath." The verb has the sense of God's freely giving His blessings. The Hebrew term rendered faithful love means "loving-kindness," "mercy"—the Old Testament equivalent of the New Testament word grace. The term rendered compassion (literally, "compassions") has the sense of attentive tenderness. The crown God bestowed was composed or crafted of covenant love and compassion. In addition, God gave David good things in abundance. The word satisfies has the sense of receiving more than enough, of being filled. David's emphasis was on the abundance God supplied, which renewed his youth like the eagle. Because of the eagle's swift movements, it symbolized strength and vitality (see Isaiah 40:31). Its size and comparatively long life added to the image. Because it renewed its plumage, it also may have symbolized youth.

103:6-7. David broadened reasons to praise God that included other Israelites as well as himself. The phrase acts of righteousness referred to God's fulfilling His covenant obligations (and perhaps to the benefits listed in vv. 3-5). Justice had the force of upholding the rights of people who were deprived of them. The oppressed were people who were wronged, who were victims of extortion. The background of David's confident assertion was God's delivering the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. The Old Testament emphasizes that God is on the side of the oppressed. He champions their cause. Although the comparison of God with a father does not occur until verse 13, verses 2-6 support and define a compassionate father's character. Be aware that as God's child you enjoy the benefits David outlined.

David stated that the Lord had "revealed His ways to Moses" (v. 7). Ways could refer to God's methods of dealing with people, His directives for life, or His overall purpose. Figuratively, it could allude to God's commands or revelation of His character. Furthermore, God had "revealed ... His deeds to the people [literally, "children"] of Israel." The Hebrew word translated deeds means "acts" and can have the sense of God's severe or mighty exploits on His people's behalf.

103:8. David continued to outline the benefits God gave His people. These benefits flowed from God's character. David's statement in verse 8 echoes Exodus 34:6b, where God partially revealed His character to Moses. In Psalm 103:8, David listed four qualities of God's character demonstrated in His dealings with His people. First, the Lord is compassionate. Yahweh, the faithful covenant God, is merciful. Second, God is gracious. The word gracious was used only of God in the Old Testament. The verb means "to show favor" with the implication that God's favor is not based on people's deserving it but is a facet of His character. The noun form means "grace." Third, Yahweh is slow to anger. He is forbearing and suffers long with people's sins. He does not nurture ("keep") His anger. Fourth, God is rich in faithful love—covenant love; loving kindness; goodness.

103:9. David used a courtroom term to stress that God did not carry His legitimate quarrel or contention with His people to the full extent. He would not always accuse them; He would not constantly find fault with them and berate them. Rather, He would deal with their sin and would not continue punishment beyond that point. Furthermore, God would not hold a grudge against His people. Unlike humans, He would not nurture His anger with a view to unleashing it for personal satisfaction.

103:10. David was acutely conscious of God's great mercy. The Lord had not dealt with the Israelites as they had deserved. Their sins were many. The Hebrew term rendered sins comes from a word that means "to miss the mark," "to not follow the right path." The Israelites often had failed to meet God's standards, to perform their covenant duties. The term translated offenses comes from a word that means "to twist or bend" or from a term that means "to commit error, to go astray." David had in mind deliberate acts of moral perversity, crookedness, or error. These wrongs against God called for severe consequences, yet He had not reacted vindictively. He did not deal out to them the devastating consequences for which their wrongs called. This truth stressed that God's purpose is to return sinners to His "right paths" (Psalm 23:3) by exercising mercy. He delights in pardon, not punishment.

103:11-12. The introductory word for connects what follows with verses 8-10, especially verse 8. Because God is rich in faithful love, He did not mete out what the Israelites' sins deserved. In verse 11, David returned to his emphasis on the scope and depth of God's faithful love, which is unique and unequalled. Unlike many people's expressions of love as an emotion, God's love is unconditional and constant, never wavering in intensity. David used the greatest expanse he knew to describe the vastness of God's loyal, covenant love. To him, the distance between the heavens and the earth was beyond measuring. Thus, God's steadfast love was great (strong, powerful) beyond the mind's ability to calculate.

God's unfailing love was directed toward people who feared Him. The Hebrew term rendered fear has the ideas of awe, reverence, and honor (respect). People who followed God—who revered Him and sought to keep His covenant demands—experienced His constant kindness. They also experienced His forgiveness. Transgressions were acts of rebellion against God's authority. The root Hebrew word has the force of willful revolt, of defiance. To David, the greatest lateral distance was east to west, sunrise to sunset. God's removing His people's willful disobedience that far pictured unmitigated forgiveness. Implied is that God's forgiveness followed the people's confession and repentance. David was not describing God's easy tolerance of sin but His willingness to extend grace to repentant sinners.