

Psalm 103.<sup>8-12</sup>

- <sup>8</sup>The LORD is merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.  
<sup>9</sup>He will not always chide:  
neither will he keep his anger for ever.  
<sup>10</sup>He hath not dealt with us after our sins;  
nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.  
<sup>11</sup>For as the heaven is high above the earth,  
so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.  
<sup>12</sup>As far as the east is from the west,  
so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

This reading is our 24<sup>th</sup> for Lent 2025.

1. In verses 8-10, the Psalmist makes several straightforward theological assertions concerning God's character. Then, in verses 11-12, the Psalmist abandons straightforward theological statements for powerful imagery to portray the character of God.
  - ? What assertions does the Psalmist make about God's character in verses 8-10?
  - ? What metaphors does the Psalmist use to portray the character of God?
  - ? How have these divine attributes impacted you in your day-to-day life?
  - ? Is there one attribute of God that the Psalmist mentions with which you have had little experience?
  - ? What could you do to discover and appreciate this heretofore un-experienced divine attribute?
2. The Psalmist testifies that God is not one who is constantly "chiding."
  - ? What does it mean to "chide"?
  - ? How do the following definitions of the Hebrew word used here, *riḇ*, alter or amplify your understanding and appreciation for this aspect of the divine character?
    - "accuse"
    - "upbraid"
    - "prosecute"
    - "feel adversity with"
    - "feel quarrelsome toward"

Consider this very well-known passage—one that might be thought of as foundational to the LDS Church.

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (Jam. 1.<sup>5</sup>).

- ? How does this passage relate to today's reading and the Psalmist's testimony that God does not constantly chide?

Our normal reading of this passage from James, focuses on his testimony that God answers sincere prayers. This strikes me as a fairly ho-hum observation, and one that largely misses James' point. What kind of God would He be if he *did not* answer sincere prayers of the faithful?

Not one that would interest me.

- ? But, what about the prayer of one who might be “deserving” of an “upbraiding”? Will God answer their prayers?
- ? What role, do you think, did James’ testimony that God “upbraideth not” those who come to Him with a need play in Joseph’s determination to pray, as opposed to the simple observation that God answers prayers? (There is strong evidence that Joseph Smith painfully felt unworthy and sinful at the time of his “First Vision.”)
- ? How do you feel and how does it impact your own prayer life to understand the focus of James’ testimony to be that God “upbraideth not” those who pray to Him in need and weakness rather than the mere fact of God’s answering a prayer of need?

3. Consider this part of the Psalmist’s testimony concerning God’s character.

“He hath not dealt with us after our sins;  
nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.”

- ? How do you feel about God dealing and rewarding us in ways that do not exactly match or reflect our actions?
- ? How does God do this and remain just?
- ? Is this consistent with your conception of and experience with Him?
- ? How has He demonstrated to you that at given moments and after certain erroneous actions you have taken He was not dealing with you as your actions might have “deserved”?

4. One of the great things about poetic imagery is that it allows us to form pictures in our heads.

- ? What pictures come into your mind when you consider the following two images?

“For as the heaven is high above the earth,  
so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.”

And

“As far as the east is from the west,  
so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.”

Take a few minutes to consider the size and scope of the universe. Feel free to do a quick Google search of “the universe” and look at some of the images.

- ? Just how big is the universe?
- ? What do you think and feel when you consider the Psalmist’s testimony that God’s mercy is as expansive as the universe is large?
- ? How closely does this match your experience with God?
- ? What do we call the furthest extent of our sight on earth?
- ? How well do you make out objects at the far horizon of your view?
- ? If God symbolically removes your sins as far as your eastern horizon is from your western horizon, what is their impact going to be on you? How well can you “see” them? How much influence should you give them?

The imagery of moving our sins as far away from us as our eastern horizon is from our western horizon is a way of saying that God removes our sins further from us than can be measured, reducing their impact upon us to near nothingness.

- ? How does this square with your experiences with God, His willingness to forgive, and the extent of His forgiveness?