

Youth 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

YOUTH Teaching Guide

by Jeremy Colliver

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

SOCIAL MEDIA CHALLENGE

Asking for forgiveness is hard. Take time this week and raise awareness for something that you need to be, or have been, forgiven for.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Fellowship

Begin your session by showing the clip “Understanding Forgiveness” from *The Shack*. If you are unable to show the clip, summarize it to the best of your ability, and then facilitate a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) Why does he not want to forgive?
- 2) What is forgiveness described as?
- 3) Who is forgiveness for? Explain.
- 4) Who has been the hardest person to forgive?
- 5) How does it feel to be forgiven?
- 6) How does your faith allow you to forgive and be forgiven?

Information

Transition to the next section of the session by reading Psalm 103.1-13. Allow the students to ask any initial questions they have about the text. As you answer their questions, you may want to provide some of the information found in Tony’s commentary to answer their questions. When the students have had an opportunity to share their initial thoughts, continue the discussion by facilitating a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) How can we bless God? How is the psalmist calling us to bless God?
- 2) What does the psalmist say God can do for you?
- 3) How is this psalm both for the individual and for the group?
- 4) What is the law for?
- 5) How does forgiveness override punishment?
- 6) What should we do because we are forgiven?

Information *continued*

If your group would like to dig deeper in their discussion, share some of the insights that Tony provides in the “Digging Deeper” portion of his commentary. You may want to use some questions like the following to facilitate your discussion:

- 1) How is a vow conditional?
- 2) How is this psalm evangelical?
- 3) What does this psalmist mean by sin?

You may also want your group to discuss “The Hardest Question” if they would like to continue their discussion on this passage. Tony poses the following question to consider as “The Hardest Question”: Why the big switch at the end of the psalm?

Transformation

Conclude your time together by sharing the Social Media Challenge of the week:

Asking for forgiveness is hard. Take time this week and raise awareness for something that you need to be, or have been, forgiven for.

After sharing the challenge, allow the students to share ways they have been forgiven, or perhaps, people they need to ask for forgiveness.

Close with a prayer asking God for forgiveness for those things that we have mentioned and those things that have gone unmentioned.

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

Digging Deeper *continued*

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 *pesha* (“transgression”) in verse 12. How God relates to sinners was of obvious importance to the psalmist.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

The Hardest Question 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.

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?