

Shaped By The Psalms

Bless The LORD, O My Soul / Psalm 103 / July 26, 2026

Introduction:

Today, we will be focusing our attention on Psalm 103, a psalm of praise. Unlike so many of David's psalms, Psalm 103 contains no complaint. No enemies are pursuing him, no desperate cries for deliverance, and no confession of a particular sin. Instead, David simply stands in awe of who God is. As the commentator James Luther Mays writes, *"Psalm 103 is a profoundly evangelical hymn. It gives voice to the thankfulness of sinners that the Lord is a God of mercy and grace."* That's exactly what this psalm is. It is the song of forgiven sinners, the worship of people who have discovered God's mercy. David never tells us to praise God because life is easy. Instead, he tells us to bless the Lord because of who He is. Our circumstances, health, finances, and relationships can change. But God's character never changes. That is why our worship can remain steady even when our circumstances do not. This is important because one of the greatest dangers in the Christian life is spiritual forgetfulness. We become consumed with today's distractions and problems, gradually forgetting yesterday's grace. Our prayers become filled with requests but empty of gratitude. Our worship becomes routine because our memories become dull. David understands that tendency, and it's why he begins by preaching, not to the congregation, but to himself. Before he calls anyone else to worship, he addresses his own soul and tells himself how he should feel. If we only worship when we feel like worshipping, we will often remain silent. David understands that genuine worship sometimes begins with a deliberate act of remembering. Perhaps that's exactly what some of us need this morning. Not new information nor a new theological insight. Simply a renewed remembrance of the God we already know and all He has done for His people so that every part of our lives may respond in wholehearted worship. First, David tells us to... I. Bless The LORD By Remembering His Benefits. David opens with words that almost sound like a command directed inward.

Psalm 103:1-2

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,*

The worship that is so often found in many modern churches is often contrary to David's sentiment. Countless worship songs are sung across our nation every Sunday, and many of those songs are chosen because of how it makes people feel rather than the truth they display. Worship, sadly, has become about emotional expression rather than a thoughtful response. But not so with David; he knows his own heart. He knows how easily gratitude fades and emotions change. So, he commands his own soul to remember and to bless. When Scripture says that God blesses us, it means He graciously pours out His favor upon us. But when we bless God, we are not adding something He lacks. We are recognizing what He already is and we respond to Him. That's exactly what David is doing. He is reviewing God's excellencies and reminding himself of God's goodness. And notice how comprehensive his worship is. *"All that is within me."* God deserves wholehearted worship because He has shown immeasurable mercy and grace. David gives the reason: that we may *"Forget not all His benefits."* When Moses prepared Israel to enter the Promised Land, he repeatedly warned them not to forget the Lord after they experienced prosperity. When life becomes too comfortable, we begin assuming that blessings are normal rather than gifts we don't deserve. David says the soul must fight that tendency by intentionally remembering. Then David lists those benefits:

Psalm 103:3-4a

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

⁴ *who redeems your life from the pit,*

Notice that David's list of benefits doesn't begin with material blessings but with forgiveness. Everything else rests upon this. Before David speaks about healing, before redemption, before renewal, he begins with forgiveness. Without forgiveness, every other blessing would be temporary. The greatest need of every human that has ever lived has never been better circumstances. Our greatest need has always been reconciliation with God, and He gives it in abundance. God forgives all your iniquity. Every sin confessed in genuine repentance is met by God's abundant mercy. David knew that personally. He knew the crushing weight of guilt after his sin with Bathsheba. But he also knew the joy of receiving God's forgiveness. Next, David says, *"Who heals all your diseases."* To be clear, this verse is not a promise that every believer will experience physical healing in this life. David's sin with Bathsheba was forgiven, but God did not remove the painful consequence. Regardless, David still celebrates the God who heals because he knows that sometimes God reserves perfect healing for the resurrection and, therefore, whether we experience it in this life or in eternity, every healing we experience comes from the same gracious hand. Even more importantly, forgiveness itself is the deepest healing our souls could ever know. Sin is the disease beneath every other disease. That is why Jesus often forgave before He healed. The greatest miracle was never restored legs or restored eyesight. It was restored fellowship with God. David continues, *"Who redeems your life from the pit."* The word "pit" in Hebrew refers to corruption, the grave, or a deep hole. It can mean a dark place of hopelessness, sin, death, or pain that people cannot escape on their own. But like David's great-grandfather Boaz, who redeemed his great-grandmother Ruth from a hopeless situation, God steps into our lives and redeems us from our hopelessness. Without Christ, we are spiritually dead, unable to rescue ourselves. But Christ became our Redeemer. He entered our condition, bore our judgment, and paid our debt. He brought us out of the pit and into His family. David could only see that redemption from a distance. We, on the other hand, know our Redeemer's name. And because He lives, those who trust Him never need to fear that the pit will have the final word. David has already reminded us that God forgives, heals, and redeems. Now he continues by turning to God's character: II. Bless The LORD By Remembering His Character.

Psalm 103:4b-5

who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,

⁵ *who satisfies you with good*

so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

Notice God doesn't just rescue His people from destruction; He brings them into a relationship with Him. This is both a benefit and points us to His character. The One who forgives now crowns the forgiven and graciously adopts us into His family. And what is this crown made of? *"Steadfast love and mercy."* The Hebrew word translated "steadfast love" describes God's covenantal, unfailing, loyal love to His people. It doesn't fluctuate with our performance; it is rooted in His own character. If God's love depended on our consistency, none of us would deserve it. God's steadfast love never changes; He is faithful even when we are not. Furthermore, He satisfies us with good things. He knows what we truly need and, as far as I have found, what we truly need is more of Him. Spiritual exhaustion often grows where spiritual forgetfulness has taken root. But when we remember our satisfaction comes from Him our spirit will find renewed strength and renewed worship. Our hearts were created for God; they will never find lasting rest apart from Him. Having spoken of God's work in his own life, David now widens the lens beginning in verse 6. The God who has dealt graciously with David has always dealt graciously with His people.

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.

Immediately our minds should go to Egypt. Israel was helpless, enslaved, and unable to rescue herself. And yet God saw their oppression and delivered them. David reminds us that God's righteousness is not cold or detached, and He rescues His people by confronting evil. David is also pointing us back to a defining moment. After Israel's shocking idolatry with the golden calf, Moses pleaded with God to reveal His glory. God answered that prayer by proclaiming His own name, and David quotes that revelation almost word for word.

Psalm 103:8

⁸ The Lord is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Israel had just committed spiritual adultery by bowing before an idol they made with their own hands only weeks after promising covenant faithfulness. If anyone deserved judgment, they did. Yet this is how God describes Himself. The God of Scripture is perfectly holy and just, but also perfectly compassionate, gracious, patient, and loving. Those truths exist together in perfect harmony, and we get to see the clearest expression of that harmony at the cross, where God's justice was satisfied and His love was displayed in all its fullness: in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. The cross is where Psalm 103 finds its fullest expression. David continues:

Psalm 103:9-10

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.

Unlike fallen human beings who tend to prolong quarrels and nurse grievances, God's anger is restrained by His mercy. Though infinitely wronged by us, He delights to forgive those He has chosen to love. Our sins against a holy and righteous God deserve justice, condemnation, judgment, and death; and that is what every one of us deserves apart from Christ. Yet David says God has not dealt with us according to what we deserve, and we know that He does this by standing in our place. Our sins were dealt with when the LORD laid on Him (Christ) the iniquity of us all so mercy could rightly flow toward us while His justice was fulfilled. That brings David to two unforgettable images:

Psalm 103:11-12

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.

How high are the heavens? No one can measure them. Eventually north becomes south, but east and west never meet. The distance is immeasurable. David simply says, God's covenant love is greater still. When God forgives our sin, He removes it and remembers it no more. When Satan reminds you of your forgiven past, preach Psalm 103 to your own soul. Then David closes this section with a tender image of our God:

Psalm 103:13-14

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.

David has described God as King, Judge, and Redeemer. Now he calls Him Father. Think of a loving father kneeling beside an injured child. He knows the child's weakness and fears. He doesn't respond with irritation but with compassion. He knows us even better than we know ourselves, remembering that we are dust. He remembers our frailty even when we forget it ourselves. He still graciously loves us despite knowing our weakness and limitations. That is the God David is calling his soul, and ours, to bless. If all you knew of God were His holiness and power, you might fear Him and despair. But when His holiness and fatherly compassion meet in the person of Jesus Christ, you find a Savior who is both perfectly righteous and perfectly merciful to the weak and undeserving. **III. Bless The LORD Because His Love Outlasts Our Frailty.** Having celebrated God's compassion, David now reminds us why we need that compassion so desperately. He turns our attention away from the greatness of God and toward the weakness of man.

Psalm 103:15-16

¹⁵ *As for man, his days are like grass;
he flourishes like a flower of the field;
¹⁶ for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,
and its place knows it no more.*

David isn't trying to depress us; he's giving us perspective. Our culture does everything it can to avoid thinking about mortality. We spend billions of dollars trying to delay our aging and avoid conversations about death. Yet Scripture refuses to let us ignore the reality that our life is "a vapor" and our days quickly pass away. We're like wildflowers that bloom beautifully for a brief season before disappearing. That is David's picture of human life: beautiful, precious, and God-given, but brief. Life is not meaningless, it is fragile. All of us knows that everything can change in an instant and that realization should humble us. We make plans as though tomorrow is guaranteed. We assume there will always be another opportunity to repent, to reconcile, or another opportunity to obey, forgetting that our lives are astonishingly short. Despite this, we can have hope because of God.

Psalm 103:17-18

¹⁷ *But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him,
and his righteousness to children's children,
¹⁸ to those who keep his covenant
and remember to do his commandments.*

Our lives are temporary but God's love for us is eternal. Though we change and fade, He remains and never forgets. Notice David doesn't just say that God is eternal, He says God's **steadfast love** is everlasting. That is profoundly comforting, reminding us that God's covenant love does not expire, it stretches from everlasting to everlasting. These verses deserve careful attention, though. David is not teaching that God's love is earned by obedience. Everything in the first half of the psalm has already ruled that out. Those who fear the Lord do not receive His steadfast love because they have earned it, but because they have already experienced His forgiveness. Their obedience is the grateful response of redeemed people, not the price of God's favor. That is the pattern of the entire Bible. Grace always comes before obedience, and it's meant to transform us. Those who truly know His mercy begin learning to walk in His ways. Not perfectly, but genuinely. Then David lifts our eyes even higher.

Psalm 103:19

¹⁹ *The Lord has established his throne in the heavens,
and his kingdom rules over all.*

That single verse changes the scale of the entire psalm. David has moved from one human soul to the covenant people to all creation, and now to the throne of the universe. Why does he end here? Because all of the blessings he has celebrated depend upon this truth. God can forgive and redeem and sustain His covenant because He reigns. His compassion is backed by omnipotence, and His mercy is exercised from the throne of the universe. That means there is not one corner of your life outside His authority. There is no circumstance, temptation, or suffering that His kingdom doesn't rule over. That doesn't remove every question, but it gives us confidence in the One who holds every answer. Our comfort has never been that life is predictable; our comfort is that our King reigns. IV. Bless The LORD With All Creation. The final verses are like the crescendo of a great symphony. David has been speaking to himself. He has been speaking to God's people. Now he calls upon the entire universe.

Psalm 103:20-22

²⁰ *Bless the Lord, O you his angels,
you mighty ones who do his word,
obeying the voice of his word!*

²¹ *Bless the Lord, all his hosts,
his ministers, who do his will!*

²² *Bless the Lord, all his works,
in all places of his dominion.*

Bless the Lord, O my soul!

Imagine countless angels surrounding God's throne, perfectly obeying His will and joyfully carrying out His commands. All those angelic beings that are awaiting orders. Everything and everyone that has been formed by the words of His mouth. Every star, every planet, every ocean, every mountain, every creature, every grain of sand, and every redeemed sinner... David says to them all, "Join me." All creation exists to glorify its Creator. Paul echoes this vision when he tells us that one day every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Creation is moving toward that one great purpose: The universal praise of the King. But after inviting the entire universe to worship...David quietly returns to where he began. "*Bless the LORD, O my soul.*" Isn't that beautiful? After surveying heaven and contemplating eternity, after celebrating God's covenant love, David comes back to his own heart once more. It is possible to stand among worshipers while failing to worship. To sing every lyric while your heart remains disengaged. David refuses to let that happen by preaching to himself once again. Perhaps that's where we should end as well, by asking, "Has my soul truly blessed the Lord today?" As magnificent as Psalm 103 is, David was singing with only part of the story. He knew God forgave but he did not yet know the cross. Everything David celebrates finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, the One who forgives all our iniquity. Jesus is the Great Physician who heals our deepest disease, our Kinsman-Redeemer who entered our humanity to rescue us from the pit. He is the Son through whom we receive adoption into God's family and who crowns us with steadfast love and compassion. Jesus is the One who satisfies the deepest longings of our souls. Jesus is the perfect revelation of the Father's compassion. If you want to know what Psalm 103 looks like in flesh and blood, look at Christ. David has spent twenty-two verses helping us remember. Remember God's forgiveness, His healing, His redemption, His steadfast love, His compassion, His fatherly care. Remember His everlasting kingdom. Our worship grows where remembrance flourishes and, therefore, our only application and response is to remember and worship. But maybe you've simply grown forgetful. Then do what David does. Preach to your own soul. Tell your heart the truth before it tells you its fears. Remind yourself of the gospel before your circumstances preach a different sermon. And then, with every part of your being, join David in saying: "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name."