

December 16

Lesson 3 (NIV)

LOVE AND WORSHIP GOD

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 86:1-7
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Psalm 103:1-
17, 21, 22

PSALM 103:1-17A, 21, 22

- ¹ Praise the LORD, my soul;
all my inmost being, praise his
holy name.
- ² Praise the LORD, my soul,
and forget not all his benefits—
- ³ who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases,
- ⁴ who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and
compassion,
- ⁵ who satisfies your desires with
good things
so that your youth is renewed
like the eagle's.
- 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 trans-
gressions from us.
- ¹³ As a father has compassion on his
children,
so the LORD has compassion on
those who fear him;
- ¹⁴ for he knows how we are formed,
he remembers that we are dust.
- ¹⁵ The life of mortals is like grass,
they flourish like a flower of the
field;
- ¹⁶ the wind blows over it and it is
gone,
and its place remembers it no
more.
- ^{17a} But from everlasting to everlasting
the LORD's love is with those
who fear him.
- ²¹ Praise the LORD, all his heavenly
hosts,
you his servants who do his will.
- ²² Praise the LORD, all his works
everywhere in his dominion.

Praise the LORD, my soul.

KEY VERSE

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

OUR LOVE FOR GOD

Unit I: God Is Worthy of Our Love

LESSONS 1-5

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Give the reasons for praising the Lord found in today's text from **Psalm 103**.
2. Tell how these reasons apply to Christians living under Jesus' new covenant.
3. Compose a psalm to the Lord, combining an acknowledgment of the Lord's character with an awareness of the blessings he has given.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Praying It Upward
- B. Lesson Context
- I. Opening Exhortation (**PSALM 103:1-5**)
 - A. Reasons to Praise (vv. 1, 2)
 - B. Remembrance of Blessings (vv.

3-5)

- II. God's Character (**PSALM 103:6-17A**)
 - A. Righteous (vv. 6, 7)
 - B. Gracious (vv. 8-12)
Abundant Mercy
 - C. Compassionate (vv. 13-17a)
Prairie Grass
- III. Closing Exhortation (**PSALM 103:21, 22**)
 - A. To the Hosts of Heaven (v. 21)
 - B. To Every Place on Earth (v. 22)

Conclusion

- A. What's Your Story?
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Babylon	<i>Bab-uh-lun.</i>
Colossians	<i>Kuh-losh-unz.</i>
Ecclesiastes	<i>Ik-leez-ee-as-teez.</i>
Hosea	<i>Ho-zay-uh.</i>
Immanuel	<i>Ih-man-you-el.</i>
Micah	<i>My-kuh.</i>
parallelism	<i>pair-uh-le-li-zum.</i>
paralytic	<i>pair-uh-li-tik.</i>
Sinai	<i>Sigh-nye or Sigh-nay-eye.</i>

Introduction

A. Praying It Upward

Sometimes when a person is the recipient of a kind deed, the individual will

talk about “paying it forward.” The idea is that anyone who has been helped should “forward” that kindness to someone else. This way of thinking is meant to counter a self-centered, “me first” frame of mind.

The principle of paying it forward can be drawn from certain biblical passages. When sending his disciples to preach and do miracles in his name, Jesus said, “Freely you have received; freely give” ([Matthew 10:8](#); compare [Romans 15:25-27](#)).

Scripture also encourages the practice of “praying it upward,” of acknowledging that “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” ([James 1:17](#)). Offering praise to the Lord does not mean ignoring the needs of others around us; if anything, it encourages us to bless others as we have been blessed and to thus “pay forward” the goodness we have received from God.

The Bible includes dozens of commands to praise the Lord. The book of Psalms witnesses many such imperatives and a variety of expressions of praise to God. One such is the source of today’s lesson text.

B. Lesson Context

The book of Psalms has often been described as “Israel’s hymnal.” It is

replete with expressions of emotions directed to God. These range from praise (as in today’s passage from [Psalm 103](#)) to extreme frustration and anger at how God appears to be addressing (or not addressing) the problems of a broken world. Often there is disappointment and confusion expressed over how God’s own covenant people are being mistreated while evildoers seem to suffer no consequences in doing as they please (see [Psalms 73](#) and [74](#)). No sentiment seems to be off-limits in the Psalms. This makes the book of immense value to God’s people when they pray.

The above factors and others have resulted in Bible scholars noting various types of Psalms. These include hymns, psalms of thanksgiving, laments, royal psalms, wisdom psalms, and messianic psalms. Certainly some of these can overlap, so one must be careful not to be too rigid with such classifications. A writer can go from lament to praise in the same brief psalm (as in [Psalm 13](#)).

Like any hymnal, the book of Psalms includes contributions by different authors and covers a wide span of time. The oldest psalm is by Moses ([Psalm 90](#)), and there is at least one psalm that comes out of the setting of the captivity of God’s people in Babylon ([Psalm 137](#)). These two benchmarks are separated by approximately 900 years.

About half of the psalms are attributed to King David, known as “the hero of Israel’s songs” (2 Samuel 23:1). Today’s passage from Psalm 103 is one of those psalms. While some psalms include a superscription that provides the setting (example: Psalm 51), there is no such background given for Psalm 103. It simply notes the association with David.

I. Opening Exhortation (PSALM 103:1-5)

A. Reasons to Praise (vv. 1, 2)

1. Praise the LORD, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name.

The word translated *praise* is used in Scripture of what people offer up to God as well as of what God does for people. In the latter case, the translation may be some form of the word “bless” (example: Psalm 107:38). Because God blesses, he is praised. God’s blessings are his gifts, what the psalmist (David) calls “his benefits” (103:2, next). People’s blessing of God is expressed in praise of him and gratitude for those benefits.

David’s *praise* of the Lord is not a casual, half-hearted sentiment. It comes from his very *soul*. In the Old Testament, the word *soul* is often used to signify a person’s being or essence. The frequently used device in Hebrew poetry known as parallelism, in which the second line of a

verse repeats the thought of the first line—sometimes in reverse order—highlights this meaning. We saw this earlier as an example in lesson 1:

Praise the Lord,
all my inmost being,

my soul;
praise his holy name.

An individual’s soul is therefore *all [a person’s] inmost being*. In a sense, David is talking to himself, encouraging remembrance of the Lord’s goodness. Similar “soul talk” is found in Psalm 42:5, 11. A person’s *name* represents that individual’s character or uniqueness. God’s holiness is one of his most prominent qualities (examples: Leviticus 19:2; Joshua 24:19; Psalm 99:3, 5, 9; Isaiah 6:1-3; Revelation 4:8; 15:4).

What Do You Think?

In what ways can the church keep God’s name holy?

Digging Deeper

What will be your part in helping it do so?

2. Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—

One’s offering of praise to God is closely linked with remembering all he has done. Thus David expresses the desire not to *forget* all the blessings the Lord provides. Moses urged the Israelites who were on the verge of entering the promised land to remember the Lord’s

goodness. He also warned them of the high price that would accompany forgetfulness ([Deuteronomy 8:10–20](#)). Israel’s track record in this matter is hardly exemplary (see [Psalm 106](#)).

B. Remembrance of Blessings (vv. 3–5)

3. who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases,

Here David specifies some of the Lord’s blessings. They are both spiritual (the forgiveness of *sins*) and physical (the healing of *diseases*) in nature. As Immanuel (“God with us”; compare [Isaiah 7:14](#)), Jesus demonstrated his power both to forgive sins and heal diseases, as in the case of the paralytic brought to Jesus ([Mark 2:1–12](#)).

What Do You Think?

How can Sunday school classes do better at ensuring the prayer time focuses just as much, if not more, on spiritual issues as it does on bodily health?

Digging Deeper

As a result of doing an online Bible search of the phrase “pray for,” what changes do you need to make in your own prayer life?

4. who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion,

David describes God’s power to

change our circumstances from the worst to the best—to be treated as royalty as we are crowned *with love and compassion*. Christians can give thanks for the redemption provided by Jesus’ death and resurrection; his work has left death itself destroyed ([1 Corinthians 15:26](#)).

5a. who satisfies your desires with good things

David focuses on the material blessings (*good things*) that only the Lord can provide. The Lord as provider is a theme repeated often in the Psalms (examples: [Psalms 103:5; 104:28; 145:16](#)).

5b. so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

Compare [Isaiah 40:29–31](#).

II. God’s Character ([PSALM 103:6–17a](#))

A. Righteous (vv. 6, 7)

6. The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.

David now calls attention to the Lord’s compassion toward the *oppressed*. *The Lord* has always been passionate that *righteousness and justice* be carried out on behalf of those who are often mistreated or overlooked because of their powerless status. The Lord makes clear how compassionate he is toward groups such as widows and orphans ([Deuteronomy 24:17–22](#); compare [Exodus 23:3, 6, 9](#)).

His people, however, do not always demonstrate such compassion, which is why the Scriptures (both Old and New Testament) highlight the necessity of seeing such people, or anyone in need, as God sees them ([Isaiah 1:17, 23](#); [Jeremiah 7:1-7](#); [Matthew 25:31-46](#); [James 1:27](#)).

What Do You Think?

In what ways can believers stand up for the oppressed today?

Digging Deeper

What will be your part in doing so?

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

Within pagan religions, the worshippers are often left groping and guessing what the deities desire. There is no concept of revealed truth. In contrast, the Lord has not left his covenant people in such uncertainty. He has revealed his will for all people through the words of Holy Scripture.

Moses told the Israelites “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law” ([Deuteronomy 29:29](#)). God’s *deeds* on behalf of his people cannot be duplicated by any other god, for there is no other god.

B. Gracious (vv. 8-12)

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

This verse proclaims one of the most important statements of faith within the Old Testament. It was first revealed to Moses when the Lord permitted him to see a portion of his glory on Mount Sinai and “proclaimed his name, the Lord” before him ([Exodus 34:5-7](#)). It is highlighted, with minor variations, at various places within the Old Testament ([Numbers 14:17-19](#); [Nehemiah 9:16, 17](#); [Psalms 86:15](#); [145:8](#); [Joel 2:13](#); [Jonah 4:2](#)).

What Do You Think?

What are some ways the church can extend God’s graciousness to others?

Digging Deeper

What will be your part in doing so?

9a. He will not always accuse,

The word translated *accuse* comes from a Hebrew word that indicates bringing a case to court ([Hosea 4:1-4](#); [Micah 6:1, 2](#)). That happens when human sin reaches a critical point and must be confronted. But God delights most of all in showing grace, as the previous verse notes. Satan is the one who carries the reputation of being “the accuser of our brothers and sisters” ([Revelation 12:10](#)).

9b. nor will he harbor his anger forever;

God does not let his anger smolder or allow it to control his entire perspective and temperament, as is often the case with human anger. God's anger is not like human anger, which is often uncontrolled, irrational, and guided by highly questionable motives. "Human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires" (James 1:20). God's wrath, by contrast, is a holy, righteous response to human sin. He alone knows when and how to administer it. But it is clear to David (and to all those in Scripture who know God in an intimate way) that God's mercy and grace are what make him worth "praising" with all one's soul.

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

The clearest evidence of God's mercy is in the way he deals with human sin. If he were to treat us as we *deserve*, based on *our sins*, then our plight would be hopeless. "If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you" (Psalm 130:3, 4).

ABUNDANT MERCY

I heard a loud crash from the bedroom where my daughter was playing. It sounded like a waterfall of knickknacks, all of them breaking on their way down. I ran to the bedroom to see what had hap-

pened.

Entering the room, I saw my daughter standing in front of a pile of rubble that had once been ceramic figurines, picture frames, and handmade art projects. The shelf they had been on lay on top of them. "I don't know what happened, Mom! It just fell off the wall!" my daughter exclaimed. We began the cleanup process and managed to salvage quite a few of the most favored objects. I told her that accidents happen, and we went back to our separate activities.

A few minutes later, my daughter emerged from her room, a penitent look on her face. "I have to tell you something. It didn't just fall off the wall," she said. "I was jumping, and I knocked it down." She looked down in embarrassment. While I was shocked and unhappy that my daughter had lied to me earlier, her obvious shame went to my heart. She was penitent, and I could see that she regretted her lie. We talked about why lying is wrong and how it can destroy relationships. Then I forgave her.

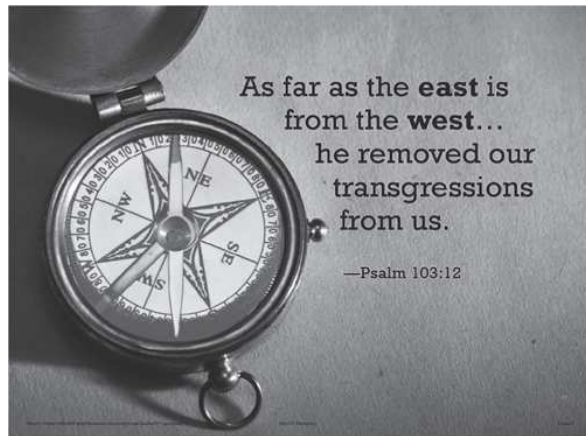
The psalmist (David) says that God's anger does not last forever. He is "compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love," and he does not "repay us according to our iniquities." Do you forgive as God forgives you? See the next two verses.

—L. M. W.

11, 12. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

Our knowledge of the vastness of the heavens is far, far greater than it was in David's time. Yet his words are still true: their height cannot provide an adequate means of measuring the extent of the Lord's love for those who fear him.

In measuring how far *the east is from the west*, some have observed that a person could begin at a certain point and travel south to the South Pole then north to the North Pole, then travel south again to the original starting point. However, a person could travel around the world many times going east, reaching the starting point repeatedly without ever moving in any direction but east. Thus we can speak of a North Pole and a South Pole but not of an East Pole or a West Pole, since there is no place at which east meets west. God's intention is that our sins be *removed* so that we never "meet" them again.



Visual for Lesson 3. Read the commentary on *Psalm 103:11, 12* aloud, and then ask, "How does what you heard help you appreciate these verses?"

C. Compassionate (vv. 13–17a)

13. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;

The knowledge of God as a *father* is more clearly revealed in the New Testament because of the fuller revelation of God provided by Jesus. But God as father is not totally foreign to the Old Testament (*Deuteronomy 32:6; Psalm 89:26*). Fathers who read a verse such as this must ask themselves how much sympathy they consistently demonstrate toward their children. Or do they "embitter" their children so that they "become discouraged," which Paul warns fathers not to do (*Colossians 3:21*)?

14. for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are

dust.

As Creator, God knows how we are put together. The Hebrew verb from which *formed* comes is used in [Genesis 2:7](#) to describe how God “formed” man from *dust*. From our perspective that fact may cause us to reflect on our unworthiness and inadequacy. God sees it as a reason for sympathy and patience.

15, 16. The life of mortals is like grass, they flourish like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.

These verses also comment on the transitory nature of human existence. As we age, we tend to recognize our limitations, and we sense how quickly time has passed. But even young people should acknowledge the truth of David’s words and “remember [their] Creator in the days of [their] youth” ([Ecclesiastes 12:1](#)).

17a. But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD’s love is with those who fear him.

In contrast with humanity’s temporary, fleeting existence, *the Lord’s love is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him*. This echoes the previous “limitless” language of verses [11](#) and [12](#). Rather than dwell on the frailty of human beings, David finds his delight in exalting the faithfulness of God.

PRAIRIE GRASS

We moved to our new home in the Midwest in the month of June, just as the prairies surrounding our town became green and lush. Every day on my drive to work, I passed field after field of green grass dotted with yellow and purple flowers. When the wind passed over it, the grass waved in the current, resembling a green ocean tossing gently in the wind. A few times I felt compelled to stop my car and roll down the window just to watch this unique beauty.

We had lived there a few years when we heard about huge wildfires sweeping across Kansas, south of our home in Nebraska. Although the fires never came close to us, we learned that they affected more than 651,000 acres of land, destroying pastureland and killing thousands of cattle, not to mention consuming homes and taking people’s lives in the process. Reports say that high winds fed the flames, spreading them quickly in grass that served as tinder after an extremely dry and warm winter.

These fires, the largest in the history of Kansas, remind us that the beautiful grasses and flowers are only temporary. [Psalm 103:15-17](#) compares our days with that of the grass or the flowers of the field. We flourish for a time, but the wind passes over us, and we are gone. In contrast, “From everlasting to everlasting the

Lord's love is with those who fear him.”

—L. M. W.

What Do You Think?

How should [Psalm 103:15, 16](#) change your priorities?

Digging Deeper

How does your answer change, if at all, when [Psalm 103:15, 16](#) is considered alongside [Psalm 90:12](#)?

III. Closing Exhortation ([PSALM 103:21, 22](#))

A. To the Hosts of Heaven (v. 21)

21. Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will.

As the psalm nears its conclusion, David returns to his original command to *praise the Lord*. In so doing, David calls on *all* of God's *hosts* to do so. Angels are called on to do so in [Psalm 103:20](#) (not in today's text). This may be another instance of parallelism, where one expression is synonymous with the other. One may think of the “great company of the heavenly host” that assembled to praise God on the night of Jesus' birth ([Luke 2:13](#)).

On the other hand, it may be that these hosts are the starry hosts, or celestial bodies ([Deuteronomy 4:19](#)). Such were created as the Lord's *servants* to do his bidding, as indicated when he created

them ([Genesis 1:14–18](#)).

B. To Every Place on Earth (v. 22)

22. Praise the LORD, all his works everywhere in his dominion. Praise the LORD, my soul.

David concludes with a call to the entire creation to join him in his adoration of *the Lord*. Clearly he does not want to perform a solo! At the same time, praise is something intensely personal for David, and he never grows tired of expressing it. He ends the psalm with the same enthusiasm he had at the beginning.

Conclusion

A. What's Your Story?

As you think about God's blessings in your own life, what comes to mind? What's your story? What psalm, poem, or testimony could you compose to “praise the Lord”?

No doubt every one of us could point to circumstances, whether in another country, our own nation, our city or county, or our personal lives, that reflect how badly broken by sin this world continues to be. David, the author of [Psalm 103](#), certainly experienced much heartache and sorrow during his lifetime—much of it due to his own choices to disobey God.

It may seem hard to believe that we

are in the midst of another Christmas season and approaching the end of another year. If you have a calendar on the wall somewhere in your home, flip back to January of this year. Go through each month and think about the blessings you have received. (You may want to write them down or keep a record of them electronically.) Consider, as David did, both the spiritual and material blessings given by the Lord. Thank him for the circumstances and the people he brought into your life—even during the hard times, those situations that were not on your schedule or even in your mind when the year began. And take time to “praise the Lord.”

Some of the brokenness resulting from the curse of sin will not be fully eliminated until Jesus returns and “a new heaven and a new earth” ([Revelation 21:1](#)) are established for eternity. At that time, all diseases of all varieties will be done away with for good. Until then we—like Paul, whose thorn in the flesh remained despite his prayers that it be removed—must trust God’s grace to be sufficient and trust that he will use us to bear witness of his power even in the throes of our pain ([2 Corinthians 12:7–10](#)). There is no excuse not to praise the Lord!

B. Prayer

Father, may we bless and magnify

your name! We praise you for the grace you have shown to us, especially now during this season of remembering the wondrous gift placed in the manger in Bethlehem. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Learn to speak the language of blessing and praise.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible](#)
Student

Into the Lesson

Distribute self-stick notes and pens. As you do, ask learners to take one minute to write down one or two blessings for which they are thankful. After you call time, have volunteers share their blessings and affix their notes onto the board or wall.

State: “Today we will be reading a psalm that David wrote in which he praises God for his blessings. Let’s read David’s psalm and consider his reasons for feeling blessed and the ways he praised the Lord.”

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Satisfied with Good Things” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have students work in pairs to unscramble the words and solve the puzzle. Tell them the message is the main theme of today’s lesson.

Into the Word

Have a volunteer read [Psalm 103](#) aloud to the class. Allow learners to work in pairs or teams of three to read the psalm again, identifying reasons for David’s thankfulness. Make sure each pair or

group has paper and pen. After five to seven minutes, they should have identified the following regarding God’s actions: he *forgives sins, heals diseases, redeems life, crowns with love and compassion, satisfies with good things, renews youth, brings about righteousness and justice, is compassionate and gracious, has not dealt with us according to our sins/iniquities.* Have each reason written on a self-stick note ahead of time. Use notes of a different color from those used earlier.

Ask pairs or groups to share identified reasons for David’s praise. As they do so, affix the note with that reason on the board or wall where students placed their notes earlier. Draw attention to the fact that David’s praise can be divided into categories. Verses [1](#) and [2](#) address reasons to praise. Verses [3-5](#) are a remembrance of blessings. Verses [6-17a](#) contain praise for God’s character.

As you place each reason on the board or wall, encourage learners to share how they might be able to relate to the reason and why it is meaningful to them. Ask, “How do you think David blesses or praises God in this psalm?” To help learners to realize the importance of recognizing and remembering our blessings, explain that the very action of being thankful for our blessings is a blessing to God. Ask, “How do we know that we should all praise the Lord?” If no one else

does so, point out that in verse 22, David says, “Praise the Lord, ... Praise the Lord, my soul.”

Remind learners that in Luke 19:40, Jesus told the Pharisees, when they asked him to rebuke his disciples for praising him that, “I tell you ... if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

Ask learners to look again at the reasons David praised and think about the new covenant that we have because of Jesus. Ask, “How do these reasons apply to Christians living under the new covenant?” Jot responses on the board during a time of open discussion.

Into Life

Say, “In the busyness of life, especially in the weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas, we may fail to recognize our blessings and praise God who provides for us. Let’s take the next five minutes or so to write a group song or prayer of praise.”

Provide sheets of paper on which learners can write the lines of the prayer or praise song. After they do, ask them to read it together. Say, “Perhaps you can post your song on your refrigerator or mirror so you can read it again and again to praise the Lord in the coming weeks.”

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Praise Journal” activity from the reproducible page. Provide about one minute

for learners to complete as indicated. Close by reading or singing “To God Be the Glory, Great Things He Has Done.”

To print the reproducible activity page, simply click the highlighted text below to create a pdf file on your hard drive.

Then open the pdf file in Acrobat Reader and print.

[Activity Page \(December 16—Love and Worship God\)](#)

LOVE AND WORSHIP GOD

Lesson 3, Psalm 103:1-17a, 21, 22, NIV

SATISFIED WITH GOOD THINGS

Unscramble these words found in Psalm 103. Copy the letters in the numbered blanks to the blanks at the bottom to figure out the message.

1. HERTAF	1	_____					
2. SESSADEI	4	13	11	_____			
3. TINBEEFS	8	7	_____				
4. TOSRUSSHENGI	_____	6	_____	3	12	16	
5. GEART	15	_____	5	_____			
6. RITNLASVEEG	10	_____	9	_____	2	14	_____

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16

PRAISE JOURNAL

In Psalm 103 David begins by praising the Lord and listing many reasons why he deserves praise. Now it's your turn to praise him!

Praise the Lord, _____, praise his holy name!
(your name)

Praise the Lord, and don't forget all of the reasons why you are praising him!

List three reasons why you praise him.

I praise you because _____

I praise you because _____

I praise you because _____

Lord, you have been merciful and gracious to me. I have seen your mercy and love when . . .

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