

Leader Notes – Lesson 10 – Let Me Count the Ways . . . Psalm 103

**PLEASE DON'T READ THESE NOTES UNTIL YOU HAVE COMPLETED YOUR LESSON.
YOU WILL ROB YOURSELF OF THE JOY OF DISCOVERY!**

**In case you don't have time to discuss all the questions,
be sure to ask your group which questions
they want discuss.**

Before beginning this Lesson, see if anyone in your group has some insights to share from the Response exercise from Lesson 9, keeping in mind or meditating on **Psalm 19:14** this week: *May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.*

DISCUSSION STARTER

- What activity do you enjoy doing so much that you can say that you do it with “your whole heart” or with “all that is within you”? Why do you like this activity so much?

This can help your group understand what it means to praise God with our whole heart.

PREPARATION

1. Before you read **Psalm 103**, ask the Holy Spirit to teach you and guide you into all truth (John 16:13). We have been using the prayer, *Holy Spirit, think through me until your ideas become my ideas*, or King David's prayer, *Open my eyes to see the wonderful truths in your law*.

Have someone pray and ask God to give understanding and to see wonderful truths from His Word.

2. Read **Psalm 103** slowly and thoughtfully in *at least two translations*. As you read and reread, mark any words or phrases that are meaningful to you and put a question mark by anything that you don't understand.

Read Psalm 103 together

All: 1-5

Reader A: 6-12

Reader B: 13-19

All: 20-22

3. Give **Psalm 103** a *title* or write a short *summary sentence* that captures what you think is the essence of this Psalm.

Have several share

4. Write out a verse(s) from this Psalm that your heart really needs to hear right now.

Have several share

QUESTIONS

5. What directive or instruction is repeated in verses **1, 2, 20-22**?

Praise the Lord or Bless the Lord

6. *Who* is David addressing in these verses?

Himself (his soul or innermost being); angles; heavenly hosts or armies of angels; everything God has created – “all his works everywhere in his domain.”

What are some conclusions we can come to about praise from David’s call to praise?

Praise is a choice that begins with the individual;

Sometimes we need to be reminded to praise;

God deserves praise from everything and everyone because he created it all;

ALL of creation (not just humans and angels) can praise God;

praise is a shared experience – we can praise God together

Praise doesn’t have to be spontaneous; we can plan it

Praise doesn’t necessarily come naturally to us – we begin to praise out of obedience

♥ Why would David tell himself to praise God? Do we need to do this too? We were created to praise God but because of our fallen position and inherent sin nature, we need to remind ourselves to praise God or to call ourselves to praise.

7. What do you think it means to praise God with *your whole heart* or *all your inmost being*?

Have several share

Means we are fully committed to praising God, holding nothing back. We praise him with our heart, soul, body, mind and spirits. We get “totally into it.” We are focused on God and God alone. (Compare this to other activities that we “get totally into.”)

♥ Is it possible to praise God half-heartedly and unenthusiastically? Explain your answer.

♥ When was a time that you were so overwhelmed with gratitude, thanksgiving and joy that you wanted to summon all that was deepest within you to praise God?

8. According to the following verses, what are some specific ways we can praise God?

Psalm 27:6 – Shouts of joy; sing and make music to God

Psalm 35:18 – Give thanks with other people; praise God in the community of God

Psalm 66:16 – Telling others what God has personally done for us

Psalm 104:34 – Rejoicing in God and pleasing him with our thoughts

Psalm 106:1 – Thanking God directly for his goodness

♥ Who benefits from the act of praising God? How? God deserves our praise and it pleases him, but he doesn’t NEED our praise. We usually are the ones who benefit. When we choose to praise God with all that is in us, we have an intimate encounter with God. We never come away from an encounter with God unchanged.

♥ What is your favorite way to praise God? Why? Have several share

♥ In **Revelation 4 and 5**, how do the angels and the heavenly host praise God? What can we learn about praise from them?

9. What is another instruction David gives himself in **103:2**?

Forget not all his benefits or never forget the good things he does for me

Why do you think it is necessary for David to remind himself of this?

Again, we are prone to forget God's goodness to us. We often see the glass half empty instead of half full. When I remember everything He has done for me, it encourages me and builds my faith and helps me trust him for the future. Remembering also leads to praise.

10. Read **103:3-5** in the *New International Version*. List the five actions of God that make up *God's Benefit Package* for us. Underline the key verb in each statement.

Forgives all your sins

Heals all your diseases

Redeems your life from the pit

Crowns you with love and compassion

Satisfies your desires with good things (so that your youth is renewed like the eagles)

11. Consider the five actions of God from question 10: God *forgives, heals, redeems, crowns, and satisfies*. We say that "actions speak louder than words". What conclusions can you come to about God's person and character based on his actions in **103:3-5**?

He is loving, kind, generous, understanding, able to take what is bad in my life and make it good; powerful; cares about and restores the individual; willing to forgive my sin; able to restore and heal me; knows what I need; THERE IS NOTHING NEGATIVE OR HARSH IN GOD

- ♥ Do your *conclusions* about God match your *experience* of God? Why or why not? We can know things about God, but never experience these things. It's important that we experience God, not just know facts about him.
- ♥ When God forgives our sins, what other important action does he take? (**1 John 1:9**) Why is this important? He also cleanses us from our sin; He takes away the guilt and stain of sin; we get a fresh, new start.

Heals all your diseases – Sin and disease are often linked in Scripture (Mark 2:1-12), but disease does not always refer to physical sickness. Often it is a metaphor for adversity, setbacks and suffering in general (Deut. 29:22; Jer. 14:19; 16:4). God healing all our diseases speaks to God's ability to mend his creation that has been broken by sin and all its consequences. Healing in this life is sometimes partial and always temporary, for we all will die a physical death (Heb. 9:27) as a result of our sin (Romans 3:23; 6:23). However, God promises that someday we, and *all* of creation, will be totally healed (Rev. 21:1-5; 22:1-3).

- ♥ What "pit" (103:4) has God redeemed you from? What is an appropriate response for what He has done?
- ♥ What images come to mind when you think of the word "**crowned**"(103:4)? What does the word "crowned" reveal about God's view of you? God thinks of me and treats me as royalty – part of his family!

12. In the Bible, eagles are often "word pictures" symbolizing **renewed strength given by God just when we need it**. This is because eagles allow themselves to be carried on the wind currents for miles with little or no effort on their part (**Is. 40:30-31**).

In **103:5**, why would God *satisfying our desires with good things* cause our *youth to be renewed like the eagles*? What do you think is the connection between these two things?

This is a question that takes some thought and the more you think about it, the more connections you will see. Basically, we all have deep desires that need to be fulfilled. These desires are God-made and they come from what it means to be human. We need a purpose to live for. We need to use the gifts and talents God has given us. Every human needs to feel significant and fulfilled. We all need to worship something. We all have a "God-shaped vacuum" in us. If these and other basic desires are not fulfilled, we become depressed, purposeless and empty.

God knows these desires because he placed them in us. He is the only One who can truly satisfy them. When HE satisfies our desires and passions (instead of us running to other things to try and fulfill them), then we begin to live for the purpose we were created and this brings life and vitality. Our youth and strength will be renewed! We will feel alive and joyful!

13. In **103:8-10**, David shifts his focus to who God *is* rather than what he *does* for us. Read these verses in at least two translations of Scripture and put into your own words the eight characteristics of God mentioned by David.

Everyone's answers will be a little different, but the 8 characteristics of God are:

Compassionate

Gracious

Slow to anger

Abounding in love

He will not always accuse

He will not be angry forever

He does not treat us as our sins deserve

He will not repay us or punish us for all our sins

♥ Does David's description of God match your own concept of God? If not, what would it take for you to see and experience God this way?

♥ How do we deserve to be treated by God? **The penalty for sin is death.**

Why doesn't God treat us like that?

14. What implications does God's treatment of us have for our treatment of others?

If God treats me this way and does not give me what I "deserve", then at the very least I can do is to treat others like God treats me!

♥ Whom do you treat as he or she deserves? What would it mean to bring the same grace God has for you into the situation?

15. In **103:11-12**, we are given three powerful word pictures to help us understand the depth of God's love and forgiveness. Which word picture do you like best and why?

Have several share

16. Who, exactly, will *experience* God's incredible love? **103:11, 17, 18**

Those who fear him and with their children's children; those who are faithful to his covenant and obey his commandments

****If you are not sure what it means to "fear God", go back and read the explanation given in Lesson 5.**

♥ Does your experience with your earthly father help or hinder the word picture given in **103:13**?

Sometimes it is hard for a person to relate to God as Father when their human father was or is not what God intended. Perhaps the explanation below will help some. God has put something in all of us that let's us know and recognize a good father, even if we did not have one. When our human fathers fail and hurt us, we inherently know this is wrong.

God as Father is a painful image for some. Concerning this, Richard Foster in his book *Prayer* writes: *I know that many find abba (father) language painful because they have been inexpressibly hurt by their own human fathers. I grieve for those wounded by these terribly destructive experiences, and I pray, even as I write these words, that they may know grace and healing. Then, too, it may help all of us to remember that we are to receive our understanding of how human fathers are supposed to function by learning what God is like, not the other way around. (Page 131)*

17. According to **103:14**, what two facts does God keep in mind about us?

He understands how we are formed (how weak we are) and he knows that we are dust

What does this mean for us? Are you insulted or comforted? Why?

He won't expect more out of us than we are able to be. He knows exactly what we are capable of. This should be a comforting thought.

♥ How do humans (**103:15-16**) compare to God's love (**103:17**)? In which one will you put your trust?

18. Whose in charge of the universe? **103:19**

God's throne is in the heavens and from there he rules over everything!

Why, then, are there so many things "wrong" with our world?

Even though God rules over all, he allows his creation to make choices and choices have consequences. God does not block the consequences of our actions. If he did, they would not be true choices.

The biggest reason why God allows us choices is that love has to be given freely and not forced. We must choose to love God and have a relationship with him. Someday God will set everything straight and evil will be judged, but in the meantime we live in an imperfect world where consequences of bad choices are a reality. The good thing is that God will meet us in our suffering and he promises that for the one who in relationship with him, that he will work out for good all that happens to us, even the bad.

What does this reveal to us about God's character? Consider **2 Peter 3:9-10** in your answer.

God is patient with us and does not immediately bring his judgment on us because he is waiting for people to repent! He wants to include everyone in his plan of salvation. Verse 10 assures that judgment is coming when God will expose everything and will make things right.

RESPONSE:

What are your reasons to praise God? How important is praise to you? On a typical day, how often would you say you offer up praise to God? How will you join the universal call to praise in **103:20-21**?

Try writing a personal Psalm of Praise beginning the same way David did. *Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits . . .* or begin with, *How do I love thee? Let me count the ways . . .*

Is God worth the effort it takes to praise him? Who will benefit from your Psalm of Praise?

Praise is important to God (it is one way we can show our love for him) and it benefits us, but we have to choose to do it!

On the next page is all the "extra scripture" from this lesson in case you want to make copies for your group so that you can easily read together the verses referred to in the questions.

Psalms 27:6

Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his tabernacle will I sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the LORD.

Psalms 35:18

I will give you thanks in the great assembly; among throngs of people I will praise you.

Psalms 66:16

Come and listen, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me.

Psalms 104:34

May my meditation be pleasing to him, as I rejoice in the LORD.

Psalms 106:1

Praise the LORD. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.

2Peter 3:9, 10

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 10But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.