



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Summer Playlist

Remember – Part 1

Steve Lombardo | July 12, 2020



Have you ever asked, "What's in it for me? What am I going to get out of this?" Now, if you're like me and have been raised in a respectable Christian home, that might be a question you've shied away from, because you don't want to seem like you're selfish. You don't want to seem like you're just thinking about yourself. So why would you ask that question about anything? Why would you ask that question about Christianity or following Jesus Christ? That would seem pretty selfish. But you know, that's not a bad question. It's not wrong to ask, "What's in it for me?" in relation to following after Jesus Christ?

When you're making biblically-based decisions, you should be asking, "What's in it for me?" There are places in the New Testament where we see this question being asked. In some places, there's a negative connotation. I'm thinking of the time when Jesus' disciples asked to be seated on His right hand and on His left when He would come into His Kingdom (Mark 10:35-45). They had their mother make the petition for them. They were rebuked for this request, but not because of the question, "What's in it for me?" They were rebuked because it was not right for them to seek those high positions in the Kingdom of God.

There are other places where this question was asked when it wasn't seen as a bad question. I think of Luke 18, when the rich young ruler came up to Jesus and asked, "Rabbi, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" This man had a lot going for him, telling Jesus he had already kept the laws. Jesus does not rebuke him for asking about how to obtain eternal life. Rather, He spoke to the man's heart what he actually needed to hear: "Sell all you have and store up treasure in heaven." That wasn't a rejection of the question; it actually doubled down on it. "If you want to have the best possible life in My eternal Kingdom, here's how you would do that." The question was a good one.

Then I think of the thieves on the cross in Luke 23. One of them said to Jesus, "You said You could save others; save Yourself and save us." Then the other thief rebuked him and said, "Can't you see this Man has done nothing wrong? Jesus, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom." In essence, he was pleading for help because he believed His Kingdom was real. He believed Jesus was Who He was, so he didn't want his life to be wasted. Jesus told him, "*Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise*" (Luke 23:43). The question "What's in it for me?" is not a bad question.

A final example is when Peter acted as a spokesperson for the rest of the disciples in Mark 10:28-30. He told Jesus, "We've given up everything to follow You." Jesus responded, "Everyone who gives up everything in their lives—their job, their family, their way of life—for My sake will receive 100-fold in the Kingdom that is yet to come." There was something better in store for them. He didn't say to Peter, "How dare you ask that question?"

In other places, Jesus told people to consider the cost. Asking "What's in it for me?" is not a bad question for those of you who seek to follow Jesus, who call yourselves Christians and who seek to make decisions based on Scripture. Young people might be saying, "I'm going to commit to purity before I'm married." This might bring ridicule, but it's a Christ-like decision. Others might say, "I'll pray for my enemy instead of paying him back." When we live out the teachings of Jesus when we're lied about or reviled or hated for His sake, I'm here to tell you it's worth it. There are glorious benefits in store for those who follow after God.

The big idea today for Psalm 103 is that God is wonderfully good and that He lavishes awesome benefits on His children. So praise Him. Bless His name. That's the message of Psalm 103. It's at the beginning of the Psalm, but it's also at the end, in verses 20-23:

Bless the Lord, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word! Bless the Lord, all his hosts, his ministers, who do his will! Bless the Lord, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the Lord, O my soul!

The psalmist David ended this hymn of praise in the same way he started it: by praising the Lord. All creation is to bless the Lord, because He is wonderfully good and has great things for those who follow after Him.

I want to read the first five verses, then we're going to concentrate on them in this part of our Summer Playlist. I'm going to read from two different translations just to get the flavor. You may be familiar with the King James Version, which I'll read first, then I'll read the same verses from the New Living Translation. I think both of these reflect the Hebrew text well. Then for the rest of our text we'll be using the English Standard Version. But first, Psalm 103:1-5 in the King James Version:

Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.
Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:
Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases;
Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies;
Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.

So if "satisfieth" doesn't speak your language, listen now to the New Living Translation:

Praise the Lord, I tell myself;
with my whole heart, I will praise his holy name.
Praise the Lord, I tell myself;
and never forget the good things he does for me.
He forgives all my sins
and heals all my diseases.
He ransoms me from death
and surrounds me with love and tender mercies.
⁵He fills my life with good things.
My youth is renewed like the eagle's!

The first thing I want to mention here is that David is commanding himself to praise the Lord, to worship God and bless His name. That's what comes out in the New Living Translation: "I tell myself." He's commanding himself. It's not always about feelings. Your walk with God is not dependent on how you feel. Here David is commanding his own soul to praise the Lord. He's making a decision to worship, honor and magnify God. That's good news for us when our feelings fluctuate. We can command ourselves to praise the God Who gives great things to His children.

I want to list the five benefits of following God that David gives us in the first five verses. In verses one and two we read, "*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.*" Here are the benefits.

Number one: God gives us forgiveness. "*Who forgives all your iniquity*" (verse three). That means everything can be okay. Even though we might be sinful or wrong or in trouble, there is the possibility of forgiveness. There is the possibility we can be made right with the God of heaven and earth, the God Who made us. Everything will be okay, despite our sins and shortcomings and all the trouble we've gotten into. But in order to receive this forgiveness, we must acknowledge the second part of verse three. In order to receive this forgiveness David is singing about, we have to acknowledge our iniquity.

In my life, I have found that everyone agrees they are a sinner. It's almost as if when everyone says that it makes it a little more palatable. It's not that big of a deal. But while everyone admits they are a sinner, many people justify their sin. Here's what I mean by that. They'll do one of two things. First, they'll minimize their sin, like it's no big deal. I've been there. We do this by pointing to how much good we do to balance out the bad. "Of course I'm sinful, but haven't you seen what I've done over here? At the end of my life, I hope the good I've done will outweigh the bad. Then God—if there is a God—will accept me." That's how the reasoning goes. It minimizes sin to justify one's self before God.

The other way people minimize their sin is to compare their sin to the sin of others. "Yes, I sin. Yes, I'm wrong in that. But have you seen what so-and-so has done? Do you know what she did to me?" It's easy to find someone else who sins more than we do, using that to

minimize and justify what we've done. But in order to receive God's forgiveness, we must acknowledge that we have iniquity that is an abomination before the Lord.

There are some people who also try to manage their sin. We all have to live with sin and get on with our lives. We either minimize our sin to make ourselves feel better or we manage it—or we might even master it through self-discipline. "You know what? I've been drinking too much lately. I realize I've lost control and hurt people because of how much I drink. I'm going to scale back. I'm only going to drink on the weekends." Or "Yeah, I get in trouble with mixed drinks, so I'm going to shift over to beer or wine for a while." This is a form of sin management. Now hear me—I'm not saying it's a sin to drink alcoholic beverages, but some of you who have struggled with drinking understand what I'm saying. You think you can manage what you drink and that will solve the problem.

Or "I have a lying tongue, so I'm going to cut that back a bit." "I'm going to make a commitment not to speak badly about others." That's a self-discipline to manage sin that makes our sin palatable to us, justifying us in our own minds. Our sin is a serious problem and we need the forgiveness only God gives. Praise God, He is the One Who forgives all our iniquity.

In Psalm 25:11, David says, "*For your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my guilt, for it is great.*" David knew his sin. He was acquainted with sorrow and he spoke about how great his sin was. In Psalm 130:3-4 we read, "*If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,*"—or keep a record—"O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared." If God is going to keep records, who's going to be able to stand? Nobody. Sin is dreadful. Sin is horrendous. Sin is an abomination before God. Who could stand before Him?

Back to Psalm 103, look at verse 12 where the psalmist unpacks how God forgives. "*As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.*" Instead of keeping a record of wrongs, here's the picture of what God does. He takes our sins—our iniquities—away from us "*as far as the east is from the west.*" How far is that? That's a long way. That means they're gone, removed. We know He does this by His atoning sacrifice on the cross of Calvary through the Lord Jesus Christ. Colossians 2:13-14 tells us:

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

It's the cross of Jesus Christ which provides the basis for our justification, forgiveness and salvation. In Colossians 1:13-14 we read, "*He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*" Forgiveness of sins comes only through the Lord Jesus Christ. It's the great exchange. Jesus, the Man Who knew no sin, became sin for us. He died on the cross. "Jesus in my place" is the gospel in four words. If we believe in Him, we will not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16). He bore our sin on the cross so we might receive His own righteousness. We can stand before God as justified, forgiven sinners because of the cross of Jesus Christ. It's the glorious gospel.

John Stott, in his book *The Contemporary Christian*, writes:

Not long before she died in 1988, in a moment of surprising candor in television, Marghanita Laski, one of our best-known secular humanists and novelists, said, "What I envy most about you Christians is your forgiveness; I have nobody to forgive me."

What a glorious God we serve! What a great benefit! "What's in it for me?" Forgiveness of your sins. Freedom from a guilty conscience. God will forgive your sin if you come to Him, admit your sin, repent, turn and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

In his book *Lee: The Last Years*, Charles Flood reports that after the Civil War, Robert E. Lee visited a lady in Kentucky.

She took him to the remains of a grand old tree in front of her house. There she bitterly cried that its limbs and trunk had been destroyed by Federal artillery fire. She looked to Lee for a word condemning the North or at least sympathizing with her loss. After a brief silence, Lee said, "Cut it down, my dear Madam, and forget it." It is better to forgive the injustices of the past than to allow them to remain. Let bitterness take root and poison the rest of your life.

O, that we as God's people would practice the forgiveness we have received, that we would forgive like we've been forgiven. If you missed the rest of this message and you're just tuning in to hear this, I want you to know you can be forgiven of all your sins. It's not too late. As long as you have breath, there's hope. You can turn to Jesus Christ by faith and be forgiven for all your sins—the past, the present and the future. When we speak of the benefits of following Christ, forgiveness is a big one.

Psalm 103:2-3 says, "*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquities,*" and **then the second benefit, "who heals all your diseases."** God heals all diseases. He's not at the mercy of cancer. He doesn't cower at the thought of COVID. God

is our Healer. He is Jehovah Rapha, the God Who heals. In Exodus 15:26, when God promises to heal the nation of Israel and protect them from all the plagues He sent to the nation of Egypt, He's called "the God Who heals."

This is not just limited to physical healing. Most of the time when Scripture speaks of the healing we receive from God, it has to do with things I would say are deeper issues than just the physical. That's not to minimize anyone's physical pain that can definitely be debilitating, tearing at the very foundation of your life. But there is a greater healing which is the healing of the heart, soul and mind. In Psalm 147:3 the psalmist writes, "*He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.*"

In Isaiah 30:26 we read, "*The Lord binds up the brokenness of his people, and heals the wounds inflicted by his blow.*" Does this mean our God inflicts wounds? Yes, as part of the process of our sanctification, but He promises to heal those wounds. Hosea 6:1 says, "*Come, let us return to the Lord; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up.*" If God inflicts wounds and pain, He promises to heal and restore.

In the New Testament, Jesus is the Great Physician. Mark 2:17 tells us He didn't come for people who weren't sick and who didn't need a physician. He came to heal the sick. In Matthew 8:14-17 we read this as He fulfills the words of the prophets:

And when Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever. He touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and began to serve him. That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases."

That's our Lord Jesus Christ, the Great Physician. We're praising Him with David in Psalm 103, but what if He doesn't come through with healing? We must keep trusting and keep asking.

Let me be pastoral for a minute. You must continue to plead with the Lord and He will heal you. It might be next week; it might be in the life that is to come, but there is healing promised to you.

One of my favorite quotes from a Puritan is from Thomas Goodwin who said:

God has a multitude of all kinds of mercies. As our hearts and the devil are the father of a variety of sins, so God is the Father of a variety of mercies. There is no sin or misery but God has a mercy for it. He has a multitude of mercies of every kind. As there are a variety of miseries which the creature is subject unto, so he has in himself a shop, a treasury of all sorts of mercies, divided into several promises in the Scripture, which are but as so many boxes of this treasure, the caskets of a variety of mercies. If your heart be hard, His mercies are tender. If your heart be dead, He has mercy to liven it. If you be sick, He has mercy to heal you. If you be sinful, He has mercies to sanctify and cleanse you.

Our God is Jehovah Rapha, our Healer. The benefits of following God are forgiveness and healing.

Then the third benefit in verse four is, "*Who redeems your life from the pit.*" Why, David, are we to praise the Lord? Why are we to bless Him? Why are we commanding ourselves to do these things? Because God promises redemption for His people. God redeems your life from the pit. You were dead in your sins. You were stuck in the miry clay. You were stuck in the pit of disease and despair when God reached down, plucked you out and saved you.

Pat Morris Neff was the president of the Southern Baptist Convention many years ago. Before that he was president of Baylor University. and before that he was the governor of the great state of Texas from 1921 to 1925. During the time he was governor, he visited the state penitentiaries to evaluate the prison system in his state. He talked to the prisoners, then he told them, "I'm going to stick around afterwards if you'd like to talk to me. I'd be happy to hear how things are here and how you're doing." He reported that inmate after inmate after inmate came up to him and told him how they had been wrongfully accused and were unjustly in prison. They said they didn't deserve the treatment they had and wanted to be freed.

There was one man who came up to Governor Neff and said, "I am here justly. I committed the crime and I deserve this punishment." He had served many years already, but he believed it was just. He then added that during those years, God had changed his heart and he had been rehabilitated. He hoped there would be a day when he would be given another chance. Governor Neff responded by pardoning that man because he realized the severity of his sin and longed for redemption. This is like our God. He forgives, heals and redeems us from the pit.

Psalm 103:4 continues with the fourth benefit which is, "*Who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy.*" The word in the Hebrew is *cheched* which means loyal love. God takes us out of the pit, then bestows His loyal love on us.

I will give you a disclaimer here. I graduated from one of the top seminaries in the world—or so I'm told—Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. When I graduated with a Master of Divinity degree, they said I was proficient in the biblical languages. That includes Old Testament Hebrew and Koine Greek, the language of the New Testament. But from my view, I was kind of proficient in New Testament Greek, but I was not at all proficient in Hebrew. During my first semester at Trinity when I studied Hebrew, my professor was a Korean doctoral student. He had a thick Korean accent and his English wasn't very good. Yet he was teaching me this ancient Near East language that did not resemble my language at all. Greek at least has some similarities to English, but not Hebrew? I had to read from right to left, which felt backwards. I couldn't understand my teacher's English, let alone his Hebrew. I was in for trouble. I won't tell you what grade I got in that class. Some of you might think a B+ is a terrible grade. Mine wasn't that good. It was horrendous, but I did make it through somehow. I memorized huge chunks of the Old Testament in order to recognize one word and then be able to translate the passage because I'd memorized it in English. You're not supposed to do that, by the way. Please don't tell them; they might take my degree back.

Having said that, *cheched* is one word I remember learning. It's a fascinating word and we'll speak more about it the next time we come to Psalm 103. The English Standard Version translates it "steadfast love." It's God's covenant love. It has also been translated "lovingkindness" or "loyal love." It's an amazing love that we would all be so lucky to experience in our lives. Now, I know there's no such thing as luck with the Lord. He's sovereign and in control, but you know what I'm saying. We would be so lucky to have a marriage where *cheched* is practiced. It's a settled love that's not dependent on emotions. It's also not dependent on the person's actions who is receiving the love. This love is something that is decided upon and does not change. It's a powerful love, a love that puts the best construction on the person. This is God's steadfast love—His *cheched* love. This is an amazing benefit. I hope you find it in your marriage and I hope you find it in friendship.

In Micah 7:18 we read, "*Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love.*" There it is: *cheched*. God doesn't remember our sin. He delights in this glorious covenantal love. It's also used in Psalm 103:8, 11 and 17. Verse 11 says, "*For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him.*" How great is this love? How awesome is this love that He crowns us with? It's as high as the heavens are above the earth.

I'm a nerd and like to study about science. The universe is an amazing thing. Light moves at a speed of 186,000 miles per second. In one year, therefore, light travels six trillion miles. The closest star to us, other than our sun, is 4.2 light years away. That's 25 million miles. Some stars you see in the sky, by the way, are 2,000 light years away. How far is that? Well, if you get on an airplane and fly across the United States, it will take five and a half hours. In that same jet liner, you can go around the world in two days. If you could take that jet toward the sun—which would be a bad move—it would take you 20 years to get to the sun. If you were to fly in that airplane to that nearest star, it would take you 52 million years. And that's the closest star in the heavens. As high as the heavens are above the earth, that's how great His love for you is.

Growing up in a pastor's home, I had the great opportunity to go along with my dad on pastoral visits. I remember going to the house of a man named Art Larson. Art was a farmer who lived out on his farm. One day, when Dad was talking to Art, my eyes wandered to an end table where there was a big bowl of mints. I don't see this kind of mint that often anymore, but they were the white oval-shaped mints which have green gel in the middle to give it an extra minty kick. I really wanted one. Art noticed what I was looking at and as a seasoned saint, he asked me, "Would you like a mint?" I said, "Yes, please." He held the bowl out to me and I took one mint. Art then said, "Take a whole handful." Ah! That's just what this little boy wanted to hear. I took a whole handful. I walked out of that pastoral visit with my dad with pockets overflowing with mints, with my hands full of mints and with my cheeks full of mints.

That is a picture of the lavish love of God—His steadfast love for us. It's not just one mint. It's, "Take as much as you can carry." That's why Paul could write in Romans 8:38-39, "*For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" Receive this love—this *cheched* love. It is for you. It's one of the benefits of being a child of God.

The last benefit, number five, is satisfaction. Psalm 103:5 says, "[God] satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's." We all have a God-shaped hole in our lives. It's the way we've been created, so we will never be fully satisfied until God has His rightful place in our lives. We can try to fill it with a bunch of different things. We can fill it with money, pleasure, relationships or lots of activities. We can try to fill it with so many things, but they will only satisfy us for a short time before we have to move on to something else to fill that hole. God is the only One Who can fully satisfy us.

When I was a kid, I used to love to get Air Jordan shoes. Every basketball season I would get a new pair of Jordan shoes. I remember opening the box. It was so fresh and smelled so good. I know some of the guys on my campus now love Jordan shoes. We have got a whole bunch of them. And Pastor Appreciation Month is coming up in October. I'm just saying.

Seriously, those Air Jordans were so beautiful, so fresh and new. It was so satisfying to get my hands on them. But by the end of the basketball season, they were sweated on and smelly and scuffed up, then I was looking for the next pair of Air Jordans. I was looking for the next shoes to satisfy me. That's a picture of our lives without the Lord. We want to get the next new thing, thinking we're going to be satisfied. We want to get the new husband, the new wife, the better vacation, the better house, the better car. They all kind of feel good for a while, but they don't satisfy. Only God can satisfy.

We read here in Psalm 103 that He satisfies us with "good." And with this satisfaction comes a new vigor that is associated with youth. It's a new passion. So you ask, "What's in it for me?" Satisfaction that fills you up, giving you vitality, energy and strength like nothing else in this universe. When you make Jesus Christ the Lord of your life, He's going to change you from the inside out, so that even though time may bring changes, your satisfaction will grow in Him. This satisfaction extends even to the aging process we all experience. David writes, "*So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*"

Over 100 years ago, Matthew George Easton wrote about eagles. He said they shed their feathers in the spring, then they get new feathers that make them look young again. This is the satisfaction we have. How does that happen, even as our bodies are aging? We read in 2 Corinthians 4:16, "*Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.*" The inward man, the inward woman, is being renewed. If you don't like what you're seeing in the mirror, it's not naturally going to get better. The longer time goes on, it's going to get worse. But that's okay, because inwardly you're being renewed. Have you ever met a seasoned saint who has a passion and fire in their eyes, a vitality you don't understand? It's because their satisfaction is found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

My friend, believer, beloved, turn to the Lord Jesus Christ and praise His name today. Bless Him because of His benefits. He forgives you. He heals you. He redeems you. He has given you His *checed*—His loyal love. And He gives you satisfaction. Don't be singing with Mick Jagger, sing with David the Psalm of blessing and praise to the God of heaven and earth, Who bestows all of these awesome things on those who love Him.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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