

A Blessed Life

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits
(Psalm 103:2, *KJV*).

Scripture: Psalm 103:1-12

Song: “Bless His Holy Name”

“. . . And Lord, thank You for all the years I had with Alice. Amen.” My father always ends his prayers this way now. At age 90, he became a widower after a lifetime of loving only one woman—Alice, my mother. Instead of focusing on how much he misses her, he chooses to think about all their wonderful times together and how good God has been to him by blessing his life with her presence for so many years. My dad always makes an effort to remember God’s blessings, and by being thankful, he is blessing the Lord.

Today’s passage repeats the call for us to bless the Lord. When God blesses us, He makes us in some way better off. However, *we* cannot make *God* better off. So how *do* we bless the Lord? He is blessed when we remember to sincerely thank, praise, worship, or exalt Him for His many blessings—regardless of our circumstances.

May we never forget to be mindful of all the ways God has blessed us. Let’s be faithful to bless Him in return with our thanks and praise today and always.

Father, You are so good to me! Thank You for the abundant blessings You’ve lavished on me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

September 4–10. **Harriet E. Michael** is a wife of over 40 years, a mother, and a grandmother. She loves to write, work with youth as a substitute teacher, and garden.

Passing Along Righteousness

The mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children (Psalm 103:17, *KJV*).

Scripture: Psalm 103:13-22

Song: "Faith of Our Fathers"

Have you ever had someone tell you, "You have your mother's dimples" or "You inherited your grandfather's eyes"? People often make observations like these, especially when seeing a baby for the first time. All my life I've been told I have my mother's smile. We know that God made all creatures, including people, to pass down genetic traits from generation to generation.

In today's passage, God's compassion toward those who reverence Him is compared to that of a kind father's toward His children (v. 13). Then verse 17 tells us that the blessing of His righteousness carries on into future generations for those who live reverently before Him. But what or who is the instrument God uses to pass this righteousness down? Verse 18 says, "To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them" (*KJV*). Godly parents, teachers, and caregivers are the ones who pass along faith to the next generation. What an important responsibility and awesome privilege it is to be a spiritual parent!

It's true that I have my mother's smile as I've been told so many times. But more importantly, thanks to her witness, I also have embraced the faith she modeled for me.

Father, thank You for being a loving father to Your children. Thank You for the righteousness You preserve from generation to generation for those who, by faith, walk in reverence before You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Finding Rest

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy (Exodus 20:8, *KJV*).

Scripture: Exodus 20:8-11

Song: “’Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus”

In the 1960s when I was growing up in Africa, Sunday afternoons were quiet, comfortable, and pensive. Sunday mornings were busy as we traveled to attend church services, which lasted much longer than typical North American services do. Then we’d come home, and I’d help my mother prepare lunch and clean up afterward. But then came the quiet, restful time.

On other days, I was allowed to play outside with my friends, but not on Sunday. I wasn’t required to sleep, but I had to keep quiet so my parents could nap. There was something nice about slowing down and taking an afternoon off from usual activities. I would read, draw in a sketch book, or play quietly with toys in my room.

Today’s passage from the Old Testament gives instruction for resting on the Sabbath. (Jesus’ teachings in the New Testament would eventually shed more light on Sabbath-related priorities.) The main point in today’s teaching, however, is observing a time of rest, just as God rested (stopped working) after six days of Creation. Jesus would later invite His followers into a special kind of rest—rest for their souls. In Matthew 11:28 Jesus said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (*KJV*). How kind God is to provide such rest!

Father, thank You for Your gifts of rest. I want to come to You now and rest in the truth that You have everything that concerns me under control. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Act Now

“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts”
(Hebrews 4:7).

Scripture: Hebrews 4:1-10

Song: “I Surrender All”

A man wakes up in the morning, and his plans for the day swirl around in his thoughts. He heads out the door, and on his way to work, someone runs a red light and hits his car. A few hours later he’s being wheeled into surgery to repair his broken leg. Certainly that’s not what he thought he’d be doing that day!

Life is full of such surprises. People make plans all the time that they’re not able to carry out because something blindsides them and changes things. Sometimes these are relatively minor disruptions requiring only minor adjustments, but other times, a person’s life is altered forever by the unexpected.

Today’s passage speaks of entering into God’s rest, which is done by putting our faith in Him. In verse 7, we read that God has made a certain day called “today.” That verse goes on to quote an Old Testament passage—Psalm 95—warning us not to harden our hearts when we hear God’s voice. In the context of entering into God’s rest, this especially pertains to putting faith in Jesus without hesitation. If we hesitate, thinking we’ll wait for another time to receive God’s gift of salvation, we may end up being too late.

Father, I want to respond quickly to Your Word whenever I hear it. Thank You for the rest You provide through salvation by grace through faith in Your Son and for faithfully calling me to receive it. I affirm my trust in You today. In Jesus’ name, amen.

A Priest Who Can Empathize

We do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin (Hebrews 4:15).

Scripture: Hebrews 4:11-16

Song: “What a Friend We Have in Jesus”

Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for 27 years before he became the first Black president of South Africa. Surely he never forgot what it was like to be in prison. Abraham Lincoln was born in a cabin in the backwoods of Kentucky, the son of a poor pioneer, but he grew up to become the sixteenth president of the United States. Surely he never forgot what it was like to be poor.

Once a person suffers through hardship, they gain an understanding of what it's like to go through that experience. Usually this understanding causes them to be able to empathize with people going through similar experiences.

Jesus is our high priest who suffered while He was on earth. He knows what we go through and can empathize with us. Jesus lived as a human, and the writer of Hebrews tells us that He experienced every kind of temptation. Though He never sinned, He still knows what it is like to be tempted and understands our struggle in the face of temptation. What a friend we have in Jesus, indeed!

Father, how marvelous that You sent Your Son to earth to live as a man to experience the kinds of temptations we deal with! Thank You that, as our high priest, Jesus can empathize with us in our pains, problems, and temptations. In Jesus' name, amen.

Attuned to Another's Plight

If you see your fellow Israelite's ox or sheep straying, do not ignore it but be sure to take it back to its owner (Deuteronomy 22:1).

Scripture: Deuteronomy 22:1-4

Song: "Make Me a Servant"

During World War II, the Allied forces fought the Axis powers for six years in a war that was responsible for a massive loss of life, property, and treasure throughout Europe. But once the Axis nations had been conquered, the Allies went to work on a plan to help restore the war-torn nations.

Of course the rebuilding of Europe was a complex geopolitical set of negotiations, and the Soviet Union pressed its own agenda. But in general the other "heavy-hitters" among the Allies—the United Kingdom, United States, and China—did not exert their power to permanently divide and occupy Europe as they might have. Germany and the capital city of Berlin were divided in two, but for the most part, countries in Western Europe were "returned" to their people.

Today's passage points to a similar principle of being upright and compassionate when it comes to someone else's losses. These four verses give examples that people back in Bible times would have understood as being valuable and vital belongings: a donkey, oxen, sheep, or a cloak. In each case, God's Word instructs His people to help neighbors by being attentive and merciful, returning what is theirs, especially what is important and needed.

Father, I want to be a faithful servant whose heart is attuned to the plight of those around me. Grant me eyes to see what is needed and integrity to do the right thing. In Jesus' name, amen.

Keeping the Sabbath

[Jesus asked,] “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?”
(Luke 14:3).

Scripture: Luke 14:1-6

Song: “Every Day with Jesus”

The theme of Sabbath rest has come up again this week! We’ve looked at the Old Testament’s instructions about resting on the Sabbath. We’ve also looked at God’s instructions about helping a neighbor when an important need or situation arises. But what if your neighbor needed urgent help on the Sabbath? What *then*?

In today’s passage, Jesus provided some much-needed clarification about God’s heart in the matter. After Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath, the religious leaders were outraged, believing He was doing what was forbidden—working on the Sabbath. But Jesus indicated that God’s priority is to do what is right and true and good at all times.

As Christians we may have different perspectives about how to observe a day of rest and worship. In Romans 14:5, the apostle Paul offered some help on the question when he pointed out that one person might regard one day as special while another treats each day the same. Then Paul said that every person needs to be convinced in their own mind about what they’re doing. In other words, as we observe the Sabbath according to our convictions, we might notice that someone else’s convictions differ from our own. We can leave that between them and God. Meanwhile, we can enjoy resting and worshipping with a sincere heart as we seek to do what pleases God every day of the week.

Father, help me worship and serve You with a pure and sincere heart. In Jesus’ name, amen.