

## The Lord's Throne Is Established

Lesson Scripture: Psalm 103

Focus Scripture: Psalm 103:1-14

*Key Verse: The Lord works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed. Psalm 103:6*

### PSALM 103:1-14 (NRSV UE)

- 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 do not forget all his benefits—
- 3 who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,
- 4 who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
- 5 who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
- 6 The Lord works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed.
- 7 He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel.
- 8 The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
- 9 He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger forever.
- 10 He does not deal with us according to our sins nor repay us according to our iniquities.
- 11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
- 12 as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us.
- 13 As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him.
- 14 For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust.

### PSALM 103:1-14 (KJV)

- 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 lovingkindness and tender mercies;
- 5 Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.
- 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 chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever.
- 10 He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.
- 11 For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his 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.

## KEY TERMS

- **Vindication** – The act or process of clearing a person of blame for something.
- **Crescendo** – The climax, high point, or loudest part in a song, play, or argument.
- **Liberia** – A country in West Africa with a population of about 6 million; Africa's oldest republic.
- **Stimuli** – Something that induces or triggers a particular reaction.
- **Critical Thinkers** – People who analyze and evaluate information.


## INTRODUCTION

Naturally, we feel grateful towards people who do good things to or for us. Out of that gratitude, we praise them. When we understand this, it takes the mystery out of praising God. At its root, praise is not the result of outward stimulation by music, although we accept that music can help to enhance our praise. Rather, praise is an outward expression of the

gratitude we feel in our hearts. People with a low sense of appreciation towards God have difficulty offering praises to God. Conversely, the people who deeply appreciate God's mercy and grace towards them praise God lavishly.

Keep this basic truth in mind and watch how it plays out in the text. David did not praise because he was a "natural worshipper," as praise team leaders

assert. The intensity of his praise was rooted in his knowledge and appreciation of God's character and works in people's lives. This is a cue for us to examine the degree to which we appreciate what God has done or is doing in our lives. The insight from that examination will help us to understand the



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quality of our praise to God.

But we should also note the reverse. Although people may acknowledge God's goodness, they can become complacent about those blessings. From there a sense of entitlement develops that stops people from praising God.

This is like when children acknowledge the good that their parents contributed to their lives. However, if the children believe that the parents acted out of a sense of duty, the children will not praise the parent for the sacrifices the parents made to care for them. So, the question naturally arises about how we see God's goodness towards us. Are God's blessings a discretionary favor, or is God just doing what God must do for us? Your

answer to that question determines the level of praise you offer to God.

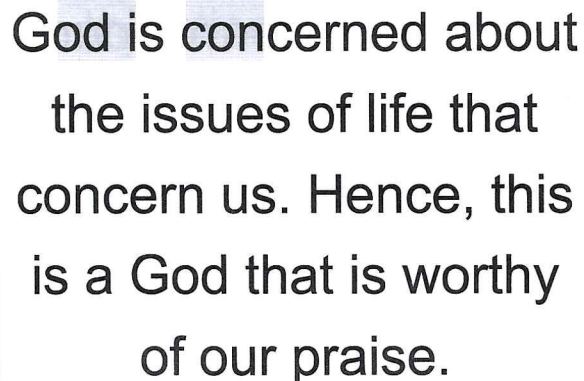
### TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

In the opening verses (verses 1-2) David encourages, indeed commands, himself to bless/praise the Lord. What is astonishing about this call is that

David had great reasons to praise the Lord. Yet his praise was not automatic. When we catch this point, we understand that at times we must, by deliberate effort, encourage ourselves to focus on God's goodness and praise him accordingly.

Verses 4-6 highlight a truth praise teams need to note. Calling people to "just

praise the Lord" falls flat when people are not focusing on the reason for the praise. People do not offer praises to God in a vacuum. They need reasons to praise. This is what David set out in these verses. Also, examine how the reasons to praise hit the major Christian themes: God's unshakeable faithfulness to his people, how God addresses our deepest fears, and meets our core needs.



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Ponder verses 3-5 and mark the topics David claimed God addresses for us: forgiveness, healing, life, significance, happiness, endurance for living, and justice. God is concerned about the issues of life that concern us. Hence, this is a God that is worthy of our praise. Follow

how the psalmist expanded on these matters later in the psalm.

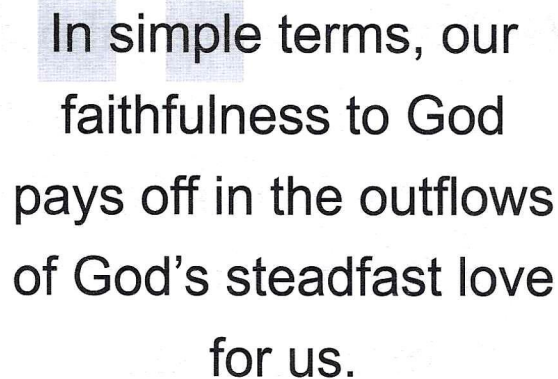
But why is David so intense in his praise for God? To use modern jargon, he had "the receipts." The first clue is that David knew the history of Israel and how God demonstrated his faithfulness to the nation (verses 7-9). The second hint

is David's own experiences with God (verses 10-18).

Verses 17-18 when taken together reach back to the earlier point of having a solid reason for obeying and praising God. In simple terms, our faithfulness to God pays off in the outflows of God's steadfast love for us.

The psalm ends in a wonderful crescendo.

David's exuberance about the identity and works of God fired him up to call for everyone and everything everywhere to bless the Lord. This is the joy believers experience as they meditate deeply on the eternal God's character, works, and steadfast love. Let us bless the Lord.



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### SANKOFA

King David's call to praise God he first directed to himself, then extended to all of Israel, and by implication to the entire universe. Liberians, it would seem, heard and heeded the call. History tells us Liberia is the only African state founded by African American immigrants

– freed American slaves. Naturally, the settlers brought with them to Liberia their American traditions, which included the Thanksgiving celebrations. However, Liberia's Thanksgiving is not a carbon copy of America's.

The Liberia celebration is on the first Thursday in November, and it focuses on thanking God for the harvests that sustain the nation. Liberians use

Thanksgiving Day as a special day to praise God in the churches and other sacred places of worship. As part of the praise rituals, worshippers take to the churches' thanksgiving services fresh fruits from their harvests. These fruits are auctioned at the end of the service. Then

the people return home for the traditional Thanksgiving meal.

But we must also note the central idea behind the Liberian Thanksgiving. The people are praising God for freeing the slaves and enabling them to come to Liberia, where they built a country where people can live in freedom.

They see the creation and development of their country as a work of God's grace. Those sentiments about the goodness of God are the same thoughts that inspired King David to call people everywhere to bless the Lord. The Liberian example should likewise stimulate us to consider the goodness of God to us. Yes, we too have great reasons to bless the Lord.

### CASE STUDY

Over the centuries, a practice has developed in certain churches where praise teams (or choirs) attempt to "get people into the mood" to praise or worship God. Often worshippers crudely referred to this as "pumping up" the people. Praise team leaders, who are skilled at this "pumping" of congregations, receive high respect, recognition, and rewards.

Critical thinkers often wonder why congregations must be "pumped" or "hyped" to praise God. Without a doubt, music can and does enhance our praise

of God. We see this in several of the psalms. Yet genuine praise to God flows from within the heart of gratitude rather than a response to outside stimuli. People who feel grateful to God will naturally express praise to God.

So how can we get into an attitude where we are ready to praise God when we enter places of worship? We simply do what the Liberians did. They saw their accomplishments not in terms of their own achievements. They did not take for themselves the credit for what they achieved in moving to and settling Liberia. They gave the credit to God. This is a foundational principle.

When we are grateful to God, we take the focus off ourselves and put it firmly on God. This is what is meant by the expression "We decrease, and God increase" during praise rituals.

Astonishingly, as our focus on God grows, our praise becomes sweeter and

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more intense. With such a focus, humility grows in us and spurs more praise. It is a self-generating cycle. But what is behind this phenomenon? Our hearts cannot have two focal points at the same time. We cannot be prideful (about ourselves) and humble before God at the same time. This is the root of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6:21-24.

Our actions follow our hearts. When the focus of our hearts is on God, our mouths, feet, and hands automatically express what our hearts see. Understanding these principles gives us the keys to exciting praise services. We must go to church services not focused on the praise team skills. We go "focused on God." God alone.

### LIFE APPLICATION

One hindrance to free-flowing praise to God is unresolved issues in our hearts. We must constantly remind ourselves that God helps us to resolve these painful issues. So, if your praise to God is not what you desire, seek God's healing so

your heart will be free to praise the Lord. The process may be painful at times, but so, too, is the formation of a pearl.

Psychology and other social sciences tell us we do not see certain things because we are not looking for them. King David saw the glory of God in the heavens because his heart was so focused. Spend time

King David saw the glory of God in the heavens because his heart was so focused. Spend time observing the beauty of the world and the grace of God that is evident in the events around the world.

observing the beauty of the world and the grace of God that is evident in the events around the world. The more we look for the fingers of God, the greater the impression of the divine hand in our hearts. These observations become the wells from which spontaneous praise flows.

Psalm 103 addresses ordinary, everyday issues that concern

us. Select a verse from this psalm that is meaningful to you. Memorize the selected verse. Draw on this verse when you think about the issue to which it relates. Knowing that God has an answer for this issue will inspire you to resolve it in the right way. You will also find it useful

to praise God in advance for his wisdom in addressing the matter.

Certain people miss the joy of God's presence because the guilt of past sin distorts the focus of their hearts. As we noted before, our minds have difficulty in embracing conflicting emotions. We cannot praise God out of gratitude when we feel condemned by past sin. Accept what Psalm 103 says about God's forgiveness of our sins. Resolve to accept God's offer of forgiveness. Read and reread what the psalm says about God's forgiveness. Then repent of your sinful action and move forward into God's forgiveness. Thank God for forgiving you.

## QUESTIONS

1. What prevents you from praising God as freely as you desire?

2. How do you view the claim in verse 2 that God heals "all your diseases"?
3. Why do unresolved issues in our hearts affect our praises to God? Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. talked about the long arc of the universe bending toward justice. How do we praise even when it is hard to see the bend toward justice?

## CLOSING DEVOTIONS

**Closing Hymn:** "Bless the Lord, O My Soul," *AMEC Hymnal* #594

**Closing Prayer:** God of justice and love, please help me to remove from my heart any unresolved issues that hinder me from praising you freely. Thanks for loving me and making it possible for me to praise you with a free heart, despite my messy past. In Jesus' name. Amen!

## HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

January 20-January 26

<b>Monday</b>	Daniel 2:31-45 (The Kingdoms of This World)
<b>Tuesday</b>	Colossians 1:11-20 (The Kingdom of God's Son)
<b>Wednesday</b>	Colossians 1:21-29 (Christ, the Hope of Glory)
<b>Thursday</b>	Zechariah 14:8-11, 16-21 (The Lord Reigns Over the Earth)
<b>Friday</b>	Hebrews 12:18-29 (An Unshakable Kingdom)
<b>Saturday</b>	Matthew 6:25-34 (Seek First God's Kingdom)
<b>Sunday</b>	Psalm 145:1-10, 17-21 (Bless God's Name Forever)