

Psalm 103 • Bless the Lord, O My Soul

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Psalm 103. This Psalm is simply said or told us of David and as we go through this Psalm, you're going to see that it is a call to worship. David begins this Psalm by encouraging his soul, his own heart, to lift up, bless, and magnify the Lord. Then he exhorts others to join him as well.

But let me just tell you, before we get into this Psalm, that this is one of those many Psalms that is an acrostic. What we mean by that is that each verse of this Psalm begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Just as you and I would start a poem with A, B, C, D, E, F, G—the first line begins with A, the second one with B—that's the way this one works, but with the Hebrew alphabet.

As we go through this Psalm, those of you who have been in the Lord for perhaps a number of years, I'll just tell you, you're probably going to hear a few older worship songs going through your head. And if you just want to bust out in song, great, that's fine. Make a joyful noise to the Lord, right?

It begins by saying, “*¹ Bless the LORD, O my soul,* (Bless the Lord, O my soul)... ” (ESV) Yeah, the word, bless is an interesting word. One, because we're not asking the Lord to bless us—we're not saying, Lord, would You please bless my soul? It sounds like that from the outset, but that's not what's going on here.

The word bless, interestingly enough, literally in the Hebrew means to kneel. But it had a more figurative meaning that meant and is translated bless or blessed the vast majority of times that it is translated into English. And as David uses it here throughout this Psalm, he's basically calling for his soul, and for you and I, to give a blessing or to bless the Lord by our praise and worship. What he means by that is he's saying, honor the Lord with the way you worship Him, the way you praise Him, in a way that blesses Him.

So he says, “*Bless the LORD...* ” right? In a way that's proper and fitting. You'll notice again, he begins by exhorting his soul, which, as you know we are made up of three parts—body, soul, and spirit. The soul is the seat of our emotions, our intellect, and our will.

So what is David saying? *"Bless the LORD, O my soul..."* David was a man who was very passionate—he was a very, he was very feeling man. He felt things very intensely. But because of that, that could become a hindrance.

People who are deep feelers can be hindered in their praise. Why? Because you come to praise and I don't feel like it. I'm feeling something very intensely, I'm feeling something very powerfully that is dragging me down and keeping me from an otherwise happy attitude, which the world tells us is everything. And we usually just obey, we usually obey our feelings.

And so David is doing what he often does throughout the Psalms. He speaks to the seat of his emotions, and he demands that his emotions follow the command of the spirit and what is proper and fitting before the Lord. And he says, I know my emotions are in the dump right now. I know that they're in the basement, but I'm calling to them now by faith. And I'm saying, bless the Lord, O my soul. Bless the Lord. Be a blessing, lift up your voice to the Lord as he speaks to his soul.

And David understood that real worship, real magnifying of the Lord, comes from the center of who we are. It's on the inside. It's not outside. It's not how I lift my hands. It's not how I stand or sit or lie down or kneel. It's not the music we play. It's not the way we sing. It's not the way we clap our hands. It's not getting up and dancing. Although any of those things are fine and appropriate in their own place. But real worship is a deep inner expression of our heart toward God to magnify Him.

And so David, he doesn't say, bless the Lord, O my body, you know, O my soul. This is the thing that's keeping me down. And then he goes on to say—look at this—he finishes that verse by saying, *"...and all that is within me, bless his holy name!"* And so, if there's anything else that I've left out here, I want this worship to be a whole-person participation.

Have you ever noticed sometimes when you're in the middle of worship, you can be singing a song, even lifting your hands or clapping, and thinking about something else because your mind is elsewhere? And it's just too easy.

David says, *"Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me..."* Every fiber of my being, I want to stay focused. You guys know that's work, right? And don't get condemned when your mind wanders.

This is why David is saying this. I think he had the same issues. He understood that you can be fragmented in your thoughts, between your thoughts and your

spirit and your physical. It's like, man, I'm here in church, but I'm tired. I'm just tired. Oh, they want me to stand up and praise the Lord, and then we're just... And so my emotions and my spirit just follow suit because my body's tired. Or again, emotionally, I'm down. The other things follow suit as well. *"Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!"* So he calls upon His whole being.

And honestly, I've got to tell you, this serves as a gentle rebuke, I think, for what often passes for praise and worship in our churches today. I don't want to be critical or judgmental, but I wonder how many of us could say that our expression of worship or praise comes from all that is within us.

I wonder even how many of us have stopped long enough to ponder what that means. What does it mean for me to worship You with all that is within me, with everything I am? What exactly am I talking about?

David goes on to put feet to this command to bless the Lord, and he begins to list the reasons, the reasons to bless the Lord. Look at verse 2: *"Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits..."*

Hang onto that would you? Hang onto that phrase right there because we're going to repeat it. I'm going to repeat it throughout this song because what he's going to do from here on, pretty much through this song, is he's going to list the benefits that we ought to think about when we are blessing the Lord with our praise, worship, and adoration.

And so he says, *"...forget not his benefits..."* which leads you and me to the conclusion that it's probably possible to forget His benefits, right? Yeah, I think so. I think it's real easy to forget His benefits.

Somebody starts talking about what's going on in their life, and we're like, oh yeah, I forgot about that. One of the reasons we do communion once a month here at Calvary Chapel—we're just reminding ourselves of His benefits. The benefit of His death on the cross—that's what communion is all about. That's what I love about Christmas. It's a reminder of the benefit that God loved the world, that He sent His only Son to be born as a human being (John 3:16).

And even though December 25th certainly wasn't the day on which He was born, who cares? I don't, and I don't care if you celebrate His birth on June 22nd or August 3rd, it doesn't matter. What we're doing is celebrating the benefit of what the Lord did for us by sending His Son; *"...forget not his benefits..."* It's an exhortation, a reminder—hey, don't forget, because we can

do that, can't we? Boy, I'm forgetful, especially when I'm going through a hard season. I forget His benefits. So, he gives us this exhortation.

And then he begins to list them here in verse 3. He says, first of all "*who forgives all your iniquity, (and) heals all your diseases.*" Wow. That is a benefit, wouldn't you say?

Let's go with the first one: He "*forgives all your iniquity.*" That's you and I probably don't talk that way. I don't walk up to people and go, don't you know He forgave all your iniquity. I just say, He's forgiven you for all of your sins. We use much simpler language, but it's really the same thing. But, I think about this, and I think we talk a lot about forgiveness in Christian circles. I mean, I bring it up, I'm pretty sure in every message, or at least in prayer and worship. We talk about forgiveness, right?

Well, whenever you talk about something, and when something becomes a common topic among believers, it has the potential of becoming white noise. You guys know what white noise is? It's like the noise that a fan makes that you just—it makes so consistent and lasts for such a long time that you stop hearing it. It's just that drone in the background that you eventually tune out.

I think that all of the talk we do and perpetuate about forgiveness for Christians can almost become white noise, and there are two things related to our forgiveness that I think we can lose sight of and forget His benefits.

First is, we lose sight of the depth of our own sin—the gravity of that. We just lose sight of it. Second thing is, we lose sight of the magnitude of God's purity and holiness. And you put those two things together, you begin to forget His benefits.

When people are talking and I'm now talking about unbelievers. When I'm talking to an unbeliever, and I'm talking about sin, they don't understand it. I get why they don't understand it. They've not been given a revelation of the gravity of their sin, nor do they have an understanding of who God is and the incredible magnitude of His glorious splendor and purity.

So, when we talk about sin, they're like, huh? My what? It's like, what's the big deal with my sin, and why does God even care? They don't get it. We get it, but we can forget it. We can lose sight of it, and I'm not talking about reminding you of the gravity of your sin so you feel perpetually rotten, but just so that you understand the beauty of His mercy, right? That's what the reminder of the

gravity of my sin does—it reminds me just how merciful God is to have forgiven me.

Because I also know from scripture, it talks about the magnitude of His purity and holiness, which I don't understand, but I understand, I get it from the standpoint that He is holy and perfect and pure. I can understand the depth of that by any stretch, but I understand He's a holy God. Knowing those two things and remembering how much He's forgiven me is a pretty powerful thing.

And the first thing David says about not forgetting the benefits—forget not His benefits—is he says here in very clear terms, who forgives your iniquity, right? Don't forget—don't ever forget—how much you have been forgiven. Don't ever forget who forgave you. It's no big deal for me to forgive you because I'm a fellow sinner. It's a big deal for God to forgive you because He is a holy, righteous, pure God who cannot abide the stain of sin. And there is no darkness in Him at all. And so don't forget His benefits, right?

It's just too easy to fall into that idea of, I'm a sinner, God's in the business of forgiving—it's what He does, right? Isn't that just what God does? Thank you, God, for forgiving me. I know it's Your job. And so I'm going to give You lots of reasons to do it today. That's forgetting the benefit, right? “...*forget not his benefits...*”

Next, he calls us—to challenges us to recall that God is the one; “*who heals all our diseases.*” Now, even though we know that these physical bodies that we have are temporary—we know that they're not going to last forever—God still cares about them. We're thankful for that. And He has included some pretty incredible healing capabilities and given them to us.

And there are basically four kinds of healing. The first is the natural healing that has just been factored into the creation of our bodies, which does not cease to amaze me. Just a couple of weeks ago, I was helping move a box of something at Home Depot for one of the clerks, and I got this paper cut—right on the joint, where you use your hand—and it hurt. And it was like, ouch. And for a few days, every time I moved my finger, I was reminded of that paper cut.

Then, I just sat, and it became just a curiosity to me because I watched it. I watched it heal. I mean, over a period of days—I didn't just sit and do nothing else. Sounds like I sat in my room and watched my finger heal—but I paid attention over the course of days and watched it close up and heal from the bottom. And now, I can't even show you any sign that it had ever occurred, that I'd ever been cut.

And I looked at it and I went, sweet! I am fearfully and wonderfully made, and God has factored healing capabilities into our bodies that—thankfully, even with sin and the influence of sin in this world—still function. And I'm really thankful for that. That's wonderful. And that's one of the ways that God heals us.

He has also allowed us to grow in knowledge and the workings of our bodies through scientific research and medical treatment. And that's the Lord. Guys, that's the Lord who has allowed us to grow in our understanding of how the human body functions. And I'm thankful that there are times that the Lord uses medical advancement to bring healing into our lives.

I mean, I'm thankful for that. I don't take it for granted, and I don't consider it contrary to the Lord. It's like, God, look what You did. I mean, that doesn't mean that man can't get in there and mess things up or go overboard or prescribe too many drugs. Or, we can, and we do, but man, I'll tell you, I'm thankful to be living in this day and age when we have made medical advancements, and that's a blessing of the Lord. And I think we should thank Him for healing in that way.

And then the third healing that happens in our lives from time to time is supernatural healing. Natural is where my body heals according to its natural properties. But there are times when God allows supernatural healing to take place in our physical bodies.

And how do we know that it's supernatural? Well, there's no natural or scientific explanation for it. It just happened, and it happens, doesn't it? Somebody goes to the doctor, and they've got this desperate situation, and then they go back a couple of weeks later, and the doctor's like, I don't know what's going on because whatever we saw before is gone. And it happens from time to time, and we all go, whoa! And it really is wonderful.

But there's a fourth way that God heals. Sometimes we don't like to think about it, but sometimes He brings the ultimate healing by allowing us to breathe our last and enter into His presence. And you know we forget about that kind of healing? We forget that Paul called it better by far to enter into His presence. We forget that; we think it's worse by far. And that's because we have a different mindset than the apostle Paul.

He said, if I had my druthers, I'd just as soon go home, which is better by far. But he says, I'm convinced I'm going to be sticking around a little bit longer for

your benefit, but I'd rather go home and be with the Lord, better by far (Philippians 1:23-24). So forget not His benefits, the benefits of healing.

And then, verse 4, he cites another one: *“who redeems your life from the pit...”* The pit is a biblical term for destruction, and it doesn't necessarily mean eternal destruction from your sin. It could just be some destruction of any kind, but He redeems your life. The word *redeem* is a term of the marketplace. It means to purchase back.

He says in the middle of verse 4, *“...who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy.”* So God's goodness is directed to us so much further than just rescuing us from the destruction and devastation of sin, disease, and trouble. It says here, He literally crowns us. He crowns us with love and mercy.

Can I ask you just to think about that for a minute? Are you aware that you've been crowned with love? Are you aware that He's taken His love and put it on you as a crown? You probably don't see it, but what does the enemy do? He wants very desperately to knock that crown off. I think it makes him pretty mad to see that crown on crown on you. But there's a crown on you, and it's God's love and mercy. He crowns you with it.

And you know what? When we begin to understand and lay hold of the profound idea that He has crowned me with love and mercy, it literally changes everything about the way we live our lives. When you are convinced that God loves you, you suddenly become bulletproof. I'm serious. You become bulletproof. It's like, God loves me. And He crowned me, He crowned with love! He didn't just say, love you, and then walk away. He crowned you with love, and that's not going anywhere.

And again, when you lay hold of that, and when your soul understands the depth of His love—Paul wrote about it—he said, you know what? He says, I'm convinced that nothing can separate us from it. I am absolutely 100 percent convinced that nothing in heaven or on earth can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38-39). When you get a hold of that and you recognize it, that you've been crowned with it, you're just like, yippee, bring it on! Doesn't matter. He crowned me with His love. Bring it on, bring on your worst. He's crowned me with His love: *“...forget not his benefits...”*

Verse 5, he says, *“who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.”* Don't look at that too quickly. Take a moment to consider what he's saying there. He satisfies you with good. Do you guys understand that our definition of good is often very different from the Lord's? Because our

definition of good is really derived from the perspective of living on this fallen planet that is under the dominion of sin and ruled temporarily by the prince of the power of the air. And so, good to you and I is tweaked, you with me?

The Bible tells us that God works all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). Many times, we don't see it because our understanding of good is different from His, and it's a worldly definition. But what I'm telling you is this: I'm telling you that as earthbound people, we struggle to recognize true good.

I'm telling you now, you don't yet know what good is. When the Lord returns, do you remember when He created the Earth? The Book of Genesis tells us that each and every time He created, after every day, He says, the Lord looked on what He had made, and what did He do? He declared it good (Genesis 1). Didn't He say it's good?

We don't understand what that good even means because we're living in the not good because sin entered into the equation. So again, our definition of good is compromised from God's definition. So when the Bible says that He satisfies you with good, He's not talking about worldly good. He's talking about His definition of good, which is so much superior to ours. And that's why it is satisfying.

The good that often comes our way from a worldly perspective is usually fleeting because today I feel good, and tomorrow, how are you doing? Oh, not so good. And then the next day, how are you doing? Not good at all. And then the next day, I'm good, right? But the Lord's goodness is a different brand of good. And this is one of the benefits of having Him in our lives. So don't *"...forget not his benefits,"* right? He satisfies you with good.

And then He continues in verse 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."*

Yeah, the Lord works righteousness and justice. And then He goes on to say, Moses sought, and the people of Israel sought. They saw His righteousness. They saw His justice, just as a reminder.

Verse 8: *"The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."* This is what the Lord Himself declared to Moses. Remember in

the cleft of the rock? You remember when God came to Moses on the top of the mountain. He said, Moses, you're okay. That's a paraphrase. And Moses said, then, Lord, let me see Your face. And God said, well, no can do, buddy, but here's what I'll do: I'll hide you in the cleft of the rock, put My hand over you, and I'm going to pass by. I'll let you see the trailing edge of My glory. But as I pass by, I will declare Myself. And this is exactly what He declared: *"The LORD, merciful, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love."* (Exodus 33:18-19)

And then the Psalmist goes on to say, *"⁹He will not always chide (although it seems sometimes), nor will he keep his anger forever."*

Those chastening times don't go on forever. It's nice. Really, I'd encourage anything to say to somebody when they're going through a hard spot, hey, listen, it won't be like this forever.

And then in verse 10, I love this. This is such an important statement: *"He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities."*

It's so important that we understand this because the fact that God does not treat us as our sins deserve is what keeps us out of trouble doctrinally. It keeps us from legalism; it keeps us from triumphalism. It's just so important when we understand that God does not deal with us according to our sins.

We understand why—because He did deal with someone according to our sins. He dealt with His Son according to our sins, right? Thank you, God. You don't deal with me according to my sins because you dealt with Him according to my sins. You gave Him what I deserved. And now, you give me what He deserves, which is craziness. But He's saying, *"...forget not his benefits..."* Guys, *"...forget not his benefits..."* I would call this a benefit, yeah.

Verse 11: *"For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west (what a great statement), so far does he remove our transgressions from us."*

It's a good thing he didn't say as far as the north is from the south, because when you go toward the north, you get up to the North Pole, and then you're not going north anymore. Now you're going south. But if you start on the equator and head east, and you keep going east, you will go east perpetually. You won't ever go west unless you turn around and go the other way. And so there's a continuation of infinity.

I love how the Psalmist makes that clear—that He has separated our sins as far as the east is from the west. It's just a beautiful picture of the depth of His love. *"...Forget not his benefits..."* You guys, *"...Forget not his benefits..."*

Verse 13: *"As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame..."*

In other words, that's a way of saying He knows how we are formed, and He understands all of the limitations and so forth of our physical bodies.

And in fact, it goes on to say at the end of verse 14, *"...he remembers that we are dust..."*

And that means that we are made from dust, and to dust these physical bodies will one day return. But notice it says there that He shows compassion upon us. He has compassion for those—but you'll notice too that it says, *"...to those who fear him..."* He shows compassion to those who fear Him.

That's important! To fear God is to recognize who He is and who you are, and never to mix up the two, right? Don't ever mix up who you are and who God is because that's what a proper biblical fear of the Lord is predicated upon. He's God, and I'm not. He's the sinner—I'm, excuse me, I'm the sinner, and He's the Savior. I've got to be careful how I say that. I'm the sinner; He's the Savior. I'm not going to mix that up. He's the Judge; I am the judged. And that, by the way, to fear God, we're told, is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10).

And then, in verse 15, the psalmist begins to speak of those differences between us and God. He says, *"As for man, his days are like grass (we saw that in the last Psalm); he flourishes like a flower of the field; ¹⁶for the wind passes over it, and it is gone (almost as quickly as it came, it's gone), and its place knows it no more. (You wouldn't even know there was a flower or grass there.)*

¹⁷ *But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting (again) on those who fear Him, and his righteousness to children's children (again, a condition), ¹⁸to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments."*

And I want you to notice that condition that's given there. The promises are made to those who fear Him, those who keep His covenant, and those who remember His commandments. And those kinds of statements were common in the Scriptures. They're included in there to remind the reader that a life lived in ungodliness does not guarantee the Lord's goodness and compassion. It doesn't

guarantee it. It doesn't mean He won't be good to you or compassionate, but it means if you're going to live outside of His projected will for your life, then you're inviting all kinds of things into your life that are just going to go bananas.

And so, these things are laid out there to remind us that we can't expect to lay hold of all these benefits that the Psalm has been talking about if we're determined to live contrary to the Word of God. If I'm just determined, I'm just not going to do it. I'm not going to live in any sort of way in keeping with His Word.

Well, you've stepped outside this place of laying hold of all these benefits and the surety of them. And that's what the Scripture is telling you and me. Listen, salvation is free, but the benefits of the Lord have conditions. Salvation is free, but if you're going to be stupid, you can expect stupidity and the things that go along with it.

Verse 19: *"The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.* (Again, a declarative statement about God's sovereignty and rulership, and so forth.)

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'* (again, another word for angels), *his ministers who do his will!*

²² *Bless the LORD, all his works'* (And that's crazy—even His works are said to praise Him), *in all places of his dominion* (Which, of course, is everywhere. And so he ends the Psalm as it began), *Bless the LORD, O my soul!"*

And so it ends as it started, with the call to the will, the emotions, and the intellect: Bless the Lord, amen. Let's pray.

Thank you, Father, so much for Your Word. Thank you for these two Psalms. We're so grateful, Lord, for the beauty of what You have laid out in the Scriptures. Thank you for the insights that You give us. And, Lord, help us, please, to forget not Your benefits.

Be with us, Lord, as we take some time to fellowship and encourage one another. Fill us with Your Spirit. Continue to teach us Your ways. Guide us and direct us in all that we do and say, for we look to You, Lord, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, amen.