

SESSION 2

▶ The Source of Forgiveness

In Focus:

Forgiveness reflects the character of God.



LOOK AT OUR WORLD

After the 2013 NFL season, two men in the Denver Broncos front office were convicted of DUIs. Vice president of football operations John Elway suspended them, but he did not fire either man. When asked why he did not fire Tom Heckert and Matt Russell, Elway replied, “. . . I’ve made a lot of poor decisions too.”¹

Both men came off suspension and continued their careers. Heckert left the team due to health reasons after the 2017 season and died in 2018, but Russell stayed on until 2021.

After announcing his retirement, Russell said, “What happened to me 7 ½ years ago gave me perspective . . . I haven’t had a drink in 7 ½ years. . . . John and Joe, by the grace of their good hearts, allowed me to save my career. And in doing so I saved my family.”²

Elway said that he gave these men a second chance because he, too, had made mistakes in the past. God forgives, but not because He made mistakes in His past. It’s His nature to forgive.



► **Who do you think of as someone known for forgiveness?**

God blesses us in many ways including forgiveness.

Psalm 103:1-5

¹ My soul, bless the LORD, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. ² My soul, bless the LORD, and do not forget all his benefits. ³ He forgives all your iniquity; he heals all your diseases. ⁴ He redeems your life from the Pit; he crowns you with faithful love and compassion. ⁵ He satisfies you with good things; your youth is renewed like the eagle.

God blesses His people for a different reason than John Elway. He does not make mistakes. God is holy and blameless. God forgives His people as it aligns with His character, provided they repent in faith.

Psalm 103 begins with a full-throated praise of God, which holds nothing back. The psalmist blesses the Lord from the depths of his soul—with everything he has (vv. 1-2) and encourages God's people not to forget all the benefits they enjoy that come from the Lord.

Saying, “do not forget” (v. 2) prompts worshipers to respond with praise as

they recall the ways they have experienced God's steadfast love. God does what He does because He is who He is. Remembering what He has done for His people prompts them to praise Him for His character.

The worship encouraged in this psalm follows a cycle of revelation and response. As God reveals His actions, the response of those who fear Him is worship. However, if God's people forget how He blesses them, they will fail to worship Him as they should. Worship only takes place when God's people remember what He has done for them—so the psalmist instructed them not to forget His benefits.

The psalmist reminds us that God forgives all our sins (v. 3). When we repent, He forgives—not occasionally, but consistently and completely (Jer. 3:12; Hosea 14:2). And when sin leads to suffering or illness (Pss. 32; 38; Jas. 5:15-16), God also brings healing (Ps. 103:3b).

Our natural response to God's unwavering forgiveness is wholehearted praise. When His people remember His blessings, nothing can silence their worship—not even the loss of speech.

After a brain tumor took away her ability to speak, Dorothy Holm began writing what looked like random letters on index cards. After her passing, her 11-year-old granddaughter Janna shared one of the cards online. Within minutes, someone

was able to decipher the letters “OFWAIH-HBTN” as the opening words of the Lord’s Prayer: “Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name” (Matt. 6:9, KJV). Though Dorothy couldn’t speak, her praise still overflowed.³

Beyond forgiveness and healing, God redeems lives from destruction. He lifts us from despair and crowns us with His steadfast love and compassion (Ps. 103:4).

Our natural response to God’s unwavering forgiveness is wholehearted praise.

The normal response to getting a second chance is to praise those who forgave. Seven and a half years after the Broncos management team gave Matt Russell a second chance, he credited their good hearts as saving his career and his family.

The response for God’s people who do not forget that God has forgiven, healed, and raised them out of the dire consequences of their sin, and made them a trophy of His steadfast love is to hold nothing back and praise Him.

God’s blessings to His people are not deficient at all. He satisfies His people who trust in Him with good things and renews them, raising them above their toils to “soar on wings like eagles” (Isa. 40:31). Our response when we reflect on how God satisfies our souls is to hold nothing back and praise Him.

Forgiveness flows out of who God is. It is consistent with God’s character, and He is consistent in forgiving His people (Isa. 55:7). God blesses us in many ways, but forgiveness is chief among them.

► *How would you describe the benefits the psalmist had in mind in these verses?*

► *What are some good things with which God has satisfied you?*

In Focus: Forgiveness reflects the character of God.

God's forgiveness is evident in how He treats His children.

Psalm 103:6-8

⁶ The LORD executes acts of righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. ⁷ He revealed his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel. ⁸ The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love.

In the same way God blesses individuals with forgiveness, He also blesses the broader faith community (vv. 6-19). God's blessings are evident in how He treats His children with justice, compassion, and grace.

In this portion of Psalm 103, the psalmist reminded the people that the children of Israel had benefited greatly from the Lord during peace time, just as He protected them during war time (Ps. 124). God covers the oppressed with His righteousness, justice, compassion, and grace. One of the ways He did this was to reveal "his ways to Moses" and His righteous, compassionate "deeds to the people of Israel" (v. 7). The law God gave through Moses encouraged the people to treat one another justly.

During the time of the Judges, when Israel had no king and "everyone did whatever seemed right" in their own

eyes (Judg. 21:25), there is yet a beautiful story of how Moses's law guided people to treat an oppressed family justly. After her husband died, Ruth unselfishly stayed with her mother-in-law, Naomi, even after Naomi released her from that obligation (Ruth 1:16-17). She went out into Boaz's fields to pick up the grain the harvesters missed, a right afforded her by Levitical law (Lev. 19:9-10), to support her mother-in-law.



Boaz provided a safe place for Ruth to gather the grain (Ruth 2:8-9). He even instructed his employees to leave extra grain for her (v. 16) and invited her to eat the food prepared for the workers at break time (v. 14). He said that he did this for a couple of reasons. Boaz noticed the noble way she was treating her mother-in-law (v. 11), and he saw her as someone under God's protection (v. 12).

When Naomi discovered that Ruth was working in Boaz's field, she encouraged Ruth to present herself to Boaz for marriage, because he was a near kinsman. God's law had provisions to help widows like Naomi and Ruth. Levirate marriage (Deut. 25:5-6) allowed a widow to have a son in her late husband's name, while a kinsman redeemer (Lev. 25:25-28) was a close relative who helped keep family property within the family.

The Levirate marriage could result in a son, who would provide for Ruth as she aged (Ex. 20:12). Ultimately Boaz married her, and they had a son named Obed, who was King David's grandfather (Ruth 4:21-22).

During a time when people did whatever seemed right to them, Boaz followed God's instructions given through Moses. As a result, the people of Israel saw God's goodness in how He cared for this oppressed woman and her mother-in-law.

God not only shows justice and compassion—He is also gracious and patient. He doesn't get angry quickly, a truth Moses learned after breaking the stone tablets in response to the people worshipping the golden calf (Ex. 32).

God called Moses back to Mount Sinai and told him to carve new tablets. While Moses held them, God spoke words later echoed in Psalm 103:

"The LORD—the LORD is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth, maintaining faithful love to a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, rebellion, and sin. But he will not leave the guilty unpunished, bringing the consequences of the fathers' iniquity on the children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation" (Ex. 34:6b-7).

When we remember how God treats His people—with justice, compassion, grace, and forgiveness—we're moved to praise Him deeply. His goodness stirs worship from the very core of who we are.

► ***When have you experienced God's compassion, patience, and grace?***

► ***What other attributes do you appreciate about God?***

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ENGAGE

Blessing the Blesser

Write brief descriptions of ways God has blessed you according to the categories of today's session passage:

1. He forgives _____.
2. He heals _____.
3. He redeems _____.
4. He crowns you with faithful love and compassion _____.
5. He satisfies you with good things _____.

Compose a prayer of praise, thanking God for His blessings:

We do not deserve forgiveness, but God forgives completely.

Psalm 103:9-13

⁹ He will not always accuse us or be angry forever. ¹⁰ He has not dealt with us as our sins deserve or repaid us according to our iniquities. ¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his faithful love 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 has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him.

God does not forgive His people because they deserve it. All people have sinned, even people who fear God. Everyone sins (Ps. 14:1-3). No one deserves forgiveness. God forgives those who fear Him—those who repent and trust Him—because it is consistent with His character to forgive, and He forgives completely, without holding grudges.

Yes, He is “slow to anger” (Ps. 103:8; Ex. 34:6), but when He does get angry, He does not let His anger smolder and linger (Ps. 103:9). God does not continue to accuse His people of wrongdoing after they repent and experience His forgiveness. He is quick to move on, but He does not just move on. He completely takes the sin away from the sinner.

But while God removes sin completely, people often struggle to forget. Sin can define a person. When you read the following names, your mind immediately races to what they did.

- We remember Hitler for genocide and mass murder.
- We remember Dahmer for murder and cannibalism.
- We remember Capone for being a notorious 1920s Chicago gangster.

These men are so infamous you not only associate their sins with their names, but you only need their last name to make the association. Their sins define them and their family name—to the point that if the sins were listed first, you likely could have filled in their names:

- Genocide and mass murder: Hitler
- Murder and cannibalism: Dahmer
- 1920s Chicago gangster: Capone

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Sin lingers and defines people.

However, God doesn't treat our sins the way society often does. When He forgives, He no longer associates those sins with us—He chooses not to remember them (Isa. 43:25). Because of His steadfast love, God doesn't give repentant people what they deserve (Ps. 103:10). He doesn't repay them for their confessed sins—He forgives.

We don't receive God's favor because we deserve it. His mercy, love, and compassion aren't earned—they're given because of who He is. It is in God's nature to show steadfast love and compassion to His people.

How great is His steadfast love? It is “as high as the heavens are above the earth” (v. 11). How high is that? Scientists debate about how far the heavens go beyond what is observable; some postulate that it is infinite; some think it is finite, but they just do not know the distance that separates the earth from the outer limits of the heavens. However, they do think that the Andromeda Galaxy is 2.5 million light-years away.⁴ (For perspective, a light year is about six trillion miles.)

Of course, the psalmist was speaking poetically, not in scientific code. His point was that since God forgives because of His character, which has an immeasurable amount of steadfast love, then those who fear God know that He has the capacity to forgive their sins.

When He forgives our sins, He no longer accuses us (v. 9); instead, He removes the sin and separates it far from us. How far? The psalmist said it is “as far as the east is from the west” (v. 12).

Scientists may debate whether the distance between earth and heaven is infinite, but they agree on one thing: east and west—being opposite directions—can never meet. That endless separation is a powerful image of how far God removes sin from those He forgives. The distance isn't just immeasurable—it's infinite. So complete is His forgiveness that He no longer even remembers our sins (Jer. 31:34).

We are now known by God's steadfast love—we are trophies of His grace. Although we do not deserve His favor, God forgives, and when He forgives, He crowns us with His steadfast love.

► ***How would you compare the way God deals with forgiven sins versus the way humans struggle to “forgive and forget”?***

► ***How does God's forgiveness help us understand His steadfast love? Why is forgiveness harder in some circumstances than others?***

LIVE IT OUT

The psalmist highlights how vital it is to remember that our sins have been forgiven. As we do, we can fully worship Him for what He's done for us personally and for our faith community. Choose one or more of the following activities:

VIEW OF GOD

Take a walk today and reflect upon all the ways God has forgiven you. Consider the blessings that have come from His forgiveness. Take some time to thank Him for who He is and what He has done.

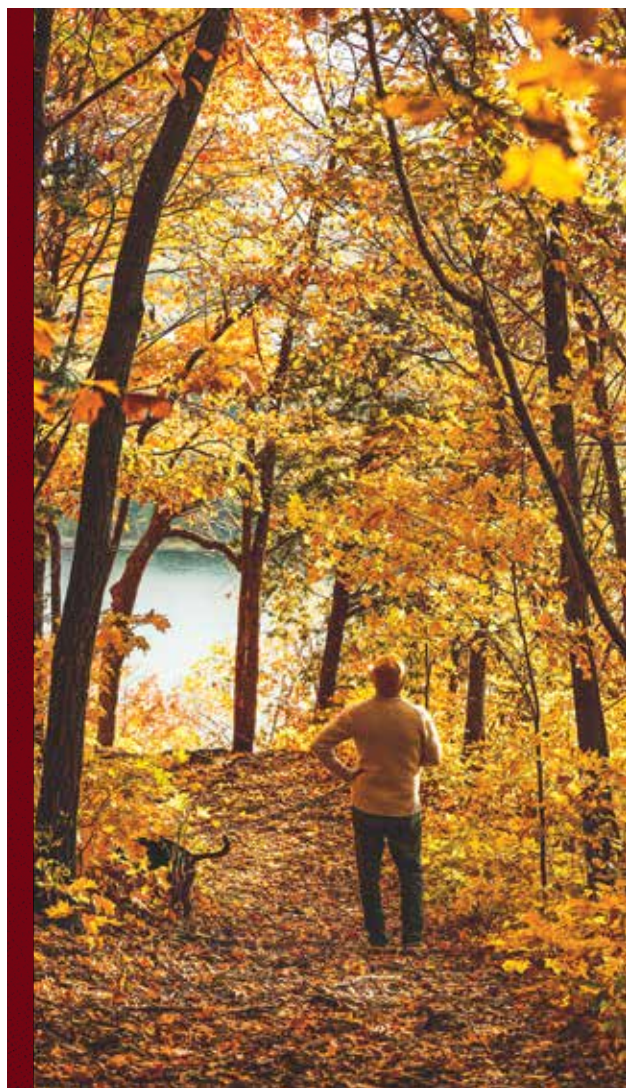
VIEW OF SELF

Keep a gratitude journal this week. Write about the ways you have benefited from God's blessings.

VIEW OF OTHERS

Who do you know that needs God's forgiveness? Carve out some time this week to share with them who God is and what He can do for those who need to hear of His forgiveness.

1. Gary Smith, "John Elway: The Ultimate Winner," *Sports Illustrated*, January 7, 2015, <https://www.si.com>.
2. Mike Klis, "Matt Russell's Retirement a Surprise but for Good Reasons," *9NEWS*, January 5, 2021, <https://www.9news.com>.
3. AP, "Internet community helps crack grandma's code," January 22, 2014, <https://www.usatoday.com>.
4. NASA, "Messier 31 (The Andromeda Galaxy)," *NASA Science*, accessed November 3, 2025, <https://science.nasa.gov>.



REMEMBER

"As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." Psalm 103:12

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