

## **Manteca Presbyterian Church**

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### **Eight More Reasons to Praise the Lord**

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#### **Psalm 103:6-12**

*6 The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.*

*7 He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel:*

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

*9 He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever;*

*10 he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.*

*11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him;*

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

#### **Philippians 4:4-9**

*4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*

*7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

*8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is*

*right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*

*New International Version*

Broccoli, spinach, carrots and praise all have one thing in common. Can you guess what it is? They're all good for us. Chocolate cake, caramel candy, peach cobbler and complaining also have something in common. You guessed it, none of them are good for us but we sure enjoy them.

Just as it takes discipline to turn down your favorite cake for a helping of broccoli, so it takes an act of discipline to turn down complaining for a helping of giving praise but the results will be the same; better health. If praising is always better for us than complaining, why do we complain so much? Because it feels good...for a little while. But it leaves a nasty after taste that starts to color everything in our life.

So how do we break the cycle of complaining? One way is to hear praise. That's actually why worshippers from the earliest of days sing in worship. Music is a way to verbalize praise. Reading positive literature like some of the Psalms is another way to do it. Take an inventory of your day. How much time each day do you spend hearing or reading something positive? Think about it.

This month we're studying David's beautiful little Psalm 103, one of the great praise psalms of all time. If you would read it over and over each day, I believe it would give you the necessary daily dose of positive thoughts that you need.

Last week we looked at the first five verses of Psalm 103 and counted six things David was praising God for: forgiveness, healings, redemption, a

crown for each of us, satisfaction that doesn't run out and renewal when we're burned out. If you believe God does those things, reciting them back to God will put you in a mindset of praise that will cause you to praise others around you.

Let's dig in to David's next seven verses. In verse 6 we read:

**1. "The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed." (v.6)**

Is that verse speaking about you? Is the Lord working righteousness and justice for you? Or in other words do you sense that God is on your side? David says the Lord works for all the oppressed. But think about who the oppressed are. Oppression can be based on the following:

1. racial or ethnic
2. religion
3. gender identity
4. political ideology or movement

Right now if you're from a country with a majority Muslim population your visa might not be accepted in the United States. That's religious oppression. Separating families from their children at the border is political oppression. The oppressed are everywhere and in more places than we can even imagine.

Notice David doesn't say the righteousness and justice of God extends only to good people who are oppressed. It extends to all the oppressed. Righteousness and justice are a part of God's nature and it's impossible for God to act apart from that nature. When folks are unjustly oppressed, God's nature reacts.

Next David gives an example of how God has worked righteousness and justice for the oppressed in verse 7: *He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel...* This is the kind of example David's readers would have understood and related to.

Moses was born during a time of great persecution when the Pharaoh of Egypt, feeling politically threatened by the growing number of immigrant Israelites who were taking jobs from hard working Egyptians, decided to have all the newborn male Israelites thrown into the Nile River to drown.

So Moses' mother, being a good Israelite, hid her baby in a basket and floated him in the Nile River hoping for some kind of miracle that would keep him alive. Perhaps someone would have mercy on him. Clearly God heard her prayers, intervened and the very daughters of the man ordering the babies killed actually found baby Moses in the river. These women took him home and adopted him. The slim chances of that happening had God's fingerprints all over it. It was an example of the Lord working for righteousness and justice for the oppressed.

Moses grew up as an adopted Egyptian and was living a pretty good life in the palace. But God, as David says, *made known his ways* to Moses and called him to work for the oppressed, his own people. He became the leader whom God used to free the oppressed of Israel from Egypt.

If you ever want to know which side God is on, look for whoever is being oppressed and you'll see God in the crowd. Think about that when you watch the news. That should make us personally sing praises because we know that if we're ever oppressed for any reason, age, religion, socio-economically, we know God will always be on our side.

## **2. The Lord is compassionate and gracious (v.8)**

Merriam Webster defines compassion as "*a sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it.*" I like that definition. To be compassionate is not just about being aware of oppression but desiring to do something about it.

Matthew 9:36 says of Jesus: *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*

Often when he had compassion he would then do something like provide a miracle meal for 5,000 or a miraculous healing. In Matthew 14:14 it says also of Jesus: *When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.*

To be compassionate means having an awareness of someone's suffering. But it means more than that. If you watch news clips you become very aware of suffering. But the fact that you would even take the time to listen to such news clips makes you closer to being a compassionate person than someone who shuts his ears to it.

To be compassionate means having an awareness of someone's suffering and then taking action to either be a presence with them through the journey or work to try and alleviate the suffering. It was one thing for God to be aware that his chosen people were suffering at the hands of Egypt but it was compassionate when he raised up leaders in Moses and Aaron to lead them out. It was compassion that parted the Red Sea. It was compassion that provided Israel with the Promised Land. Again, God is on the side of those who are oppressed, not so much with the oppressors.

### **3. Slow to Anger (v8)**

Do you ever think of God as an angry God? It may depend on what part of the Bible you focus on. The Old Testament is filled with stories of God's wrath. It's real. Remember as humans we're made in the image of God. Do you get angry? Of course. Even depression is anger turned inward. Anger is a God given emotion we're born with. What happens when a baby is hungry and mama is slow about feeding him? We get the emotion of anger from God our creator and anger in itself is not evil.

Hostility is what leads to evil and anger is not hostility. We sometimes get those confused. Hostility always involves inflicting or trying to inflict some type of destruction, psychological or physical, upon another. Anger may

inflict harm but it doesn't necessarily involve destructiveness, or pain to another.

In animals, flight and fight are their only alternatives in the face of threat, but humans are capable of employing complicated communications. We can talk things out. Anger is particularly suited for humans who can communicate. For humans, anger alerts us and provides a basis for communication. Instead of stuffing our anger and letting it come out in destructive passive aggressive ways, we can confront what's making us angry and have the potential of working it out.

David says God is slow to anger. By being slow to anger there's room for working out the anger with communication. The opposite of slow to anger is quick to anger. You've heard of people who have a quick temper. The real reason someone is going to be quick to anger is if they have already judged a situation to be negative. Let me give us an example. Stories of road rage outbursts are becoming more and more frequent, often coming out of California. Usually brewing in someone's mind before a road rage episode is a general disgust for other drivers that only has to be triggered by what could be an innocent act of another driver. Racism is another form of anger that can brew within us and lie dormant until triggered. The way to overcome road rage or blanket racism is to acknowledge that it's wrong and a form of sin and then to practice filling your mind with positive thoughts even before you get in the car.

God doesn't have that simmering, brewing hate that will be triggered by the least little thing we do. God is slow to anger. For that alone we should give thanks.

#### **4. Abounding in love (v.8)**

Instead of having festering road rage, David says God abounds in love. This could be considered a festering love meaning it's always there. It's like the love we have for our children or grandchildren. From time to time they'll

do things that may irritate us but our love for them overwhelms our actions to retaliate. That's easier with our own flesh and blood who also love us in return but it's really hard to do when someone doesn't believe in us and irritates us. There are plenty of examples of that. We sometimes just want to get revenge. But God is "abounding in love" and that overrides his actions. We can be abounding in love for I580 drivers only when we practice filling our minds with positive words of praise. Everyday practice reading something positive that can change your state of mind in a more positive direction.

### **5. Does Not Always Accuse (v.9)**

Sometimes God does accuse us of wrong behavior and needs to. But something we can give thanks for is that he doesn't always accuse. Have you ever been in a battle with someone like a co-worker who's always trying to make you look bad? They're always accusing you of doing something wrong to make themselves look better? We can give thanks that God doesn't do that. If every time you close your eyes and think of God accusing you of something wrong, you're not thinking of the right God.

### **6. Does Not Harbor His Anger Forever (v.9)**

We talked about God having anger and how it's not a sin to be angry. Anger becomes hostility when it's harbored. Injustices should make us angry. Seeing the children of immigrants separated from their parents should make us very angry with our callous government leaders. I don't understand why they're doing what they're doing. If I sit idly by while injustice is served then I will harbor anger within me. Enough anger harbored within me will ultimately spill out in other ways perhaps in road rage or in a conversation with someone sympathetic with our government.

The word harbor refers to a safe place to weather storms. Harbors are great places to winter your yacht but a terrible place to protect your anger. You don't want to provide a safe place to fester it. You want to take action to resolve it. That's what David says God does. God has no festering anger

toward it. If God is angry with something we do, he deals with it. Never let your anger fester.

### **7. Does Not Treat Us as Our Sins Deserve & 8. Does Not Repay Us According to Our Sin**

Both reasons 7 & 8 involve how God deals with us when we do something wrong. God is just and to treat us just would be to treat us by what we have done wrong. Instead God chooses another path. If you can't see that when you're thinking of God then you're not thinking about how serious your error is. You've minimized your sin.

### **Summary of Why We Can Praise God**

Verses 11 and 12 provide us with one of the best summaries of what we have to praise God for.

*11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him;*

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

How great is that love? Astronomers tell us that the farthest known light source from the earth is ten billion light years away. That means light starting from that source (a quasar) would take ten billion years traveling at the speed of light to arrive at the earth.

By contrast the nearest star is “only” four light years away from us. That's four years traveling at the speed of light, which is 186,000 miles per second. Light from the sun reaches the earth in a little over eight minutes. So even the nearest star is a vast distance from the earth. And using ion drive propulsion, you could reach the nearest star in a modern spaceship in “only” 81,000 years.

You can turn it around any way you like and we are left with two inescapable realities. First, we live in a tiny corner of the universe, and second,

the universe is vast beyond our comprehension. But God's love is greater, vaster, larger, deeper, longer, broader, and bigger in all dimensions than the universe itself. Get in a rocket equipped with any sort of sci-fi system you can imagine. Fly at warp speed if you like. Go as far as you can go, to the end of the known universe and beyond. And when you have gone as far as you can go, look up and smile because God's love is still going. You will never reach the end of it.

My sins can never come back to haunt me again. Never the twain shall meet. The farther east you go, the farther you are from the west.

That's the magnitude of God's love. Here is great good news for all the sinners of the world. When God forgives, he removes our sins, he lifts them up, he takes them away, and he puts them so far away from us that we could never find them if we searched for them for a thousand years. They are gone forever.

My sins can never come back to haunt me again.

And God says to us, his weak, needy, guilty, frail, dusty children, "I know you through and through, and I love you anyway. Come to me. Rest in me. Make me your Rock." God's mercy in Christ is more than enough for all of us.

Doesn't that feel really good to hear? Why not hear it or something like it everyday? Jesus died on the cross to forgive us of all of our sins. If you've accepted Jesus in your heart as your Savior in prayer, saying something like "Jesus I need forgiveness for what I have done, I invite you into my life to save me" then the worst of life is behind you. Now you only need to reprogram your mind each day with positive words. You'll find them in Psalm 103. Why not pick it up each day or something equivalent? Let your ears and your eyes experience something positive everyday. It will do wonders for you.



# **IF YOU'D LIKE TO KNOW HOW TO GET STARTED IN FAITH**

**1. Recognize that everyone has sinned and fallen short of God's ideal**  
**Romans 3:23-24**

**2. Know that the wages or payment for sinning is death**  
**Romans 6:23**

**3. But God loved us so much that He sent His only Son to die for us**  
**Romans 5:8**

**4. It is our responsibility to accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and allow  
Him to become the master of our life**  
**Romans 10:13**

**Invite Jesus into your heart by praying something like the prayer below...**

*"Dear Lord Jesus, in many ways I have sinned against you. I am sorry and want to turn from my sinful ways. I invite you to come into my heart and begin to make me like yourself. I commit my life wholeheartedly to you now. Thank you for saving me."*