

# Say Thank You

## Psalms 103:1-5

### Dr. Pierre Cannings

Subject:

The poem begins with an individual self-exhortation to praise that proceeds to give reasons for praise in a series of hymnic participles (vv 1–5)

First, it is most often summed up as an individual thanksgiving strongly marked by hymnic features. Its setting is then a cultic one, like Ps 22

A Psalm of joyous praise, in which the writer rises from a thankful acknowledgment of personal blessings to a lively celebration of God's gracious attributes, as not only intrinsically worthy of praise, but as specially suited to man's frailty. He concludes by invoking all creatures to unite in his song

It is significant, however, that the theological motif that dominates the psalm is Yahweh's **TON**, "loyal love" (vv 4, 8, 11, 17), a motif that was communally celebrated at the cultic service of thanksgiving according to Jer 33:11. This suggests that the psalm was written for use by a solo singer in the thanksgiving liturgy, to stimulate every individual present to praise Yahweh. Accordingly, it was composed to reflect a number of experiences of deliverance in vv 1–6.

The psalm is a thanksgiving hymn, a hymn composed for use at the communal stage of the thanksgiving service, before individuals thanked God for personal deliverance and brought their thank offerings

The element of thanksgiving in vv. 3–5 could suggest that Psalm 103 was used originally in conjunction with a thank offering (cf. Jer 33:11). As such, it would be a thanksgiving song that was sung publicly in the great assembly of God's people (cf Ps 22:22–25[23–26]) as a public testimony about what the Lord had done in the psalmist's experience. However, its predominant features of descriptive praise would indicate that a more general setting of worship was the occasion for this psalm.

## I. Bless and Don't Forget

a. Bless

i. Bless- to declare God to be the source of the special power = to **praise God**

1. adore in gratitude and praise

- ii. Oh My Soul - Heb. נַפֶּשׁ is lit. "throat," perhaps as the organ of the voice. But more probably a total emotional response is elicited, from those parts of the body where the emotions were held to be seated
    - 1. entire personality
    - 2. David told himself (**O my soul**) to **praise the Lord** with **all his being**, that is, to put his whole heart in his **praise** of God's **holy name 33:21**
  - iii. All that is within me
    - 1. All of me- the entire being, "with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might
      - a. This act of worship involves his entire person. Humans bless the Lord by speaking well of him as they compliment him publicly. Blessing, or praise, is the natural response to contemplating the Lord's holy character, which provides an inexhaustible reason for extolling him. The psalmist's praise of the Lord is intentional, as he focuses on various aspects of his greatness and goodness
    - 2. Bless His Holy Name - The object of blessing is Yahweh Himself, especially as manifested in *His holy name*], majestically sacred and so to be hallowed
- b. Bless
  - i. Don't Forget the Benefit
    - 1. Benefits- **accomplishment** of the hands from God
      - a. Deuteronomic warning, Dt. 6:12, 8:11, taken by Israel to himself, lest he should neglect grateful recognition of *His benefits*], literally *dealings*, which in their enumeration as the theme of the Ps. are all benefits.
      - b. Praise remembers the goodness of the Lord, but forgetting the Lord's goodness dilutes praise. Forgetting is the first long step toward spiritual disaster (Deut 4:9, 23), because when people forget who the Lord is and what he has done, they fail to be grateful to him. Failure to praise the Lord, then, is symptomatic of a deeper heart problem.

express the continuous characteristic activities of Yahweh in dealing with His people. All through their past history He has been pardoning all their iniquity, cf Ex. 34:7, healing all their diseases, cf Ex. 15:26, redeeming the life of the nation from the Pit of Sheol into which they had gone, in

exile, and to which they had been so often exposed through their cruel and all-powerful enemies, cf Ho. 13:14, Ps. 9:14.

## II. Benefits Package

- a. Who
  - i. Pardons - to **be indulgent towards, forgive**
  - ii. Iniquities - mistake, which is not right, unjust
- b. Who
  - i. Heals
  - ii. Diseases
    - 1. By forgiving *all* iniquity and healing *all* diseases the Lord has proven sufficient for the full range of his needs. The term *taḥălu'îm* ("diseases") can refer to psychological as well as physical maladies, and in Deut 28:21–22, 27–29, 35, 59–61 a variety of diseases are included in the list of divine judgments on sin (cf. Ps 32:2–5). It is evident that the psalmist has received from the Lord forgiveness for his sins and deliverance from their consequences
- c. Who
  - i. Redeems - to **reclaim as one's own**: a) of darkness and the moment of birth Jb 3:5; b) to claim for oneself, to **redeem** (God): Israel
  - ii. Life from Pit
    - 1. Pit - trap expressions
      - a. The Lord has redeemed the psalmist out of destruction and into delight. The image of the pit refers to the most desperate situations in life from which the Lord has extricated him (cf. Pss 28:1; 40:2[3]); and it may here refer to the underworld
- d. Who
  - i. Crowns - to **crown with a wreath** Ps 8:6 65:12 (שָׁנַת טוֹבָתָךְ): the year of your goodness
    - a. Crowning suggests bestowing blessing (as in 8:5). Like an eagle that remains strong throughout its long life, the psalmist was spiritually vigorous under God's hand (cf. Isa. 40:31).

- b. To be crowned implies great honor and status, and the Lord's faithful love and compassion have become the psalmist's crowning glory in life.
- 2. Lovingkindness steadfast love - God is רַב חַי' abounding in faithfulness
  - a. Alluding to certain facts in Israel's history, David meditated on the covenant loyalty the Lord maintained with frail sinners
- 3. Compassion- to give someone mercy Dt 13:18 Jr 42:12 corresponding
  - a. After reviewing the mercies of God toward him, David found hope in his people's covenant relationship with the Lord, though they were sinful and frail. In this confidence the psalmist called on all creation to bless their Lord

e. Who

i. Satisfies

- 1. Years with good things
  - a. Yahweh had not only preserved His people alive, but had bestowed upon them good things continuously during the entire life of the nation
- 2. Youth is renewed like the eagle - spread out the wings Is 40:31 and renew their youth
  - a. The Lord has provided him both satisfaction and strength for life. He has not given meagerly, but lavishly, so that the psalmist is sated by him. When his strength fails, as it does even for the vigorous youth (cf. Isa 40:30–31), the Lord has provided renewed energy so that the psalmist can soar as an eagle.

# Word Studies

Bless- to declare God to be the source of the special power <sup>1</sup>= to **praise God**<sup>2</sup>

**Soul** - Heb. נַפֶּשׁ is lit<sup>3</sup>. “throat,” perhaps as the organ of the voice. But more probably a total emotional response is elicited, from those parts of the body where the emotions were held to be seated.<sup>4</sup>

Benefits- **accomplishment** of the hands from God <sup>5</sup>

Pardons - to **be indulgent towards, forgive**<sup>6</sup>

**Iniquities** -mistake, which is not right, unjust<sup>7</sup>

Redeem - to **reclaim as one's own**: a) of darkness and the moment of birth Jb 3:5; b) to claim for oneself, to **redeem** (God): Israel<sup>8</sup>

Pit- trap expressions

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<sup>1</sup>= the same as

<sup>2</sup> Ludwig Koehler et al., [\*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament\*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 160.

<sup>3</sup>lit. literally

<sup>4</sup> Leslie C. Allen, [\*Psalms 101–150 \(Revised\)\*](#), vol. 21, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 26.

<sup>5</sup> Ludwig Koehler et al., [\*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament\*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 196.

<sup>6</sup> Ludwig Koehler et al., [\*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament\*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 757.

<sup>7</sup> Ludwig Koehler et al., [\*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament\*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 800.

<sup>8</sup> Ludwig Koehler et al., [\*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament\*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 169.

Crown - to **crown with a wreath** Ps 8:6 65:12 (שָׁנַת טוֹבָתָךְ: the year of your goodness<sup>9</sup>

Lovingkindness – steadfast love - to withdraw faithfulness Gn 24:27; c) God is רַב חַיָּיִם abounding in faithfulness<sup>10</sup>

Compassion - to give someone mercy Dt 13:18 Jr 42:12 corresponding<sup>11</sup>

Eagles- spread out the wings Is 40:31 and renew their youth<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ludwig Koehler et al., [\*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament\*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 815.

<sup>10</sup> Ludwig Koehler et al., [\*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament\*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 337.

<sup>11</sup> Ludwig Koehler et al., [\*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament\*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 1219.

<sup>12</sup> Ludwig Koehler et al., [\*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament\*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 731.

## Commentary Study

The poem begins with an individual self-exhortation to praise that proceeds to give reasons for praise in a series of hymnic participles (vv 1–5<sup>13</sup>

A Psalm of joyous praise, in which the writer rises from a thankful acknowledgment of personal blessings to a lively celebration of God's gracious attributes, as not only intrinsically worthy of praise, but as specially suited to man's frailty. He concludes by invoking all creatures to unite in his song.<sup>14</sup>

There are three contenders for the genre of the psalm. First, it is most often summed up as an individual thanksgiving strongly marked by hymnic features. Its setting is then a cultic one, like Ps 22. Kraus ([1989] 290), Weiser (658), and Anderson (712) are representative of this conclusion. Seybold (*Gebet des Kranken*, 142–45) sought to confirm such an understanding of

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<sup>13</sup> Leslie C. Allen, [\*Psalms 101–150 \(Revised\)\*](#), vol. 21, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 27.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, [\*Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible\*](#), vol. 1 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 376.

the psalm in a detailed study. Vv 3–5 refer to sickness as the theme for thanksgiving. They relate to a single event variously described and do not look back also to earlier healings<sup>15</sup>

It is significant, however, that the theological motif that dominates the psalm is Yahweh's  $\tau\omicron\eta$ , "loyal love" (vv 4, 8, 11, 17), a motif that was communally celebrated at the cultic service of thanksgiving according to Jer 33:11. This suggests that the psalm was written for use by a solo singer in the thanksgiving liturgy, to stimulate every individual present to praise Yahweh. Accordingly, it was composed to reflect a number of experiences of deliverance in vv 1–6. Both individual and collective elements may be explained in this way. The initial self-exhortation to bless Yahweh is an adaptation of the communal imperative hymn that uses second plural forms (Metzger, "Lobpreis der Gnade," 132 n. 27). The psalm is a thanksgiving hymn, a hymn composed for use at the communal stage of the thanksgiving service, before individuals thanked God for personal deliverance and brought their thank offerings.<sup>16</sup>

**Str**<sup>17</sup>. I. Three syn<sup>18</sup>. lines with a synth<sup>19</sup>. conclusion.—**1–2**. *Bless Yahweh, O my soul*], also v<sup>20</sup>. 2a, 22; adore in gratitude and praise. The soul stands for the entire personality, [<sup>21</sup> | *all that is within me*], the entire being, "with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might," Dt. 6:5. The object of blessing is Yahweh Himself, especially as manifested in *His holy name*], majestically sacred and so to be hallowed, cf<sup>22</sup>. 33:21, 105:3, 106:47, 145:21.—*forget not*] a Deuteronomic warning, Dt. 6:12, 8:11, taken by Israel to himself, lest he should neglect grateful

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<sup>15</sup> Leslie C. Allen, [\*Psalms 101–150 \(Revised\)\*](#), vol. 21, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 27.

<sup>16</sup> Leslie C. Allen, [\*Psalms 101–150 \(Revised\)\*](#), vol. 21, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 28.

<sup>17</sup>**Str.** strophes.

<sup>18</sup>syn. synonymous.

<sup>19</sup>synth. synthetic.

<sup>20</sup>v. verse.

<sup>21</sup>|| parallel, of words or clauses chiefly synonymous.

<sup>22</sup>cf. confer, compare.



recognition of *His benefits*], literally *dealings*, which in their enumeration as the theme of the Ps. are all benefits.

**Str<sup>23</sup>. II. Synth<sup>24</sup>. tetrastich.—3–5.** The ptcs. express the continuous characteristic activities of Yahweh in dealing with His people. All through their past history He has been pardoning all their iniquity, cf<sup>25</sup>. Ex. 34:7, healing all their diseases, cf<sup>26</sup>. Ex. 15:26, redeeming the life of the nation from the Pit of Sheol into which they had gone, in exile, and to which they had been so often exposed through their cruel and all-powerful enemies, cf<sup>27</sup>. Ho. 13:14, Ps. 9:14. The whole is summed up in: *Who satisfieth thee with good things so long as thou livest*], for thus this difficult sentence may be translated. Yahweh had not only preserved His people alive, but had bestowed upon them good things continuously during the entire life of the nation. The translation of E<sup>28</sup>V<sup>29s</sup>., “who satisfieth thy mouth with good things,” is based on the interpretation of some ancient Jewish scholars; and, though followed by many, is now generally abandoned. “Thy desire” of <sup>30</sup>, <sup>31</sup>, whether based on a different Heb<sup>32</sup>. word or a different interpretation of the same word, has its advocates. <sup>33</sup>T, “days of thine old age,” followed by JPSV<sup>34</sup>., is nearer to the true interpretation. The previous line, *who crowneth thee with kindness and compassion*] is a gloss of interpretation, cf<sup>35</sup>. 8:6, for the figure of speech. Kindness and compassion are the characteristic attributes of the Ps. An additional gloss is taken from Is. 40:31: *so that thy youth reneweth itself like an eagle*]. It is doubtful whether there is an allusion to the fable of the

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<sup>23</sup>**Str.** strophes.

<sup>24</sup>Synth. synthetic.

<sup>25</sup>cf. confer, compare.

<sup>26</sup>cf. confer, compare.

<sup>27</sup>cf. confer, compare.

<sup>28</sup>EV English Versions.

<sup>29s</sup> English Versions.

<sup>30</sup>Ⲅ Greek Septuagint Version.

<sup>31</sup>Ⲭ The Vulgate Version.

<sup>32</sup>Heb. Hebrew.

<sup>33</sup>T *circa*, about; also *cum*, with.

<sup>34</sup>JPSV. Jewish Publication Society Version.

<sup>35</sup>cf. confer, compare.

eagle's renewing its youth in old age; but at all events it is the fulness of life and vigour of the eagle that is thought of.<sup>36</sup>

## Psalm 103

After reviewing the mercies of God toward him, David found hope in his people's covenant relationship with the Lord, though they were sinful and frail. In this confidence the psalmist called on all creation to bless their Lord.

This psalm, a celebration of deliverance, seems to speak of the answer to the prayer in Psalm 102.

### A. *The mercies of God (103:1–5)*

103:1–2. David told himself (**O my soul**) to **praise the LORD** with **all his being**, that is, to put his whole heart in his **praise** of God's **holy name** (cf. 33:21). This was certainly warranted in view of the Lord's many **benefits**.

103:3–5. David praised the Lord for His many mercies, including forgiveness of **sins** (v. 3a), healing of sicknesses (v. 3b), deliverance from death (v. 4a; **pit** is a synonym for the grave), enrichment of his life with loyal **love** (cf. vv. 8, 11, 17) and tender **compassion** (cf. vv. 8, 13; 116:5; 119:156), satisfaction (**with good things**; cf. 104:28; 107:9), and renewal. Crowning suggests bestowing blessing (as in 8:5). Like an eagle that remains strong throughout its long life, the psalmist was spiritually vigorous under God's hand (cf. Isa. 40:31).

### B. *The compassion of God (103:6–18)*

Alluding to certain facts in Israel's history, David meditated on the covenant loyalty the Lord maintained with frail sinners.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Charles A. Briggs and Emilie Grace Briggs, [\*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms\*](#), International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1906–1907), 324–325.

<sup>37</sup> Allen P. Ross, "[Psalms](#)," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 867–868.

Psalm 103 is a descriptive praise psalm,<sup>25383</sup> with some hints of declarative praise in the masculine singular pronouns in vv. 3–5 that could refer to specific examples of the Lord’s goodness to the psalmist. Some commentators have called Psalm 103 a thanksgiving hymn,<sup>25394</sup> but in its structure it closely follows the standard pattern of descriptive praise rather than feature a clear report of deliverance. Goldingay concludes that “the language of ‘worship’ belongs to a praise psalm, and it does not speak of concrete recent acts of Yhwh but of the pattern of Yhwh’s acts and of the characteristic stance Yhwh has taken to Israel.”<sup>25405</sup>

This psalm is structured well, with the opening call to praise, “My soul, bless the LORD” (vv. 1–2) matched by the identical final line (v. 22) to form an inclusio. In the call to praise in vv. 1–2 the psalmist exhorts himself to praise the holy name of the Lord. The cause for praise in vv. 3–19 reflects first on the personal benefits experienced by the psalmist (vv. 3–5), and then it broadens out to consider the Lord’s benefits to the nation of Israel (vv. 6–19). The final section is an expanded call to the angels and to the Lord’s created works to join the psalmist in praising him (vv. 20–22).

The element of thanksgiving in vv. 3–5 could suggest that Psalm 103 was used originally in conjunction with a thank offering (cf. Jer 33:11). As such, it would be a thanksgiving song that was sung publicly in the great assembly of God’s people (cf. Ps 22:22–25[23–26]) as a public testimony about what the Lord had done in the psalmist’s experience. However, its predominant features of descriptive praise would indicate that a more general setting of worship was the occasion for this psalm. In either case, Psalm 103 calls on all to join in praise to the Lord for the benefits he has bestowed on his people.

### Commentary

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<sup>38253</sup> For a brief description of the descriptive praise psalms, see Estes, *Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms*, 155–56.

<sup>39254</sup> Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 28: “The initial self-exhortation to bless Yahweh is an adaptation of the communal imperatival hymn that uses second plural forms. The psalm is a thanksgiving hymn, a hymn composed for use at the communal stage of the thanksgiving service, before individuals thanked God for personal deliverance and brought their thank offerings.”

<sup>40255</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms Volume 3*, 165.

## **1. Call to Praise (103:1–2)**

**Of David.**

- <sup>1</sup> **My soul, bless the Lord,  
and all that is within me, bless his holy name.**
- <sup>2</sup> **My soul, bless the Lord,  
and do not forget all his benefits.**

**103:1** In most descriptive praise psalms the call to praise is addressed to the worshiping community or to some other group of people, but in Psalm 103 the psalmist calls on his own inner being to bless the Lord (cf. Ps 104:1, 35). This act of worship involves his entire person. Humans bless the Lord by speaking well of him as they compliment<sup>25416</sup> him publicly. Blessing, or praise, is the natural response to contemplating the Lord's holy character, which provides an inexhaustible reason for extolling him. The psalmist's praise of the Lord is intentional, as he focuses on various aspects of his greatness and goodness.

**103:2** Repeating the resolution in v. 1a, the psalmist calls on himself not to forget the benefits provided by the Lord. Praise remembers the goodness of the Lord, but forgetting the Lord's goodness dilutes praise.<sup>25427</sup> Forgetting is the first long step toward spiritual disaster (cf. Deut 4:9, 23), because when people forget who the Lord is and what he has done, they fail to be grateful to him. Failure to praise the Lord, then, is symptomatic of a deeper heart problem.

## **2. Cause for Praise (103:3–19)**

**A. PERSONAL BENEFITS (103:3–5)**

- <sup>3</sup> **He forgives all your iniquity;  
he heals all your diseases.**
- <sup>4</sup> **He redeems your life from the Pit;  
he crowns you with faithful love and compassion.**
- <sup>5</sup> **He satisfies you with good things;  
your youth is renewed like the eagle.**

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<sup>41256</sup> J. Mays, "Psalm 103: Mercy Joined to Loving Kindness," *Austin Seminary Bulletin* 105 (1990): 28, explains that to bless the Lord "means to do good to God by speaking of God's way and works in adoration and gratitude."

<sup>42257</sup> *DBI* 702: "Disciplined remembrance is institutionalized in biblical faith because we are called to interpret our present circumstances in light of God's known faithfulness in the past. Correspondingly, forgetfulness was seen as one of humankind's greatest spiritual maladies. When people had fresh experiential knowledge of God, they responded in wholehearted obedience, but forgetfulness led to wandering from God." This was epitomized in the sad history of the people of Israel when they forgot the Lord during the period of the judges (Judg 3:7).

**103:3** Beginning in v. 3 the psalmist details the general benefits of v. 2 by citing particular benefits he has received from the Lord. Continuing to speak to himself, as is indicated by the masculine singular pronouns “your” and “you,” he uses broad brushstrokes to portray how the Lord has cared for him, ministering to both his spiritual and physical needs. By forgiving *all* iniquity and healing *all* diseases the Lord has proven sufficient for the full range of his needs. The term *taḥălu`im* (“diseases”) can refer to psychological as well as physical maladies, and in Deut 28:21–22, 27–29, 35, 59–61 a variety of diseases are included in the list of divine judgments on sin (cf. Ps 32:2–5). It is evident that the psalmist has received from the Lord forgiveness for his sins and deliverance from their consequences.<sup>25438</sup>

**103:4** The Lord has redeemed the psalmist out of destruction and into delight. The image of the pit refers to the most desperate situations in life from which the Lord has extricated him (cf. Pss 28:1; 40:2[3]); and it may here refer to the underworld, as is implied by its capitalization in CS<sup>44</sup>B. To be crowned implies great honor and status, and the Lord’s faithful love and compassion have become the psalmist’s crowning glory in life.

**103:5** The Lord has provided him both satisfaction and strength for life. He has not given meagerly, but lavishly, so that the psalmist is sated by him.<sup>25459</sup> When his strength fails, as it does even for the vigorous youth (cf. Isa 40:30–31), the Lord has provided renewed energy so that the psalmist can soar as an eagle.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43258</sup> VanGemeren, “Psalms,” 5:652, notes that the language of healing is used to indicate an act of restoration in Ps 147:3 and Jer 30:12–17; 51:8–9.

<sup>44</sup>CSB Christian Standard Bible (2017)

<sup>45259</sup> The MT reads עֲדִיךָ (“your jewelry”; CSB renders “you”), but the LXX renders this τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν σου, “your desire,” which is difficult to translate back into a textually sound Hebrew text. Many commentators and translations accept the *BHS* emendation to עֲדִיךָ, with the sense “your existence.” Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 18, considers this emendation a good fit with the sense and form of Psalm 103, as well as similar passages such as Pss 104:33; 146:2. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms Volume 3*, 226, argues plausibly from the use of the term in Ezek 16:7 for cheeks that it is best rendered as “mouth” in Ps 103:5.

<sup>46</sup> Daniel J. Estes, [\*Psalms 73–150\*](#), ed. E. Ray. Clendenen, vol. 13, *New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2019), 262–264.