

BEAUTIFUL THINGS

Title: Part 1 – “The Fresh Start You've Been Looking For”

Date: August 17, 2025

While everyone here in the house is saying "Hi," I want to take a moment to say "Hi" to you if you're joining us online or on our app. We think of you as part of our church family, and we're so grateful you're spending this time with us. If there are ways we can pray for you or serve you this week, please don't hesitate to reach out—it would be our honor to walk alongside you in whatever you're facing.

Well, I am excited for today! I'm excited because you are here, today would not be as much fun if you were not here. I'm also excited because today is our church's 1,000th Sunday! How cool is that? We've got some fun planned after the service to celebrate. BUT I am also excited because we will celebrate baptism after the message today. If you have never taken this next step on your faith journey then we have a change of clothes and a towel waiting for you if you want to make today “the day!”

BUT wait... there's more! We are also beginning a new six-part collection of messages called “Beautiful Things” all about the “Six Things You Can't Live Without.” Who is as excited as I am about this? We are basically going to camp out on just one passage of Scripture, and I thought it would cool to read this out loud together, and then by the end of the six weeks we will all have this memorized. Not because you have to, but because this is one of those passages that's too good to forget.

If you have a Bible, we will be reading Psalm 103, verses 1 through 5. Let's all read this together:

¹ Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. ² Praise the Lord, my soul, and ***forget not*** all his **BENEFITS**—³ who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, ⁴ who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, ⁵ who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

How good is that? That is the passage will be getting acquainted with for the next six weeks and my prayer has been that God would write it on your heart because we are all looking for beautiful things!

Maybe this will help to set this up. This is the uncomfortable question we all wrestle with in the quiet moments:

What am I living for?

I know that sounds dramatic, but think about it. When you wake up in the morning, what gets you out of bed? What gives your life meaning? When you're stressed, where do you turn for comfort? When you're anxious about the future, what gives you hope? When you feel like you're failing at life, what makes you think you're going to be OK?

For most of us, if we're honest, we're living for things that are unreliable, temporary, or completely out of our control. We're living for success in whatever our career field is, but AI could totally eliminate your job in 5 years. We're living for our relationships, our family, but people disappoint us and go their own way many times. We're living for our health, but bodies break down. Can I get an "amen" from the over 40 crowd? We're living for financial security, but markets fluctuate. Roller coasters are fun at Busch Gardens, but they are not fun when we are talking about our retirement account! Some of us have even lived for a political ideology over the past decade or so but elections don't always go our way.

And here's what happens: when those things we're living for get threatened or taken away, we feel like we can't survive. We panic. We despair. We think our lives are over. Maybe you know that feeling right now!

BUT what if there are six things—six beautiful things—that you can actually build your life on? Six things that can never be taken away from you, never fail you, never leave you empty. Six things that, once you really understand them, you literally cannot live without.

That's what David (the shepherd boy, poetic warrior, turned king) discovered. In Psalm 103, he lists six benefits—six beautiful things—that God provides for every person who trusts in Him. And these aren't just nice religious concepts. These are life-or-death necessities!

There was a song that was everywhere last year called "Beautiful Things" by Benson Boone. How many of you are singing the chorus in your head now? He says:

"Please stay. I want you, I need you, oh, God. Don't take these beautiful things that I've got."

That song hit number 2 on the Billboard charts here in the US but get this, it topped the charts in 19 countries! It became this worldwide phenomenon because it captures something we all feel—gratitude for the good things in our lives mixed with the fear of losing them.

BUT here's what I want you to understand: the beautiful things David talks about in Psalm 103 are different. They can't be taken away! They don't fluctuate with the markets! They

don't depend on your performance or other people's behavior! They are beautiful things that survive every storm, outlast every crisis, and satisfy every longing!

So, as we dive into this today I want to preach a message I am calling:

The fresh start you've been looking for.

How many of you could use a fresh start?

Let me paint you a picture of where we are as a culture right now:

- 90% of Americans believe we're in a mental health crisis. I seriously worry about the 10 percent who don't, right?
- We are the most medicated nation in the history of the world yet among the most unhealthy.
- In a recent study, 62% of American's reported financial stress as a major concern in their lives right now. Inflation has made food insecurity a legit middle-class problem not just a poverty problem.
- Anxiety is through the roof after COVID. It is estimated that 32% (or 1 out of 3) adolescents have a diagnosable anxiety disorder.
- We've got the world's knowledge literally in our pockets, but yet we are still starving for wisdom.
- We have more ways to connect than ever before, but loneliness and suicide are at epidemic levels.

What is going on, right? It is because everyone's searching for the same things: peace of mind, physical and emotional healing, hope for the future, love and acceptance, true satisfaction, and the energy to keep going. We're all looking for beautiful things in our lives.

But here's the problem: we're looking in all the wrong places!

We think—and I am talking to believers and skeptics, we think—peace of mind comes from having enough money in the bank. We think healing comes from the right doctor or the right medication. We think hope comes from the right politician or the right job opportunity. We think love comes from finding the right person. We think satisfaction comes from buying the right things. We think energy comes from getting enough sleep or drinking enough coffee or the right diet.

I am not on social media much these days, but I do try to keep up with trends and I kept seeing these "winter arc challenges" all over the place. Anyone see these? I'm like what is

that all about? But it is these self-improvement challenges focusing on using the last few months of the year to focus on personal development and health goals, rather than waiting for New Year's resolutions. Everyone is trying the latest way to "level up" their lives, right? Everyone is trying to become the "main character" of their own story! These aren't bad desires. They're actually reflections of something God placed in our hearts.

BUT here's what frustrates me: we're trying to manufacture beautiful things through our own effort when God has already provided them! We're working overtime to create transformation when God has already accomplished it! We're desperately searching for what's already been given to us!

David had discovered something that changed everything. He found six beautiful things that could survive any storm, outlast any crisis, and satisfy any longing. Six things that weren't dependent on his circumstances, his performance, or other people's behavior. He found six benefits that only God can provide AND once he experienced them, he realized he literally could not live without them.

Look again at how David starts this psalm:

¹ Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. ² Praise the Lord, my soul, and **FORGET NOT** all his benefits...

That phrase "forget not" is crucial. David is talking to himself, commanding his own soul to remember something he's prone to forget. That tells us something important: **we have a natural tendency toward spiritual amnesia.**

When life is going well, we forget that God is the source of our blessings. When life gets hard, we forget that God has been faithful before. When we're anxious about the future, we forget God's promises. When we're discouraged about our present, we forget God's benefits. Can anyone relate to having this spiritual amnesia? I know I battle this!

But here is what is so cool. David uses the Hebrew word {J-mool} גִּמּוּל (gemul) for "benefits." Here's what's fascinating about this word choice: it typically means "recompense" or "what someone deserves"—usually in the context of punishment or judgment. But David takes this word that should describe what we deserve and uses it to describe what God gives us instead.

Think about that for a minute. The word that should describe our punishment becomes the word for our blessing! The word that should describe God's judgment becomes the word for God's generosity! The word that should describe what we've earned becomes the word for what we've received by grace!

That's the entire Gospel in one Hebrew word! We deserved punishment, but we got benefits. We deserved judgment, but we got mercy. We deserved condemnation, but instead we got forgiveness.

Augustine put it perfectly, he said:

"We owe good but have given evil; God rewards evil with good."

In other words, we gave God our broken things, and He gave us beautiful things in return.

BUT as David says, we forget. We have spiritual Alzheimer's. We lose track of what God has done, what He's promised, and what He's provided.

And when we forget God's benefits, we start trying to find those same things in other places. We start trying to create our own peace, manufacture our own healing, design our own hope, earn our own love, buy our own satisfaction, and generate our own energy. As our culture has become more and more secular, leaving God further and further behind, this then leads to the unsettling moment we find ourselves in right now. WHY?

Because it doesn't work! It has never worked. Just ask the nation of Israel all throughout the Old Testament of the Bible. There are some beautiful, can't live without, things that only come from God.

SO, as we begin to work our way through the list that David gives us the first thing we need that only God can give is this, put the verse back up, David says:

² Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his *benefits*—³ who **FORGIVES** all your sins

David starts his list with the most fundamental benefit: "who forgives all your sins." This isn't just the first benefit chronologically—it's the foundation that makes all the other benefits possible!

Again, David uses a very interesting word choice. The Hebrew word here is {sah-loch} סָלַח (salach) and here's what's remarkable about this word. In the entire Old Testament, it's only used when God is the one doing the forgiving. Never humans forgiving other humans. Never humans forgiving themselves. Only God forgiving people.

That tells us something crucial, if you are taking notes today write this down:

Forgiveness [real, complete, lasting, soul cleansing, forgiveness] **is something only God can provide.**

You can't forgive yourself for the things you've done wrong. Other people can't forgive you completely because they don't know the full extent of your failures. But God can and does.

Notice David doesn't say God forgives "some" of your sins or "most" of your sins. He says God forgives "all" your sins. Every failure. Every mistake. Every rebellion. Every moment you chose your way instead of God's way. All of it!

BUT here's what most people don't understand about forgiveness, it's not just about removing guilt. It's about removing the debt.

When you sin, you create a debt. You owe something to God's justice. You owe obedience that you can't provide. You owe punishment that you can't pay. You owe restoration that you can't make.

AND forgiveness doesn't just say, "I'm not going to hold this against you anymore." Forgiveness says, "The debt is completely canceled. The account is not just forgiven—it's closed. You don't owe anything anymore!"

Imagine this week you walk out to your mailbox and while you are digging through the junk mail and the latest Publix flyer you see a letter from the government about your student loan. You open it up assuming it is your next loan payment notice only to find a letter that says your student loan with an \$86,000 balance has not only been forgiven but that your account will now be closed. Imagine the joy, the relief, the disbelief. This is way better than some hack you saw on TikTok that didn't work!

BUT here's the thing. That doesn't even come close to capturing what God's forgiveness does because student loans are forgiven by transferring the debt to someone else—the taxpayers, right. A debt was created, and someone has to pay and in this case it just gets transferred to someone else. But when God forgives your sin, He doesn't transfer the debt onto someone else. He pays it Himself through Jesus!

That's why Jesus said on the cross, "It is finished." Tetelestai: the same word written across paid receipts in that culture. The debt is not just forgiven; it's marked PAID IN FULL.

AND here is why that matters to you today, write this next point down:

God's forgiveness addresses our deepest fear.

This is why David starts with forgiveness. Because unforgiveness is the root of every other problem we face.

Think about it: Why are you anxious about the future? Because you're afraid God is going to punish you for your past. Why do you struggle with feelings of worthlessness? Because you know you've failed, and you think that failure defines you. Why do you have trouble trusting God? Because you're afraid He's keeping score of your mistakes. Are you with me?

Unforgiveness creates a barrier between you and every other beautiful thing God wants to give you. As long as you're not sure you're forgiven, you can't rest in God's love. You can't trust His goodness. You can't believe His promises.

BUT when you really understand that you're completely forgiven—not just pardoned, but actually declared righteous, having equal standing as Jesus before God—when you really allow that to sink in and define you, everything changes!

You don't have to earn God's love anymore because Jesus already earned it for you! You don't have to perform perfectly because Jesus already performed perfectly for you! You don't have to worry about God rejecting you because Jesus already took your rejection on Himself! Make some noise in the house if you are glad your deepest fears have been swallowed up by the cross!

This is why Jesus said, **"Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy burdened, and I will give you rest."** The rest He's offering is rest from trying to earn what's already been given. Rest from trying to pay what's already been paid. Rest from trying to fix what's already been restored.

John Eldredge says it like this: **"Most Christians live like God is TRYING to love them, when the truth is God IS loving them."**

Friend you don't have to convince God to love you. You don't have to earn His forgiveness. You don't have to prove you're worthy of His grace. It's already done! The beautiful thing of complete forgiveness is already yours in Christ! Touch your neighbor and tell them, "It is finished!"

AND that leads us to this, this is the hope someone needs today, write this down:

Broken things can become beautiful things.

I don't know where you might be spiritually. You might be skeptical of all this. You might be new to faith. You might have grown up in the church and left and are now coming back. Your life might have been smooth sailing, or you might have some things hidden in your closet that you pray never see the light of day. BUT here's what I want you to understand: **forgiveness doesn't just deal with your past. It transforms your future.**

See when God forgives you, He doesn't just erase your failures. He redeems them! He takes the broken pieces of your life and creates something beautiful.

The apostle Paul said it this way: (2 Corinthians 5)

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, ***all things*** have become **NEW**.

That's about right now, today, your failures don't have to define you anymore. Your past doesn't have to determine your future. Your worst moments don't have to be your lasting legacy. BECAUSE God specializes in making beautiful things out of broken things.

I think about the woman caught in adultery in the New Testament that the religious leaders dragged to Jesus for judgment. Her life was broken. Her reputation was destroyed. Her future looked hopeless. But Jesus said, "**Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin.**" In one moment, her broken thing became a beautiful thing. Not because she deserved it. Not because she earned it. But because forgiveness has the power to transform everything!

I think about Zacchaeus, the first century tax collector who had cheated people and betrayed his own community. His life was broken by greed and selfishness. But when he encountered Jesus, forgiveness transformed him into someone who gave generously and made restitution. Broken thing became beautiful thing.

I think about Jesus closest disciple Peter, who denied Jesus three times in His moment of greatest need. Peter's loyalty was broken. His integrity was shattered. His leadership was compromised. But Jesus restored him and made him the leader of the early church. Broken thing became beautiful thing.

Look at movies like "The Pursuit of Happyness" where a father's love and determination transform a story of homelessness and struggle into one of success and hope for his son. Or "The Greatest Showman" where P.T. Barnum takes society's rejects—people who were seen as freaks and outcasts—and creates a place where they become stars. Or even "Frozen," where Anna's forgiveness of Elsa breaks a generational curse and restores their

relationship. These all explore the deep human question: can my broken things become beautiful things? Can generational pain become generational healing?

AND the answer according to God's Word is YES! God sent me today to tell you that there is nothing so broken in your life that He can't turn it into something beautiful through the power of His forgiveness. Abuse, addiction, divorce, financial failure... nothing is beyond His ability to make beauty from ashes or turn graves into gardens!

As the worship team heads up to help me close this out... Forgiveness, real forgiveness, is something only God can provide. God's forgiveness addresses our deepest fear. Broken things can become beautiful things. One more:

Forgiveness changes everything right now.

- Your failed marriage doesn't have to be the end of your story—it can be the beginning of a beautiful testimony of redemption!
- Your addiction doesn't have to define you—it can become the platform for ministering to others who are struggling!
- Your financial failure doesn't have to destroy your future—it can teach you to trust in God's provision instead of your own planning!
- Your broken dreams don't have to leave you bitter—they can make you more compassionate toward others who are hurting!
- Your health crisis doesn't have to defeat you—it can deepen your dependence on God's strength!
- Your family dysfunction doesn't have to be passed down to the next generation—it can be where the cycle of pain stops, and the legacy of healing begins!

But it starts with forgiveness. It starts with believing that God really has canceled your debt, erased your failures, and given you a clean slate.

I wish I could communicate this more effectively because do you realize what this means?

- It means you don't have to live under the weight of your past anymore!
- You don't have to wake up every morning rehearsing your failures!
- You don't have to go to bed every night feeling guilty about what you did or didn't do!
- It means you can stop trying to earn what's already been given!
- You can stop performing for approval you already have!
- You can stop working for acceptance you already possess!

It means your broken marriage can become a beautiful testimony of God's love! Your prodigal child can become your greatest blessing! Your financial struggle can become your deepest lesson in God's provision! Your health battle can become your strongest foundation of faith!

Because when God forgives, He doesn't just remove the sin—He redeems the story! He doesn't just erase the failure—He transforms it into a testimony! He doesn't just cancel the debt—He turns it into a display of His grace!

Some of you came in here today carrying broken things. Broken relationships. Broken dreams. Broken trust. Broken health. Broken finances. Broken hearts.

AND you think those broken things disqualify you from beautiful things. You think your past determines your future. You think your failures define your worth.

But I'm here to tell you that the God we serve specializes in making beautiful things out of broken things! He takes what Satan meant for evil and turns it into good! He takes what was meant to destroy you and uses it to display His glory!

But it starts with forgiveness. It starts with believing that Jesus really did pay for all your sins on the cross. It starts with accepting that when God says you're forgiven, you're really forgiven. NOT partially forgiven. NOT conditionally forgiven. NOT temporarily forgiven. Completely, eternally, irreversibly forgiven.

And when you really believe that—not just in your head, but in your heart—everything changes. Your broken things become beautiful things. Your failures become testimonies. Your pain becomes purpose. AND that is a fresh start that everyone needs!

Before we pray though I want to talk to those of you who are feeling something stirring in your heart right now. Maybe for the first time, you're understanding what it means to be completely forgiven. Maybe you've been carrying the weight of your past for years, and today you're realizing that Jesus already carried it to the cross.

Or maybe you've believed in Jesus for a while, but you've never taken that public step to declare your faith. You've been a secret Christian, keeping your faith private, never making it official.

Today, we're celebrating baptism, and I can't think of a more perfect day to talk about taking your next step in following Jesus.

Baptism is your opportunity to say to the world, "My old life of trying to earn forgiveness is over. My new life of living in grace has begun." It's your chance to publicly declare, "Jesus paid for my sins, and I'm not ashamed of what He's done for me."

Romans 6:4 says: **We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.**

When you go down into this water, you're saying, "I'm burying the old me—the one who was defined by failures, mistakes, and broken things." When you come up out of the water, you're declaring, "I'm rising as a new creation—someone whose broken things have become beautiful things through Christ."

But here's what I love about baptism: it's not just a symbol. It's an anchor for your soul. When the storms of life come—and they will come—when you're tempted to believe the lie that you're not forgiven, when the enemy whispers that your past disqualifies you, when you start doubting God's love for you, you can remember the day you were baptized.

You can say, "I remember the day I went public with my faith. I remember the day I declared that Jesus is my Savior. I remember the day I buried my old life and rose to walk in new life. That's my anchor. That's my foundation. That's my beautiful thing that can never be taken away."

Hebrews 6:19 says: **We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.**

Your forgiveness in Christ isn't just a nice idea—it's an anchor that holds you steady no matter what storms you face.

Some of you have been sitting on the fence for years. You believe in Jesus, but you've never made it public. You love God privately, but you've never declared it publicly. Today can be the day you stop living like a secret agent for Jesus and start living like a bold witness for Christ!

Others of you are hearing about God's forgiveness for the first time, and something inside you is saying, "I want that. I need that. I'm tired of carrying this weight." Today can be the day you discover that your broken things can become beautiful things.

If you need to take your next step and be baptized, don't wait. Don't put it off. Don't think you need to get cleaned up first—that's what baptism is for! Come as you are, with all your broken things, and let Jesus make them beautiful.

Over the next five weeks, we're going to talk about five more beautiful things that God provides: healing for all your diseases, redemption from the pit, crowning with love and compassion, satisfaction with good things, and renewal of our youth.

But they all build on this foundation: complete forgiveness for all your sins.

Pastor Craig Groeschel says, "When you understand the depth of your sin and the height of God's grace, you can't help but be overwhelmed by His love."

That's where transformation happens—not in trying harder, but in understanding deeper how completely you've been forgiven.

Next week, we're going to talk about something that will blow your mind: divine healing that goes deeper than any medicine can reach. We're going to discover that when David says God "heals all your diseases," he's talking about restoration that touches every broken part of your life.

But for today, I want you to walk out of here with one beautiful thing firmly planted in your heart: you are completely, permanently, eternally forgiven in Christ. Your broken things can become beautiful things. Your story isn't over—God's just getting started.

And if you're ready to make that forgiveness official, to plant that anchor deep in your soul, to take your next step in following Jesus—baptism is waiting for you.

Let's pray together.