

The Lord is Active

Edith looked out at family and friends sitting at the decorated tables. She was at the head table with her husband, Elderick, and her three children and their spouses.

It was Edith's retirement party, and her husband and children had planned a grand affair. She was so excited, grateful, and pleased to be retiring from the university after 30 years; those years included discrimination. Her supervisors were unfair, difficult, and harsh people. She had endured unkind and unwelcoming coworkers too. For all those years, Edith was overworked and overlooked.

But she would be remiss if she didn't recall her shortcomings, her mishaps, and her blow ups. Once, Edith had gotten into an ugly altercation with a coworker. This staff member eventually filed a formal complaint, but it included intentional lies about Edith. After an investigation, the complaint was shown to have no merit. As far as Edith was concerned, the Lord had protected her.

Edith's mind snapped back to the room as she was being called to the microphone.

"First, I want to thank God for His love and faithfulness to me," Edith said, looking from table to table. "If it had not been for the Lord, who was on my side, I would have not made it to retirement! And the Lord continues to be faithful to me."

"I'm so grateful," she said. Edith smiled when the entire room erupted into applause. "So thankful!"

1. *How would you describe God's relationship to His children?*

2. *Do God's children have a role in experiencing and noticing His faithfulness in their lives?*

3. *When have you experienced God's faithfulness in the past, and how can memory of that time help in present struggles?*

Remember All of God's Benefits

Psalm 103:1–5 KJV

A Psalm of David.

1 Bless the LORD, O my soul:
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name.

2 Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits:

3 Who forgiveth all thine
iniquities; who healeth all
thy diseases;

4 Who redeemeth thy life
from destruction; who
crowneth thee with loving-
kindness and tender mercies;

5 Who satisfieth thy mouth
with good things; so that thy
youth is renewed like the
eagle's.

Psalm 103:1–5 NIV

Of David.

¹ Praise the LORD, my soul;
all my inmost being, praise
his holy name.

² Praise the LORD, my soul,
and forget not all his
benefits—

³ who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases,

⁴ who redeems your life from
the pit
and crowns you with love
and kindness,

⁵ who satisfies your desires
with good things
so that your youth is
renewed like the eagle's.

The psalmist begins by speaking to his own soul—a poetic way of saying what he should do. He encourages his soul to “praise the LORD.” He knows that he should be commemorating abundant “benefits”—which means gifts that God has generously given to him. Then he starts listing some of these gifts.

Forgiveness of sins is a recurring theme throughout this psalm (vv. 8–10, 12). The psalmist is aware that his sins could cause a rift in his relationship with God (v. 10), but God remains faithful in forgiving his sins. God's healing means not only forgiveness but also physical healing. Throughout the Old Testament, God often heals His people when they cry out to Him. This is evident in stories like the healing of Hezekiah, who asked God for aid and received 15 more years of life (2 Kings 20:1–11).

Verse 4 highlights God's deliverance of His people from “the pit” or “grave,” which is a metaphor for death. In its

original context, this statement referred to the threat of death, similar to the modern expression, “snatched from the jaws of death.” Subsequent promises of God’s eventual resurrection and exaltation of the righteous dead invite people to read this text more deeply, in light of Christ’s redemptive work and resurrection.

God proceeds to give them a “crown” to further glorify the recipients of grace, to show His love and kindness (v. 4b). This line invites Christian reflection, not only on God’s kindness toward us now, but also our future glorification, when Christ returns and restores us to life. In 2 Timothy 4:8, we hear of a “crown of righteousness” awarded at a future day of judgment.

Verse 5 depicts God as generous and loving, delighting in bestowing good gifts on His children (compare James 1:17). He renews people’s youth, so that they resemble the energy and strength of an eagle (compare Isa. 40:31).

4. *What are the specific benefits the psalmist mentions in verses 3–5?*

5. *What does the “pit” in verse 4 represent, and how does God respond to those in the pit?*

Remember God’s Great Compassion

Psalms 103:6–10 KJV

6 The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.

7 He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel.

8 The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

9 He will not always

Psalms 103:6–10 NIV

6 The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.

7 He made known his ways to Moses,
his deeds to the people of Israel:

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

9 He will not always accuse,

chide: neither will he
keep his anger for ever.

10 He hath not dealt
with us after our sins;
nor rewarded us accord-
ing to our iniquities.

nor will he harbor his anger
forever;

¹⁰ he does not treat us as our sins
deserve
or repay us according to our
iniquities.

The psalmist continues his reflection on God’s compassion toward sinners. Verse 6 describes special consideration for the lowly and downtrodden and those who are oppressed. In the ancient world, the poor faced injustice from others who were powerful, people who might swindle or cheat. Scripture says that fair retribution belongs to God (Deut. 32:35). Those who are harmed can be certain that God will execute justice, in His divine timing.

Verses 7–8 recall God’s revelation of His compassion in front of Moses. When God allowed Moses to witness His glory (Ex. 33:18–23; 34:5–8), He revealed a key aspect of His nature. The psalmist echoes God’s declaration in His self-disclosure to Moses, which says, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness” (Ex. 34:6).

God “will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever.” The psalmist focuses on God’s immutable character, specifically His compassion. He urges his soul to remember that God will save His people from their sin.

6. *Who are the “oppressed” referenced in verse 6?*

7. *What do verses 7–8 tell us about God’s character as revealed to Moses?*

8. *What does verse 9 reveal about God’s feelings towards His people?*

God Remembers Us

Psalm 103:11–14 KJV

11 For as the heaven is high
above the earth, so great is his

Psalm 103:11–14 NIV

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

mercy toward them that fear him.

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

13 Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.

14 For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.

so great is his love for 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;

¹⁴ for he knows how we are formed,

he remembers that we are dust.

The psalmist emphasizes God's love for His people and willingness to forgive their transgressions. He compares God's love to the height of the heavens. God's love for those who fear and respect Him is as vast as the distance between the earth and the heaven: immeasurable, limitless. God's profound love compels Him to remove people's sins as far as the east is from the west.

Verses 13–14 reiterate the theme of God's compassion for His children. Readers are invited to envision God as a compassionate and caring father. One reason for His compassion is explained in verse 14: God recalls "how we are formed . . . that we are dust." God recognizes human mortality, frailty, and weakness. Our mortality prompts Him to feel compassion towards us. God relents from His anger and shows mercy toward people because He knows their transience.

9. *What analogy does the psalmist use to describe God's love in verse 11?*

10. *What does it mean when the psalm says God has removed our transgressions as far as the east is from the west in verse 12?*

11. *What is the significance of God remembering that we are dust?*

Choosing to Remember

Sarah and Damon were ready for their family to grow. They already had two children under five, both boys; and they were pregnant with their third, a girl. They named her Evelyn after her grandmother, and together their family prepared for new life. They picked out a new car seat, had a space for Evelyn to sleep, and Sarah was working tirelessly to be ready for maternity leave.

But the unthinkable happened. In their third trimester, Evelyn was stillborn. What made it even worse was that their family was grieving at different speeds. They couldn't expect the boys to understand, but they understood enough. Sarah wouldn't need time off from work after all; instead, she faced the prospect of explaining the loss of her daughter to clients and coworkers who might ask the wrong questions.

But God was there for Sarah and Damon, even when they felt undeserved shame. Their church community came alongside them, offering to watch the boys, to get them anything they needed, to sit with them as they planned a memorial. Somewhere in the longing and waiting, they found God's faithful presence. They had the intense impression that God was bringing them closer as a family and helping them to treasure one another. They decided not to hide their sorrow but to share it openly. The couple found that friends tended to listen when they spoke of God's enduring love and the way their family had faced tragedy.

12. *What role does remembering God's past faithfulness play in moving forward when life's lows are before us?*

13. *What are some practical things we can do when overwhelmed with life's inequity?*

14. *Share with someone a time that you experienced God's faithfulness in your life, when no one else could have gotten you through that time or problem.*

Remembering God's Faithfulness

Remembering God's faithfulness can prove to be difficult at times—especially when trials barrage your life. Maybe God's goodness seems more like a mirage than anything else. Whether you are in a season of sorrow or joy, find hope in God's faithfulness by considering His Son in the following activity.

► *Psalm 103 describes God's immense love and faithfulness, as well as numerous benefits He provides His people. Take some time to read through Psalm 103 and pause whenever you see one of God's characteristics or one of His benefits. Consider how these things, though written long before Jesus' birth, have been made available for today's believers.*

KEY VERSE

The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.
—Psalm 103:6 KJV

The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.
—Psalm 103:6 NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of January 13 through January 19

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Revelation 4—God's Heavenly Throne.
- Tue.** Revelation 22:1–14—Life Springs from God's Throne.
- Wed.** Isaiah 6:1–8—My Eyes Have Seen the King.
- Thu.** James 4:1–10—Draw Near to God in Humility.
- Fri.** Hebrews 4:11–16—Boldly Approach the Throne of Grace
- Sat.** Isaiah 66:1–14—Heaven Is God's Throne.
- Sun.** Psalm 103:1–11, 19–22—Bless God's Holy Name.