

Psalms Playlist

Week 9 | Psalm 103

David King, author

This week's guide was written by guest author, David King.

Day 1

Read

Psalm 103 (NIV)

- ¹ Praise the Lord, 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.
- ⁶ The Lord works righteousness
and justice for all the oppressed.
- ⁷ He made known his ways to Moses,
his deeds to the people of Israel:
- ⁸ The Lord is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in love.
- ⁹ He will not always accuse,
nor will he harbor his anger forever;
- ¹⁰ he does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities.
- ¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his love for those who fear him;
- ¹² as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
- ¹³ As a father has compassion on his children,
so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him;
- ¹⁴ for he knows how we are formed,

he remembers that we are dust.
¹⁵ *The life of mortals is like grass,*
they flourish like a flower of the field;
¹⁶ *the wind blows over it and it is gone,*
and its place remembers it no more.
¹⁷ *But from everlasting to everlasting*
the Lord's love is with those who fear him,
and his righteousness with their children's children—
¹⁸ *with those who keep his covenant*
and remember to obey his precepts.
¹⁹ *The Lord has established his throne in heaven,*
and his kingdom rules over all.
²⁰ *Praise the Lord, you his angels,*
you mighty ones who do his bidding,
who obey his word.
²¹ *Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts,*
you his servants who do his will.
²² *Praise the Lord, all his works*
everywhere in his dominion.
Praise the Lord, my soul.

- After reading the passage, did you discover different things to be thankful for that you never thought about? What are they?

Reflect

Every time I read Psalm 103, the things that come to my mind are cold weather, leaves falling, football on TV, and turkey cooking. That is because I am probably not as spiritual as I ought to be. Those things are more related to our American culture than Scripture. But the reason I think of those things is because this is a psalm that is often used as a traditional American Thanksgiving, holiday passage. And while there is nothing wrong with using it around the Thanksgiving season, I pray that we would not limit it to that. I hope we will allow God to use it in order to bless us in other times. Just like it is okay to study Luke, chapter 2 at other times than just the Christmas season, Psalm 103 ought to be on our lips and in our heart each day of every year.

Our nation has gone through a lot of crises in the last six months. Fear, resentment, anger, rage, depression, and concern for health, safety, and livelihood are just a few of the challenges we face. The events of the last few months hardly seem real, and they seem like a bad dream we cannot wake up from. How do we “Train up a child in the way he should go...” (Proverbs 22:6a) when we are trying to figure out how the new routines of this new life are to be lived out? How do we find our way back to a normal life again? We have not yet discovered what the new “norm” is.

We start by understanding that God’s will for our lives is to be thankful. We may not know what God’s will is for our life and our family’s life in years to come, but we can know what

God's will is for our life five minutes from now. Listen to 1 Thessalonians 5:18: "...in everything give thanks; for this is *God's will* for you in Christ Jesus." That says to me that God's will for my life is that I be a thankful person. That's his will for all of us. If I will start right there and be thankful, God will *eventually* show his will for me and my family, even if I can't see it right now. But the starting line is thankfulness.

In these kinds of days I often wonder, "What in the world do I have to be thankful for? I admit God wants me to be thankful, but thankful for what?" Do you ever have those thoughts? I must admit that at times I do. Yet, knowing that one of God's desires for my life is to be thankful, I can go back to Psalm 103 and see the *for what's* I have to be thankful.

This is one of the greatest praise psalms in all of the Bible. It is without a peer in all the world's literature. It is the language of a man who has stirred up his soul to contemplate the goodness and faithfulness of his God. Here we see that David's words are untouched by sorrow, though David knew sorrow. His words are undaunted by complaint, though he could have complained. His words do not reveal selfishness, though David experienced some selfish times. But from the beginning of this Psalm, until its last verse, the stanzas cascade like a torrent of thanksgiving. This Psalm is like a stream that gradually acquires strength and volume until its waves of praise swell like the waves of the sea.

Most of us are thankful for minor things that God does in our lives; we are thankful for home, health, happiness, and this great land, etc. But David shows us so much more to be thankful for. How often do we take the time to discover the deeper, underlying, magnificence and beauty of God? How often do we reach in and pull out the attributes, benefits, and handiwork of our God and discover how much they really mean to us? How often do we take the time to love our Savior who loves us so much? How often do we take the time to spare a tear for what he has done for us? How often do we go to him with praise and not merely petitions for ourselves?

It is true that we are supposed to pray for our needs, but if you place in one hand all of the petitions for our needs, and if you place in the other hand all of our thanksgivings for meeting those needs, I wonder if there might be a tremendous imbalance. Long before there was an American holiday set aside such as we know, David knew how to experience and offer thanksgiving. David's heart overflowed with God's goodness, and he was seeking to praise God in it all. I like the story of the preacher in the small, country church who prayed, "Lord, we may not be able to hold much, but we can overflow a lot." I think David was like that.

And so, David teaches us how to be thankful and what to be thankful for. Tomorrow will begin to look at some things David teaches us to be thankful for in Psalm 103.

Respond

Before we can talk about our Lord's blessings, we should look more deeply at who he is. Is that possible without a wellspring of praise rising up in you until you shout praise to the Lord?

Before we look at the reasons the Psalmist gives us for thanks, try to anticipate from this Psalm what the writer is telling us to do.

What are some things you are thankful for?

Day 2

Read

Psalm 103:1–5

*¹ Praise the Lord, 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.*

Reflect

David King, author

I heard a story about a young boy who was asked to give a prayer before dinner. Prior to bowing his head to pray, he looked at the food on the table. He then closed his eyes and prayed, “Lord, I don’t like the looks of it, but I’ll thank you and eat it anyway.” Do you ever feel sometimes like that little boy—you are not really certain what you have is the best thing, but then you find yourself thanking God regardless? Often times I wonder where to begin. I know I have a lot to be thankful for, but how do I go about knowing where to start and what to include?

When you study Psalm 103, you discover that David teaches us how to be thankful, what to be thankful for, and where to begin. We begin by speaking the attributes of God. Observe the first verse of Psalm 103 again: “Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise His Holy Name.”

That is where every soul must start. Before we can thank God for his blessing, we must thank him for his being. We must recognize who he is. Who is this One whom David is talking about? He is the One who provided a table in the wilderness, fed Elijah by the brook, took an ocean and paved a highway of mercy, made the sun stand still for Gideon and his army, delivered his people from their enemies numerous times; he provides my needs from his riches in glory. A pretty good place to start thanking God is to thank him for his being.

David urges us to engage all of our intellectual, emotional, and volitional powers in blessing and magnifying the Holy Name of our God. That phrase, “...His Holy Name” embraces every attribute of the person and nature of our God. When we survey his attributes, it is easy to see why the hymn writer of old said that he was “lost in wonder, love, and praise.”

We live in a time when we are encouraged to adopt unworthy views of God and of his Word. It is a day when we are being told, “It’s not that big of a deal. It’s good to believe in God, but do not go overboard.” We live in a day and age where apathy reigns, and furthermore, there is a passion for apathy. Let that sink in for just a moment because it may be difficult to understand: there is a passion for apathy. Yes, I know those two words contradict each other, but in other words, people today are apathetic and they choose to be that way. They desire to stay that way, and they do not want that apathetic spirit in them to be challenged. What a sad reality! That is the new world we live in today.

Consequently, it is important and wholesome that we come to this psalm because it is like an oasis in our lives as we see his beauty and the glory of the Trinity. In kaleidoscopic splendor, we see the portrait of a God who loves us so much that he spared not the blood of his only Son Jesus. We see a love refusing to let go of the souls of men and women. And when we recognize that, we condition ourselves afresh in the holy art of worship. That’s why John recorded Jesus as saying, “God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). In other words, both, in spiritual attitude and in Biblical truth, we are to bless the Lord with all of our soul, and all that is within us, we should bless His Holy Name.

We are to be a thankful people, and when giving thanks, that is where we can begin—by speaking the attributes of God. But there is something else we must do, and we will look at that tomorrow as we dive into the deep waters of this psalm.

Respond

Is giving thanks ever obligatory to you? Do you find yourself knowing you need to give thanks but not really wanting to? Or not knowing where to begin?

Soak on the thought: “a passion for apathy.” What does that mean to you?

What are some attributes of God that you can be thankful for?

Day 3

Read

Psalm 103:1–5

*¹ Praise the Lord, 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.*

Reflect

David King, author

Over the last two days we have seen that it is God's will that we be a thankful people. There are a lot of things that we do not know about each other, but suffice it to say, there is something I can promise that I know about you and what God's will is for your life. I may not know all the details of his will for your life, but I know it starts with being thankful. Listen again to 1 Thessalonians 5:18: "...in everything give thanks; for this is *God's will* for you in Christ Jesus." That tells me that God's will for your life and mine, which may consist of many different things, involves being thankful. I believe that after we are a thankful people, God will have us in a position to show us the other things of His will that He wants us to eventually know.

Over the past two days, we also saw where David showed us in Psalm 103 that we should speak the attributes of God. Today, the psalmist is going to show us that we must specify the benefits of God. The Psalmist says in the second verse that we are to forget none of his benefits, and then, he begins to list them.

One of the evidences of the havoc that sin has caused in our lives is that we are creatures who remember the things we ought to forget and we forget the things we ought to remember. We remember things that destroy us emotionally, mentally, and spiritually, and we forget the things that could heal us emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. We are prone to overlook the blessings which God lavishes upon us. We must be reminded to not forget all of his benefits. So, let's itemize some that we see in this passage of the 103rd Psalm:

1. There is the personal blessing of forgiveness of sin – We see this in the first part of verse 3 where we were told that God "forgives all your sins." There is only one who can absolve sin, and that is God. God does it because of the sacrifice of his Son, Jesus. I don't know about you, but I would not want to miss out on being forgiven for anything in the world. David said in another place, "Blessed is he whose sin is forgiven, whose sin is covered" (Psalm 32:1). We should be thankful for forgiveness of sin.
2. There is the personal blessing of restoration – David goes on in verse 3 to say, "...and heals all your diseases." While the thought of sickness is not entirely absent from this statement, the main idea is that of moral defilement. David promises that after confession and forgiveness, there comes restoration.
3. There is the personal blessing of elevation – Notice the first part of verse 4. "...who redeems your life from the pit..." Do you think David had the same thought in mind

when he said in Psalm 40:1-2 that he waited patiently for the Lord and the Lord brought him out of a horrible pit and set him on a rock? You and I can be thankful for that same rescue. We are made to sit together in heavenly places with Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:6).

4. There is the personal blessing of coronation – David goes on in verse 4, “...and crowns you with love and compassion...” We should understand this better than David did. We live on this side of Calvary. We’ve seen Jesus, and Jesus has come into our lives. This means that having elevated us, our God makes us kings and priests (Revelation 1:6).
5. There is the personal blessing of satisfaction – Verse 5 says, “who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” Isaiah picks up that same analogy when he says in Isaiah 40:31 but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

Those are the personal blessings that David lists. Then David graduates from there to talk about national blessings, and we will look at those tomorrow.

Respond

What are some ways that God has brought you forgiveness of sin, restoration, elevation, coronation, and satisfaction?

Can you itemize other blessings that we have not discussed?

Day 4

Read

Psalm 103:6–19

- ⁶ The Lord works righteousness
and justice for all the oppressed.*
- ⁷ He made known his ways to Moses,
his deeds to the people of Israel:*
- ⁸ The Lord is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in love.*
- ⁹ He will not always accuse,
nor will he harbor his anger forever;*
- ¹⁰ he does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities.*
- ¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth,*

*so great is his love for those who fear him;
¹² as far as the east is from the west,
 so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
¹³ As a father has compassion on his children,
 so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him;
¹⁴ for he knows how we are formed,
 he remembers that we are dust.
¹⁵ The life of mortals is like grass,
 they flourish like a flower of the field;
¹⁶ the wind blows over it and it is gone,
 and its place remembers it no more.
¹⁷ But from everlasting to everlasting
 the Lord's love is with those who fear him,
 and his righteousness with their children's children—
¹⁸ with those who keep his covenant
 and remember to obey his precepts.
¹⁹ The Lord has established his throne in heaven,
 and his kingdom rules over all.*

Reflect

David King, author

I heard a story about a father and his little daughter who were walking together on a clear, winter night. The little girl said, “Daddy, I am going to count the stars.” The father heard her count to 225. Then he heard her sigh and say, “Oh dear! I had no idea that there were so many. I don’t believe I can ever count them all.”

The wise father said, “The stars are just like God’s benefits. God showers us with his blessings and benefits day by day. There are so many of them that we can never count them all.”

That assessment is so true, and God does bless us in ways we have yet to discover. Yesterday, we saw as David listed in Psalm 103 some of the personal blessings. Now, he progresses to list some of the national blessings that God has given to His people.

1. There is the national blessing of God’s justice – David describes this in verses 6 and 7: “The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel...” Do you remember when God brought the children of Israel out of bondage, through the wilderness, and into the Promised Land? Divine intervention like that has been repeated many times without number throughout the history of the human race. God is still judge of all the earth, and we can trust him to do righteously when we call upon his name.
2. There is the national blessing of God’s mercy – Verse 8 says, “The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.”
3. There is the national blessing of God’s patience – “He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities” (Psalm 103:9-10). Were it not for the suffering and patience

of God, every nation under heaven would have the same result as Sodom and Gomorrah. We should be thankful that God is patiently waiting for men and women to turn to him.

4. There is the national blessing of God's pardon – Verses 11-12 say, “For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.” David speaks here using the plural pronoun. There is such a thing as national sin, just like there is such a thing as personal sin. That is why David's son, Solomon, wrote: “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin condemns any people” (Proverbs 14:34). We should thank God that he is willing to forgive a nation just like he is willing to forgive an individual. He longs to bless the peoples of the earth.
5. There is the national blessing of God's pity – Verse 13 tells us, “As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him....” David goes on and discusses the frailty and brevity of man's human existence. Man is compared in verses 14-18 to the grass that grows up in one day and is scorched the next; but yet in mercy and pity, God looks down upon humankind in all of its weakness, and he blesses all who keep his covenants and obey his commands.
6. There is the national blessing of God's power – Verse 19 says, “The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.” For the most part, God's power is ignored by nations on this earth today. No nation in the UN fully acknowledges God's power. They may acknowledge an individual's right to believe it, but they refuse to adopt this truth.

If only we believed that God Omnipotent reigns, and that he causes things to happen in response to the prevailing prayer of his people, then we could see some wondrous things happen in our time. Unfortunately, many have forgotten that a nation can be blessed or that a nation can be removed. We no longer recognize the God of justice and of mercy. When we speak of thanksgiving, we often think of it as only a holiday. It has become a meaningless word. We must, once again, speak of the attributes of God and specify the benefits of God. There is another thing that we must do, and we will look at that tomorrow.

Respond

Why is it important that we look, not only at personal blessings from the Lord, but national blessings?

Do you believe God has blessed nations on this earth in spite of how they have treated him and their people? Why do you believe what you believe?

Day 5

Read

Psalm 103:20–22

*20 Praise the Lord, you his angels,
you mighty ones who do his bidding,
who obey his word.
21 Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts,
you his servants who do his will.
22 Praise the Lord, all his works
everywhere in his dominion.
Praise the Lord, my soul.*

Reflect

David King, author

I was shopping in one of the local grocery stores last year in mid-October, and I noticed that Thanksgiving had pretty much been overlooked. Christmas, because of its great commercial power, had already been pushed in the stores. Noticeably absent were the paper pilgrims that used to decorate the stores not too many years ago. Just as soon as the big push to buy costumes and candy is over (which, in mid-October, is not usually over), out comes the commercialization of Christmas. We are bombarded with Santa Claus, reindeer, and snowmen even before that season has arrived.

As God's people, it is fitting that we should pause for a while, “unplug” and focus our thoughts upon the goodness of God and offer our gratitude to him for who he is and for all he has done for us regardless of the time of year. If God's people do not do that, then who will? God's people are the standard bearers to be used by God to influence others.

In Psalm 103, we have seen that David has been thorough and methodical in delineating specific things to be thankful for. He has shown us that we must speak of the attributes of God and specify the benefits of God. Now today, we will see that he tells us that we must speak of the creation of God. David talks about God's handiwork.

David climaxes his praise by calling upon the angels in heaven and men on earth to recognize the purposes of God throughout his universe and throughout time and eternity. We cannot appreciate who God is and what he gives us without desiring to advance his cause. And David shows us that we speak of the creation of God by doing three things:

1. **Obeying His Word** – Verse 20 says, “Praise the Lord, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his Word.” David directs this word to God's angels, but if they should praise the Lord and obey his Word, we who are redeemed should as well. It's really simple—if your heart is a thankful heart, it will issue obedience. We must convert the Word of God into the primary stuff of life, and that begins with obedience.
2. **Fulling God's Will** – Verse 21 tells us, “Praise the Lord, all his Heavenly Hosts, you his servants who do his will.” The Apostle Paul tells us that the ultimate expression of total dedication to God is that of proving “what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2). Fulfilling God's will is one of the ways we please our Lord and live to his glory.

3. **Performing God’s Work** – David closes out in a doxology of blessing in Verse 22 by saying, “Praise the Lord, all his works everywhere in his dominion. Praise the Lord, my soul.” Here, the Psalmist has in mind the material universe, including humanity, and he calls upon every creature of earth to perform his appointed task. In like fashion, the Apostle Paul reminds us that we are the workmanship of God “created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

True thankfulness is thankfulness in the heart. It manifests not only in the obedience of life, but also in the performance of labor. We do not labor to gain salvation, but because we have been saved.

Did you know that a perfect example of this is found in Jesus Christ who shows us his thankful heart? In Matthew 11:25, Jesus was thankful for the simplicity of the Gospel. In that scene of Christ’s ministry, Jesus was reaching out to the poor and needy, yet was being rejected by the proud critics and the Pharisees. They misunderstood everything about Jesus. Jesus prayed, “I thank you Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth because you have hidden these things from the wise and the prudent and revealed them to babes.” Then Jesus gives a marvelous invitation, “Come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.” He was thankful for the simplicity of the Gospel, though his critics stumbled over the simplicity of it.

Jesus was thankful for something else: the sufficiency of the Father. In John 6:11 we see a miracle so impressive that it was recorded in all four gospels. Christ was thankful for the provision of those loaves and fishes. An incredible paradox exists in that he made the universe and yet was thankful for the loaves and fishes. He called forth the first stalk of wheat and yet was thankful for the bread. He spoke the first fish into existence, and yet was thankful for those given to him. That seems to highlight, even more, how little I am thankful.

Jesus was thankful for something else: salvation through the cross. In describing that upper room experience, Paul tells us that when Jesus took the bread, he blessed it and gave *thanks*. There must have been a tremendous realization going on in the humanity of Jesus at that time. He knows this bread and wine is a representation that he will spare not his body which will be broken, and he will spare not his blood which will be shed—yet, he is thankful. Jesus is thankful even though death is imminent. What an amazing love! What a Savior who loved us so much that he was thankful to give whatever it would take for us to be saved.

Respond

If Jesus was thankful for his own eventual death that would save us, why is it that we often cannot say, “Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name”? What hinders that response in us?

Other than obeying God’s Word, fulfilling God’s will, and performing God’s work, Can you identify other ways we can be thankful?

What have you learned from Psalm 103 this week?