

SESSION 2

THE SOURCE OF FORGIVENESS

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THE POINT:
FORGIVENESS
REFLECTS THE
CHARACTER OF GOD

PSALM 103:1-13

¹ My soul, bless the Lord, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

² My soul, bless the Lord, and do not forget all his benefits.

³ He forgives all your iniquity; he heals all your diseases.

⁴ He redeems your life from the Pit; he crowns you with faithful love and compassion.

⁵ He satisfies you with good things; your youth is renewed like the eagle.

.....
⁶ The Lord executes acts of righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.

⁷ He revealed his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel.

⁸ The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love.

.....
⁹ He will not always accuse us or be angry forever.

¹⁰ He has not dealt with us as our sins deserve or repaid us according to our iniquities.

¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his faithful love toward those who fear him.

¹² **As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.**

¹³ As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.

MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

His holy name (v. 1)—Just as God is holy, His name is holy. It is the name by which God identified Himself to Abram (Gen. 12:1): “Lord” (YHWH; believed to be pronounced “Yahweh”).

Redeems from the Pit (v. 4)—To “redeem” (*ga'al*) means to rescue from enslavement, to pay the price to set free. In forgiving our

iniquity God has made a way for our souls to be redeemed, rescued from the pit of eternal destruction.

So great is his faithful love (v. 11)—This is the third of four times David used the Hebrew term (*chesed*) “faithful love” in this psalm. His faithful love led Him in Christ to redeem us.

HOW DOES FORGIVENESS MIRROR THE NATURE AND CHARACTER OF GOD?

In many cases, people's view of God is influenced by their relationships with other people, particularly authority figures. The impression people have of authority figures with whom they have interacted is then projected onto God. If parents, teachers, or church leaders were harsh to them at some point in their lives, they may view God as being a harsh, disciplinary figure as well. This image does not reflect the character of God we find revealed to us in the Bible. Rather than waiting to catch us doing wrong, God desires to forgive us. Forgiveness is not just a piece of God's character, though. Forgiveness is at the heart of how God interacts with people.

Our lesson today provides one example that can help correct misunderstandings about how God relates to us as human beings. God already knows us and desires to forgive and restore us. If we want to know what true forgiveness looks like, we can look at God as a model. While people in our culture may want to attach conditions to forgiveness, God offers forgiveness that is abundant and freely given. This level of forgiveness gives us reason to praise God and remember His goodness to us.

God Forgives All Our Sin

// Psalm 103:1-5

In this Psalm, David gives a testimony about God's love and compassion for His people. The psalm serves as a call to worship for David individually and for the people of Israel as a whole. Whether alone or in a group, a believer can give himself or herself a personal call to worship. Each person should take time to bless the Lord in private and as part of the worshiping community. To bless or show honor to the Lord means to speak highly of Him in regard to what He has done. This is to be done with one's entire being. The blessing also comes from the deepest part of person, like water drawn from a deep well. While many things can compete for a person's attention, each person's attention is to be solely focused on God in times of worship. The repeated call to bless the Lord moves to include a command not to forget. The command would not be necessary were it not so easy to forget the things God has done. When the busyness and cares of life occupy space in the mind, one can heed the instruction found here. Do not forget the things God has done. The people of God need to remember all of God's benefits and



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regularly rehearsing those benefits in one's mind makes it less likely that he or she will forget them.

Now David begins to describe the scope of all the benefits God provides to His people. David links the forgiveness and healing that God provides. God forgives and heals His people individually, but David is likely also referring to how God has treated Israel as a whole. God had identified Himself as the One healing His people after providing the Israelites with clean water when they left Egypt (Ex. 15:26). The healing described can be physical, but also likely refers to the spiritual healing that God provides. Since the healing is mentioned so closely to forgiveness, God's healing of the people's spiritual condition is likely being celebrated. Forgiveness serves to heal the relationship between God and His people as well as the people's guilt about their sin.

Continuing his list of benefits, David talks about how God redeems His people. Here, David talks about the deliverance that God provides. Ultimately, being in connection with God results in being delivered from death and separation from God. The idea is of God rescuing or snatching His people away from the harm that would otherwise overtake them. David refers to God's faithful love: God's abiding by the covenant He had made with Israel. This faithful love allows for a reversal of the people's fortune. While they had been destined for destruction, David recognizes that God rewards His people with good things. In a sentiment echoed by Isaiah 40:31, David asserts that the believer has youth "renewed like the eagle" (v. 5). Instead of facing death (the Pit), the worshiper reflects on renewed youth, vitality, and strength.

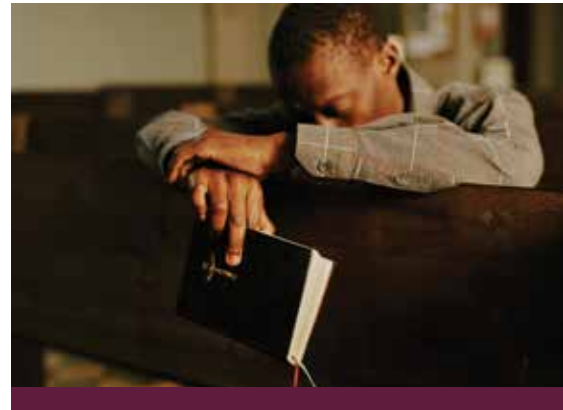
WHICH OF THESE BENEFITS WILL YOU BLESS GOD FOR TODAY?

God is Compassionate when We Sin

// Psalm 103:6-8

Having led worshipers in reflecting on God's mercy on each person individually, David expands his view to consider God's dealing with others. God's steadfast love is so expansive that it reaches out to work on behalf of all who are oppressed. The righteousness of God has a communal aspect, and God is concerned about all people who are being mistreated. The people of Israel likely recalled their ancestors enslaved in Egypt who cried out to God in their misery (Ex. 3:7). Just as God rescued His people from the yoke of Egyptian bondage, so too does He stand ready to act to set things right for others. This protection from harm is certainly worthy of being listed with the benefits the Lord provides for His people.

While some people may view justice and compassion as being in opposition to one another, God demonstrates both in perfect harmony. In fact, God's heart for justice can be seen in His



DIGGING DEEPER A PICTURE OF COMPASSION

In discussing God's treatment of the people of Israel, David says that the Lord is compassionate (Ps. 103:8). In Hebrew the term is *rachum* and can also be translated as merciful. The Hebrew term is related to the term for womb, *rechem*. As a pregnant woman shows compassion and concern for the life growing inside of her, God shows compassion for His people. Through the ups and downs the people of Israel experienced, God's compassion for them remained constant. When the Jewish people despaired because of the Babylonian exile, God related His compassion for them to that of a mother for her children. Speaking through the prophet Isaiah, God said, "can a woman forget her nursing child, or lack compassion for the child of her womb? Even if these forget, yet I will not forget you" (Is. 49:15). God's compassion is deeper and more consistent than even the best human care and remains even where human care has failed.

Which biblical pictures of God's compassion stand out to you the most?



compassion towards those who are oppressed and thereby fail to receive justice. For justice to truly abound in the life of the community, special care must be taken to address the condition of the oppressed.

God revealed His ways to His people, allowing them to learn about His nature. In asserting God's compassion and grace, David refers to God's own self-revelation to Moses in Exodus 34. Moses had asked to see the glory of God (Ex. 33:18) and God allowed His glory to pass in front of Moses. While passing in front of Moses, God identified Himself using the attributes that David mentions here. It is amazing that when God revealed aspects of His nature to humanity, He chose to focus on His mercy and love. These attributes form the foundation of God's relationship to the children of Israel. Despite the grumbling of the people during their wilderness journey as well as the unfaithfulness to the covenant by subsequent generations living in the Promised Land, God never wavered in His care for the people. His deeds demonstrated this care, giving the people food and water when they needed them and guiding them through their journey to the Promised Land and during their settlement of it. The same God who acted in Egypt, still sees injustice and responds to His people today.

David recognizes that God is slow to anger, demonstrating great patience in dealing with people prone to sin. This patience is a labor of love, however, because God abounds in love. As a God of righteousness (as David has mentioned), God is rightly angered by sin, but the biblical testimony is

that God does not rush to judgment or punishment of His people. The cycles of Israel's disobedient behavior prove the extent of God's patience. In reflecting on this, David calls other worshipers to consider the depth of God's compassion and love in their own lives. Just as God delivered Israel from bondage in Egypt, He delivers sinners from the effects of sin. This deliverance is motivated by God's compassion for sinners, not any merit on their part.

HOW HAVE YOU WITNESSED GOD'S COMPASSION AND ABOUNDING LOVE?

God Is Full of Mercy for Our Sin

// Psalm 103:9-13

After proclaiming God's own self-revelation of His character, David discusses the implications of God's attributes. He says that God will not always bring accusations against the people, again recognizing being part of the covenant people. God does not hold grudges. God is eternal, but thankfully His anger and punishment are not. David recognizes how important this is for human beings because people could not bear the implications of God being vindictive. This also serves as correction of the unhelpful idea of God in the Old Testament being solely wrathful and without love. The Old Testament repeatedly and emphatically refutes this notion. God does not give people what they deserve. In another psalm, David declares that God's "anger lasts only a moment, but His favor, a lifetime" (Ps. 30:5).

David tries to describe the immensity of the love of God by comparing it to the distance between heaven and the earth. Once again, David refers to the covenant love God has for the people of Israel. The repeated mentions of God's covenant love are not redundant when worshipers consider God's repeated acts of mercy towards the people. In a similar attempt to describe the immensity of God's love, David says that God has removed the people's transgressions "as far as the east is from the west" (v. 12). These descriptions give insight to God's transcendence. God is greater than human beings can imagine or fathom.

Not only is God transcendent, however. While

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David has just attempted to describe God's greatness on a cosmic scale, He now moves to depicting God's greatness on a personal, intimate level. Here, he describes God as being immanent, willing and able to help His people. While the initial description highlights God's expansiveness for the people, the second describes His nearness to them. It has been said that God sits high, but He looks low. Likening God to a father illustrates how close He longs to be to His people. Picture how a father relates to his children. He knows they stumble and do not always get things right. Like a father with a child learning to walk, God is right beside His people to guide them and pick them up when they fall. Children do not have to earn love and favor from their fathers. God provides an even greater example of compassion to those who fear Him.

While the idea of fear may be uncomfortable for some to think about, fear of God is not the type of fear that would make people cower or avoid God. Rather, a proper fear of God involves approaching Him in awe and reverence. God is worthy of praise because of His willingness to show His people mercy when they sin. Reading to the end of the psalm, one finds that it ends as it begins, with a call for each worshiper to bless the Lord!

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE MAGNITUDE OF GOD'S MERCY TOWARD US?

DID YOU KNOW?

Some people may think of God as a harsh judge, ready to lock us up and throw away the key as it were. The inaccuracy of this picture is shown throughout various passages of Scripture. As this passage shows us, God identifies Himself by His compassion, grace, and abundant love. Far from gleefully seeking to punish us, God desires to forgive us and show us mercy. Understanding this can remove the barriers of pride or shame that prevent some people from seeking God's forgiveness. We do not serve a God waiting and planning to strike us down at every moment. Instead, God does not treat us as we deserve. If we are going to talk about God, our descriptions of Him should align with the ways that He describes Himself in His Word.

Biblical Truth: "Because of the Lord's faithful love we do not perish, for his mercies never end. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness!" (Lam. 3:22-23).

Why do some people hold on to inaccurate ideas about God and His relationship to us?

LIVE IT

How will you show appreciation this week for God's willingness to forgive you?

Reflect upon all the ways God has forgiven you. Consider the blessings that have come from the forgiveness He has given you. Remember that forgiveness goes to the heart of God's character. When we appreciate the magnitude of God's compassion and love towards us, we should respond with gratitude and praise. Spend some time thanking Him in prayer. Make sure that you do not forget God's benefits or forget to thank Him for providing them.

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- **Create a benefits list.** Write down some of the benefits God has given you. Testify about those benefits to someone else.
- **Confess any sins.** Take a moment to evaluate whether there is any sin in your life that you have not confessed. Remember that one of the benefits God provides is to forgive all your sins.
- **Commit to a justice-making activity.** God has compassion for all people, and you should share His heart in this regard. Find a cause you can support to demonstrate your commitment to sharing God's heart.

DAILY READINGS

1. I FEEL YOU // HEBREWS 4:15

It's easy to sometimes feel as though we've let God and ourselves down when we fall into sin, especially when we feel we should have "known better." In those moments, we need to remind ourselves that Jesus understands, possibly better than we might think. Hebrews 4:15 tells us that He was "tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin." For something to be a temptation, by definition, it would have to be enticing to the flesh, and Paul tells us that Jesus was tempted in every way that one could be tempted. He felt the pull. He's been there and understands, arguably better than we do ourselves.

Jesus chose to feel so that you could be free!

2. THE CHASE // EPHESIANS 3:16-19

A lady recently said that the Bible begins with God creating man and man sinning. The rest of the Bible, she said, was God chasing after us. She was right. No matter where we look, we always find God somehow always ahead of us making a way back to Him. If this doesn't speak to the heart of the Father, I don't know what does. He wants relationship, so even in our sin, His pursuit of us never stops. He's always there waiting for us to see the error of our ways and turn back to Him. This is endless, boundless love, and we should never take it for granted. God never stops pursuing us.

When everyone else fails, He can always be trusted with our heart.

3. THE GOD KIND OF AMNESIA // PSALM 103:12

How far is the east from the west? Conceptually speaking, the universe is still expanding from the moment God spoke it into existence. In all this time, east and west have never once ended or met. With the distance ever increasing, it's not hard to see the infinite space He desires to place between us and our sin when we repent. And, He didn't stop there! He chose not only to put infinite distance between us and "it" but to also cover "it" with the blood of Jesus! This tells us that once we turn from

our sin, He never sees it again, which means as far as He's concerned, it never happened! Why would we struggle to forgive ourselves when God doesn't even remember what we're talking about?!

Thank you Lord, for choosing not to remember my sin.

4. THE WAY BACK // ACTS 4:12

Though Adam and Eve sinned, God always had a plan to restore us to Himself. The intimacy they shared walking and talking in the Garden was never supposed to end. The plan was always for Jesus redeem us back to Himself so that through His blood we had a way back to the Father. In this way, He brought the Garden to us so that we could walk and talk with Him just as Adam and Eve did in the beginning. Sin can only separate us if we allow it, and being that we understand just how precious this gift of communion is, why would we ever allow that? How must His heart feel when we don't make the time? The fastest way to find our way back to God is to make room for Him in our lives.

God so desires to commune with us every day.

5. PIONEER AND PERFECTER // HEBREWS 12:2

Think about the worst thing you've ever said or done, that thing you never want to visit ever again and wish you could wipe from existence. You can! Jesus saw it before you ever committed it, and even then, still chose the cross for you. Still chose the beatings. Still chose the pain. Still chose death—all so that you could have a way back to Him. The reality of God never being in relationship with us again was greater than the pain of the cross! He doesn't care about our past, only our healing, our restoration, our salvation! What a loving God we serve! We are so valuable to God. "keeping our eyes on Jesus,[a] the pioneer and perfecter. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Jesus died with joy so that there wouldn't have to be a world eternally separated from Him.