

# Real Prayers for Real Life

A Prayer of Thankfulness

Psalm 103

June 29, 2025

## Pastoral Prayer

*Father in Heaven, we come to You this morning with all that is within us—the stuff we are proud of ... the stuff that we are ashamed of ... the things that we are grateful for ... the things that we wish would go away ... the good things we have done ... the bad things we have done ... all that is within us—and we say together: Bless the Lord, O my soul.*

*You are the High King of Heaven—set apart in majesty, unmatched in power, unshaken in authority. The earth is Your footstool and the skies declare Your glory. And yet, in all Your greatness, You bend low with kindness. You are not far off or indifferent. You draw near with mercy. You don't just reign—you redeem. You don't just command—you care. You are endlessly patient, deeply loving, and fiercely faithful. Who is like You, O Lord?*

*This morning we confess that we are forgetful people. We forget Your benefits. We forget Your forgiveness. We forget that our lives have been redeemed from the pit and crowned with steadfast love. We forget—so easily—that we are not our own. Forgive us for living like orphans when You have adopted us as sons and daughters.*

*We thank You that in Jesus, our sins—though many—have been removed as far as the east is from the west. Thank You for the cross where justice and mercy meet, and for the resurrection that renews our strength like the eagle's.*

*Lord, would You help us to remember today?*

*To remember Your kindness.*

*To remember Your forgiveness.*

*To remember the beauty of being part of Your people—the church—where grace is shared and stories of redemption are celebrated.*

*We lift up those among us who feel crushed by guilt or wearied by suffering. Renew them, Lord. Satisfy them with Your goodness. For those who are full of joy, keep them humble and thankful. For those who feel forgotten, remind them of Your promises.*

*We ask, too, that You would shape us into a grateful people—quick to bless and slow to grumble. Let gratitude saturate our worship, our relationships, our witness.*

*And as we continue to pray, sing, listen, and come to the Table, may our hearts echo David's ancient words, and may we say with all sincerity: Bless the Lord, O my soul—and all that is within me, bless His holy name.*

*In the name of Jesus—the One who forgives, heals, redeems, and crowns us—we pray,*

*Amen.*

## Introduction

When was the last time you forgot something important?

Maybe it was an anniversary. Maybe a birthday. A lunch appointment? Maybe it was where you parked your car at the Atlanta airport. Maybe—like me—it was where you set your keys and wallet down yesterday when you got home for the day.

We are forgetful people, and those kinds of things cause their share of trouble or discomfort. But the most dangerous kind of forgetting isn't the kind that makes you late to work or sleep on the couch—***it's the kind that makes you numb to grace.***

That's what David is preaching to himself in Psalm 103. Look at vv. 1-2 with me.

***1 My soul, bless the LORD, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.***

***2 My soul, bless the LORD, and do not forget all his benefits.***

David knew what we all know but are slow to admit: forgetfulness leads to ingratitude, and ingratitude leads to spiritual amnesia, and that leads to all sorts of sinful postures and behaviors that do us no good. When we forget what God has done, we start to act like He's never done anything at all.

Of course, a better question is, "What leads to forgetfulness in the first place?" And I think there are two answers to that.

**The first is when things are going very badly—Suffering strangles gratitude.** I recall my months of depression and anxiety more than a decade ago. I had the family and the house and the job that I wanted, but my heart and mind were not grateful. EVERYTHING had to be right for me to be grateful, and I could not enjoy much of what God had given me. Suffering strangles gratitude.

**The second is when things are going quite well—Prosperity drowns gratitude.** When things are "up and to the right," we start to feel like we earned the view. We forget to be grateful to the Giver because we're too busy enjoying the gifts. This is basically the whole warning of

Deuteronomy 8. God says: *When you eat and are full, and build beautiful houses to live in ... be careful that your heart doesn't become proud and you forget the Lord your God (Deut. 8:10–14).*

God knew that the people were more likely to forget Him after the Promised Land than before it. Prosperity drowns out gratitude.

So, pain or pride ... suffering or success ... It is easy to let both of these cloud our picture of God and His goodness. Our experiences and interpretation of those experiences have a way of determining our theology ... what we think and believe about God.

Psalm 103 does the opposite – it's theology that shapes our experiences. And when we do that ... when we let our theology inform our interpretation of our experiences, we become grateful people in both good times and bad.

That's why we need to love Psalm 103. Psalm 103 is a prayer that keeps us grounded in gratitude. And in praying through it, what we'll see over and over again is this:

***The gospel keeps us grounded in gratitude. CROSS CHART***

Let me show you this in the text.

## Body

### Remember the Gospel's Work in You

Psalm 103 walks us through three areas of remembrance—each wider than the last. We'll only get to the first two, and the first one is this: ***we are to remember the gospel's work in our personal lives.*** Look at vv. 3-5.

***3 He forgives all your iniquity; he heals all your diseases.***

***4 He redeems your life from the Pit; he crowns you with faithful love and compassion.***

***5 He satisfies you with good things; your youth is renewed like the eagle.***

Now, it doesn't take a lot of work to see how all of the things David speaks to himself about are all gospel things, but I've decided that we're better served this morning by focusing on the first one: ***He forgives all your iniquity.***

Whenever you see a list of things like this in Hebrew (and there are 17 things listed in Psalm 103), know that the items are essentially force ranked. And at the top of the list of benefits of knowing God and being known by Him that David wants to speak to his own soul is that God forgives sin.

Now, deep down, everyone of us understands and feels just how valuable forgiveness is, because everyone of us has wronged another person, and everyone of us has been wronged by

another person. And if you have wronged another person and are still in a good relationship with them, it's because your sin against them has been forgiven. And if you have been wronged by another person and you are still in a good relationship with them, it's because you have forgiven their sin against you. Everybody understands, at some level, how crucial forgiveness is, and we all understand, at some level, how HARD forgiveness is.

In fact, it's so hard sometimes, that instead of forgiving someone, we just ghost them ... or berate them ... or guilt them ... anything that keeps them feeling guilty and at arm's length from us. We exact the price of their sin from them.

No wonder, then, that at the top of the list of benefits of knowing God that David wants to remember and hold on to is that God "forgives iniquity." God, who is perfectly holy and sovereign and powerful and has every right in the universe to exact from me and you an eternal price for the sin we've committed against Him .... Chooses to forgive.

And because you have forgiven many other people in your life ... and because many people have forgiven you ... you know that forgiveness costs something. Sometimes it costs not so much, and sometimes it costs a lot ... like, you need a mortgage to forgive that person. But forgiveness, by definition, costs.

In his book on forgiveness, Tim Keller<sup>1</sup> puts it this way:

***Forgiveness is a form of voluntary suffering. In forgiving, rather than retaliating, you make a choice to bear the cost.***

So, when David says in vv. 1-3:

***1 My soul, bless the LORD, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.***

***2 My soul, bless the LORD, and do not forget all his benefits.***

***3 He forgives all your iniquity ...***

He is saying, I bless the Lord and I don't want to ever forget that I stand as a sinner against God, and that all of the time God suffers voluntarily for me. God has chosen to bear the cost of my sin against Him. God forgives.

And what's really amazing is that David didn't know the HALF of it on his side of redemptive history. But he knew enough that his sacrifice of animals for sin didn't REALLY cover the pay for his sin. He knew that somehow, some way, God was paying the price. And on our side of redemptive history, we know where that price was paid. Jesus is our forgiveness.

- Isaiah said He would be pierced for our transgressions (Isaiah 53:5).
- Paul said, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses" (Eph. 1:7).
- And on the cross, Jesus didn't just say "I forgive you"—He said, "It is finished."

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<sup>1</sup> Keller, *Forgive*, p. 6.

Do you want to be a more grateful person in the everyday things of this life? Never forget God forgives you. Never forget the work of Jesus on your behalf. Bless the Lord who forgives all of your iniquity.

## Remember for the Gospel's Work in the Church

And not just your iniquity! David goes on in vv. 6-18 to remember that God has worked to forgive the sin of not just a person, but a people. So we should not only remember the gospel's work in our lives, but ***in the lives of the church as well.***

Verses 7-10 are particularly clear on this point. Notice the shift to the first person plural.

***7 He revealed his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel.***

***8 The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love.***

***9 He will not always accuse us or be angry forever.***

***10 He has not dealt with us as our sins deserve or repaid us according to our iniquities.***

The thing that God has done for you is a very personal thing, but it is not a private thing. The good news of Jesus ... the Christian faith ... is inherently communal.

*To illustrate: I met one of our members for lunch this week and I was (wisely) wearing a bright red polo with a **UGA logo** on the chest, and he commented, "Man, you are just fitting right in." Being a UGA fan is a personal choice, but it is not a private choice. It's inherently communal, and a great deal of joy and enthusiasm for our personal decision is wrapped up in the fact that we are not alone in our choice.*

The same is true of being forgiven by God. It's personal, but it's not private. That a good number of people where you live are equally cognizant of and joyful for God's forgiveness is something that you and I should contemplate on a regular basis, and when we do so, we become more grateful people.

One of the more interesting ways you can see in the New Testament is in Paul's letters to the various churches he either planted or assisted in his missionary journeys. Listen to Paul's heart of gratitude in these passages!

- Ephesians 1:15-16. ***"This is why, since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I never stop giving thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers..."***
  - Here, Paul's gratitude is stirred by the faith and love of the church. He sees their story as evidence of the resurrection power of Jesus (v. 20).
  - What this means is that gratitude grows when we notice what God is doing in and through our brothers and sisters.
- Philippians 1:3-6 – ***"I give thanks to my God for every remembrance of you... because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now."***

- In this passage, Paul ties gratitude is tied to shared ministry—partnership, perseverance, presence.
- What this means is that when you see a church laboring together in the gospel, it's a visible sign of His faithfulness, and we should thank God.
- Colossians 1:3–6 – *“We always thank God... when we hear of your faith... and the love you have for all the saints... just as it is bearing fruit and growing all over the world...”*
  - Here, Paul is grateful not just for individuals, but for the fruitfulness of the gospel movement through the body of Christ.
  - What this means is that the Church is God's field where the gospel seed is taking root, and we become grateful to Him when we see fruit!
- 1 Thessalonians 1:2–5 – *“We always thank God for all of you... remembering your work produced by faith, your labor motivated by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”*
  - In this passage, Paul's thanksgiving is connected to the community's transformed lifestyle and visible testimony.
  - What this means for you and I is that gratitude isn't only felt—it's fueled by seeing the Spirit's work in God's people.

Do you want to be a more grateful person in the everyday things of this life? Be involved in the church and give thanks to God for the work of Jesus in your church and in THE Church.

## Application/Conclusion

So what does that mean for you and me?

Let me offer a few takeaways:

### 1. Talk to your soul.

David didn't wait until he felt grateful—he preached to his own heart. What would it look like for you to begin each morning not with your to-do list, but with a “don't forget” list?

### 2. Fight spiritual amnesia with active remembrance.

Make time—daily or weekly—to name God's benefits. Write them. Share them. Pray them. Pray Psalm 103. Write your own Psalm 103. BIBLE READING PLAN.

### 3. Practice Forgiveness and experience the gratitude that comes with it.

If a relationship has broken down, it is always your move to initiate relationship repair. Matthew 5 says, “If your brother has something against you, go to him,” while Matthew 18 says, “If you have something against your brother, go to him,” so it doesn't matter who started it. A Christian is responsible to begin the process of reconciliation, regardless of how the alienation began.

Grateful people forgive more easily. Serve more joyfully. Give more freely. Gratitude is the soil where the fruit of the Spirit grows.

#### 4. Join the church.

#### 5. Train your family and your church to remember.

What if we made *remembrance* part of our discipleship? What if Life Groups started not just with prayer requests—but with praise reports?

What kind of community could we be if we lived like Psalm 103?

- A people who don't grumble but *give thanks*.
- A people who don't forget but *remember*.
- A people who sing Psalm 103—not because life is easy, but because grace is real.

*“Bless the Lord, all his works in all the places where he rules. My soul, bless the Lord!”*

Let's be that people.

Let's be the people who live and breathe the gospel, and who see ***the gospel keep us grounded in gratitude.***

## Closing Prayer

*Lord, we thank You for the reminder this morning that the gospel keeps us grounded in gratitude. That we are forgiven because Jesus bore the cost. That we are not alone in our faith, but part of a church—a people—on whom You have poured out mercy and grace.*

*But today, You've brought us back.*

*Back to the truth of who You are.*

*Back to the cross, where our forgiveness was secured.*

*Back to the church, where Your grace is alive and multiplying.*

*Back to the quiet joy of remembering that every breath, every blessing, every second chance comes from Your hand.*

*So teach us, Lord, not just to count our blessings but to trace them back to You.*

*Make us a people who remember well, forgive freely, and give thanks loudly.*

*Let our lives sing what David sang: “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name.”*

*And may we leave here not forgetful, but full.*

*In the name of Jesus—our Redeemer, our King, our joy—we pray, Amen.*