

Psalms, Teacher's Guide

Week 10: Remembering God's Steadfast Love

Psalm 103

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

After weeks of lament, suffering, and repentance, Psalm 103 lifts the study into soaring gratitude and praise. What is doctrinally at stake is the very character of God. The psalm gathers up the great self-revelation of God at Sinai, 'merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love' (Exodus 34:6), and unfolds it in vivid pictures: sins removed as far as east from west, a Father's compassion on His children, an everlasting love that outlasts our fragile lives. This is the foundational truth that makes every other lesson in the study bearable and joyful: God is, at His core, merciful. Teach students to know God as He has revealed Himself, not as the harsh figure their guilt or their fears imagine.

The psalm also climaxes in the reign of God, 'The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all' (v. 19), which connects naturally to the study's teaching that Christ reigns now. The God of all this mercy is not a sentimental indulgence but the enthroned King of the universe; His steadfast love is the love of the Sovereign. And His steadfast love finds its fullest expression at the cross, where He did indeed not deal with us according to our sins but laid them on Christ (Romans 8:32; Ephesians 1:7). Draw the line from the psalm's mercy to Calvary.

Formationally, this psalm targets one of the most common spiritual ailments: forgetfulness. David models the discipline of deliberately remembering and naming God's benefits, talking to his own soul, refusing to let mercy go unnoticed and unthanked. Aim to send students home both knowing God truly as merciful and gracious, and practicing the habit of gratitude that blesses the Lord by calling His benefits to mind. This is the antidote to the grumbling, anxious, joyless heart.

Question 1

Student Question:

David begins, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!" (v. 1), summoning his whole inner being to praise. What does it mean to 'bless the Lord,' and why does David have to command his own soul to do it rather than waiting for the feeling to arise on its own?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the meaning of 'bless the Lord.' When God blesses us, He gives good gifts; when we bless God, we do not add anything to Him but render Him the praise, thanks, and adoration He

is due. To bless the Lord is to speak well of Him from a grateful heart, to give Him His worth in worship.

Note the totality David summons: 'all that is within me.' He calls his whole inner being, mind, emotions, will, into the act of praise. Worship is not meant to be half-hearted or distracted but the engagement of the whole person.

Draw out the striking fact that David commands his own soul. He does not wait until he feels grateful; he summons gratitude as an act of the will. This is crucial: praise is often a decision before it is a feeling, and the feeling frequently follows the obedience.

Apply it directly. Many believers assume worship should be spontaneous, and so they only praise God when they feel like it. David teaches the opposite, that we can and must call our reluctant souls to bless the Lord, trusting that as we rehearse His benefits the heart will warm.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Blessing the Lord as rendering Him the praise and thanks He is due.
- Worship as the engagement of the whole inner being.
- Praise as an act of the will, often before it is a feeling.
- Summoning the reluctant soul to gratitude rather than waiting for the mood.
- Feeling frequently following the obedience of praise.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it actually mean to 'bless the Lord'?
- Why does David command his soul rather than wait to feel grateful?
- How might deciding to praise lead the feelings to follow?

Question 2

Student Question:

David tells himself, "forget not all his benefits" (v. 2), because the human heart so easily forgets. What good thing has God done for you that you have already half-forgotten or stopped thanking Him for? What would change in your daily outlook if you regularly called such things to mind?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes up 'forget not all his benefits.' Help students see that forgetfulness, not just doubt, is a chief enemy of gratitude. We are quick to forget answered prayers and daily mercies.

Teach the cost of forgetting. A forgetful heart drifts toward grumbling, anxiety, and entitlement, because it loses sight of how much it has received. Israel's repeated failures often began with

forgetting what God had done (Psalm 106:13, 21). What we forget, we cease to thank God for, and ingratitude sours the soul.

Prescribe the remedy David models: deliberate, specific remembering. Encourage students to actually count recent mercies, perhaps to keep a record, so that the benefits are named rather than allowed to fade. Gratitude grows by rehearsal.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Forgetfulness, not only doubt, as an enemy of gratitude.
- The cost of forgetting: grumbling, anxiety, entitlement (Psalm 106:13).
- Ingratitude souring the soul.
- Deliberate, specific remembering as the remedy.
- Gratitude growing by rehearsal.

Discussion Prompts

- What good thing from God have you already half-forgotten?
- What does forgetfulness cost us spiritually?
- How could you make remembering God's benefits a regular habit?

Question 3

Student Question:

David lists God's benefits beginning with the greatest: "who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy" (vv. 3–4). Why does David place forgiveness first in the list, and what does the ordering teach us about which of God's gifts is most fundamental to a blessed life?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Walk through the benefits of verses 3–5 and note their order. David begins with forgiveness: 'who forgives all your iniquity.' Of all God's gifts, this one comes first, because it addresses our deepest need.

Teach why forgiveness is foundational. Healing, provision, and satisfaction are wonderful, but without forgiveness our fundamental problem, our separation from God by sin, remains unsolved. A person could be healthy, prosperous, and satisfied and still be lost. Forgiveness is the gift that opens the way to all the others and to God Himself.

Note that David does not despise the other benefits. Healing, redemption from the pit, steadfast love, satisfaction, all are real mercies to be thanked for. But the ordering teaches priority: the greatest mercy is the pardon of sin.

Connect to the study's arc. This echoes Psalm 32 and Psalm 51, where forgiveness is the foundation of the blessed life. The God who is merciful and gracious deals first and most deeply with our sin.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Forgiveness placed first as the most fundamental benefit.
- Our deepest need as the pardon of sin, addressed before all else.
- The other benefits as real mercies, rightly ordered under forgiveness.
- Forgiveness as the gift that opens the way to God and to every other good.
- Continuity with Psalms 32 and 51 on forgiveness as the blessed life's foundation.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does David place forgiveness first in the list?
- Why is pardon of sin our most fundamental need?
- How does forgiveness open the way to every other benefit?

Question 4

Student Question:

David says God "satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's" (v. 5), describing a soul filled and refreshed by God. Where have you been seeking satisfaction in things that never quite fill you? What would it look like to let God Himself, and His benefits, be where you go to be satisfied?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question takes up verse 5: God 'satisfies you with good.' The human heart is restless and constantly seeks satisfaction; the question is where. Ask students where they habitually go to feel full.

Expose the cycle of false satisfactions. The things we chase, possessions, achievements, entertainment, approval, promise satisfaction but never deliver lasting fullness; the craving returns. Only God satisfies at the level of the soul (echoing the thirst of Psalms 42 and 43).

Point to the renewal David describes: 'your youth is renewed like the eagle's.' Being satisfied in God produces a kind of vitality and freshness that the endless chase cannot. Encourage students to bring their restless craving to God rather than to the next empty well.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God as the only true satisfaction of the restless soul.
- The cycle of false satisfactions that never finally fill us.
- Soul-level satisfaction in God versus surface-level craving (cf. Psalms 42–43).

- The renewal and vitality that flow from being satisfied in God.

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you habitually go to feel satisfied?
- Why do those things never quite fill you?
- What would it look like to be satisfied in God Himself?

Question 5

Student Question:

David declares, “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever” (vv. 8–9), echoing how God revealed His own name to Moses. What does this self-revelation teach us about the very character of God, and why is it significant that ‘merciful and gracious’ stands at the center of how God describes Himself?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 8 is the theological heart of the psalm, and it is a direct echo of Exodus 34:6, where God proclaimed His own name to Moses: ‘The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.’ This is God’s own self-description, the nearest thing to a definition of His character He gives us.

Dwell on what stands at the center: mercy and grace. When God describes Himself, He leads not with His power or His wrath but with His mercy. He is, at His core, gracious. This must shape our whole picture of God. Many believers carry a distorted image of a God who is mainly angry and hard to please; the self-revelation corrects them.

Balance the truth carefully. ‘Slow to anger’ does not mean God has no anger against sin; the same Sinai revelation says He ‘will by no means clear the guilty.’ But He is slow to it, abounding in love, and ‘will not always chide.’ His mercy is not weakness or indifference to sin; it is the settled disposition of a holy God toward repentant people.

Apply it to assurance. Because this is who God is, by His own testimony, the repentant believer can come to Him with confidence. We are not gambling on God’s mood; we are resting on His revealed and unchanging character.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Verse 8 as the echo of God’s self-revelation at Sinai (Exodus 34:6).
- Mercy and grace at the center of how God describes Himself.
- Correcting the distorted image of a mainly angry, hard-to-please God.
- ‘Slow to anger’ balanced with God’s holiness against sin.

- Assurance grounded in God's revealed, unchanging character.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that God leads with mercy when describing Himself?
- How does this correct a distorted picture of God?
- How is God's mercy different from indifference to sin?

Question 6

Student Question:

David marvels, "as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us" (v. 12). Do you actually live as a person whose sins have been carried infinitely far away, or do you still drag old, forgiven failures behind you? What would it mean to believe this verse about your own past?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question takes up the vivid verse 12: sins removed 'as far as the east is from the west.' Note the geography: east and west never meet; the distance is infinite and unbridgeable. God has put our forgiven sins that far from us.

Press the practical question: do we live as forgiven people? Many believers intellectually affirm forgiveness while emotionally dragging old, already-pardoned sins behind them, replaying them, doing penance in their minds. This verse confronts that habit.

Apply the cure. Believing verse 12 means refusing to pick back up what God has carried infinitely far away. When the old guilt resurfaces, the forgiven believer answers it with the fact: God has removed this; I will not retrieve it. Feelings of guilt must submit to the verdict of God's mercy.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The infinite, unbridgeable distance to which God removes forgiven sin.
- The gap between affirming forgiveness and living as forgiven.
- Refusing to retrieve what God has carried away.
- Feelings of guilt submitting to the verdict of God's mercy.

Discussion Prompts

- Do you live as a person whose sins have been carried infinitely far away?
- What old, forgiven failures do you still drag behind you?
- How can you answer resurfacing guilt with the truth of verse 12?

Question 7

Student Question:

David pictures God's tenderness: "As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust" (vv. 13–14). What does it teach us that God relates to His people as a compassionate Father who understands our weakness, and how does this guard us against picturing God as harsh, distant, or impossible to please?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 13–14 give one of Scripture's tenderest images of God: a compassionate Father who 'knows our frame' and 'remembers that we are dust.' God is not a harsh taskmaster surprised and outraged by our weakness; He is a Father who understands it.

Teach the fatherhood of God carefully and warmly. God's fatherly compassion is not indulgence that ignores sin, but the tender understanding of one who made us and knows our limits. He remembers we are dust, frail, finite creatures, and He deals with us accordingly, with patience and pity.

Counter the distorted image again. Many people relate to God as if He were impossible to please, always disappointed, tapping His foot in irritation. This passage dismantles that. The God who knows our frame is gentle with our weakness, even as He calls us higher.

Connect to Christ. Jesus revealed the Father fully (John 14:9) and welcomed the weak, the failing, and the broken. The father in the parable of Luke 15 runs to the returning son. This is the heart of God toward those who fear Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God as a compassionate Father who knows and pities our weakness.
- Fatherly compassion as tender understanding, not indulgence of sin.
- Correcting the image of a God impossible to please.
- Jesus revealing the Father's heart fully (John 14:9; Luke 15:20).
- God's patience with our frailty even as He calls us higher.

Discussion Prompts

- How does picturing God as a compassionate Father change the way you relate to Him?
- Where have you imagined God as harsher than He really is?
- How does Jesus show us the Father's heart toward the weak?

Question 8**Student Question:**

David contrasts our frailty, “as for man, his days are like grass” (v. 15), with God’s everlasting love, “but the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him” (v. 17). How does honestly facing your own brief, fragile life actually deepen rather than diminish your gratitude, and where do you most need to anchor your security in God’s everlasting love rather than in your own strength?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 15–17 set our frailty against God’s everlasting love. ‘As for man, his days are like grass,’ here today, gone tomorrow, ‘but the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting.’ The contrast is meant to comfort, not to depress.

Teach how facing our mortality deepens gratitude. When we honestly accept how brief and fragile our lives are, we stop taking our days for granted and start receiving each one as a gift. Numbering our days makes us wise and thankful (Psalm 90:12).

Locate the security. Because we are grass, we cannot anchor our security in our own strength, health, or longevity, all of which fail. We must anchor it in God’s everlasting love, which does not fail. The frail creature finds rest not in itself but in the unchanging God.

Apply it to where students place their confidence. Ask them where they have been trusting in their own strength or permanence, and invite them to re-anchor in the steadfast love that outlasts the grass.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Our frailty (grass) set against God’s everlasting love.
- Facing mortality as a deepener of gratitude and wisdom (Psalm 90:12).
- Security anchored in God’s unfailing love, not our own strength.
- The frail creature resting in the unchanging God.

Discussion Prompts

- How does honestly facing your frailty deepen your gratitude?
- Where have you anchored your security in your own strength?
- What would it mean to rest in God’s everlasting love instead?

Question 9

Student Question:

David celebrates that God “does not deal with us according to our sins” (v. 10) and removes our transgressions completely (v. 12), and he ends by summoning all heaven and creation to bless the Lord (vv. 19–22), declaring, “The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all” (v. 19). How does the steadfast love this psalm celebrates find its fullest

expression in the cross of Christ, and what does it mean for us that the God of all this mercy reigns now as King over everything?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Bring the psalm's mercy to its fullest expression in Christ. Verse 10 says God 'does not deal with us according to our sins nor repay us according to our iniquities.' This is the wonder of grace, but it raises a question the psalm does not fully answer: how can a just God set aside the penalty our sins deserve? The New Testament gives the answer: the cross.

Teach the cross as the place where mercy and justice meet. God did not simply overlook sin; He dealt with it in Christ. 'He did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all' (Romans 8:32). God did not deal with us according to our sins because He dealt with our sins in Jesus. The steadfast love this psalm celebrates cost the life of the Son. The east-from-west removal of our transgressions (v. 12) was accomplished at Calvary (Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 2:24).

Then take up the psalm's climax: 'The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all' (v. 19). The God of all this mercy is the enthroned King. Connect this to the study's consistent teaching: Christ reigns now, having been raised and exalted to the right hand of God (Acts 2:33–36; Ephesians 1:20–22). His kingdom 'rules over all' in the present tense; we do not await a future earthly throne but serve a King already enthroned.

Hold mercy and majesty together. The same God who is tender as a Father with our weakness is the Sovereign whose kingdom rules over all. His steadfast love is not the sentiment of a doting grandfather but the committed love of the Almighty King, which is exactly why it is unshakable. Nothing can separate us from a love backed by the throne of the universe (Romans 8:38–39).

Land on worship. The psalm ends by summoning angels, hosts, and all creation to bless the Lord, and then returns to where it began: 'Bless the Lord, O my soul.' The right response to such a God, merciful, fatherly, everlasting, reigning, is wholehearted praise. The believer who grasps this love joins the chorus of all creation.

Keep the boundary clear. The kingdom and throne language is not a hope deferred to a future earthly reign; it describes the present rule of God, now fully expressed in the reign of the risen Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The cross as the place where God's mercy and justice meet (Romans 8:32).
- God not dealing with us according to our sins because He dealt with them in Christ.
- The east-from-west removal of sin accomplished at Calvary (Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 2:24).
- God's established throne and present kingdom (v. 19), fulfilled in the reigning Christ (Acts 2:33–36; Ephesians 1:20–22).
- Mercy and majesty held together: the tender Father is the enthroned King.
- An unshakable love backed by the throne of the universe (Romans 8:38–39).

- The kingdom as present rule, not a future earthly reign.

Discussion Prompts

- How does the cross explain how God can 'not deal with us according to our sins'?
- What does it mean that the God of all this mercy reigns now as King?
- How does holding mercy and majesty together make God's love more secure, not less?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole psalm, from "Bless the Lord, O my soul" to all creation joining the praise. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through it. What is the single truth from Psalm 103 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone traces the psalm from 'Bless the Lord, O my soul' to all creation joining the praise, and asks students to name one way Jesus is forming them. Give them quiet to reflect.

Press toward the concrete. For some the formation is to build the habit of remembering and thanking; for others to finally believe their sins are removed east from west; for others to know God as a compassionate Father rather than a harsh judge. Help each name their next step.

Close by inviting the class into the psalm's own response: praise. After weeks of lament and repentance, this is the turn to gratitude. Send students home not merely informed about God's mercy but blessing the Lord for it from a remembering, grateful heart.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Building the habit of remembering and thanking God.
- Believing our sins are removed as far as east from west.
- Knowing God as compassionate Father, fully revealed in Christ.
- Gratitude and praise as the fitting response to God's steadfast love.

Discussion Prompts

- What single truth from Psalm 103 will you carry into this week?
- What benefits from God's hand do you most need to start remembering?
- How will you make blessing the Lord a daily habit?