

Psalms

Week 10: Remembering God's Steadfast Love -- Psalm 103

We are, all of us, world-class forgetters. Not of phone numbers and appointments, though those too, but of the good things. A kindness done for us last week has already faded; a crisis we begged God to resolve, and which He did, slips out of memory almost as soon as the relief arrives. We hold on to our grievances with both hands and let our gratitude leak away like water through our fingers. David knew this about the human heart, and so he does something in Psalm 103 that every one of us needs to learn to do. He talks to himself. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits."

Notice that word: forget. The great enemy of a grateful, joyful life is not unbelief so much as forgetfulness. So David sits his own soul down and walks it through the list, slowly, deliberately, the way you might count out treasures one by one. God forgives all your iniquity. He heals your diseases. He redeems your life from the pit. He crowns you with steadfast love and mercy. He satisfies you with good. This is not a man working up an emotion he does not feel. This is a man refusing to let the mercies of God go unnoticed and unthanked.

And as he counts, the psalm rises into one of the most breathtaking descriptions of God's character anywhere in Scripture. "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." He does not deal with us according to our sins. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. He is like a father who has compassion on his children, who knows our frame, who remembers that we are dust. This is the God David wants his forgetful soul, and ours, to remember.

This week we practice the holy discipline of remembering, of blessing the Lord by calling to mind His benefits and marveling at His steadfast love. After weeks of lament, suffering, and repentance, this is a psalm of soaring gratitude, and it comes not as an escape from the hard things but as their answer. Read Psalm 103 slowly. Let David teach your forgetful heart to count its blessings and to bless the One from whom they all flow.

Group Discussion: David commands his own soul, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits" (vv. 1–2). He clearly believes that forgetfulness, not just outright unbelief, is a great threat to a grateful and faithful life. Why are we so prone to forget the good things God has done, and what does our forgetfulness cost us spiritually?

Personal Reflection: David deliberately lists God's benefits, forgiveness, healing, redemption, steadfast love, so that his soul will not forget them (vv. 2–5). If you stopped and counted, what specific benefits from God's hand would be on your list this week? When was the last time you deliberately thanked Him for them?

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?

10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Exodus 34:6–7, God revealing His own name as merciful and gracious; Micah 7:18–19, the God who delights in steadfast love and casts our sins into the sea; Luke 15:20–24, the compassionate father running to the returning son; Ephesians 1:3–8, every spiritual blessing and redemption through the blood of Christ; Romans 8:31–39, nothing able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.