All that believers are in response to all that God is—this constitutes the essence, expression, and experience in worship as God intended it to be. Becoming occupied with God is the aim; it is body, soul, mind and spirit actively engaged in adoration of the Creator; and such is the substance of Psalm 103. One of the reasons Christians love the book of Psalms so much is that the songs verbalize so artfully and majestically what we often feel inside but cannot find the words to express. Nowhere is this more visible than in Psalm 103, for within its cadences of praise and thanksgiving, we find our own deepest emotions and gratitude mirrored.

At the time this psalm was written, David had come through a perilous trial that brought him physically and emotionally to the brink of death (Psalm 102), but the Lord had intervened. David responded in Psalm 103 by using all his capacities to bless the Lord’s holy name and all His benevolent benefits. David’s use of the phrase, “all that is within me” actually means “all my inward parts.” The result was a renewal of body, soul, mind and spirit that brought a rejuvenated experience to David’s life. What this psalmist discovered at a time of great crisis and blessing discloses a power that can bring about the same renewed exuberance to our spiritual lives as well.

*Did you know ~*

The Hebrew poetry of Psalm 103 is replete with the use of comparisons, similies, and parallelism. Verses 3 through 5 each have statements that are first presented and then repeated or amplified by illustration for emphasis. The second statements in these verses amplify the blessings of forgiveness, redemption, and satisfaction or fulfillment. The end result of these divine blessings is that there are no petitions or supplications in this prayerful psalm—only gratitude and praise!
Psalm 103

Bless the Lord!

A Psalm of David

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 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.

6 The Lord executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed.

7 He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel.

8 The Lord is merciful and gracious,
   Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.

9 He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever.

10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins,
    Nor punished us according to our iniquities.

11 For as the heavens are high above the earth,
    so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him;

12 As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.

13 As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him.

14 For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.

15 As for man, his days are like grass;
    As a flower of the field, so he flourishes.

16 For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.

17 But the 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.

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!
OBSERVE

“Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law.” – Psalm 119:18

The basic thing to remember about observing a psalm is that it is poetry—and poets think in images. Whatever type of psalm it may be (praise or lament, meditation or petition, just to name a few) the psalmist uses familiar images to turn his experience into a picture. He uses figurative language to reflect on God’s character and express the stirrings of his own soul.

Start by reading the entire psalm through a few times. You might try reading it aloud, or have someone else read it while you listen intently.

Some things to look for: Does the psalmist compare or contrast one thing to another? Does he repeat a specific word or phrase to emphasize a theme? The psalmist may use hyperbole (an exaggeration for the sake of effect, not meant to be taken literally). What experience does he describe? What emotions does he express? What characteristics of God does he mention? Does he make a vow or a declaration? Use the first column to describe what the psalmist says. Use the second column to jot down your own notes, thoughts, impressions or questions.

Write the definition of words listed in each section. Use a regular dictionary or an Old Testament Word Study dictionary if you have one.

Psalm 103:1-5
What the psalmist says: My notes and personal observations:

bless
benefits (v. 2)

What does David bless the Lord for? Notice the verbs David used to describe God’s blessings.
Psalm 103:6-18
What the psalmist says:  

My notes and personal observations:

---

---

Did you know . . .

Q: How high are the heavens above the earth?  A: The outermost layer of earth’s atmosphere extends about 800 miles. The average distance from earth to the sun is 929,357,000 miles. The nearest star is 4.24 light years away (that's roughly 24,925,000,000 miles). The nearest galaxy to ours is thought to be about 25,000 light years away.

Q: How far is the east from the west?  A: Immeasurable. If you head north, eventually you reach the end (roughly 12,416 miles) and begin heading south. But you can travel in an easterly direction and never find a point where east meets west. Mathematicians call the distance between east and west “infinity”.

Q: How long is everlasting—when did it begin and when does it end?  A:

Psalm103:19-22
What the psalmist says:  

My notes and personal observations:
CONSIDER
According to Psalm 103 . . .

What does blessing the Lord “with all that is within me” do for your own soul? ______________

Who is called upon to bless the Lord? _________________________________________________

INTERPRET and APPLY

“The unfolding of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.”
– Psalm 119:130

Look for a spiritual lesson. The imaginative language of the Psalms helps us to understand that God’s Word provides guidance for our feelings as well as our faith. As you look for spiritual lessons, keep in mind that this collection of prayers and songs teaches us how to worship God—not just with our lips but with our lives. While the Psalms address all aspects of life and human experience, ultimately they point us back to our Creator.

Ask: What is the theme of this psalm? How does the psalmist express himself to God? What does this psalm reveal about God’s character or His relationship with His people? Is there a command to obey? Is there a promise to claim? Is there a condition to that promise? Is there a warning to heed? Is there an example to follow or avoid? State the lesson in one simple sentence.

“I pondered the direction of my life and I turned to follow Your statutes.
I will hurry, without lingering, to obey Your commands.”
– Psalm 119:59-60 NLT

We don’t read the Bible just to gather information—we want to spiritually grow. Our heart needs to be open to change. The only way to move truth off the pages of your Bible and into your life is to put it into action.

To apply a spiritual lesson, we must examine ourselves and take deliberate steps to obey what we have learned. Ask yourself: What can I learn from the psalmist’s experience? How does this help to line up my feelings with my faith? Does it provide comfort? Does it provide correction? Think of how the lesson relates to you and what specific course of action you will take. Write your application in the form of a question to make it personal.

Psalm 103:1-5

Lesson: ____________________________________________________________

Application: ________________________________________________________

?
Psalm 103:6-18
Lesson: ________________________________________________________________

Application: _____________________________________________________________

Psalm 103:19-22
Lesson: ________________________________________________________________

Application: _____________________________________________________________

Summary
Write a simple sentence that summarizes what the psalm is about. __________________________

Give your own title to the psalm to help you remember what it says.

________________________________________

Up close and personal

For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him;
As far as the east is from the west,
so far has He removed our transgressions from us.
Psalm 103:11-12

Memorize God’s Word
Choose the translation you prefer to memorize the verse in and re-write it here.

____________________________________________________________________________

Meditate on God’s Word
As you memorize this verse, let it work into your heart and mind. Scripture meditation is like a
good cup of tea: the longer it steeps, the richer the flavor. So give yourself permission to slowly
savor God’s Word! Use the questions below (like a tea bag) to keep dipping into this verse.

Challenge alert: You won’t always see an obvious answer directly from the verse. Just think and pray
about it and share what the Lord brings to your heart and mind.
Look up. What does this verse teach you about God? (For example, look for signs of His character, His attributes, His works, His promises.)

_____________________________________

Look around. What does this verse teach you about the world and people in general?

_____________________________________

Look within. What does this verse teach you about yourself?

_____________________________________

Look ahead. Does this verse give you reason to hope? Briefly share your thoughts.

_____________________________________

Look alive! Given the opportunity, how would you express the truth found in this verse to someone who needs to hear it?

_____________________________________

Make God’s Word Your Prayer
As you memorize and meditate on this verse, pray it back to the Lord. Let the Holy Spirit examine your heart, increase your understanding, and help you to pray. Ask Him for faith and strength to act on the truth of God’s Word.

_____________________________________

A Lamp to my Feet and a Light to my Path
What has been the most important lesson, for you personally, as you studied this psalm? How will you begin today to put what you are learning into practice?

_____________________________________

_____________________________________

7