



LESSON 10: LET ME COUNT THE WAYS . . .

PSALM 103

BACKGROUND

Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote a tender love poem recognized by many:

*How do I love thee?
Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach . . .*

Think of Psalm 103 as God's love poem to us. In its message we can hear God, our Abba Father, saying, "**How do I love you? Let me count the ways . . .**"

In this *Song of Praise*, King David makes no complaint, nor does he ask God for anything. Instead, the entire Psalm focuses on God's goodness and love to us and David's desire to respond with praise that comes from the deepest part of his person. David is not giving us a list of *facts* about God. This Psalm comes from his personal *experience* of God.

As you study this Psalm, ask yourself if your experience of God matches David's. In not, pray that you, too, might experience God as David did.

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?

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*.
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.
3. Give **Psalm 103** a *title* or write a short *summary sentence* that captures what you think is the essence of this Psalm.
4. Write out a verse(s) from this Psalm that your heart really needs to hear right now.

QUESTIONS

5. What directive or instruction is repeated in verses **1, 2, 20-22**?
6. *Who* is David addressing in these verses?

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

- ♥ Why would David tell himself to praise God? Do we need to do this too?
7. What do you think it means to praise God with *your whole heart* or *all your inmost being*?
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- ♥ 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 -
Psalm 35:18 -
Psalm 66:16 -
Psalm 104:34 -
Psalm 106:1 -
- ♥ Who benefits from the act of praising God? How?
 - ♥ What is your favorite way to praise God? Why?
 - ♥ 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**?

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

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.

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**?

- ♥ Do your *conclusions* about God match your *experience* of God? Why or why not?
- ♥ When God forgives our sins, what other important action does he take? (**1 John 1:9**) Why is this important?

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?

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?

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.

- ♥ 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? Why doesn't God treat us like that?

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

♥ 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?

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

***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**?

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?

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

♥ 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**

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

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

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?