

Psalm 103 Developing a Godly Personality

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[0 : 0 0] And we are in Psalm 103 today, although last week we primarily went through an exposition, leaving this week for application.

! So last week was primarily an exposition of Psalm 103 examining the steadfast love of the Lord, that He delights in showing steadfast love.

And today we are really trying to apply what we learned in that message from last week. So last week the title was Understanding God's Personality, and this week it will be Developing a Godly Personality.

The two things are, of course, related in Scripture, and we'll get to that in a moment. But we examine who God is and how He acts and how He thinks, and then we impose those standards on our own personality and seek to become more and more like Him.

That's what it means to pursue godliness. Now to even have this conversation, we have to dump some worldly baggage that we may be carrying into this whole conversation.

[1 : 1 1] For instance, we have been taught by our culture that personalities themselves are quite unchangeable and static, and you just are what you are. If you're an introvert, you're an introvert. If you're an extrovert, you're an extrovert.

If you're a type A, you're a type A. If you're a type B, you're a type B. We've created this sort of immutability of personality. The Bible doesn't have that category or kind of thinking at all.

The Bible states over and over again, you can change, and maybe you should change. And that's the second global kind of worldly category that we bring into the subject of personality. And that is that all personality qualities are equally as good.

And that would be true if mankind were God. But because mankind is not God and God is God, we can assess the virtue, the goodness of every personality quality by holding it up against God's and asking, is this like that?

And that's really how the Bible teaches us to think about our personalities, not as something that we've received and can never change, but as something that we received and should rule and subdue and shape into the conformity of Christ.

[2 : 1 8] And we should use Jesus as our example, His personality as our example, to figure out what should go, what should stay, what should be turned up, what should be turned down, so on and so forth.

This is all typified in language throughout the scriptures where God is held up and His attributes are held up, and then we are told to be like them.

So the classic would be in both Leviticus and 1 Peter, be holy as I am holy. In Luke chapter 6, if I remember right, Jesus says, God is merciful, therefore you should be merciful.

And of course, in Matthew 5, Jesus says, be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. I want to take a moment before we get into the whole personality thing and tell you a little fun I've been having.

I didn't realize what Nazarenes believed. I was kind of naive about that. There's not a lot of Nazarenes in East St. Louis, you know, where I was for a long time.

[3 : 19] But this place is crawling with them, right? So it took me a long time. I just never put it on my list of things to figure out. And so I have a friend who's Nazarene. And so we were able to talk, and I just was like, oh my goodness, I didn't realize y'all were Pelagian and Wesleyan and so on and so forth.

Let me explain just like one key difference as you talk and interact with Nazarenes. Pelagius was a guy who was very sincere in wanting to keep the notion of free will intact in the philosophy of Christianity.

And I think was a well-intentioned guy who had a pretty bad way of studying the Bible. He read this verse, Matthew 5, 48.

You should be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. And he brought some logic into this that's kind of interesting. And that is, if God commands something, it must be possible for us to obey it.

And so he actually thought that Christian perfection was possible. That you could get to a place in your Christian life where you simply stopped sinning. That that was sort of the final destination, even in this life, that you would arrive at this perfect state of grace where you no longer sinned.

[4 : 32] And that's what Pelagius taught from this verse, from be perfect as your Father is perfect. So I didn't know that Nazarenes think that way, but they do. And so, you know, there's plenty of times where I can have friendly debates with people who think about, think that thing and think about that.

And obviously, it's relatively easy, you would think, to show a Pelagian, a Nazarene, hey, do you really think, like, you stopped sinning?

Like, do you really think that's happened? And to hear them sort of explain, oh yeah, yeah, you know, it happened two years ago. It was a sunny day, and I was, you know, and I just stopped sinning.

When I have those conversations, at least, you know, as I think about them, I think, well, let's just read the context of what Jesus said before he said, therefore be perfect as my, as the Heavenly Father is perfect.

This is what Jesus said. You have heard it said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.

[5 : 38] For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others?

Don't even the Gentiles do the same thing? You, therefore, must be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect. So I would just say to some person who believes that they've reached sinless perfection, it's like, you really love your enemies?

Like this describes, you, you, you really have completely forgiven. There's no, there's no shred of bitterness and resentment in your heart. To me, what Jesus is talking about here is in some sense, the final frontier of sanctification.

The hardest thing to do is to be kind to those who are unkind to you. To give grace to those who haven't extended it to you and so on and so forth.

And that's really what we're going to talk about today. Because if that is the primary feature of God's personality, which we see in Psalm 103 and many other verses, is the way that God would describe himself to us.

[6 : 47] Exodus 34. God chooses to reveal himself as kind, compassionate, overlooking, forgiving, and so forth. That's his, that's how he, that's how he leads when he introduces himself.

So what does it mean for you, whether you're an introvert or an extrovert, or all these other weird markers, whether we're talking Enneagram or Myers-Briggs, what does it mean for you to have a godly personality?

It means that for you and for me to have a godly personality, we must be evidently, obviously, clearly, gracious, and merciful to those around us.

That's what it means to have a godly personality. It means to go the opposite direction from resentment, from bitterness, from scorekeeping, from word parsing, from defensiveness, and go in the complete opposite direction and take on these traits that God himself possesses.

That's really the thrust of so many of the scriptures that just say, God is like this, therefore you must be like this. And above all you'll see, and when you, when you look at all of the language like that in scriptures, the primary thing that comes forward is something like, God has forgiven you, therefore, be forgiving.

[8 : 11] God has shown you mercy, therefore, be merciful. So if we do an exposition of Psalm 103, which we did last week, what's the application?

If the exposition is God is kind and compassionate, what's the application? And the application is we must also be that way toward others.

So you could talk about this as emulation, but it doesn't quite get there, because the Bible talks about it in a deeper way. And I thought of like, well, how would we describe this deeper way that the Bible talks about the God of grace making gracious people?

And I started thinking about this, this thing called statue rubbing. Have you heard about that? You've probably seen this before. The first time I saw it was in Springfield, Illinois. There's just all over the world.

There are bronze statues, and it's the habit of people to touch a particular spot on the statue, and it removes the oxidation, it removes sort of the damage of the environment from the spot, because there's acid in the skin, and it just keeps that spot clean, like it has always looked.

[9 : 23] It keeps that bronze completely burnished. And so in Springfield, you've got Lincoln's nose. At Harvard, you've got John Harford's foot. And I found out also that the French are staying true to themselves, and the statues there, the parts that are shiny, are parts I can't talk about, because that's the French for you.

The truth is, is that becoming a gracious, merciful, kind person isn't simply a matter of the will in which we examine the attributes of God and muster up the strength to exude those attributes in our own lives.

The truth is, is that becoming a gracious, merciful person is simply a byproduct of God repeatedly touching our soul every day over and over again with His grace and mercy.

Our heart will, without that consistent process, our heart will grow oxidized. It will get polluted. It will grow dark.

It will manifest bitterness. It will manifest unforgiveness. It will manifest scorekeeping. But if, on a daily basis, the God of the universe extends His merciful touch and renews your soul with His grace day after day, as the Bible says He does, you will progressively, over time, become that kind of person.

[10 : 57] It's not just emulation. It's something that's more caught than taught, you might say. It is simply the process of walking with God in the way that He calls us to walk with Him.

Think of it this way. If you, every day, experience a God who forgives all your iniquities, touch. Who heals all your diseases, touch. Who redeems your life from the pit.

Who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy. And who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like eagles. If you are walking with that God and He is touching you in that way consistently, you will show it in how you act and how you think.

It will actually not simply give you categories of behaviors to pursue, although that may be your experience initially. Ultimately, it will give you instincts. You will find, ultimately, if you walk with God in this way, you will start having merciful instincts, not merely merciful aspirations.

Now, why is it that I could say that so confidently while at the same time saying, and yet many Christians do not demonstrate this sort of vibe in their daily life?

[12 : 14] What's going on? Well, let me just throw out a few obstacles to becoming a godly person. Let me say it this way.

The primary question would be, what is keeping you from experiencing ongoing grace from the Lord? Okay, that would be, because the thesis is, if you experience that regularly, you will become a gracious person.

You won't even be able to help it. So, what would keep a Christian from experiencing that regularly? I think the first idea I'd put forward is a kind of shallow moralism. When I was growing up in the Southern Baptist world, it was, you know, you don't cuss or chew or go with girls who do.

There is a hierarchy of sins. There were certain sins that were sins, and there were certain sins that were failings or weaknesses or struggles.

There were certain sins you needed the cross for, and there were certain sins you just needed people to look the other way for. And the problem with that approach to Christianity is that you'll get over all the big things relatively quickly.

[13 : 19] And you'll not be a conscious object of grace for most of your life. You'll have to look way back in the rearview mirror to those times when you really needed grace.

Because after all, in the grand scheme of things, in comparison to others, you're just not that bad. That's a kind of shallow moralism. I think you could also talk about a kind of consequence-based moralism.

This is something I teach in our premarital counseling sessions now. There's a pivot when we grow into adulthood. We, as kids, experience consequential, consequence-based morality.

So, consequence-based decision-making. So, we determine what is right or wrong by what can hurt us or what will get caught doing, so forth. And so, our sort of way of evaluating whether we're in the right or in the wrong is, are there any consequences to what I'm doing?

Now, as you get older, you've got to shift into simply kind of a morality-based decision matrix where it's not, are there consequences, but is this right or is this wrong? But, of course, many people don't grow into that.

[14 : 27] And so, they look at their lives that are relatively free of harmful consequences because they've eliminated all those big sins that bite back. And they sort of don't understand that their whole life is full of sins of omission.

There are many people they are failing to love. There are many people they are failing to share the gospel with. They should be more generous. They should be more this or that. They don't even think about sins of omission. They're really just focused on these particular sins they were told when they were younger or bad and that they needed grace to overcome those.

So, this is one of the things that keeps Christians from experiencing the radical grace of God on a regular basis. a kind of shallow moralism. There's another thing that you could call therapeutic deism where we have turned a lot of sins into sicknesses and turned our need for a redeemer into a need for a therapist.

And many of our great issues in life aren't so much a consequence of our sinfulness anymore in our minds. They're simply a consequence of our circumstances. Well, if you choose that pathway you essentially lost any access to the grace of God.

You don't need it anymore. You need a therapist not a crucified Savior. You know, so you can move down certain avenues and completely distance yourself while still being a Christian completely distance yourself from the reality and that reality is that every single day you would fall into hell if the God of grace did not care for you.

[15 : 55] it is actually really easy to fall away from that awareness and that is why we're told at the beginning of this psalm bless the Lord oh my soul and all that is within me bless his holy name bless the Lord oh my soul and forget not all his benefits it's the danger the danger is to forget all of his benefits where are those benefits taking place?

look at verse 3 and 4 do you see any past tense? I see one past tense in that entire section everything else is present tense this is key older Christians to not becoming an embittered blaming kind of person how are you doing with the fact that you're kind of good people you're worthy you're admirable people you know as far as people go how are you doing with that reality are you going to lie about that?

are you going to say you're worse than you are? we know you're not that bad we like you we respect you how are you going to stay close to the grace of God and become and stay a gracious person?

this is a real problem of age well you have to see that every single day the God of the universe is actively forgiving your iniquity healing your diseases redeeming your life from pits crowning you with steadfast love satisfying you with good this is action happening in real time not back when you were saved this is what God is doing for you right now and when you stop seeing the God who is actively showering you with grace you stop being an active shower of grace I love I love male friendship and I love male friendship pranks and the social media algorithms have figured this out and so Angela gets dogs jumping on trampolines and I get chads pulling pranks on each other and I saw the most remarkable prank I'm a respecter of pranks and this one had me in awe a group of guys were out one of the guys had been drinking a little too much and he they were out just doing stuff doing guy stuff and they were in their pickup and he was he had drank too much beer and so he had actually fallen asleep taking a nap in the back of the pickup truck and he's got three other buddies in the truck quad cab they decide that you know what would be great let's go down to that fancy new automatic car wash and the great thing is is that they had a dash cam and so you could see you could see the dude in the back as he wakes from a drunken stupor with robot brushes and foam and spray from every single direction and he's so confused and he's like in the middle of a car wash it's like that is like the best six dollars you could ever spend add the price of the beer

I think you know whatever but that what a remarkable prank friends that is what Psalm 103 says God does for you every single day it's when you get into these fancy new automatic car washes there's literally not a direction you know your undercarriage isn't safe back to the French statues it's all coming from every it's just a total holistic wash and what Psalm 103 is saying is that this is what God does for you every day it isn't as if you have accumulated a spot here or there and need the Lord to very kindly and delicately brush the suede clean it up a little bit no the Bible teaches well like John Flavel the Puritan says that even our tears of repentance must be washed with the blood of Jesus we are not capable of doing things apart from

[20 : 14] Christ that please God we are capable of one thing and one thing alone and that is sin and so the reality is is that what God is actually doing for you every single day is not any different than what he did for you 20 years ago when in probably your eyes and mine you were a lot less disciplined of a person and so on and so forth you need this level of grace every day or you die and go to hell today that's who God is and that's the way to begin to become a gracious person is to be aware that you've been in the car wash again today and the next day and the only way that happens is if you will slow down have a sensitive conscious conscience begin to evaluate not only your actions but also your thoughts and your emotions and begin to take all of it to the Lord confessing it as sin in need of the blood of Jesus Christ but so many of us end our days on our phones and not in confession we are so distant from the reality that there's a God of the universe who is holy and what

I think matters and what I feel matters and my general appetites matter and it's all in need of grace and if you will live like that before the Lord you will be overwhelmed by the amount of steadfast love and mercy he shows you every day and it will become an instinct for you to show that to others I have one additional kind of hint one additional tip that I see in verse four to help you to become a more gracious person which is indeed to develop a more godly personality look look at verse four he redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with steadfast love and mercy as a pastor I absolutely love doing one thing in particular as an act of love to the saints and that is every single person in this room before you even made a decision about it when you were kids you developed happiness strategies here's what I mean by that you started to notice how certain behaviors would lead toward praise and acceptance and none of us made so we're all there's no blame happening right now we're all we this all happened to all of us and

I'll just and it's funny because there's just certain avenues certain roads people take one of the roads people take in a really high drama low low structured environment is I can become appreciated and praised if I'm simply low maintenance adaptable and don't have any you know real desires that that's how I can get a crown some of us were taught like if I say smart things I will be accepted and praised some of us were taught if I'm pretty I will be accepted and praised obviously I've been on that road for a long time I've tried to be pretty some of us were taught if you're just compliant or kind or nice or if you're strong or adaptable or tough really before any of us knew what we were doing we were actually making strategy happiness strategies we were choosing paths that we would walk to pursue particular crowns maybe we switch some of those up as we get older maybe you know sexual intimacy becomes one or money becomes one but the general idea that we've all gotten stuck in since we were kids is that we like to be liked we like to be accepted and we've noticed that certain behaviors give us these crowns

I've obviously as a pastor walked with a lot of people who have been in pits you know it's a big enough pit when you have to call me like you could tell like you know things it's a pretty pity pit I don't know anyone who has wound up in a pit for a reason other than what I just described they were pursuing happiness in some way that they were persuaded would lead to joy acceptance whatever it was that they were after it's just something we do guys and you know you and I will not be able to live the abundant life God has for us until we are free from competing in the earthly crown economy we just won't be who we need to be we're not able to say yes I have become mature until we're able to say I am no longer chasing all this stuff also it's really hard to be forgiving and gracious when people keep threatening your earthly crowns it's like

I can be forgiving to someone who does something against me it doesn't have any effect on my happiness whatsoever but man if they do something to me that has some great effect on my happiness then that's that's really going to sting well the key that I'm trying to lead you to see here is that the God of the universe the creator of all things the sustainer of all things the creator of all the stars in the sky all the black holes infinite of infinite eternal of eternal has himself put a crown on your head and this means you are free to stop competing for the crowns of this earthly world because you have already got the best one he already did it you are not in a competition with the rest of the world for acceptance or approval because the one whose approval and acceptance matters has already through Christ placed his crown of steadfast love and mercy on your head it's actually pretty easy to be a gracious person when you feel the weight of that crown sitting on your head and realize

[26 : 43] I have the one crown that I couldn't have earned and I can't lose because of me and that no one can take away from me it can't get canceled off my head if everybody decides to not like me tomorrow it'll still be there there is a resiliency and dare I say let me just say you cannot be the kind of gracious person I'm describing until you have a supernatural mix of humility and confidence and that that is something that only comes when you are conscious of the crown that God has placed on your head it isn't a crown you've earned that checks pride but it isn't a crown you can lose and that checks despair and mousiness and doormatiness I'm telling you that the key to being having a godly personality is to feel the weight of this incredible crown

I'm going to just close out with some examples from literature that I'm hoping will nudge you in the right direction to understand at least what you're looking for because what we're not looking for is someone who hears all of this but still is basically adapting a strategy of I will earn approval by being nice now we're asking we're not looking for that we're looking for someone who tells the truth doesn't compromise the truth but is also a person full of grace and mercy and I want to walk you through some historical stuff here to just kind of create a framing for the qualities that I think God would have us to pursue so real quickly back in the 19th century a philosopher in Germany his books all got burned eventually but a philosopher in Germany wrote a whole book on resentment that's really interesting because of course Nazism was the action of politicized resentment it was it's so funny when the left calls the right

Nazis because Nazism is grievance politics right that's that's a woke thing anyway Max Scheller he was thinking through resentment and how to get out of it how to get out of bitterness and forgiveness or unforgiveness and so forth and he was operating from a Christian framework and he starts talking about the noble person and that's what I'm calling you to today is to be a noble person to be self conscious that the God of the universe has placed a crown of steadfast love and mercy on your head and listen to how he talks about this the noble person has a completely naive and non-reflective awareness of his own value and his fullness of being an obscure conviction that enriches every conscious moment of his existence this should not be mistaken for pride quite the contrary pride results from an experienced diminution of this naive self confidence it's a way of holding on to one's value seizing and preserving it deliberately the noble man naive self confidence which is as natural to him as tension is to the muscles permits him calmly to assimilate the merits of others and all the fullness of their substance and configuration he never grudges them their merits on the contrary he rejoices in them let's tighten the lens a little bit

C.S. Lewis do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man he will be what most people call humble nowadays he will not be a sort of greasy smarmy person who is always telling you that of course he is nobody probably all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful intelligent chap who took a real interest in what you said to him if you do dislike him it will be because you feel a little envious of anyone who seems to enjoy life so easily he will not be thinking about humility he will not be thinking about himself at all that's what that crown will do you are just at the deepest levels of your soul satisfied in God you've opted out of the crown economy the person you're talking to is no longer something to be won over they're no longer holding a respect that you crave just a person and they're free to just be loved as people not as great obstacles or accelerators to our newest achievement in self respect we've sharpening the lens a little bit we can sharpen it even more we can go from 19th century

Germany 20th century England the first century Mediterranean Paul 1st Corinthians 15 10 but by the grace of God I am what I am that's all we're talking about today is to get there by the grace of God I am what I am and I'm at peace with that because Jesus has done it I saw him do it today I saw him do it yesterday when I laid down in my bed and confessed I just am what I am by the grace of God I am what I am and you start living here you will start having a godly personality one last touch point from history I know of no other fictional character in all the fiction I've read that best articulates what you don't want to be than a character from

[32 : 32] Les Mis named Javert if you are familiar with the story you know that this is really just a story about two men one of whom accepts grace and builds a whole life on it and another who refuses it Javert's entire crown seeking strategy was to be the most morally upright person he could be to be the most self righteous person he could be and his archenemy was a former convict named Jean Valjean who did not deserve in Javert's opinion to be free Jean Valjean himself encountered radical grace by a priest who forgave him for stealing and was a changed man because of that grace Javert is relentlessly pursuing Jean Valjean throughout the novel relentlessly insisting that he live up to the law as Javert determines it to be but then the tables turn because God is good

Javert is arrested by a bunch of rebels and led to a this Pharisee of a man is arrested and led to a firing squad and there he will die and Jean Valjean this man whose life had been surrendered just had been absolutely changed by grace and he knew it he never forgot it saw his mortal enemy the man who was desiring to kill him or lock him up saw his mortal enemy about to be killed in the firing squad went up to the firing squad took him off the firing squad took him privately and released him spared his life and said if you must arrest me come back to my house tomorrow let's end this but you are not going to die and Javert could not handle being the recipient of radical grace he couldn't handle it and this is how Victor Hugo describes Javert encountering this total pardon in which his enemy gave him freedom that he did not deserve his supreme anguish was the loss of certainty that feels really good to be in a moral economy that you make for yourself where all the rules kind of work in your favor that's what

Javert had done and now suddenly boom grace his supreme anguish was the loss of certainty he felt that he had been uprooted the code was no longer anything more than a stump in his hand he had to deal with the scruples of an unknown species there had taken place within him a sentimental revelation entirely distinct from legal affirmation his only standard of measurement hitherto hitherto to remain in his former uprightness did not suffice a whole order of unexpected facts had cropped up and subjugated him he perceived amid the shadows the terrible rising of an unknown moral sun it horrified and dazzled him what's happening is he realized that there's a law above the law and it's the law of steadfast love it's the law of grace and mercy and he realizes that his whole life had been dedicated to a lesser law and now being the recipient of this higher law he does not know what to do to himself and so the book ends with

Javert looking at the dark waters of the river Seine and taking his own life using his last bit of hard earned gritty self-discipline to drown himself in the waters he simply could not handle living in a grace based economy now that would be one way to go and unfortunately as I've preached over 30 years I've seen people walk to hell in their old age because they could not be a recipient of grace they simply had to earn it and they got what they earned and that's where Javert's story ends but you know Paul is Javert the apostle Paul is Javert until he meets Jesus on Damascus road because there's this alternative you if you're the person who's not a graceful person right now if you're a person who's not mostly showing mercy if you're a person who's not been transformed in that way you don't need to kill yourself in the river you just need to kill that part of yourself and Paul says that exactly in Galatians 2 20

I have been crucified with Christ it's no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me and the life I now live I live by faith in the son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me that's the new moral code which has always been the real moral code and so rather than kill himself Paul simply died to himself and took on this persona in which he was able to say I am the chief of sinners nevertheless grace was shown to me to show the perfect patience and mercy of the God of the universe it's all about reframing that salvation experience and every day afterward into the way that Paul sees it and that is I was shown mercy to show mercy I was shown mercy to show mercy and the more I confess my sins to the Lord the more scrupulous I am with his holy word not seeking to nullify the commandments of God or the holiness of God but to say this is

[38 : 10] God's righteous standard the more I bring my sins to the Lord and experience his extreme undeserved grace and forgiveness the more my heart gets deoxidized I put away resentment I also put away insecurity I got a crown on my head after all I don't have to fight in the earthly economy for approval because the God of the earth has shown his approval to me in Christ Jesus let's pray Lord God I pray that you would do a transforming work in our lives make us more gracious make us more kind and forgiving without ever even for a second compromising on the truth God give us regular frequent encounters with your undeserved grace so that we can see that every day we go through the car wash every single day you shower us with undeserved mercy please

Lord may your grace define our growth for the next year may you and your mercy be sort of the agenda of what we want to become in this coming year oh we love you Lord we don't deserve you we praise your holy name thank you that we are now going to celebrate the Lord's table which is your way of keeping us in Psalm 103 1 forget not all his benefits and so every week we gather and celebrate the table which is the representation of your steadfast love that we can taste and see so Lord as we take this table now would you please bless us with faith to see the substance behind the symbol in Jesus great name we pray amen