Title: Bless the Lord, O My Soul: Discovering God's Eternal Mercy Through Gratitude

Sermon Summary: Drawing from Psalm 103:1-5, this sermon opens a Thanksgiving series by exploring the inseparable relationship between mercy and thanksgiving in the life of a believer. The pastor argues that God's mercy is eternal precisely because it flows from His holiness, which is the primary and foundational attribute of His nature. From His holiness flows His love, and from His love flows His mercy toward humanity, particularly toward those who are His people through faith in Christ. This mercy is unsought, unearned, and undeserved. When received rightly, it produces self-forgetful gratitude that leads to worship, wonder, and wholeness. The sermon also addresses the danger of spiritual amnesia, the human tendency to forget God's mercies over time, and calls believers to combat this forgetfulness through deliberate, written inventories of gratitude organized around five categories drawn from the psalm: forgiveness, healing, redemption, honor, and renewal.

Key Points:

- Mercy and thanksgiving are inseparably linked in the life of a biblical believer; a truly thankful person will be merciful, and a truly merciful person will be thankful

- God's mercy is eternal because it flows from His holiness, which is the primary attribute of His nature; His righteousness, love, and mercy all flow from that foundational holiness

- God's mercy is unsought, unearned, and undeserved by humanity; it is entirely by grace

- For human beings, the proper receipt of mercy produces self-forgetful gratitude, which leads to worship; self-directed gratitude, which leads to wonder; and self-influenced gratitude, which leads to wholeness

- Spiritual amnesia is a fundamental human condition in which people gradually forget God's mercies and begin to take them for granted when circumstances normalize

- The psalm's litany of mercy in verses 3-5 covers five areas: pardon of iniquity and its accompanying guilt, healing of diseases, redemption from destruction and eternal death, crowning with loving kindness and compassion, and satisfaction and renewal of strength

- Humility is the heart of Christian holiness, and it grows through genuine gratitude; pride blocks the development of personal holiness

- Worship style preferences, whether contemporary or traditional, are secondary to the posture of self-forgetfulness in worship

- Believers are called to pursue a growing, cosmic vision of praise that moves from personal thanksgiving outward to a doxology that encompasses all of creation

Scripture Reference:

- Psalm 103:1-5, the primary passage, in which the psalmist commands his own soul to bless the Lord and to remember all of God's benefits, including pardon, healing, redemption, loving kindness, compassion, and renewal

- Psalm 32:1-5, in which David describes the weight of unconfessed sin and the relief of God's forgiveness of both sin and its accompanying guilt

- Psalm 34:22, affirming that the Lord redeems the souls of His servants and that none who take refuge in Him will be condemned

- Psalm 147:3, describing God as the one who heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds

- Lamentations 3, in which Jeremiah declares that God's loving kindnesses never cease and His compassions are new every morning

- 1 Peter 2:24-25, affirming that Christ bore sins in His body on the cross so that believers might die to sin and live to righteousness, and that by His wounds they were healed

- 2 Corinthians 5, where Paul writes that the love of Christ seizes believers, having concluded that one died for all, so that those who live would no longer live for themselves but for Him

Stories:

- The pastor recounts being asked by Pastor Leo Gibson in approximately 1983 to preach a Wednesday evening Thanksgiving message from Psalm 103, a direction he found slightly off-putting at the time but which has reverberated with meaning for more than four decades since

- James Waltner's commentary illustration of a parent whose child's cancer goes into remission; the parent overflows with gratitude for weeks, but as life normalizes months later, the consciousness of God's mercy evaporates even though the child remains healed

- The pastor shares his personal experience of holding his father's hand as his father died, feeling his father's heart continue to beat firmly for nearly two minutes after breathing stopped, and witnessing his father's resilience, altitude, and stamina as he passed into eternity

- The pastor and his wife Terry were slowed by highway construction while driving to visit their daughter, and later passed a serious accident involving an overturned car and a tractor trailer, realizing that had they not been delayed they would likely have been involved in the crash

- The pastor references his own health journey, including cancer surgery in Columbus and heart stents, and calls the congregation to pray for a member named Mikey who is scheduled for kidney removal surgery the following Tuesday due to cancer

- John Donne's poem beginning "Batter my heart, O three-person God" is read as a reflection on the soul's need for God to break through and make it new

- William Shakespeare's Sonnet 29, beginning "When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes," is read as an illustration of how remembering God transforms despair and discontentment into soaring praise