

## “The Lord Is Active”

**Lesson Text:** Psalm 103:1–14 **Background Scripture:** Psalm 103 **Devotional Reading:** Isaiah 66:1–14

### Psalm 103:1–14 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup>Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. <sup>2</sup>Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—<sup>3</sup>who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, <sup>4</sup>who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, <sup>5</sup>who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s. <sup>6</sup>The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.

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

### TODAY’S LESSON AIMS

- **Learning Facts:** To give the reasons for praising the Lord in today’s text.
- **Biblical Principle:** To explain the importance of considering the history of God’s work when anticipating His future work.
- **Daily Application:** To write a prayer that celebrates God’s character as the source of blessings.

### INTRODUCTION

#### God’s Wide Mercy

Frederick Faber was a nineteenth-century preacher, theologian, and hymn-writer. Probably his most famous hymn was “Faith of Our Fathers.” Less known is his “There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy.” The latter hymn reminds those singing it that God’s mercy is like the wideness of the sea. The lyrics connect God’s love, mercy, kindness, and grace.

We may wonder how we can let others see those aspects of God’s character in us in an increasingly post-Christian (or anti-Christian) culture. We wonder whether our reflection of God’s merciful character traits will be interpreted as approval of ungodly behavior. We might begin to answer these questions by taking inventory of the mercies we have received as individuals and congregations. Psalm 103 will help us do so.

### LESSON CONTEXT

The book of Psalms is often described as “ancient Israel’s hymnal.” Like hymnals today, the book of Psalms includes contributions by different authors and covers a wide span of time. The oldest psalm is by Moses (Psalm 90), and at least one psalm comes out of the setting of the captivity of God’s people in Babylon (Psalm 137). These chronological bookends are separated by some 900 years!

About half of the psalms are attributed to King David, known as the “sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Samuel 23:1). Today’s passage is one of those psalms. While some psalms include a superscription that provides the setting (example: Psalm 51), there is no such background recorded for Psalm 103. It simply notes the association with David, who reigned about 1010–970 B.C.

The Psalter is traditionally seen as falling into five sub-books, their divisions being Psalms 1–41, 42–72, 73–89, 90–106, and 107–150. Psalm 103 is located within the fourth of those five. A broad brush look at the four psalms that close book four of the book of Psalms (Ps. 90-106) emphasize praise to the Lord for several reasons: His benefits to

His people (Ps. 103), His care of His creation (Ps. 104), His wonderful acts on behalf of Israel (Ps. 105), His longsuffering with His people's rebellion (Ps. 106). There are no requests in today's psalm (103); it is only praise to the Lord. In studying this psalm, we must remember that God's blessings on Israel depended on their obedience to His covenant (vs. 17-18), and believers today must also be obedient to God's will if they would enjoy God's best (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1). The psalm also admonishes us not to forget the blessings after we have received them and enjoyed them. "give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

### **Call to Worship: Psalm 103:1-5**

David calls upon his *soul*, his immortal nature, which he defines as *all of his inmost being* to bless the holy name of the Lord. To "bless the Lord" means to delight His heart by expressing love and gratitude for all He is and all He does. Parents are pleased when their children simply thank them and love them, without asking for anything. True praise comes from a grateful heart that sincerely wants to glorify and please the Lord. "All my inmost being" means that all of our inner being is focused on the Lord—heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:28-31). It also means that we are prepared to obey His will after our praise has ended.

### **1. What was the psalmist (David) showing us regarding the value of worship? (Psalm 103:1-2)**

#### **What Do You Think?**

How does blessing the Lord guard against forgetting what we ought to remember about Him?

#### **Digging Deeper**

What daily habits can you cultivate to bless the Lord continually?

The next several verses feature a series of action verbs that describe how God relates to humanity. David listed six special blessings from the hand of the Lord (vs. 3-5): forgiveness, healing, redemption, love, satisfaction, and renewal. The word translated "forgives" is used in Scripture only of God's forgiveness of sinners (see vs. 10-12). Those who have trusted Christ have experienced God's forgiveness (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14 and 2:13). When you read 32 and 51, you learn that David knew something about God's gracious forgiveness (and see vs. 10-12).

God is able to heal every disease (Matt. 9:35), but He is not obligated to do so. Paul was not able to heal two of his friends (Phil. 2:25-30; 2 Tim. 4:20), and David's own baby son died in spite of his fasting and praying (2 Sam. 12:15-23). The believer's body will not be completely delivered from weakness and disease until it is redeemed and glorified at the return of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:18-23).

The word "redeem" (v. 4) would remind the Jewish people of their deliverance from the bondage of Egypt at the Exodus (Ex. 12-15). The statement describes God rescuing someone about to fall into a pit, and "the pit" is a symbol of sheol (6:5; 16:10; 28:1), the world of the dead. David also knew something about crowns, but no crown he ever wore compared with God's lovingkindness and compassion (tender mercies). These attributes also appear in verses 8, 11, 13, and 17.

Regardless of our age, when we find joy and happiness in blessing the name of the Lord and recounting all His benefits to us, the strength of our youth *is renewed like the eagle's*. We have the strength to soar over the problems that face us daily because we have a heart satisfied with God.

### **2. What's the "why" in our worship? (Psalm 103:3-5)**

## What Do You Think?

Which blessing in Psalm 103:3–5 is most evident in your life today?

## Digging Deeper

Which of these blessings seem lacking? Why?

### Acknowledge Divine Grace: Psalm 103:6-14

The series of action verbs continues, extending the ideas of the two previous verses. The characteristic actions or concepts of righteousness and justice are closely related, coupled as we see here about 50 times in the Old Testament (examples: Psalm 33:5; Isaiah 5:16; Jeremiah 9:24).

God expects the way He supports all the oppressed to be a guide to how the Israelites were to do so as well. The care of the oppressed is a recurring feature in the Old Testament Scriptures (Psalm 9:9; 10:18; Job 35:9; Isaiah 1:17; etc). This expectation is no less important in the New Testament era (Luke 4:18; Galatians 6:2).

It is an act of sovereign grace and condescending love when the Lord God reveals Himself to any individual (v. 7 of today's lesson). Throughout the wilderness journey God revealed Himself continually, although mysteriously, to both Moses and *the people of Israel*.

### 3. In what ways does God help the oppressed? (Psalm 103:6-7)

The psalmist now turns his attention completely to praising God for His divine character. Being a holy God, He did get angry at sin, however, God's anger bears no grudges and harbors no resentment. He is a God who will accept repentance and atonement.

One of the most praiseworthy characteristics of God is that *He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities*. God does not punish us as we deserve, as each of us would be without hope (Ezra 9:13), consigned to the lowest hell. The punishment that we deserve was given to Jesus (Isa. 53:4-6). We ought to praise the Lord for what He has not done to us, as well as for what He has done for us.

### 4. What are some of God's characteristics? (Psalm 103:8-10)

Sin is removed by the miracle of God's love and Christ's atonement. His mercy is the cause, and the extent of forgiveness is described by the largest measure which the earth can render. The reason for this wondrous mercy is clear. Like the reverence and respect of a child to his father, so too when we exhibit that godly fear (Hebrews 12:28) toward God, His great mercy is extended toward us.

### 5. What did David mean by God having compassion on those who fear Him? (Psalm 103:11-13)

## What Do You Think?

What role should guilt or shame play in the life of someone whose sins are so far removed?

## **Digging Deeper**

How would you encourage someone who still struggles with these feelings after receiving God's forgiveness?

God knows that man is fragile, feeble, and when left to himself, helpless. This conclusion is entirely consistent with the fact of the creation of humans in Genesis 2:7. The Creator knows His creation. Moreover, God's mercy reflects His awareness of our limits. The fact that our bodies decay into dirt results from our limited life spans. God works with due regard for our limitations.

## **6. What is another great thing about God's mercy towards us? (Psalm 103:14)**

### **What Do You Think?**

What encouragement can you experience knowing that God remembers our limitations as creatures?

## **Digging Deeper**

What freedom might you experience if you remembered our human limitations?

## **CONCLUSION**

### **God Knows Us!**

Psalm 103 insists that God knows us. And because of that knowledge, He is compassionate toward us. This cause-and-effect may be surprising because knowledge of another person's limitations can lead to estrangement, anger, disappointment, or even hatred. Those negative consequences present themselves because of our limited commitment to virtue and capacity for love. The contrast between the consequences of our knowledge and the consequences of God's knowledge could hardly be greater.

The amazing thing is that God's mercy creates the space in which we can come to know ourselves, each other, and even God. These texts anticipate that life will be filled with signs of God's mercy. How would others see such signs in you?

## **PRAYER**

O God of mercy, You have given us every breath we have. You have taught us to think, question, wonder, and even protest when the world does not go as You intend. Hear our prayers for Your world as You have heard them in the past. Teach us a little more daily about Your compassion for all human beings, and may we be Your hands and feet in that regard. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## **THOUGHT TO REMEMBER**

Expect signs of God's mercy. Be one yourself.

## **ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON**

Next week's lesson is "The Lord Is Righteous" where we see the psalmist David crying out to God in prayer and reminding us that the word of God helps us to pray in the will of God. Study Psalm 145:1, 10–21.