

this is our God

Psalm 103 describes God as compassionate, merciful, slow to anger, and filled with unfailing love. In spite of this, it's easy to have misconceptions about God that contradict Psalm 103. If we're not careful, we can allow circumstances to shape our view of God rather than His Word. Thankfully, Psalm 103 helps clear up many of our misconceptions. Today, we'll see that God is, perhaps best of all, a good father.

Discussion Questions:

1. Looking back at your sermon notes, what encouraged or challenged you the most?

Read Psalm 103:13-18

2. In Psalm 103, David describes the scope of God's immeasurable love and forgiveness (verses 11-12). How does that description compare to how David describes God in verse 14? What is the comparative significance of this view of God as our Father?

The magnitude of God's love and mercy are so significant that they can almost feel "other" – hard to grasp with our finite minds and feeble hearts, which makes David's following words all the more important: "The Lord is like a father to his children." Fatherhood is something we can wrap our minds around. It feels a little more familiar. Yes, He's the Creator of all. Majestic in glory. But He's also a father who is accessible enough to help open a lid for His children. Of all the ways God is described in the Bible, perhaps the most important is father. He's a good father who loves you, provides for you in ways you don't even recognize, scoops you into His arms when you fall, smiles like no other when He hears your laugh, and sits with you in the quiet places when you're uncertain of what's next. Yes, He's immeasurable, but He's also near.

3. The word "compassion" used in verse 13 conveys a parent's deep feelings for their children – it's an emotionally descriptive word as much as it is an act of love. Reflect on the following verses and note what they reveal about God's compassion for His children: Isaiah 46:3-4; 49:15; Luke 15:20. How do these verses encourage you to run to God rather than hide from Him when you fail somewhere in life?
4. Reflect on each of the following passages and note what they reveal about God as a father: John 1:12; Matthew 6:7-9; Matthew 7:7-11; Galatians 4:6-7; Hebrews 12:3-11; Galatians 4:4-7; 1 John 3:1. Which characteristic about the fatherhood of God stands out to you the most? Why?

Note: There is a popular misconception that God is a father to everyone. "We're all one big family, and though He may be looked at differently in different cultures, God is this big father of everyone."

If by “father to everyone,” you mean that He is the Creator of everyone – yes, that’s true. But that’s not how the Bible talks about God’s fatherhood. The Bible talks about God being your Father if, and only if, you have entered into a particular kind of relationship with Him. The Bible says it’s only when you enter into a specific relationship with God that you receive that relationship with Him as your Father. This means you will never have the enormous benefits of being a child of God if you think it just happens automatically. It’s something you have to enter into. It’s something you have to receive by putting your faith in Jesus.

5. How does our experience with our earthly fathers shape the way we view God? How can Psalm 103 help overcome misconceptions about the fatherhood of God? How can the gospel encourage us as parents when we don’t get it right with our children?

The picture of God as "father" can be a difficult or painful image for some people. In his book *Prayer*, Richard Foster writes, "I know that many find abba (father) language painful because they have been inexpressibly hurt by their own human fathers. I grieve for those wounded by these terribly destructive experiences, and I pray, even as I write these words, that they may know grace and healing. Then, too, it may help all of us to remember that we are to receive our understanding of how human fathers are supposed to function by learning what God is like, not the other way around."

6. In verse 14, what two facts does God consider about us? What does this say about Him as our Father? How should this impact us as we relate to God as our Father? See Psalm 139:15-18.

In his devotional, *The Songs of Jesus*, Tim Keller writes the following of Psalm 103: "Parents know their children's besetting sins (verse 14). Yet a good father loves his children anyway (verse 13). Indeed, the more weak and needy a child is, the more the father's heart goes out to him or her. God knows us to the bottom yet nevertheless loves us to the skies – literally."

*What does it mean that God knows you to the bottom yet loves you to the skies?

7. Throughout the Bible, grass and wildflowers are used in various analogies. How do we see this happening in Isaiah 40:8 and Matthew 6:28-32? How is David using this analogy in Psalm 103:15-17 regarding God's love? When do you most need to be reminded of this truth about God's love?

These verses in Psalm 103 assure us that God's love is permanent. He loves you with a never-give-up, never-let-go, never-let-you-down kind of love. Never mind how frail we are or how brief our life span is – God's love for us will last as long as His word – forever. His love is a sustaining love. A love that hems you in and never runs out.

8. What's one personal takeaway from today's study you can focus on applying in your life this week?