

# Counting your blessings

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[ 0 : 00 ] Psalm 103, a psalm of David. Psalm 103, a psalm of David.

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He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him.

As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.

For he knows our frame. He remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass.

[ 1 : 51 ] He flourishes like a flower of the field, for the wind passes over it and it is gone, and its place knows it no more. But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him.

And his righteousness to children's children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments. Bless the Lord has established his throne in the heavens and his kingdom rules over all.

Bless the Lord, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word. Bless the Lord, all his hosts, his ministers who do his will.

Bless the Lord, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the Lord, O my soul. Okay, well we're going to look at Psalm 103 today as just a sort of one-off thing.

Have we got an echo or is that going to get picked up? Okay. Just as an introduction, here's a thought for you to take into this psalm with us. I wonder how many of you have felt the deep pain of thanklessness from someone to whom you've been really generous.

[ 3 : 21 ] When we invest a lot of time and money, energy and effort into helping someone, the hurt of not receiving a thank you, even though presumably we didn't do the things we did for that person with a view to getting thanks, still in all, not to receive a thank you for an investment of time and energy and money is one of the most hurtful things I think we can experience.

Perhaps one of the greatest expressions of selfishness. Perhaps you've experienced it over Christmas. you've put huge effort into selecting a gift for a friend or a family member, only to have them open the gift.

And you can see, you just know that they're not feeling any gratitude or joy for the thing you've given them and the time and effort you've put into choosing it for them.

And it hurts. Now, bring that idea into the context of the new year, that time when we review the year it was and reset the focus, our focus for the year to come.

Now, of course, there's many interesting and fun ways to review the past year, but I suspect that for most of us, your review of 2021 is dominated by the anxiety and the challenges and restrictions of the COVID pandemic.

[ 4 : 50 ] Because I don't think anything else has really intruded into everyday life in the way that that has. Changing our plans and everything else. Perhaps your review of 2021 is in terms of notable personal events.

You know, the standard things like births, marriages, deaths, memorable milestones in marriage and family, political events in Australia and globally, technological developments such as the rise of space tourism, or as the ABC News concert Charlie Pickering said, randomly, the mouse plague.

Obviously, in his mind, probably he wasn't closer than 400 kilometres to the mouse plague, but nevertheless. So there's lots of ways we can review 2021. Some of them more helpful than others, obviously.

But hopefully as Christians, any review that we do of 2021 will be accounting of spiritual blessings. Growth in our understanding of God.

Growth in our understanding of his word. His daily commitment to us individually and as a church family. Growth in our worship of God. That is the overflow response of love.

[ 6 : 10 ] Delight. Joy for relationship with him and for all the blessings which he showers on us. On a daily basis. Individually. And indeed as a church family.

And hopefully therefore also your desire for 2022 are for circumstances which will produce even more spiritual growth.

Rather than settling your sights on 2022 as the year of hassle-free living. And that's what we're hearing across the news media, isn't it, at the minute?

2021, we just want to sell it off. We just want to get rid of it. A clearance sale. Get it gone. It's been so awful. And what are we putting in place? The hope of a hassle-free year.

That's what we're hearing. Is that how you're setting your sales for 2022? Well, Psalm 103 is from the very first sentence to the very last sentence.

[ 7 : 21 ] A call for deep, well-informed gratitude. Praise the Lord, O my soul. Now, the Hebrew word bless means literally to kneel in worship.

And so we can interchange bless or praise as the start of this psalm. So therefore, to bless the Lord means to praise or worship him.

That is, to respond to his blessing, to count our blessings in terms of adoration. Delight. And joy.

Thankfulness. Understanding. A whole-of-life response of all those things. That's the call of Psalm 103.

Praise the Lord, O my soul. And so what we have in Psalm 103 is King David enjoying the Lord personally as he reflects on what the Lord has done for him.

[ 8 : 26 ] As he reflects on who he is in the Lord. But he's also modeling, modeling the art of kindling heartfelt thankfulness.

And he does it by using mindfulness, to use a very modern word. Mindfulness and memories. In verses 1 and 2. Bless the Lord, O my soul.

And all that is within me. Bless his holy name. Essentially, David is talking to himself. He's talking to himself through a deliberate, mindful process, systematically rehearsing his blessings from the Lord.

Now, why does David do that? Well, we're told in verse 2 why he does it. Because he's fearful of being thankless. His fear of thanklessness drives him in this particular setting.

He knows his propensity to take God's blessings for granted. Forgetting to be thankful. So he forces himself to count his blessings.

[ 9 : 40 ] What they are. And why he has received them. And I think when he says, all that is within me, bless his holy name.

I think David's saying, look, I'm totally defined by God's blessing. And so it's only appropriate. I want every part of my being to respond to those blessings.

In praise. Including, my friends, his emotions. He wants everything that is him to be involved in this expression of gratitude, praise, and worship.

Now, just let me pause there and try and engage our minds more. Why might we not be thankful for blessings? Well, I've already suggested it may be carelessness or familiarity.

Sometimes we just get so busy enjoying the blessing that we actually forget the person from whom we got the blessing. From whom we received the blessing.

[ 10 : 53 ] So it can be just carelessness. But sometimes it can be a little bit more sinister than that. Pride. Pride. Will keep us from being thankful.

Pride will make us thankless. And what is pride? Well, pride essentially, there's lots of things you could say. But essentially pride is the belief that we have made our own way in the world. That whatever good life we have around us, that essentially we've created it.

Or to use a modern colloquial expression, we've made our own luck. See, if we're defined by our own abilities and efforts and achievements, then we certainly won't be looking for or needing blessings from others.

Including God. But then again, it could be that we just simply don't believe ourselves to be blessed.

How could we possibly think that? Well, perhaps because we have the world's idea of what blessing is. And generally speaking, the world's idea of blessing is health, wealth, happiness.

[ 12 : 09 ] Feeling warm and fuzzy and good about yourself. So when others around us, we perceive to have that, and we think, well, we don't have that, then we conclude, well, we're not blessed.

Unable to see the value of God's blessings. Because we're focusing on the immediacy of what the world's blessings are counted as.

And we conclude, then, we've missed out on God's blessings. So David's busy here knowing himself, he's busy kindling an attitude of thankfulness and fostering an overflow response of worship.

Picking up verses 3 through to verse 22. Any reflection on God's blessings for King David prompts acute awareness of God's involvement in his life personally.

God's personal involvement in his personal life. Pick up verses 3, 4, and 5. Look at that list there. Forgives your iniquity.

[ 13 : 25 ] Heals all your diseases. Redeems your life from the pit. Crowns with steadfast love and mercy. Satisfies with good things.

Ah. What a testimony to God's personal involvement in his life. Though David may have in mind here a particular episode of sin and discipline and restoration.

But I think it's much more likely that David's just reflecting on his life generally. And this is just how he's experienced God generally. And I think it's also representative.

He's not listing every blessing. Those things that we might call blessings common to all people such as food and family and safe travel and stuff like that. But no, he's focusing on his spiritual blessings.

The things that define him as a person. His salvation. His relationship with the Lord. And so he speaks of God's total forgiveness.

[ 14 : 37 ] Every sin. Every offense against God. Every act of rebellion against God. Forgiven. Wow. What a blessing. He's speaking of God's complete restoration or renewal. Freeing him to be the image bearer he was created to be.

Someone who truly would reflect God's character. And who would genuinely live under God's rule. God's deliverance or redemption or rescue.

Rescue from and protection from his own destruction. Especially the ultimate threat of the ultimate destruction.

Death. The pit of hell. And I think David here can just be, might just be reflecting on times when the Lord has delivered him from almost certain death.

[ 15 : 35 ] But I think David's doing something a bit deeper here. He's longing for resurrection. He's longing for that time where he will be with the Lord. To enjoy him forever. David, I think, is anticipating resurrection life.

Eternal life with God after this life is done. And he reflects on God's commitment to treat him contrary to what he deserves.

He deserves to be treated because of his sin. But what does the Lord do? He crowns him. That is, the Lord, in contrary to what he deserves, crowns him or honors him. With showers of love and mercy.

And you can sense David's satisfaction.

Verse 5. Delight. And a tireless energy to serve the Lord. That's a picture. So that your youth is renewed like the eagles.

[ 16 : 40 ] David says, when I reflect on the blessings that the Lord has given me and what I am because of the Lord's blessing, I just want his sower. Point to note along the way here.

Knowing what we do of David's life from other sources, and we get many sources in the scripture, knowing what we do of David's life, we can then say very clearly and confidently that blessings do not always equate with happiness, immediate happiness, and a hassle-free life.

Because when you know the story of David's life, many of the greatest blessings for which he was most thankful came in the context of him being caught in sin and exposed by the Lord and needing to repent and then understanding the Lord's restoration.

That was often the context of the greatest blessings for which there is the greatest thankfulness. But I can tell you, not one of those experiences would have been happy and warm and fuzzy at the time.

Not in terms of how the world understands that anyway. To be blessed, therefore, is not about being happy at a surface level, although ultimately it gives deep happiness because we're loved by the Lord.

[ 18 : 02 ] But to be blessed is to be the recipient of God's best for us in any given situation, even though that situation may of itself be unpleasant. Now, friends, I just want to pause there.

I don't want to get too deep into the exegesis of this passage. I just want to try and stir your heart and now ask a question. What overflows from your heart as you review 2021?

Is it joy, delight in the security of relationship with God in the face of a whole range of troubles and struggles last year?

Yes, including COVID. Could you actually review 2021 and see the pandemic as one of God's richest blessings to you last year?

In some sense, that's how I see it. Now, I know I haven't been struck down with COVID and so therefore maybe I'm not qualified to speak in every aspect.

[ 19 : 13 ] But the intrusion into my life, it stripped away things and helped me see things that I had become dependent on in a wrong way.

And it forced me back to ask the question, well, what is my life? Where is my security? What is it that I can feel calm and secure and safe in?

God's blessings, my friends, will not always deliver surface immediate happiness.

But verse 5, they'll always deliver good things, spiritual truth, spiritual renewal into your life. And that's true blessing.

Well, moving on. David, reflecting on his own personal blessings, then is pointed to the bigger context of those blessings, which is God's character to bless his people.

[ 20 : 14 ] Picking up verse 6 onwards. And David's pretty clear here that every aspect of God's character that he can think of and he can list, every aspect of God's character brings direct blessing to King David and to God's people.

Verse 6 and 7. God's righteousness delivers blessing. The Lord modeled what he's like. He showed his righteousness, his commitment to doing right with the people he promised to love and protect in the covenant.

And that's especially seen in the history of the Exodus. But it's seen right throughout their history as a nation. He preserves his special covenant people as promised.

That is the righteousness of God delivering blessing. God's gracious love, verses 8 through to 13. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

God's commitment to doing good for his people so defines his relationship with his people that even his anger is temporary.

[ 21 : 34 ] And even then, it's an expression of love. Of gracious correction and redirection. His anger is only ever temporary.

But his grace and mercy are limitless in expression. And again, they remind themselves that God's character is to forgive completely.

Totally detaching our sins. The sins from, sorry, totally detaching his people from their sin. From east to west. That's a geographic figure.

You can't get any further apart. Totally detaching his people from their sin. Condemning and dealing with sin. But saving and delivering his people.

That's God's character to do that. For his special covenant people. To be blessed by the Lord. Another picture in these verses.

[ 22 : 40 ] To be blessed by the Lord is to experience a strong but gentle and compassionate love. All that's pictured of the passion and intimacy of a good father expending himself for the well-being of his beloved children.

God's faithfulness. Verses 14 to 18. What an incredible blessing it is that the Lord knows us. That is, he knows our weaknesses.

He knows our failings. He knows that we're locked into this tassel with life and death because of sin. He knows our brokenness. He knows our dysfunction. He knows that sin is just there inside of us.

And what does he do? He makes allowances for it in the way he deals with us. As he cares for us and provides for us.

In spite of our sinfulness. He is committed to fulfilling, faithfully fulfilling his covenant promise. To care and save his people. Knowing full well that we can't deliver on our side of the covenant promise.

[ 24 : 07 ] What do you say? Apart from, wow. These blessings don't just come randomly to David personally. They're a clear consequence.

Overflow of God's own character. Of God's own heart. And so David can be absolutely confident that these blessings will continue.

Because they're just a reflection of God's character applied to God's people. But David then puts it in one bigger context. So it's personal context. Bigger context.

Then ultimate context. Verse 18 through to 22. Takes David ultimately to God's purpose and salvation and building his kingdom. Verse 19 to 22 rather. David's rehearsal of his experience of personal blessing.

Steps him from his own self to God's character and ultimately to God's purpose. And can there be a greater assurance of future blessing than knowing that God's character and God's purpose remains unchanging?

[ 25 : 17 ] God's character. God's character. Verse 19. Verse 19. David knows that God will not be thwarted by any circumstance.

He will not be usurped by any hostile power. He will do what he promises to do. He will achieve what he sets out to achieve.

His glory will be displayed to the world because it is his world. And he is without challenge in his world ultimately. His servants will achieve precisely what he intends them to achieve.

And of course, as David steps up into this bigger context all the time, all of this goes far beyond even what David could imagine.

And he's got lofty thoughts of the Lord here. But it goes well beyond what David could even imagine. He described, when he described the extent of God's forgiveness and love, that the best he could do was picture opposite horizons, east and west.

[ 26 : 43 ] The vastness of the sky. As he tried to picture and encapsulate the extent, the limitless horizon of God's love.

But you see, as we sit here this morning as Christians, we have something vastly superior to that. We have Jesus on the cross.

That's the picture we go to for the passionate faithfulness of God to his promise.

His promise to rescue his people from sin. His promise to restore them to relationship with him. The cross shows that the depth of the love in God's heart.

The heart that was actually literally torn with grief for his people. A heart that said, okay, I will deal with this.

[ 27 : 39 ] I will take this sin upon myself. I will bear the burden of that guilt. I will pay for it in terms of justice.

So that my people can be free and renewed and restored. The Lord has removed our sins completely.

But the picture here is even better than the one David. Because theoretically, even though our sin is removed to the opposite horizon, there is a possibility that could be brought back or reconnected.

But in Christ, it's been dealt with judicially. It's actually been removed completely from the landscape. He has taken full responsibility for every one of the sins of his people.

He has paid the full penalty himself with full restoration. Ephesians 1, 3 to 14. Go and read it this afternoon when you go home. We have every spiritual blessing in Christ in the heavenly realms.

[ 28 : 49 ] There is no better blessing. There is no more blessing to come. We have it all in Christ. Now, we might enjoy the realization of some of those blessings better in heaven.

There's no question about that. But in terms of the blessing we have in Christ, there's nothing more to come. So, my friends, back to reviewing 2021 and setting our focus for 2022.

Is your response to the year past one of thankfulness? I was reflecting back on to quite a number of comments that came to me after the morning of the AGM, back on whenever that was, October, November.

And the comments were all largely the same. People found it very tedious to reflect on the year past in terms of the numerous ministries that happen every single week in this church, often behind the scenes.

Those things that people contribute to this church to actually make us what we are as a church family. But we find it tedious to spend 10 minutes reflecting on it.

[ 30 : 17 ] So, is your response to the year past one of thankfulness? Are you relaxed in your ultimate security in Christ that then allows you to say, well, okay, everybody around me is succumbing to anxiety and fear as they watch helplessly the things they've built security upon in this life being deconstructed by pandemic or by economic recession or by threat of war or a host of other things.

Do we have something that allows us to be secure in the midst of all of that? And be thankful. Calm and thankful.

Are you, going back to what I've already said, are you starting to thank the Lord for the challenges of the past year because of the spiritual growth that has been brought to you through them?

Because the Lord has used pandemic and lockdowns and a whole shaking of what our normal life is and even our normal patterns of churching. He's shaking those to the core.

And I think, certainly for me, He's exposed idols. Things that you're looking for satisfaction and joy in instead of Him.

[ 31 : 43 ] Instead of the Lord. And realizing that the pandemic gave us an opportunity to refocus, reset and come back to the Lord in repentance and say, yes, you alone, Lord, is my strength.

Are my strength, whatever the English is. And as you look forward into 2022, is there real praise in your heart? Or is it just a question of, oh well, ho-hum, spiritual lukewarmness?

What might that look for us, look like for us as a church family? Well, it might be coming to church mindlessly as a habit. Or perhaps now, it might be not bothering to come to church at all.

Because it's too much effort. Because it's not that much important. It's not that important. It might be coming to church, being on Zoom weekly, listening to God's word, but not really engaging with it.

Well, that's just, we have that 30-minute monologue, they call it a sermon. It's part of church, yep, I'll listen to it. But we don't really engage with it.

[ 33 : 02 ] We're not really seeking to have God's word change us from the inside out. So we hear it, but we don't hear it. Do you see this church family as a wonderful blessing from the Lord?

Or do you just see problems and difficult people? Do you see this church family as a key means that the Lord has given you graciously for growth, spiritual growth, as they challenge you, as they support you, as they stand alongside you?

Do you see this church family as a key point at which the watching world might see a viable alternative to the lifestyle and the worldview that exists out there?

Do you consider this church as a possibility, as a compelling witness to the watching world? Something that speaks of the changing power of the gospel, the reality of the gospel working in people's lives.

are you determined to play your part, to do your part in making us a cohesive group of people rather than simply a crowd of people that meets together on a Sunday morning?

[ 34 : 39 ] What's the difference between a group and a crowd? Well, it's common purpose, common goals, common acknowledgement of what defines us.

So, are you taking your part in that? Or, are you happy to leave the heavy lifting to others? The new year, my friends, I would venture to say is not a time for resolutions.

I think, for us as a church, it's a time for revolution. something that grabs us from the inside out. Seriously taking stock of our purpose as God's safe people individually and collectively.

Are you counting your blessings such that you overflow in thankfulness and worship for them? Well, friend, let me just swap for a minute, swap direction for a minute.

Speak to those who are not yet believers among us here or on Zoom. If you're not yet a believer, if you're not yet a Christian, then I have to tell you that the wonderful blessings you've heard about this morning are not yours to enjoy.

[ 36 : 12 ] But they are yours for the taking. they're on offer this morning and they're yours for the taking. You too can know the personal experience of God's forgiving grace and restoration and renewal and the security and the safety that gives.

They are yours to enjoy when you come into a relationship with God through Jesus, through coming to Jesus. And that means giving up your commitment to personal sovereignty, personal autonomy.

It means recognizing your guilt before the Lord. it means trusting his promise that Jesus will deal with the guilt of your sin and take it away from you and restore you in spite of what you deserve.

It will mean responding in new obedience as you gladly live under his rule and under his word. So my friend, I say to you as I finish this morning, trust yourself to God's promise to renew and to care for you.

Think of God as the ideal father, the compassionate, passionate, faithful father who expends himself for the good of his children.

[ 37 : 39 ] Think of the Lord as that. Think of his promise that that's exactly what he wants to do for you. Come to him this morning and you too can start to count your blessings.

Pray with me and then I'm done. Lord, words can't really do justice to the beautiful poetry that David has captured here.

We thank you, Lord, for those who are highly skilled craftsmen and women of words who can take words and build such beautiful, compelling pictures.

We pray, Lord, that we might soar with David as we understand and count our blessings. And pray, Lord, this morning that there might be some here this morning or some on Zoom who for the first time begin to count their blessings because they've come to you in repentance and faith.

Lord, go before us into the new year. Help us to be thankful, confident, calm, purposeful servants of yours.

[ 39 : 03 ] And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Thank you very much for listening this morning. Thank you. Thank you.