



## Prologue

The great Irish writer and theologian, CS Lewis, said, **"Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."** I have just gone through the most difficult physical experience of my life. During this

time, God has whispered to me, spoken into my heart, and perhaps even shouted into my soul. The end result is that during my difficulties, I have EXPERIENCED God in new and beautiful ways. "Experiencing God" in a real way begins with awakening to the fact of how much He loves you, how much you need Him, and responding to that love by loving Him back with all your heart, soul, and might.

In the English language, knowing a truth doesn't necessarily mean that you have experienced that truth. However, in Hebrew (God's language), the verb "to know" is *yada*. It means so much more than it does in English. The verb "*yada*" means **to know something intimately by having experienced it**. Today, we'll explore Psalm 103. I'd like to relate how it helped me to experience God in a deeper way. It is my hope that you'll take this teaching, and that it will help you learn in a more real way how to experience God.

At the end of August, I went to spend a week with one of the smartest guys I know. He is a childhood friend who is a retired Pediatric Cardiac Surgeon. He and his wife live on a working sheep farm in Michigan in the beautiful countryside about an hour west of Detroit. While visiting, I mentioned to him that I had an MRI done prior to the visit that had revealed that I had a growth in my prostate, and the doctor informed me that it was probably cancer. This friend invested a great deal of time in learning about my situation and in exploring options for me in terms of treatment. God was putting together a medical team for my benefit. God provides us with so many benefits, and when we focus on those, we find a heart of gratitude wells up within us, and we experience God in new ways.

A few weeks after my solo trip to Michigan, Sandy and I went to spend another week with a couple whom we've known since we were in our twenties. The husband is one of the smartest guys I know. We met at Texas A&M in 1975. He was the first person ever admitted to Texas A&M Medical School (which was formed about the time we graduated). He is a retired Interventional Radiologist. He is familiar with every kind of cancer imaginable, and it is his wife who was miraculously cured of Stage 4 Lymphoma

when we were in our thirties. Both visits had occurred before my diagnosis, so God had prepared me with a team of close personal friends who were both highly skilled physicians who would guide me through what was to come. I received the biopsy results after we returned from Idaho. God had already provided me with knowledge and wisdom to guide me through the process of healing.

A few days after the news from the doctor, I went to our Tuesday morning men's group, and I told the guys about my diagnosis. At the close of our meeting, I asked Sparky Hardeman to pray for me. He later told me that he felt a definitive word from the Lord that he was to speak Psalm 103 over me. Take out your Bible, and let's look at what it has to say. It is David giving us personal instructions of how to experience God in a deeper, more meaningful way.

## The Text

### ***A Psalm of David.***

*103 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 forgives all your iniquities,  
Who heals all your diseases,  
4 Who redeems your life from destruction,  
Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies,  
5 Who satisfies your mouth with good things,  
So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. (Psalm 103:1-5, NKJV).*

The Psalm begins with David speaking truth to his soul. Remember that our soul is the seat of our emotions, our intellect, and our will. Emotions are a tricky thing because they can take us up, but oh how they can let us down. When we get into a crisis in our lives, we hopefully have biblical truth hidden in our minds, but we don't experience God in a deep way until that truth finds its way into our heart. When the Bible talks about our "heart," it is that place where our minds meet our emotions. The "heart" is where true *yada* happens. In this Psalm David urges his soul to get in line with the truth of what He knows to be true about God.

David here is telling his soul to "Bless the Lord." He shouts out " בְּרַכְּי יְהוָה אֱתֵי-יְהוָה . " The word bless is related to the word "to kneel." I don't know exactly how kneeling and blessing relate to each other. Perhaps a blessing is given as one kneels. Perhaps it is on our knees that we understand Who God is and how great He really is. But David is commanding his emotions saying, "Hey feelings, hey mind, hey everything, kneel before God and honor Him just because He is Who He is." David adds and "ALL THAT IS

WITHIN ME kneel before and honor His holy name.” David’s will is instructing all of himself to redirect and to refocus. When we experience pain, if we are in tune with the fact that God is our all in all, we KNOW that we MUST redirect and understand all that we can about Who He is and how much He loves us. David calls himself to remember ALL OF THE BENEFITS OF KNOWING GOD AND WALKING WITH HIM. When we begin to remember His benefits, gratitude follows. And, joy is a by-product of gratitude. Here in the end of verse two, David begins to list and itemize all the benefits of experiencing God.

### Verse 3

He forgives all our sins, and He heals our diseases. In the depth of my pet scans and all the related poking and prodding that went with my diagnosis, I found great peace reciting these first five verses. I held on to them with all that I had. David reminds his soul that it is God alone who forgives all our iniquities. That means He loves us and forgives us of all our sins. The mind of a worldly person is often unaware of one’s own sin and deficiencies. But a conscience that has been pricked by the Spirit of God understands just how wicked and fallen we can be. We are so self-directed and self-absorbed. But even David understood that it is only God that can forgive us of our wrongdoing. It is such a relief to get your mind around the fact that God loves you and has forgiven you of your sins. That is the first benefit listed. Then David follows that by saying that God heals us from all our diseases.

Healings happen in four different ways:

1. They can occur in what we call natural ways, but in fact, are all miracles provided to us because of the way God made us. He gave us immune systems, and tissue and skin that grow back over injuries and that “naturally” heal our infirmities. We see this happen and we often forget that it is God at work in these bodies that He provided for us.
2. We can be healed through skilled physicians. I meet people that have an inherent bias against medical doctors and modern medicine. I don’t really understand this. God has revealed methods and means into the minds of doctors who facilitate in the healing that God does in our bodies. I grew up with parents in the medical field who had a commitment to work in partnership with God to stamp out disease and suffering. Physicians are a gift from the God.
3. Healings can be totally supernatural with no human explanation. In my own case, after my diagnosis, we all prayed that the Lord would hold back the cancer in my body and keep it from spreading. Biopsies from before the surgery and then after the surgery revealed that my cancer had shrunk in size and had been downgraded in its severity. That, my friends, is unexplainable. That is supernatural. God answered our prayers and provided a miracle for my benefit.

4. God can perform the ultimate healing when He knows that His time allotted for us on earth has come to an end. He allows us to pass from this life into our permanent eternal life with Him.

Verse 4 – David continues to recount the benefits of knowing God. <sup>4</sup> *Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies. (Psalm 103:4, NKJV).* God does indeed redeem our lives from destruction. I don't know about you, but without the Lord and His guidance and influence in my life, I believe my life would have come off the tracks and ended in my own "destruction" numerous times. He redeems us again and again from destruction. When a life is submitted to Him He will nudge, push, and pull us again and again from going in directions that will end in our ruin. And not only does He just save us from a path of misery and destruction, He does it while putting a crown of *chesed* (חֶסֶד) on us. Remember that *chesed* is a LOVE THAT NEVER QUILTS. IT IS LOVE THAT NEVER LETS GO. Your mind may know that God's love never quits, but has that truth made it into your heart? Oh what a benefit that is when we come to truly understand that.

Verse 5 – *Who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. (Psalm 103:5, NKJV).* It's interesting that David uses the imagery of what satisfies our mouths. Our mouths are the focal point of our appetite for food. But, we have all kinds of other appetites, don't we? We hunger for security. We hunger for love and affection. At points in our lives, we hunger for sexual satisfaction. We hunger to have value and worth. And when we try to satisfy these deep appetites and needs with anything but God, IT ALWAYS ENDS IN FRUSTRATION AND CONFLICT. He satisfies us with WHAT HE KNOWS WILL BE GOOD FOR US. That is often very different than what we think will be "good" for us. We see what is good in a different way from how God sees "good."

There are not enough material things to fill us up. There's not enough loving that will make us feel totally loved. At the end of the day, THE ONLY THING THAT WILL SATISFY our deepest needs is God. We forget this again and again. Being in pain has helped me to find my way back to these truths. We mistakenly believe that getting that "one thing more" will bring us satisfaction. In reality, it never does.

<sup>6</sup> *The LORD executes righteousness  
And justice for all who are oppressed. (Psalm 103:6, NKJV).*

Over these last few months, I've learned to love reading the Bible again. As I've made my way through the prophets, this promise of executing righteousness is ubiquitous in scripture.

<sup>7</sup> *He made known His ways to Moses,  
His acts to the children of Israel. (Psalm 103:7, NKJV).*

His benefits to Moses and the children of Israel in the Exodus from Egypt were on full display as Israel went from being a family to becoming a nation.

*<sup>8</sup> The LORD is merciful and gracious,  
Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. (Psalm 103:8, NKJV).*

We utter these words a lot, but our souls need to understand and receive that we serve a merciful God. He is perfect righteousness, yet He is personally involved in each of our lives.

*<sup>9</sup> He will not always strive with us,  
Nor will He keep His anger forever.  
<sup>10</sup> He has not dealt with us according to our sins,  
Nor punished us according to our iniquities. (Psalm 103:9-10, NKJV).*

He didn't strive with us forever because He dealt with His Son according to our sins. God does not treat us as our sins deserve. *He that knew no sin was made sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.* (2 Corinthians 5:21-Pastor's paraphrase).

*<sup>11</sup> For as the heavens are high above the earth,  
So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him;  
<sup>12</sup> As far as the east is from the west,  
So far has He removed our transgressions from us. (Psalm 103:11-12, NKJV).*

God's love and mercy are immeasurable. His mercy is great toward those who fear Him. God's benefits are available to all believers, but all believers don't enjoy them because they're living in the flesh.

*<sup>13</sup> As a father pities his children,  
So the LORD pities those who fear Him.  
<sup>14</sup> For He knows our frame;  
He remembers that we are dust. (Psalm 103:13-14, NKJV).*

From dust we came and to dust we will return, but He has compassion for us in our mortality. The Lord pities those who fear Him.

*<sup>15</sup> As for man, his days are like grass;  
As a flower of the field, so he flourishes.  
<sup>16</sup> For the wind passes over it, and it is gone,  
And its place remembers it no more. (Psalm 103:15-16, NKJV).*

We see here the difference between us and God. We're here for but a moment.

*17 But the [steadfast love of the Lord] mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting*

*On those who **fear Him**,*

*And His righteousness to children's children,*

*18 To such as **keep His covenant**,*

*And to those who **remember His commandments** to do them. (Psalm 103:17-18, NKJV).*

If you're living outside of God's intended will for your life, these benefits are not meant for you. They are available to you, but they will not be enjoyed. Salvation is free, but the benefits come with a condition; they result when you walk in your identity in Christ. A life lived in ungodliness will result in chaos.

*19 The LORD has established His throne in heaven,  
And His kingdom rules over all.*

*20 Bless the LORD, you His angels,  
Who excel in strength, who do His word,  
Heeding the voice of His word.*

*21 Bless the LORD, all you His hosts,  
You ministers of His, who do His pleasure.*

*22 Bless the LORD, all His works,  
In all places of His dominion.  
Bless the LORD, O my soul! (Psalm 103:19-22, NKJV).*

David returns to reminding his soul once again of the benefits that are his when experiencing God. I read a wonderful book leading up to my surgery. It is called Experiencing God by Henry Blackaby. His basic premise is that we love Him because He first loved us. When we respond to His love, we will want to get to know Him better. As we know Him better, we will be able to see Him working in us and around us. He will whisper to our souls how He wants us to get involved in that work that we now see. Knowing God better comes through experiencing the power of His Word, and God speaks to us through different means and methods.

### Developing a True Devotional Time in 2024

I want to talk for a moment about having a time of personal worship with the Lord this year. Sometimes, this is called a person's "devotional time." This is not something we do because we want a relationship with God. I have a time of personal worship because I ALREADY HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. When we are in a relationship with someone that we love, we desire to spend time with them. I look forward to my time

with the Lord because spending time with Him deepens and enriches the relationship that He and I already share.

Don't try this year to read your Bible out of sheer will and discipline. Blackaby suggests approaching your times with God as an opportunity to get to know someone who has an everlasting all-powerful love for you!<sup>1</sup>

Make it the priority in your life and devotional times to love Him with all your heart. That will solve most of the problems with your quiet time. Read in the scriptures of God's vast love for you. Recall what He has done to demonstrate His love. Share your heart, your concerns, and your burdens with Him in prayer. Remain silent before Him and allow Him to share His love with you. The better you know God, the more you will love Him. The more you love Him, the easier it will be for you to spend time with Him. It is never a chore to spend time with someone you love, although it can be tedious to spend time with a stranger!<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps your model this year can be Psalm 103. I will bless the Lord, oh my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, Oh my soul, AND FORGET NOT HIS BENEFITS.

OH WHAT A WONDERFUL ALMIGHTY GOD WE SERVE!

Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at [uniongrove362@gmail.com](mailto:uniongrove362@gmail.com) or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Neese- Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.

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<sup>1</sup> Experiencing God, Henry Blackaby, 2021, B&H Publishing Group, Brentwood, Tennessee, p.103

<sup>2</sup> Ibid