

**A Grace Gathering**  
**26 January 2025**

**Thoughts our Meditation in 2025**  
**Psalm 103**

We had come to a new year, an occasion for both reflection and anticipation. Dangers lurk globally from our climate to militarism. Political controversy has led to trauma nationally and internationally. I would argue that 2025 holds much promise of the same.

What should we do? Where is strength and comfort to be found for us? There are three possible answers that I can think of:

1. Look inward repeating the Pythagorean theme, “Man is the measure of all things.” Is found in some secret insight lodged in each of us discoverable by meditation.
2. Look outward, depositing hope the governmental regulations will curtail the evil decimating our social and family structures.
3. Look upward to a Savior that is transcendent and all-powerful, but also a loving compassionate father.

What is the proper motive for looking upward? There are only three motives for those of us who have seen the wisdom of looking upward.

1. To obtain what we do not already possess. We have been given all that God has for us though we do not realize the depth and wonder of it all.
2. To keep what we do already possess. If we are the recipients of what God has given, it cannot be taken away because God’s promises are a fruit of His character. Being righteous, He is truth; being very God, He has no weaknesses!
3. To be energized and renewed daily by reflecting on what we have been given that can never be taken away regardless of physical circumstances. Peace is not found in mere circumstance; it is found in the realization of God’s loving character in every circumstance.

The key to a wonderful walk with God is this: it depends on what we prioritize in our thought life which forms our values and leads to our actions.

### Setting of the Psalm

The psalm has no superscription that would help us to understand the circumstance of David's composition. Perhaps, the point of the absence is that it is a timeless poem that God's people are to utter in every circumstance of life.

### Theme of the Psalm

The motif of David's poem is that praise to God is an obligation of indebtedness of Christ-followers of all centuries. Thankfulness is a characteristic of most people, but what distinguishes the believer is the object of praise, the redemptive mercies of God revealed to us through Jesus' life, His penalty-satisfying substitution, and the new life granted in the gift of the Holy Spirit, whose possession of us is eternal life.

The repetition of the word "bless" appears as bookends the same phrase that frames and explains the purpose of the psalm. "Bless the Lord, O my soul (vv. 1, 22). "Bless" is found six times, twice in the prelude (vv. 1, 2) and four times in the postlude (vv. 20, 21, and twice in v. 22).

### Structure of the Psalm

- I. Prelude: A Call to Praise, vv. 1-5
- II. The object of Praise: God's mercies, vv. 6-14
- III. The Contrast: the frailty of mankind, vv. 15-18
- IV. Postlude: An Invitation to Praise, vv. 19-22

### Survey of the Psalm

This has been called a pure praise psalm; it contains no petitions, not laments, or cries for help. It is simply a poem of adulation and worship.

- I. Prelude: A Call to Praise, vv. 1-5
  - A. The announcement of praise, vv. 1-2a  
This is a personal song of the king in which he calls himself to remember the source of his blessings. "Name" has reference to God's character and actions to which he prefaces the word "holy," defining the quality of his character and actions; they are righteous. There is not cause for lethargy when it comes to the praise of God! The cause for such is revealed in the next verse.
  - B. The ground of praise, v. 2b  
This seems to be a pivotal sentence in the psalm; praise diminishes in proportion to our forgetfulness. David notes this human tendency at v. 14 ("He knows our frame... we are but dust") and, again in v. 15 ("As for man, his days are like grass").

C. The reasons for praise, vv. 3-5

David lists five causes that should regard our forgetfulness, five wonderful gifts from God: forgiveness, healing, rescue, good experiences in life, and renewal.

- **“Forgiveness”** has to do with our sins; it is immediate.
- **“Healing”** has a slightly different nuance though “diseases” is in parallel with “forgiveness.” As in the case with the Bathsheba, forgiveness was immediate upon confession (II Sam. 12:13), but healing was denied for seven days of fasting and prayer over the pain of the consequences until mental and emotional healing came to him (12: 15a-18, 22). While sin is resolved in divine forgiveness, there is frequently lingering consequences of the human level both in us and towards others. For all of us, the consequences of our sins are a second difficulty that continues to trouble and haunt us; yet, how often it is that God heals our negative feelings and depressive state with His love. There comes a time when we can put the personal hurt behind us, or at least we should! There is no sin greater than God’s capacity to forgive! The problem that causes lingering guilt is that we do not believe God is as gracious as He says that He is!
- **“Redeems”** in this context is more clearly translated as rescues or delivers from contemporary difficulties.
- **“Satisfies”** means that God fills our lives with good things and person to cheer and delight us.
- **“Renews”** is not dependent of youthfulness; the aging process does not diminish the benevolences of God toward us. He constantly refreshes us regardless of age (see Isa. 40:31).

D. The Object of Praise: God’s mercies, vv. 6-14

A. The fact of God’s mercies rehearsed, vv. 6-10

David turns to illustrate concretely how God has blessed and, therefore worthy of praise. using the story of the nation. Clearly the context indicates that he is using the events of Israel’s emergence.

1. In forming and preserving a people, v. 6

David’s praise emerges out of the context of Israel’s great deliverance from Egyptian bondage. The words “righteous deeds” are more clearly rendered “acts of vindication.” God has verified repeatedly to Israel, and to us, that He will keep His promises.

2. In revealing Himself to Moses, v. 7

Even in the wilderness God revealed His faithfulness by granting them a prophet-leader through whom God revealed Himself to the nation. His acts in the wilderness included the pillar of fire to given them warmth in the cold nights in the desert, the cloud to lead them and shelter them from the heat of

the day, manna, water from a rock, low-flying quail, the tabernacle of His presence, and the Law.

3. In unrelenting patience and loyalty, vv. 8-14

a. Stated, v. 8

The wording of this verse is almost a word-for-word repetition of Exodus 34:6, the episode with the Golden Calf at Mount Sinai. The context is the plea of Moses that God would not forsake His people for their disobedience.

“Now, therefore, I pray Thee,  
If I have fond favor in Thy sight,  
Let me know Thy ways that I might know Thee,  
So that I might find favor in Thy sight.  
Consider too, that this nation is Thy people (33:12).”

“...if I have found favor in Thy sight, O Lord,  
I pray, let the Lord go along and in our midst.  
Even though the people are so obstinate;  
And do Thou pardon our iniquity and our sin,  
And take us as Thine own possession (34:9).”

b. Applied, vv. 9-10

(1) His anger: limited, v. 9

Is this not a wonderful realization for all of us; God is averse to our wrongdoing, but it is not such that it destroys our relationship in His family or His promises. His anger is expressed as a corrective, a teaching mechanism for our good. His chiding has a righteous purpose. When we turn from our sin, He turns from His chastisement of us. The Lord harbors no resentment toward His children; His motive is always remedial, never punitive. When the chastening is over, so is His anger!! His anger is that like a parent, not a stranger.

(2) His grace, unlimited, v. 10

We should praise the Lord because we have never suffered what we deserve. There is no sin that is greater than God's mercies that would inhibit its expression toward us.

c. Explained, vv. 11-13

(1) The concept illustrated: space, v. 11

The limitlessness, boundlessness, of the heavens, having no end, is an illustration of the limitlessness of His grace. Can we think of anything as having no boundaries but space? Think vertically!

(2) The concept illustrated: distances, v. 12

How do you define the distance between the extremes of geography? This is an earthy metaphor for limitlessness, broadness. Think horizontally! “Deep and wide, deep and wide, there is a fountain following deep and wide,” says an old hymn. Sin is removed from us by a miracle of love! If sin be removed so far from us, we may be sure that the scent, the trace, the very memory of it must be entirely gone. There is no fear of it ever being brought back again.

(3) The concept illustrated: parental love, vv. 13

The illustration here is not so much about distance, but care and intimacy. God has a parental relationship with us! His care will never cease to flow, and we will never cease to need it.

d. Reasoned, v. 14

God is knowledgeable of our frailties. In the first line of the verse, “He” is in the emphatic position (stated as “He Himself”), meaning it is the point of focus. Jesus knows our weaknesses, but such is no obstacle to His care and protection. We were “fearfully and wonderfully made,” but we are now broken! We are all fragile people, and God handles us with care!

II. The Contrast: the frailty of mankind, vv. 15-18

A. Human temporality, vv. 15-16

Grass and flowers are beautiful to see in our gardens, meadows, and majestic landscapes (arrayed more beautifully than Solomon in all his glory [Matt 6:28-30]), yet their duration is in reverse proportion to it. We are like the grasses in our earthy sojourn; we flower, but briefly, and our earthly existence ends caused by the corrosive “winds” of time.

B. Divine eternity, vv. 17-18

In contrast to the temporal realities of human, earthy existence, God has no time restraints. Since God is eternal, the display of His character and mercies are also timeless. His love (lovingkindness) for us will never end (“everlasting” appears twice here for emphasis). “His children” are those who obey His demands and His precepts though we are but “grass,” possessing short memories, fragile, and brief.

III. Postlude: An Invitation to Praise, vv. 19-22

A. The final cause, v. 19

God is unique, not only because He is “King of Kings and “Lord of Lords” (I Tim. 6:15, Rev. 19:16),” but because His throne, the origin of His power and decrees, are from above. He reigns over the earth, not from the earth, but above it; He has no equals in power, glory, wisdom, strength, compassion, and majesty.

B. The final call, vv. 20-22

1. To angels, vv. 20-21

David calls the heavenly hosts to join in cosmic praise to God. The inhabitants of the unfallen realms of glory (“perform His word obeying,” “serve Him,”).

2. To creation, v. 22a-b

Here, the psalmist extends an invitation to all that God has created to join the angels in worshipping God. This includes trees, flowers, the animal kingdom, and all of humanity.

3. To himself, v. 22c

Finally, and repetitiously (v. 2a), he adds himself to the chorus of praise to God.

### Thoughts

It would do all of us well to think about the character of God as expressed in this psalm. We all have our down moments, yet I am convinced that what we fill our minds with very much determines our physical and spiritual health

“Lovingkindness (one word):” This is the great descriptive term of God’s actions in the Hebrew Scriptures; it means loyalty, steadfast love, faithfulness, promise-keeping. It is found four times here (vv. 4, 8, 11, 17).

The actions of God (positively [11 things]):

“Pardons (v. 3),” “heals (v. 3),” “redeems (v. 4),” “crowns (v. 4),” “satisfies (v. 5),” “performs (v. 6),” “made known (v. 7),” “has compassion (v. 13),” “knows our frame (v. 14),” “mindful that we are but dust (v. 14),” “established His throne in the heavens (v. 19).”

The actions of God (negatively [4 things])

“will not always strive (v. 9),” “[nor] keeps His anger (v. 9),” “not dealt...according to our sins (v. 10),” “[nor] rewarded us according to our iniquities (v. 10).”

The character of God (4 things):

“Compassionate, v. 8),” “gracious (v. 8),” “slow to anger (v. 8),” “abounding in lovingkindness (v. 8, also vv. 4, 11, 17).”