

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

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Psalm 103 — David's Doxology: The Sum of the Psalter

1.0 Introducing Psalm 103

- Book 4 of the Psalter concludes with four psalms calling God's people to bless, thank, and praise Him. Note the way that these four psalms begin and end:

Psalm	103	104	105	106
Beginning	Bless the LORD, O my soul, And all that is within me, <i>bless</i> His holy name. (v. 1)	Bless the LORD, O my soul! O LORD my God, You are very great; You are clothed with splendor and majesty, (v. 1)	Oh give thanks to the LORD, call upon His name; Make known His deeds among the peoples. (v. 1)	<u>Praise the LORD!</u> Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; For His lovingkindness is everlasting. (v. 1)
Ending	Bless the LORD, all you works of His, In all places of His dominion; Bless the LORD, O my soul! (v. 22)	Let sinners be consumed from the earth And let the wicked be no more. Bless the LORD, O my soul. Praise the LORD! (v. 35)	So that they might keep His statutes And observe His laws, <u>Praise the LORD!</u> (v. 45)	Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, From everlasting even to everlasting. And let all the people say, "Amen." <u>Praise the LORD!</u> (v. 48)

- Book 4 contains only two psalms attributed to David (Psalms 101 and 103).
- Song writers have based a number of popular hymns on Psalm 103:
 - ✓ "My Soul, Now Praise Thy Maker" (Johann Graumann, 1525).
 - ✓ "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation" (Joachim Neander, 1680).
 - ✓ "O Bless the Lord, My Soul" and "Bless, O My Soul! The Living God" (Isaac Watts, 1719).
 - ✓ "O Bless the Lord, My Soul" (James Montgomery, 1819).
 - ✓ "Praise My Soul, the King of Heaven" (Henry F. Lyte, 1834). Use "Angels from the Realms of Glory" as the tune.

Praise, my soul, the King of Heaven;
To His feet thy tribute bring.
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,

Evermore His praises sing:
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Praise the everlasting King.

✓ “Count Your Blessings” (Johnson Oatman, Jr., 1897).

2.0 Reading Psalm 103 (NAU)

103:1 *A Psalm of David.*

Bless the LORD, O my soul,

And **all** that is within me, *bless* His holy name.

103:2 **Bless the LORD, O my soul,**

And forget none of His benefits;

103:3 Who pardons **all** your iniquities,

Who heals **all** your diseases;

103:4 Who redeems your life from the pit,

Who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion;

103:5 Who satisfies your years with good things,

So that your youth is renewed like the eagle.

103:6 The LORD performs righteous deeds

And judgments for **all** who are oppressed.

103:7 He made known His ways to Moses,

His acts to the sons of Israel.

103:8 The LORD is compassionate and gracious,

Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness.

103:9 He will not always strive *with us*,

Nor will He keep *His anger* forever.

103:10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins,

Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

103:11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth,

So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him.

103:12 As far as the east is from the west,

So far has He removed our transgressions from us.

103:13 Just as a father has compassion on *his* children,

So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him.

103:14 For He Himself knows our frame;

He is mindful that we are *but* dust.

103:15 As for man, his days are like grass;

As a flower of the field, so he flourishes.

103:16 When the wind has passed over it, it is no more,

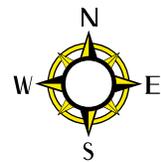
And its place acknowledges it no longer.

103:17 But the lovingkindness of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on
those who fear Him,

And His righteousness to children’s children,

103:18 To those who keep His covenant

And remember His precepts to do them.



- 103:19** The LORD has established His throne in the heavens,
And His sovereignty rules over **(all)**
- 103:20** **Bless the LORD**, you His angels,
Mighty in strength, who perform His word,
Obeying the voice of His word!
- 103:21** **Bless the LORD**, **(all)** you His hosts,
You who serve Him, doing His will.
- 103:22** **Bless the LORD**, **(all)** you works of His,
In **(all)** places of His dominion;
Bless the LORD, O my soul!

3.0 Understanding Psalm 103

3.1 Outline

- I. An Individual Call to Praise (vv. 1-5)
- II. Israel's Cause for Praise (vv. 6-18)
- III. A Universal Call to Praise (vv. 19-22)



3.2 Notes

- **v. 1** “Bless the LORD, O my soul”
 - “Bless” means to acknowledge the LORD in His position of power with all the respect due Him.
 - “Soul” in such a context refers to the individual’s total being: mind, heart, and will.
- **v. 2** “His benefits”
 - What are they?
 - ✓ Pardoned and healed (v. 3), redeemed and crowned (v. 4), satisfied and renewed (v. 5).
 - Compare Deuteronomy 8:11-18; 2 Chronicles 32:25; Psalm 116:12-14; Romans 6:22 (“benefit” is literally “fruit”).
- **v. 3** “Who heals all your diseases”
 - “This verse has played an important but unwarranted role in some systems of theology that stress what is called ‘healing in the atonement,’ meaning that if we have been saved from sin by Christ, we have been healed or have a right to be healed of any physical affliction too. This is bad theology, because it is simply not true that those who have been forgiven for sin are spared or have a right to be spared all diseases. Believers do get sick, and many passages teach that God has his purposes in the sicknesses.”—James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 2:834.
 - ✓ Justin Peters (see <http://www.justinpeters.org/seminar.htm>) provides a superb response to the so-called “Word of Faith” movement characterized by Benny Hinn, Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, and others.

- **v. 4** “redeems your life from the pit”
 - The text most likely speaks of resurrection to eternal life.
 - Compare Psalms 16:9-11 and 49:7-9, 14-15.
- **v. 5** “your years”
 - The Hebrew text says “your ornament.” Some modern Bible versions tend to translate it as “you” (ESV, NRSV), because the translators understood “ornament” as another way to speak about one’s soul or self. This is the most likely meaning, similar to the use of “my glory” in Psalms 7:5; 16:9; 30:12; and 57:8.
 - Other translations use “your desires” (NIV) and “your mouth” (NKJV). Thinking of the body as an individual’s ornamentation, some Jewish commentators translate as “your body.”
- **vv. 8-10** Echo of Exodus 34:6-7
 - David’s quote of Exodus 34:6-7 is one of several in the Old Testament.
 - ✓ Nehemiah 9:17
 - ✓ Psalms 86:15; 145:8
 - ✓ Joel 2:13
 - ✓ Jonah 4:2
 - Such citations provide evidence that the Israelites accepted Moses’ writings as authoritative Scripture long before the closing of the Old Testament canon around 400 B.C.
- **v. 10** “He has not dealt with us”
 - This verse is a marvelous explanation of what God’s grace is all about. We cannot earn forgiveness for our sins—it is God’s gift.
 - As sinners we deserve death (Romans 6:23) and the most extreme of punishments because we have rebelled against God and acted as His enemies (Romans 5:10).
- **v. 12** “has He removed our transgressions”
 - As in verse 3, God exhibits His loyal love primarily through forgiveness.
- **vv. 14-16** Flesh is a Fading Flower
 - “For” in verse 14 might better be translated “Indeed”—emphatic.
 - We do not base our assurance on our character, but on God’s character. He is eternal and unchanging, while we are transitory and changing.
 - Cp. Job 7:6-7, 10; 8:18; 14:1-2; 20:9; Psalm 90:5-6; Isaiah 40:6-8.



- **v. 15** “As for man”
 - For “man” here the Hebrew uses *'enosh*, which often carries with it the concept of mortality, weakness, or even sickness. It is a fitting word in this context.
 - ✓ See Job 25:6; Isaiah 13:12; 51:12.
- **vv. 17-18** Recipients of God’s Unfailing Love
 - “those who fear Him” = believers
 - “those who keep His covenant” = faithful believers
 - “[those who] remember His precepts to do them” = obedient believers
 - Compare James 2:17-18.
- **v. 17** “from everlasting to everlasting”
 - See Psalm 90:2. Both psalms speak of the ephemeral nature of man in contrast with the eternal and unchanging nature of God.
- **v. 19** “His sovereignty rules over all”
 - See David’s prayer in 1 Chronicles 29:12—“You rule over all.”
- **vv. 20-21** Angelology
 - Angels are:
 - ✓ “Messengers” (literal meaning of “angels”).
 - ✓ “Mighty ones” (literal translation of “mighty”).
 - ✓ Obedient to the Lord’s word.
 - ✓ An organized army (“hosts,” cf. Psalm 148:2).
 - ✓ “Ministers” (= “who serve”), serving God (cf. Psalm 104:4).
- **v. 22** “all you works of His”
 - This psalm began with one person (vv. 1-5), expands to the people of Israel (vv. 6-18), then envelopes all creation (vv. 19-22). The soloist summons all creation to be part of the choir of praise.
 - One person devoted to God can impact the whole world.
 - God’s praiseworthiness is so great that even all of His works are inadequate to proclaim His praise.

4.0 Singing Psalm 103

O My Soul, Bless Thou Jehovah (Tune: “Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken”)



1 O my soul, bless thou Jehovah,
All within me, bless His Name;
Bless Jehovah and forget not
All His mercies to proclaim.
He forgives all thy transgressions,
Heals thy sicknesses and pains;
He redeems thee from destruction,
And His love thy life sustains.

2 He with tender mercies crowns thee,
Satisfies thy full request,
So that, like the tireless eagle,
Thou with youth renewed art blessed.
Righteous is the Lord in judgment
Unto all that are oppressed;
To His people He has ever
Made His goodness manifest.

3 Yea, the Lord is full of mercy
And compassion for distress,
Slow to anger and abundant
In His grace and tenderness.
He will be not angry alway,
Nor will He forever chide;
Though we oft have sinned against Him,
Still His love and grace abide.

4 As the heav'ns are high above us,
Great His love to us has proved;
Far as east from west is distant,
He has all our sins removed.
As a father loves his children,
Feeling pity for their woes,
So the Lord to those who fear Him
Mercy and compassion shows.

— Author unknown

Bless His Holy Name

Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
Bless His Holy name.

Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
Bless His Holy name.

He has done great things,
He has done great things,
He has done great things,
Bless His Holy name.

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5.0 Praying Psalm 103

- Lord, help me to never forget any of the benefits You have given me. [v. 2]
- Thank You, Lord, for pardoning my iniquities. [v. 3]
- How I praise You for being gracious and compassionate to me. [v. 8]
- Thank You, God, for considering my frailty. [v. 14]
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6.0 Applying Psalm 103

- We should constantly praise the Lord with all of our being.
- Assurance is founded upon God's character, not ours.
- Individual praise stimulates corporate praise.

“We may find it difficult not to place limits on our compassion, but God doesn't. We may find it impossible to wipe the slate clean, to forgive when others offend us, but God doesn't.”

— Robert Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms*
(Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 337