

# Praying Wow/Sorry/Thanks/Help in a Culture of Self-Reliance

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at [ChristChurchEastBay.org](http://ChristChurchEastBay.org). Today's scripture reading is Psalm 103 as printed in your liturgy, a Psalm of David.

Praise the Lord, my soul, all my inmost being. Praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagles.

The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel. The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.

He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever. He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him.

[ 1 : 33 ] As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him, for he knows how we are formed.

He remembers that we are dust. The life of mortals is like grass. They flourish like a flower of the field. The wind blows over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.

But from everlasting to everlasting, the Lord's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children, with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.

The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all. Praise the Lord, you angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word.

Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will. Praise the Lord, all his works, everywhere in his dominion. Praise the Lord, my soul.

[ 2 : 36 ] The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever. Good morning, Christ Church. I want to say as we begin that that new song, I felt like this side did a pretty good job, but this side did a lot better.

It's just, that's just kind of how I felt being on this side. So, we're 22 days out from an election. Maybe you've heard about this election.

And I thought I'd begin today with a prediction of the outcome of this election. And some of you are like, wow, my anxiety just went really far.

But here's my take. You know, in the days following the election, half the country is going to be really glad, and half the country is going to be really sad and mad and anxious.

How's that for a prediction? I'm pretty confident that that's what's going to happen. And you know what our nation's going to need? You know what the Bay Area is going to need, regardless of the outcome?

[ 3 : 38 ] They're going to need Jesus, and they're going to need people who know how to pray to Jesus. They're going to need people who've cultivated a daily habit of prayer, who have the ability to access heaven, who know how to engage the presence and the power of God, who know how to

pray, Father, your name be hallowed over all the other names that are out there.

Your kingdom come over all the other kingdoms that are out there. Your will be done over all the other agendas that are being jockeyed about. The religious right and the religious left, right now they're very focused on power and following either the elephant or the donkey.

And what we really need are serious godly Christians who are focused not on power but on prayer, following not the donkey or the elephant, but following the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

We need people who know how to pray to the king and people who know how to pray that his kingdom would come down in a place like this as it is in heaven.

Amen? So we're talking about the holy habits of grace. That's what our sermon series is all about. And it's these Christian practices, these predictable patterns in our lives that enable us not to earn God's grace but just to respond to God's grace and to receive and experience more and more of his grace.

[ 4 : 58 ] And we talked so far about the practices of solitude and silence and a culture of hurry and busyness and noise. We talked about the practice of Scripture meditating on and reading Scripture and a culture of ideological idolatry.

And today we want to talk about cultivating this holy habit of prayer. What is prayer? How do we define and understand prayer? I would like to suggest that prayer is answering God.

That God speaks to us through his word and we simply answer him in prayer. That God initiates and we respond. That we inhale God's grace through his word and through his spirit and then we exhale our response to that grace in prayer.

And we're looking in the Psalms because the Psalms is the prayer book of the Bible. And it teaches us how to answer God. Eugene Peterson wrote a book called Answering God.

It's all about the Psalms and prayer. And here's how he intros that book. He says this, If we wish to develop the life of faith, to mature in our humanity, and to glorify God with our entire heart, mind, soul, and strength, the Psalms are necessary.

[ 6 : 16 ] We cannot bypass the Psalms. They are God's gift to train us in prayer that is comprehensive and honest. The Psalms are necessary because they are the prayer masters.

Christ prayed the Psalms. The Christian community was early convinced that he continues praying them through us as we pray them. It is imperative to recover the Psalms as the primary tool for developing a life of prayer.

And so today our prayer master is going to be King David. And he's going to teach us how to pray today through this 3,000-year-old hymn that was sung by the Son of God himself.

It's one of the most familiar, one of the most beloved of all the Psalms. And I'm just going to follow the three stanzas of this poem, the three principal parts of this prayer.

And I want to talk about praying God's benefits, praying God's attributes, and praying God's promises. Okay, praying God's benefits, his attributes, and his promises.

[ 7 : 20 ] First of all, let's think about praying God's benefits. If you just look again at verse 1. Praise the Lord, my soul, all my inmost being. Praise his holy name.

He's summoning his soul. He's calling his whole being to be spiritually engaged with God. You know, part of pouring out our soul to God involves dialoguing with our soul about God.

Right? It's not just listening to our heart, but talking to our heart. And actively exercising faith by taking your soul in hand and saying, soul, listen up.

Soul, right now is the time to praise the Lord. And I know you're focused on yourself, but right now is the time to focus on one who's much greater than yourself.

David says, all my inmost being. Praise his holy name. Here's the king of Israel, and he's urging himself, and he's urging us to give all that is deep down inside of us entirely to God with boundless enthusiasm and praise.

[ 8 : 23 ] Now, how in the world do we do that? Well, David tells us it's by remembering all of God's benefits to us. Right? When he says, forget not, that's a strong double negative where he's warning his soul not to forget because it's far too easy to forget what God has done for us.

And think about it. How much of our fear, how much of our anxiety and anger and discouragement is due to forgetting all that has been given to us and all that's been promised to us by God in Jesus Christ?

Or another way to think about this is that if your first habit, the first thing that you do in the morning is to coat your brain with cortisol, you know, that stress hormone cortisol, is to go down and you go downstairs and you pick up your phone and you just coat your brain with cortisol by reading news about violence and injustice.

And then you go from there to read some tweets about people's outrage over their political enemies. And then you go from that to scrolling through social media to see how everybody else is living a better life than you and there's photo evidence for that and you are missing out.

And then you go and you just read your fantasy novel to sort of numb out and live in denial and put in your AirPods and listen to Spotify. And then you think to yourself, gosh, why am I so depressed? Why am I so anxious?

[ 9 : 50 ] Why do I feel so stressed out and so lonely in this world? Well, I want to suggest to you an alternative habit to that one. And that is to just simply ask the question, what are all God's benefits toward me?

If I were just to sit down and write a quick list, like what are six benefits that God has given to me? And of course, that's not my idea.

It's King David's idea. He lists six benefits right here starting in verse three. He says, He forgives all of your sins. He heals all your diseases. He redeems your life from the pit.

He crowns you with love and compassion. He satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagles. Now in David's story, if you know his story, it seems likely that all those benefits and blessings from God flow from the very first of those benefits because you might recall that he had this moment of grievous adultery with Bathsheba, right?

And then from there, he moved on to eliminate her husband, Uriah. And because of that, the army of Israel suffered incredible losses. And the prophet Nathan, he comes to the king and he tells David, he says, you deserve to die because you broke God's commands and you abused your position of authority and power.

[ 11 : 16 ] And this loving accountability is what led David to humbly repent and to put his faith in the grace of God. And here in the psalm, David's saying, you know, that experience is what led me then to experience God's forgiving of my sins.

And then that led me to experience God healing me soul and body or at least having a fresh hope that God is one day going to eliminate all the disease and suffering in our lives.

And that realization led me to an awareness that God has actually redeemed my life from the pit.

He's redeemed my life from Sheol, which is that place where the unrighteous go when they die.

And that realization has caused me to see that God has actually crowned me with his steadfast love and his merciful compassion. And that has led me to see that I've been so satisfied in all my desires for goodness in my life.

And God has been so good to me. And all this realization of these things, these benefits, is causing me, the result of all that is my inner strength, my inner vitality deep inside of my soul is being renewed.

[ 12 : 27 ] So that just as the eagle is fearless and majestic and soaring, that's how my soul feels. It feels fearless and majestic and soaring. Do you follow David's progression of praise?

Now if you're like me, often my mind knows, but my heart forgets that in Jesus Christ, I'm forgiven.

That I have been, by the Holy Spirit, I've been given access to God's healing power.

That I'm delighted in by God the Father's redeeming grace. That I've been crowned with the love and the mercy of Almighty God. That the goodness that I'm experiencing now in my life, all of that's just a mere foretaste.

It's just a signpost to all the goodness and abundant life and resurrection life that's coming for me in the kingdom of God. And so the question today is, you know, how can we drive the reality of these benefits from our head down into our heart?

How can you apply this tomorrow morning? Perhaps you literally just need to write down this list and pray it. And say, Lord, I gratefully praise you for forgiving me, healing me, redeeming me, crowning me, satisfying me, and renewing me, and then just sit there and meditate on all the ways He's done that for you.

[ 13 : 50 ] Last week, some of you came and took my handouts, which has really made me feel great as a pastor. And so I have another handout today. If you'd like to come get it, you can after the service. It's called Guide for Morning Prayer or something like that.

And you'll see that the first thing on there is a Trinity prayer that I got from a pastor named John Stott. I think we have some slides if we can pull that up. But basically, I just, I get up in the morning and I go outside, I take my cup of coffee, I walk around our block, and I pray something like this prayer.

And I say, good morning, Heavenly Father. Good morning, Lord Jesus. Good morning, Holy Spirit. Heavenly Father, I praise you as the creator and sustainer of the universe. And I pray that today you'd enable me to live in your presence and please you more and more, to love you with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength.

And Lord Jesus, I worship you as the savior and king of this world and I pray that you'd enable me to deny myself, take up my cross, and follow you today. And Holy Spirit, I worship you as the Lord and giver of life, the sanctifier and guide of all the people of God and I pray that today you'd cause the fruit of Christ's character to ripen in me, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Oh, most holy, blessed, blessed, and glorious Trinity. I worship you. Have mercy on me. But what I do is I kind of just, I get to each person of the Trinity and I kind of can't help myself, but just marinating on all the benefits that I've received from each person of the Trinity.

[15:27] And so typically, my mind will go to like Luke 15 and I'll say, Father, this is the story of the prodigal sons, right? And I'll say, Father, Father, I praise you today because when I was way off in that far country by myself and I was filthy and I was starving and I was filling myself with pig's food, you awakened my heart to your love and you were searching the horizon for me and you came running for me and took my shame upon you.

You gave me your hug, you gave me your kiss, you put your robe and your ring and your sandals on me, you killed the fattened calf for me, you set the house to music and dancing and rejoicing because I was lost and now I'm found, I was dead and now I'm alive and Father, you promised that I'm always with you and everything that's yours is mine and so Father, thank you for the benefit of coming home.

And then usually, my mind will go off to something like Romans 5 and Romans 8 and I'll say, Father, thank you so much for that golden chain of salvation that before the foundation of the world, you predestined me and elected me to be yours and that one, at that one moment in time, you called me by the gospel of your grace and you regenerated my heart and gave me new life and you gave me the gift of repentance and saving faith and you justified me by the righteousness of Christ, you caused me to reign with him in righteousness and life, you've adopted me into your family, Heavenly Father, you've empowered me with your Holy Spirit, you're sanctifying me now, you've prepared for me a future where I'm going to be glorified with a resurrected body and a beautified soul to be like Jesus.

Father, thank you. Thank you for making me more than a conqueror. Thank you that there's nothing that can separate me from your love. And I just do that, I do that when I get to Jesus, I do that when I get to the Holy Spirit.

If you want to know more about how I pray, I'm happy to teach you after the service. But I want to say that that's a way better thing than coating my mind with cortisol in the morning.

[17:36] Right? Because there I'm remembering who I am and who I belong to and who God is and what he's done for me.

That's what it means to pray God's benefits. And maybe that's something we could grow in a little bit as a church. But I want to also think together about praying God's attributes.

Praying God's attributes. I didn't start my timer, so this could be an interesting sermon today. I have no idea where I am and who knows what's going to happen today.

But praying God's attributes. Many people persist in contrasting the wrathful God of the Old Testament with the loving God of the New Testament. And when you hear people say that, you just know they've never read Psalm 103.

In fact, they've probably never read the Hebrew Bible. They don't know much about Jesus' Bible. Right? And his theology of who God is. They probably haven't read much of the New Testament either.

[18:38] But this second stanza of the psalm unfolds for us the beauty and the fragrance of God's grace that informs the forgiveness that David has experienced.

And he begins by saying in verse 6, he says, the Lord works righteousness and justice for all of the oppressed. And the main illustration of this in the Old Testament is the Lord liberating his

oppressed people from their bondage in Egypt.

When he came and he met the unrighteousness and the injustice of Pharaoh and he met it with a greater power that just unraveled and dismantled his empire. And David's taking us back to that great moment in the scriptures.

And then he says in verse 7, he made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel. King David loves his Bible. He takes us back to Exodus. He takes us back actually specifically to Exodus chapter 33 where Moses prayed, Lord, show me your ways.

Lord, make known to me your ways. And that prayer comes right in the middle of the story of the golden calf. And just so we can remember what that story is all about, while Moses is going up, he's on Mount Sinai and he's receiving the Ten Commandments, the people of God are down at the foot of the mountain and they've made this gold-plated image of a calf and they start to worship it.

[ 20 : 01 ] And you know, a more blatant breaking of the first two commandments could hardly be imagined, right? The first commandment, you should have no other gods, no counterfeit gods before me and you should not make any image that would limit my majesty and my glory in any way.

And they say, well forget about that, we're going to make this golden calf. And God is angry and Moses is angry. And so as Moses comes down the mountain, he smashes the tablets on which those Ten Commandments are written as a symbol of the idolatry of God's people that has smashed God's covenant.

covenant. And the Lord threatens to destroy the whole nation of Israel except for Moses with whom he's going to make a fresh start and Moses falls down on the ground and begins to plead with God in passionate prayer and he says, oh Lord, please don't do that.

Please relent. And God does relent and in the midst of that prayer, Moses says, Lord, show me your glory. Show me your glory. And what Moses hears in that moment is the most significant theological statement in the Bible because it's God's own definition of himself.

And here's what God says. He says, I am the Lord, the Lord, compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in loving kindness and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin, yet I do not leave the guilty unpunished.

[ 21 : 30 ] Because I'm absolutely righteous and just. That is, that statement reveals the character of God definitively and that's why the Old Testament quotes that statement constantly.

And anywhere you see the phrase steadfast love mentioned in the Bible, Exodus 34 is ringing there in the background. If you're looking for a scripture to memorize, that is the one.

Exodus 34 illustrates more clearly than anywhere else what God's steadfast love, what his unfailing love is all about. And that's what David is meditating on in verse 8.

The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever. He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

See, this speaks of a God who's righteous and just and yet he allows his mercy and his grace to outrun his justice. Right?

[ 22 : 33 ] He's prepared to forgive the most grievous and the gravest of our sins in response to our prayer and our repentance. And, you know, the prophet Micah, he's reflecting on this and he's blown away by it.

Here's what he says. He uses this vivid image in Micah chapter 7. He says, long ago.

See, what Moses is saying and David is saying and Micah is saying and the whole Bible is saying is that God's anger is different from our anger. Right?

Because we are quick to become angry. And most of the time our anger is triggered by our hurt ego, isn't it? And we make people pay who wrong us and then even after we've made them pay, we nurse our grievances with resentment.

Maybe it's just me. But the scriptures tell us that God is slow to anger. And in the midst of that, he provides forgiveness for sinners and then he remembers our sins no more.

[ 24 : 07 ] He hurls them into the depths of the sea. See, King David is marveling here at the comprehensiveness of God the Father's pardoning mercy and his forgiving grace.

In verse 11, he says, For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him. And as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

He's using immeasurable distances to just try to convey to us the immeasurable love that the Lord has for us.

The vertical and horizontal axes of God's love for sinners has no limits. And really, it's only on the vertical and the horizontal beams of the cross of Jesus Christ that we see what it costs for God to do this, what it costs for God to punish sin without punishing us.

It's only on the cross that we see there the perfect son of God being treated as our sins deserve. Jesus being repaid according to our iniquities.

[ 25 : 21 ] It's as if Jesus is stretching out his arms on the hardwood of the cross and saying, look to the east and look to the west and know that that is how far God is removing your transgressions from you by laying them onto me.

See, verse 13 says, the father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him for he knows how we are formed. He remembers that we are dust. Parents, you know this.

The more weak and needy your child is, the more your heart goes out to him or her, right? And on the cross of Jesus, we have a demonstration that our good and gracious father, even though he knows us all the way down to the very bottom, way better than we even know ourselves.

It says he loves us to the skies and beyond. He doesn't just pardon our sins by the blood of his son, but he adopts us into his family as precious daughters and treasured sons.

He fills us and empowers us with his Holy Spirit. He grants us 24-7 access to him in prayer. He guarantees to us an inheritance for us in his kingdom.

[ 26 : 36 ] And what I want you to see is that Psalm 103 is giving us the vocabulary, it's giving us the language to rejoice in the attributes of God's character from which flows all the benefits of his salvation to us.

And the question is, don't we want to pray this way? If this is true, if it's real, don't we want to pray it into our lives? I want to end by talking a little bit about praying God's promises.

We talked about praying God's benefits, praying God's attributes. But I want to talk about praying God's promises. If you look again at the Psalm in verses 14-16, it says, God the Father has compassion on us because he knows we're dust, he knows we're these dependent and fallen creatures.

And it talks about these images of grass and flowers and wind, which speak of how our lives are so short and transient. We're here today and tomorrow we're gone. And then in verses 17-18, in contrast to the frail and transitory nature of our existence is the enduring love of God.

And hear what David says. He says in verse 17, but from everlasting to everlasting, again, this side's saying it better, but from everlasting to everlasting, the Lord's love is with those who fear him and his righteousness with their children's children, with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.

[ 28 : 07 ] But that right there is a massive promise of God that the saving power of my love will extend beyond just you and it will go out to your children and to their children and to future generations.

But I do want to say, as amazing as that promise is, it's not automatic. It's not inevitable. Because who is this promise for?

It's not for everyone. It says it's for those who fear the Lord, who keep his covenant, and who obey his precepts. And what I want to suggest to you is that this is one of those promises of God that needs to be prayed into reality.

This is a promise of God not to be presumed upon, but to be prayed upon. I read a book last summer by Jean Twenge, who's a psychologist at San Diego State.

And she wrote a book in 2023 called Generations. And she says at the end of that book, she says in 2017, for the first time, fewer than half of high school seniors said that religion was important in their lives.

[ 29 : 16 ] And in 2018, for the first time, fewer than one out of four high school seniors attended religious services at least once a week. It's not just high school students. Young adults have also become progressively less religious in both public and private ways.

And if you want to study her charts or Ryan Burge's graphs about religion, it'll wake you up from your slumber and your sleep.

And what it's done for me is it's caused me to begin to pray this promise of God into reality where I've begun to humble myself before God and say, Lord, you know that I'm just dust and I'm just grass.

You know that I don't have the power to guarantee that your love is going to be transmitted from this generation to the next generation. You know, Lord, that I don't have the ability nor the authority to ensure that even my own children and their children will be part of God's covenant people.

I can't change these social trends. I can't even change one human heart. God, you know how hopeless and helpless I am. And then I remember verse 19. The Lord has established his throne in heaven and his kingdom rules over all.

[ 30 : 34 ] And I begin to pray, Lord, you're the everlasting king. Your throne is established in heaven. You have all authority and all power. You promised your love and your righteousness, your covenant and your precepts to be passed on to our children and to their children.

You promised that your unfailing love will go out to future generations and we cannot do it. I cannot do it. I'm just dust. I'm just grass. But Lord, you can do it because you're enthroned on high and you're in control of everything.

And so, Lord, I'm pleading. I'm pleading with you that your sovereign rule and reign would break in with new light and new glory in the next generation.

And I'm contending with you, Lord, that more and more young people would open their hearts to the presence of the king, that more and more people would be awakened to the power of your kingdom. I'm begging you, Lord, that your kingdom would come in the lives of the next generation as it is in heaven. And I don't know if I'm the only one starting to pray that way, but I would love for this church to join me in praying the promises of God into reality.

[ 31 : 45 ] You guys want to pray that way? We are, this Friday, October 18th, we have a day of prayer. We've been doing this quarterly for the past couple years. And if you're new with us, the way it works is we have one-hour slots where you can pray from 6 a.m.

to 9 p.m. We have these one-hour slots from before sunrise to after sunset. We hope that those who can would come on site and pray with others. Those who can't, you're free to pray remotely and hopefully find a buddy in the church you can Zoom with and pray with.

We created a guide for how to pray. You're not just left on your own, but we've shown you how to pray the first 30 minutes of that hour for revival and for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit here in this place.

The second 30 minutes is all about our alpha course and our attempt to invite people to come and ask their questions about God. If you're not able for whatever reason to pray for one hour straight, you can pray for 30 minutes in the first half in the morning, 30 minutes in the second half in the evening.

Right now, we have 13 folks signed up and we have 37 spots open and my hope is that we'd have 50 people there, which would be the most we've ever had at a day of prayer and if you want to make your pastor's year, sign up.

[ 33 : 04 ] Seriously, it would encourage me massively, but it will strengthen you spiritually and it will change our world significantly. If the church would just do this basic thing that we're called to do, which is just to pray.

And so if you take your QR code on your worship folder and you're welcome to pull out your phone right now, permission granted, you can scan that QR code. The first thing that's going to come up is that sign up sheet and if God's leading you either right now or later on at the end of the service to sign up, I encourage you to do that.

If you're an elder of this church, a deacon, a staff member, community group leader, a ministry team leader, consider yourself called to prayer. If you're part of our youth, if you're in middle school or high school, consider yourself called to prayer.

If you're a parent, consider yourself called to help your kids learn how to pray. I just love to see our church grow in this kind of praying because it's biblical prayer.

It's King David prayer. It's Messiah Jesus prayer. Moses and David and Jesus and the apostles, they prove that praying the promises of God is a powerful and effective way to pray.

[ 34 : 16 ] And so I wonder, what if we were to prove in our own time, in our own place, that this kind of prayer actually works? What if we gave God the opportunity to be faithful to his promises by believing in them and then showing that we believe in them by humbly asking him to make his promises a reality in the next generation?

We can't just presume and sit back and be comfortable. We've got to engage in prayer. And so Lord, may your love and your grace, your steadfast love and grace be poured out on Christ's church.

And Lord, may your kingdom, which is an everlasting kingdom and a very gracious and merciful kingdom, may it come to rule over this city? We pray in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Amen.