

Psalm 103:1-14  
The Father

We are going to Psalm 103 today. We'll be taking today off of Exodus for child dedications and father's day, and then for most of this summer we'll be back in Exodus, surveying the rest of the book and wrapping up by fall.

So we'll be in Psalm 103 today.

**Psalm 103:1-14** “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 forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, 4 who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, 5 who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. 6 The LORD works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. 7 He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel. 8 The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. 9 He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. 10 He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. 11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; 12 as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. 13 As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. 14 For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.

The Bible is not a self-help book. It isn't primarily about how to do life, it isn't primarily about how to be a great dad. But it is a book about God, written with the assumption that our whole life changes around who our God is. We become like the God we worship.

And as that process works in our lives, it certainly shapes fatherhood.

And as we talk about that today, it is important that we realize that it is for all of us, even though not all of us are fathers.

Because a church is a community, and it is important that we all, in love, understand that texts and messages that might apply more directly to others are still important for us.

In Christ, we don't have men vs. women, fathers vs. mothers, all competing for attention. In Christ, we are glad when women benefit from a ministry or men benefit from a ministry, because as one part of the body is strengthened we are all strengthened. The presence of more godly women in the church benefits the men, women, and children. The presence of more godly men in the church benefits the men, women, and children. And the presence of more godly fathers likewise benefits everybody.

Even if you're not a dad, you may be one someday. You may be raising one, or may raise one someday. You may be a grandfather or grandmother to one. You may be discipling one. And we all benefit from knowing what a father is supposed to be.

So we're looking at God as Father today, in the hopes that we will know Him better, and know better what a father is supposed to be like.

Which flies in the face of two lies we can believe:

### **LIE 1: WE CAN NEVER KNOW GOD WELL BECAUSE OUR EARTHLY FATHERS WERE A BAD EXAMPLE**

Its safe to say that just under half of everybody here grew up in a house without a dad present, and for those that did have dads present, many weren't dads who understood their roles or engaged well, and even the best of our fathers were sinners like us and not complete in the way they lived out their role as fathers.

And this fatherlessness is some serious baggage that we bring into our relationships with God. It's more difficult to know what God the Father is like if we've never seen a good father. In some cases, we even had abusive dads and so to say that God is the father doesn't make us think good things about him. So we can limp as a result. Our view of God is affected by our dad.

Jesus told us to address God as our Father, so it is impossible to have a view of God that hasn't been shaped by our dad. So because of their imperfections, we can struggle to see through the fog to what God the Father is like.

But, we have to be careful with our struggling. We acknowledge our weaknesses and blind spots that arise from the ways we were fathered. But it doesn't honor God to assume he is powerless over our circumstances.

We can still know God as good Father even if we had bad or imperfect fathers. He has given the scriptures so we could know what He is like, and we all have false beliefs to overcome. This is why it is so important for us to derive our view of God from serious time spent in the Bible as opposed to just our own thoughts of what He might be like, because we'll always gravitate to things we've seen on earth and think, "God must be like that."

He has given us a Bible so we can say, "Yes, my dad failed in some ways. But My Father in heaven is different from him, and I can know that Father."

## **LIE #2 - WE COULD NEVER BE GOOD FATHERS BECAUSE OUR EARTHLY FATHERS WERE BAD EXAMPLES**

God turns things around. He makes us a new creation when we become Christians. The fatherlessness of our generation creates real problems, all of which can be overcome by the power of God's spirit and the transforming nature of the Gospel. God changes family trees in a generation.

We will be far from perfect, but we are confessing our sins to a God who forgives and restores.

So when we confess our sins, including the ways we fall short as dads, we don't confess them assuming we can never change and will always be who we are because of how we grew up. Because we confess our weaknesses to God, we know we are confessing them to the one who can change them.

*I bring my car to the mechanic confessing that "I can't fix this." But I bring it in confidence that the mechanic can. He can diagnose what I can't*

*understand, he knows a lot I don't know, he has the tools to fix what I could never fix.*

God is not a powerless God. And the darkness that we've experienced, as significant as it is, cannot drive out the light.

We should expect light to drive out darkness.

It's true that our upbringing will affect our view of God. It is true that being just like my dad is my default setting.

But it is even more true that as we learn to be worshippers of our perfect Father in heaven, the LIGHT of who God our Father is can push that darkness out. We can have a healthy relationship with God as Father even if we had unhealthy relationships with earthly fathers. And we can have our whole definition of what a father is changed and we can be different because of it.

Our deficiencies and brokenness do not limit God. He can and does overcome them.

Our default mode as men is to act like our dads. But if we learn about and believe in God's fatherhood, it makes us more like Him.

The more we see our Father for who He is, the more we're transformed to be like Him.

**1 John 3:2 Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.**

Seeing Him for Who He is changes us to be like Him.

We are transformed by truths about God.

So its important not to move quickly past the truth that Christians believe that a central way God has revealed Himself to us is as our Father. When Jesus prayed, he addressed God as Father or Abba almost every time He

prayed. (On the cross was the only exception when He called Him 'My God'.)

He wants us to know God as Father. But, because of the stigma created by a few bad dads, that tends to get underemphasized in contemporary churches.

Churches emphasize Jesus - great emphasis - there's a strong emphasis on having a relationship with God the Son. More charismatic churches emphasize God the Holy Spirit - also a great emphasis. But there isn't much emphasis on God the Father.

But God has revealed Himself as Son, as Spirit, and as Father.

I. **The Compassion of a Father (Psalm 103:13)**

And at the heart of Psalm 103 is verse 13:

**13 As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.**

What comes before this verse and after this verse in the Psalms is an unpacking of what the compassionate fathering of God looks like. This whole Psalm is saying, "This is what our Father in heaven is like."

And it says at the heart of his fatherhood is *compassion*. Which is a word that means a deep stirring up of your spirit for someone, the kind of love that compels you to act on someone's behalf.

It's a love for someone that causes you to take responsibility for them.

It's often used of mothers and the kind of care and concern they have for nursing babies:

**Isaiah 49:15 "Can a woman forget her nursing child and have no *compassion* on the son of her womb ? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you.**

The kind of care and concern the Father has for us is like the kind of care and concern a mother has for nursing babies. It's a diligent, constant concern. It's a concern for someone that is hard-wired into you and causes you to act.

*I remember driving home from the hospital with Lydia. When we were going there, I was fairly reckless. That's your chance to drive fast for free. But on the way home, I checked and double checked the car seat. I drove home slowly - felt like I should have the flashers on - because there was a baby in the car. It changed how I drove.*

*Then, I had new emotions - a new kind of love, and new kinds of anger at things that would threaten her.*

*Because there was now compassion - a care and concern that affects how we act.*

It's built into the biology of a parent to care for a new baby, to the point where you do anything necessary for the good of your kid.

And God says that's what his Fatherhood is like toward us. He doesn't change, so it isn't saying that us coming along changed God. But He is saying that love and active concern for us goes to the core of His being.

He isn't a disinterested Father to us, he's not a Father who is annoyed by our presence, who is fed up with us. He's not a Father who has plopped on the couch and doesn't want us to disturb Him.

He's a Father with active compassion that compels Him to take responsibility for us.

**And every time He describes His Fatherhood to us, he is defining for us what a Father is.**

And these are all calls for us to be dads like that too.

There's a place in Chronicles of Narnia where Aslan the Lion goes to the White Witch's castle. And there, he has to bring some of the stone statues back to life so he can have soldiers for a battle. One of those statues is a

lion. Aslan brings him back to life, and at one point says something to him about what “US LIONS” are like.

Soon this lion struts around talking to everyone else and says, “*Did you hear what he said? **Us lions.** That means him and me. **Us lions.**”*

He raised him from the dead and included him in the mission, and said US LIONS. It gave that lion his identity and sense of purpose- it was an invitation to be a lion like Aslan is a lion.

And in the same way, God calling himself a Father, is in effect saying to human fathers, “Us fathers.” This is how “us fathers” live, this is how “us fathers behave.” Which is an exciting invitation.

At the heart of what it means to be a father is compassion - to be moved to act and TAKE RESPONSIBILITY like God does.

And I know there’s a lot written about how being a man means living a life of adventure - risking it all to go after your dreams, traveling the world and experiencing the beauty.

But real manhood is not a call to live all of our dreams, but to take responsibility.

Which requires a major change in us.

And that’s why the Psalmist starts by talking to himself - to his soul - in verse 1. He’s preaching to himself.

## **II. The Preaching of a Father (Psalm 103:1-2)**

He’s grabbing himself by the collar and saying, “You have to believe this stuff and act accordingly”

**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,**

So he says, “Praise the Lord - worship the Lord”. And not just my lips, but my soul - all of me. Don’t forget all that He does.

He's preaching to Himself, and it's an important discipline for all of us to learn, dads and everyone else. To continually remind ourselves of the nature of God and all that he does.

To fill our minds with thoughts of God that will change us.

We are affected by what we preach to ourselves continually:

We can preach to ourselves our excuses: all the reasons I can't be as responsible as other guys. Here are all the reasons I could never love my wife well. Here are all the reasons I could never care for my kids well. Here are all the reasons I could never provide what my family needs.

We can preach to ourselves how we're life's victims so we could never do more.

Our preaching affects us.

And our default message to ourselves is a selfish one: my life is all about me, and my responsibilities like my job and work and kids, are all interfering with what my life should be.

The default mode of our heart is not to gladly take responsibility for others, it's to be selfish.

So the Psalmist grabs his soul by the collar and says listen to me: You have a Father in heaven who's not like that. Who is moved to responsibility for others by his compassion. Don't forget his benefits.

Our default is to be like our father, Adam.

Adam sins and when God comes looking for him, he says to God, "That woman that you gave me made me do that." He sins and blames. He doesn't do what he is supposed to do, but he takes no responsibility, and blames his bride.

But contrast that with Jesus. Here we are, the bride of Christ, and the problems in the world really are our fault. But Jesus hung on the cross and

said, in effect, “That woman that you gave me made me do this.” Our father Adam sinned and blamed. Jesus didn’t sin at all, but still took total responsibility.

So the Psalmist says, “Don’t forget his benefits.” Because in beholding our Father in heaven we become like Him.

So look at His benefits, look at what this Father is like, the one who looks at the fathers among us and says, “Us fathers...”

### **III. The Forgiveness of a Father (Psalm 103:3)**

#### **3 who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,**

God as our father forgives all of our iniquity. All of it. There is no sin we commit that makes God not for us, no deficiency in our life that is too big for Him to overcome.

As a Father, he always works to restore a relationship.

Our Father in heaven is a Father who forgives all that we do wrong, because He is our Father. That’s a permanent relationship.

He’s the Father in the story of the prodigal son who is looking for us to come home, who has prepared a celebration for when we return. We can run to him again and again and He forgives all of our iniquity. Because He is a True Father.

We need to see that and become like Him. Sometimes our kids mess up and we get so mad because our pride is hurt, they smudge our glory, and we go weeks on end withholding forgiveness. But Fathers like this forgive all iniquity.

And in our discipline, which should be present in our homes, we should provide opportunities for quick resolution and restoration of relationship, not endless heartache. But when we hold bitter grudges against our wives and kids, we are nothing like our Father.

God is a reliably gracious Father who forgives - we know we can find forgiveness in Him.

#### **IV. The Redemption of a Father (Psalm 103:4)**

**4 who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,**

He takes responsibility for the pits we are in.

Good fathers are like that - they see the mess that their families are in, and they redeem. They work to fix it. They don't run away when their families fall into a pit. They own the pit.

And at times, when it looks like our families are in the pit, it may seem like an opportunity to cut and run.

We don't feel attracted to our wives, we don't feel fulfilled by our children - home is loud and chaotic and we want out. So we shamefully abandon them and leave altogether, or we stay, but check out mentally and emotionally. We retreat to video games or hobbies or distractions.

But look at our Father.

He sees us in a pit - and comes into that pit with us to push us up out of it. He becomes flesh and lives among us, wears a crown of thorns so we can be crowned with glory and honor. He gives his life so we can live.

And men, when home is a pit - just like our Father owned our pit, we need to own that pit. And work to redeem it.

When the marriage relationship has grown stale, or cold, or even angry - work to fix that. When your kids are looking like they're going to derail their lives or their faith, work to redeem it.

Fathers redeem from a pit, they don't run from a pit.

#### **V. The Provision of a Father (Psalm 103:5)**

## 5 who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

He provides what we need to be whole.

Fathers take the responsibility to provide. Even when its costly.

Men just have to work.

But so much of our energy to work gets undermined by our daydreams.

We have to remember that biblical manhood is not dreaming a dream and then running after every dream we have, it is taking responsibility.

But we take the responsibility God has given us: for the family we have, for the work we do, and we run from that and daydream. We daydream about the DREAM GIRL, the DREAM DAY, and the DREAM JOB - and shirk responsibility where we are.

**Dream Girls.** How many men are lost in internet pornography, sinfully dreaming about women that have been photoshopped and don't exist in the real world, only to look at their wives with disgust for not being that dream girl.

**Or we have our dream day** - the way it should go. We should go to work at 9, work hard till 5, get recognized by the boss for our great performance, get paid more than we deserve. And then we get home, and our wives are smiling and energetic, so excited to see us. The kids run up and hug us. And then we plop on the couch at 5, eat a steak, and watch TV till 10, uninterrupted, in peace.

But that fantasy day doesn't happen. We go in at 7:30. And have to stay late till 6. We're underpaid. We get home, and our wives have worked all day too, so they're tired. The kids are tense. They need help with homework, and the car needs work, and the sink is leaking. So we go home and work a whole second work day - on the kids, the house, the car. And at 11, we're exhausted. And we feel like something has gone wrong. This wasn't the dream day.

But God's dream for men is not a life of ease. Its a life of responsibility. And our daydreams can make the responsibility seem so frustrating.

**And we have to be careful of our daydreaming about our dream job,** the job we were made for, the work we can be passionate about. That job may be out there, and if you can find it or make it, do.

But God's clearly revealed dream for us is responsibility: work hard at a job that is cursed like all of them to provide for our families like our Father in heaven provides for us.

And if the job I love won't do that, I either have to find a way to make it do that, or do a job I don't love for the PEOPLE I DO LOVE.

And remember, love like Jesus.

**Jesus ON THE CROSS was not doing his dream job.**

He was doing the job that was necessary to provide for his kids. And there was joy - but it was the joy set before him. "For the joy set before him he endured the cross."

And many of our jobs will be jobs we endure for the joy set before us - the joy of our kids eating, the joy of our wives having what they need.

Ultimate manhood is displayed not in chasing our dreams, but carrying our loads. Fulfilling our responsibilities. Having a love so deep that it compels us to take responsibility for others, like our Father in Heaven.

**VI. The Presence of a Father (Psalm 103:6-7)**

**6 The LORD works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. 7 He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel.**

He is a God who makes his presence known. And who teaches.

And he says, "Us Fathers." Fathers are present with their kids and teach their kids.

Presence - we are there, not running away - play with kids, be there for them.

Mom should not be the only one teaching our kids about Christ. They should certainly teach.

But men need to be spiritual leaders. For our boys especially, if they don't have dad leading the way, when they start to become men, they'll be leaving aside what they view as soft and feminine. And Jesus will go out the window.

### **VII. The Mercy of a Father (Psalm 103:8-10)**

**8 The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. 9 He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. 10 He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.**

Notice how our Father is slow to anger, and doesn't stay angry forever.

Guys, it will affect our homes and our kids when we're not like our Father.

Many of us allow anger to be the baseline mood of our homes. We're just always angry. So our kids aren't themselves around us, they don't open up to us, they learn to stay away from us, they learn they're an annoyance and a bother.

But God's baseline mood is merciful and gracious.

It doesn't say he never gets angry - He does. God doesn't allow everything, he's not detached, he's not permissive. Our behavior can make him angry - it has to if He loves us. When He sees sin that is destroying us, He has righteous anger.

But even his anger compels him to action - to redeeming us from the pit. He's angry at the pit, and loves his kids in the pit.

Good dads get angry - they get angry at the sin that destroys our kids. And they redeem them from it.

And, like our Father, anger is not the norm. We should be slow to get there, and quick to get out of there. Constant anger, constant discipline wrecks our kids. So does permissiveness. But we have a perfect Father to look to.

### **VIII. The Lavish Father (Psalm 103:11-14)**

**11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; 12 as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.**

Look at how He's lavish and generous.

We tend to think money. But presence, instruction, happiness, service.

**13 As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. 14 For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.**

We feel we can't approach God because of our deficiencies. But it is our frailty that provokes extra care.

God is intimately involved with his kids because they're so weak.

So often we are not like our father.

We should protect, but sometimes our emotions and anger are the main thing they need protection from.

We should provide, but we are the reason they're not provided for.

We should drive the warmth and joy in the home, but we become the reason for sorrow there.

We had few models, and end up being poor fathers.

The only way to recover what we've lost is by coming to know the father.

In the gospel, the fatherless no longer are. God restores when we worship Him. And he forgives.

And if we believe, we become the children of God. **John 1:12-13** **“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.**

Scriptures Referenced:

Psalm 103:1-14

1 John 3:2

Psalm 103:13

Isaiah 49:15

Psalm 103:1-2

Psalm 103:3

Psalm 103:4

Psalm 103:5

Psalm 103:6-7

Psalm 103:8-10

Psalm 103:11-12

Psalm 103:13-14

John 1:12-13

Notes:

By learning who the Father is, we will have the tools to overcome our deficient view of God and our deficient view of fatherhood.

- I. The Compassion of a Father (Psalm 103:13)
- II. The Preaching of a Father (Psalm 103:1-2)

- III. The Forgiveness of a Father (Psalm 103:3)
- IV. The Redemption of a Father (Psalm 103:4)
- V. The Provision of a Father (Psalm 103:5)
- VI. The Presence of a Father (Psalm 103:6-7)
- VII. The Mercy of a Father (Psalm 103:8-10)
- VIII. The Lavishness of a Father (Psalm 103:11-14)

For Discussion:

- 1) Which of these attributes of God as Father stand out to you? Why?
- 2) What others attributes of God as Father are present in the scriptures?
- 3) How do these attributes affect your view of and relationship with God?
- 4) How do they shape human fatherhood?
- 5) How is responsibility-taking fundamental to good fatherhood?