














# EXTREME LOVE

**TOOLBOX**


-  THINK
-  OBSERVE
-  CLOSE-UP
-  WRITE
-  DISCUSS
-  FEELINGS
-  BRAINSTORM
-  REFERENCE
-  PASSAGE
-  ARTICLE
-  BIG IDEA
-  CROSSROAD


 **THINK**


Our three great longings:

- To be **loved**
- To be **understood**
- To be **forgiven**






 **UNDERSTANDING**

 **LOVE**


 **FORGIVENESS**



   **DISCUSS**

What are some things students do to try to experience . . .	
Love?	
Understanding?	
Forgiveness?	

Why is it so difficult to be loved, understood and forgiven?

 **IMAGINE**

A human relationship in which you are:

- Loved unconditionally.
- Understood completely.
- Forgiven when you blow it.





## CONTEXT

This is a psalm of hope based on David's confidence in God's love and compassion. This magnificent hymn praises God for His personal blessings (vv. 1-5), for His national blessings (vv. 6,7), for His forgiving love (vv. 8-14), and for His eternal love (vv. 15-18).

### PSALMS AS POETRY

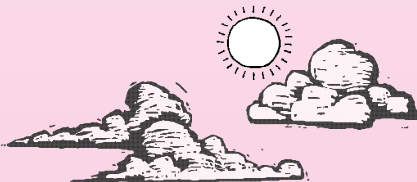
Perhaps the most important thing to remember in reading or interpreting the Psalms should also be the most obvious: they are poems—musical poems.

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... Hebrew poetry, by its very nature, was addressed as it were, to the mind through the heart (i.e., much of the language is intentionally emotive).

... [Hebrew music poetry] is intended to appeal to the emotions, to evoke feelings rather than propositional thinking, and to stimulate a response on the part of the individual that goes beyond a mere cognitive understanding of certain facts.

Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stewart, *How to Read The Bible For All It's Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), pp.170-176.



## Psalm 103:1-14

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

(emphasis added)

### BENEFIT

Insight:

### REDEEM

Insight:

### SATISFY

Insight:

### COMPASSION

Insight:

### GRACE

Insight:

### "TO THOSE WHO FEAR HIM"

In the Old Testament of the Bible, the word *fear* is used to communicate the concept of faith. So, the phrase in verse 11, "to those who fear Him," refers to persons who have entered into a covenant relationship with God. In New Testament terms, a believer has entered into that covenant relationship through Christ. Therefore, the promise of God's love in Psalm 103 is for all believers.



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## PERSONAL SIDE

The day I began to experience God's love in a personal way was a pivotal one. I began to grasp that God was safe harbor for me. He was not a policeman or judge in my life. He was not someone to hide from. He is a gracious, forgiving heavenly Father who knows everything about me, but still forgives my wrong doings and weaknesses and loves me unconditionally.

I grasped for the first time that I could be honest with God because of His love. He could not be surprised or shocked by my sin, my shortcomings or failures. Instead of running away from God, I began to run to Him for love and forgiveness, especially when I messed up.

I didn't have to perform to feel accepted. I could love, forgive and accept myself because I was experiencing the love and acceptance of God. I could look at myself in the mirror and say, "Barry, you're not perfect, but you are loved and forgiven."

When I sinned, I was honest with God. That was a new experience. Instead of hiding it, I admitted my sin to God and accepted His forgiveness. It wasn't an attitude of "thanks for letting me off, God, I'm glad to be out of trouble." It was an attitude of, "thanks for forgiving me God, I want to please you and I need your power to change me from the inside out." I felt a new freedom with others, with myself, and tremendous openness and security in my relationship with God.

What might some of the results have been in Barry's life if he had not discovered the unconditional love of God? How might this have affected him later in life as a husband? Father? Leader?



## DISCUSS

What effects does knowing God's unconditional love, understanding and forgiveness have on:

-How you relate to God?

-How you view yourself?

-How you relate to others?

*God proved His love on the cross. When Christ hung, and bled, and died, it was God saying to the world, "I love you."*

-Billy Graham

*God loves each of us as if there were only one of us.*

-Augustine



## HONEST WITH GOD

You can't shock God. You can't embarrass Him. We can tell Him anything and everything. Without fear of rejection. He is concerned about us and wants us to share anything and everything with Him. Are you frustrated over circumstances in your life? Feel like you need to unload? To ventilate? Nurturing some angry thoughts about the status quo? About others? About God? Tell Him.

We cannot tell others everything. Some things they don't need to know. Some things they can't take. Our words may depress them, confuse them, frustrate them, upset them, alienate them. No matter how close the relationship is with another person, eventually we can hurt and even destroy that relationship with our words. Only God can handle anything and everything we have to say, want to say, need to say. Deepen that relationship with God. Tell Him everything. He will never interrupt, except to inject a word of truth.

J.Grant Howard, *The Trauma of Transparency* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1979), pp.125,127.



## REFLECT

There is nothing I can do to make God love me more.  
There is nothing I can do to make God love me less.



## DISCUSS

Why is the satisfaction of these three longings so crucial to our spiritual growth and health?

Look again at Psalm 103.  
What verses or phrases indicate that God loves you unconditionally?  
How does it make you feel to know that God's love for you is unconditional?



### PERSONAL REFLECTION

Do I really believe God understands me?  
Do I really believe that there is nothing I can do to make God love me any more or less than He already does?  
Do I truly believe that God has totally forgiven me?



### RESPOND

"Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits" (Psalm 103:2).  
Begin a list of God's benefits to you.

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For further study:  
*How You Can Experience God's Love and Forgiveness*,  
Bill Bright (NewLife Publications);  
Ephesians 3

Is it true that God is love to me as a Christian? And does the love of God mean all has been said? If so, certain questions arise.  
Why do I ever grumble and show discontent and resentment at the circumstances in which God has placed me?  
Why am I ever distrustful, fearful, or depressed?  
Why do I ever allow myself to grow cool, formal, and half-hearted in the service of the God who loves me so?  
Why do I ever allow my loyalties to be divided, so that God has not all my heart?

J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1973), p. 115.

