

Adult Teaching Resources

September 13, 2020



A Prayer List for Today

Psalm 119:33-40—"Teach Me, Lord"

Psalm 103:1-13—"Forgive Me, Lord"

Psalm 78:1-7, 34-38—"Convict Me, Lord"

Psalm 25:1-9—"Deliver Me, Lord"

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“Forgive Me, Lord”

Psalm 103:1-13

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Bible Background

**Key Verse: The LORD is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love (Psalm 103:8)**

Today we pause and take time to explore Psalm 103, a beautiful psalm of praise to God. This elegant piece of writing is as much for corporate worship as it is for individual devotion. Don't rush through this psalm. Take your time and praise God as you go.

Opening

After everyone arrives, ask your group to form smaller groups of 3-4. Once settled, ask each group to define “praise.” Specifically, what does it mean to praise God?

What does praise look like?

What does praise sound like?

How does someone praise God and focus on God?

What does praise stop being about God and starts becoming more about the one doing the praising?

What role does praise have in your church?

What role should praise have in your church?

Give each group time to discuss those questions, then open the floor for a brief conversation about praise, focusing on the questions, before moving to the Bible.

Reading the Bible

How is the psalmist to bless the Lord? (with all that is within him)

What should not be forgotten? (all God's benefits)

What does God forgive? (all your iniquity)

What does God heal? (all your diseases)

From where does God redeem you? (from the Pit)

What does God crown you with? (steadfast love and mercy)

How long does God satisfy you? (as long as you live)

What the Lord work? (vindication and justice for all who are oppressed)

What did God make known? (his ways to Moses and his acts to the people of Israel)

What is the Lord? (merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love)

What will God not do? (always accuse, nor keep his anger forever)

How does he not deal with us? (according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities)

How great is his steadfast love for those who fear him? (as high as the heavens above the earth)

How far does God remove our transgressions? (as far as the east is from the west)

What does God have for us? (compassion)

Making Connections

How do you bless God? When was the last time you blessed God?

When have you experienced a blessing from God individually and also corporately (as a part of a group?) How did you know it was a blessing? How did you know it was from God?

Our Lesson Writer explains the Hebrew word "Barak (bless) is closely related to the word for knee (berek), and may also be translated as "kneel." When God's people kneel or come humbly to offer their heartfelt praise, God receives it as a blessing." What role does kneeling have for you in your relationship to God? Should you kneel more? Should you kneel less? Why do you say that?

What are the benefits of knowing and following God? How can you share those benefits in way that others will understand and be excited about?

When has God helped you? What was happening in your life that you knew you needed help? What did God do? How did that affect you?

Making Connections *continued*

If you think about all you have done, what do you think you deserve? Knowing that God knows all you have done, what does God do with you? Why do you think God loves and forgives so freely?

Our Lesson Writer says “God’s love is available to all, but forced upon none.” What does that mean to you? How does that inform the way you talk to others about God?

What is your favorite hymn or song of praise? What does that song say about God? What does that song say about your relationship with God?

So What?

Ask your group to gather back together in the same small groups from the beginning of the lesson. Ask them to think about their lives, their faith journeys, and their relationship with God.

Have them discuss these questions:

When you think of all that God has done for you, what do you think is an appropriate response?

How can we praise God for what God has done?

Is our praise adequate for God?

Give each group time to share with each other, then ask each group to create a praise for God.

Their praise could be a psalm, a written treatise, an outline of something to happen, etc. Whatever their praise will be, have them create it and be willing to share or explain it to the large group. It might be that their praise involves materials not available at class time. Simply have them explain what they would do and how they would do it.

Ask each group to share their praise with the larger group. Spend some time in conversation about the different ways to praise God.

The Challenge

This week, make an effort to praise God at least once every day. Use words from Psalm 103 if you need to get your creativity flowing.

Prayer

Loving God, you are wonderful, mighty, loving, and compassionate. No matter how human we act, you still love us. Thank you for your unending love. Help us to live the way you want us to, and when we fail, come to you in forgiveness. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Credit where credit is due—The citation from John Durham is from his classic but still relevant treatment of Psalms in the *Broadman Bible Commentary*, Vol. 4 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1971), p. 378. Claus Westermann is cited from his *The Living Psalms*, translated from German by J. R. Porter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns, 1989), 239.

A poetic payment?—The Hebrew term we translate as “vow” was actually a conditional promise: a person, usually in a position of danger or extremity, would ask God for something specific and promise some sort of payment if the petition was granted. The arrangement was binding: if God came through, the payment had to be made.

Israelites in the wilderness promised that if God would give them victory over the king of Arad, they would destroy everything rather than keeping any booty (Num. 21:1-3). The warrior Jephthah prayed that if God would grant victory over the Ammonites, he would sacrifice the first living thing to come out of his house (Judges 11:30-31). Childless Hannah pleaded with God for a son and promised to return him to God’s service, and so Samuel was born (1 Sam. 1:10-11).

Over time vows came to be commonly practiced, and often the person making the vow would promise some act of service, such as becoming a Nazirite for a certain period of time. The Hebrews developed regulations concerning vows as a way of controlling their use (Num. 6:1-21, 30:1-16)

In my doctoral dissertation and resulting book, I argued that many texts in the psalms can be read as vows in which the psalmist prays for a boon and promises to repay God with a public testimony of praise. Psalm 51 offers a fairly obvious example. There the psalmist prays for God to forgive his sins (vv. 10-12), and promises in return to teach others about God and sing of God’s deliverance (vv. 13-14, see *Vows in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992], pp. 150-153).

Our text for the day is such a paean of praise that one could imagine it serving as a public testimony of what God had done for the psalmist

As an exercise, read Psalm 51 and then read Psalm 103. While there is no evidence of a connection, Psalm 103 is precisely the sort of public praise one would offer in response to the appeal for forgiveness and promise of praise in Psalm 51.

Old Testament evangelism—James Luther Mays, writing in the Interpretation series, described Psalm 103 as “a profoundly evangelical hymn.”

The psalm, he wrote, gives voice to the thankfulness of sinners that the LORD is a God of mercy and grace. It recites in a concentrated way what Israel learned about the ways of

God; the LORD had not dealt with them according to their sins. Because of its subject and the way that subject is developed in a poem of subtle allusions and aesthetic power, Psalm 103 has been the favored praise of sinners. In every age, in liturgical contexts from Communion service to graveside, in the prayers of the simple and the sophisticated, the words of the psalm have been the means of remembering that the LORD is gracious” (*Psalms*, in *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011], p. 326).

Sin and the psalmist—God’s compassionate forgiveness is needed because of the rampant nature of human sin. References to sin appear several times, and the psalmist uses all three of the most common Hebrew words to describe sin: *’awôn* (“iniquity”) in verse 3, *chata’* (“sin”) in verse 10, and *pasha* (“transgression”) in verse 12. How God relates to sinners was of obvious importance to the psalmist.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

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Why the big switch at the end of the psalm?

Psalms 103, from vv. 1-18, seems fully focused on God's loving and compassionate relationship with Israel, sins and all. The theme is very personal. It seems surprising, then, that the psalmist would conclude the song by switching to ebullient praise to God as the ruler of the universe, calling on the hosts of heaven to join humankind in praising God.

Why might he have done this?

Perhaps it is because, though the psalm focuses on God's relationship with and care for persons, several texts set it within a cosmic context. As James Luther Mays explains it, "The LORD's steadfast love can be as great as the heavens are high above the earth, because the LORD's throne is established in the heavens (vv. 11, 19)." Likewise, "The LORD can remove our transgressions from us as far as the east is from the west because his kingdom rules over all (vv. 12, 19)."

Both of those were "poetic ways of stating one of the fundamental points of psalmic theology," Mays noted: "The salvation of the LORD is the manifestation of the reign of the LORD in the world. . . . The grace of the LORD is a sovereignty of grace. The angels and hosts and works of the LORD are connected with the fearers of the LORD by the repetition of the verb 'do/make' (the same word in Hebrew). The angels and hosts who *do* the word and will of the LORD join the earthly chorus of those who *do* the LORD's commandments."

Thus, Mays concluded, "There should be and is joyous praise in heaven among the doers in the kingdom of the LORD that there are doers on earth who confirm the love of the LORD by their obedience" (*Psalms, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011], p. 330).

As followers of Christ, are we also doing the will and word of God, seeing the world's needs and responding with the steadfast and compassionate love of Jesus?