



St Barnabas Cray

Come Home to the Father's Mercy

Weekly Devotional Journey

Monday - Preaching to Your Own Soul

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits. (Psalm 103:1-2 NIV)

Devotional Thought

There is something remarkably honest about the way Psalm 103 begins. David does not open with a burst of effortless, spontaneous joy. He opens with a command — directed not at anyone around him, but at himself. 'Praise the Lord, my soul.' He is, in effect, preaching to his own heart. And this tells us something profoundly important about the nature of genuine worship: it is not always the natural overflow of how we happen to feel in a given moment. Sometimes, it is a deliberate, courageous choice.

We often assume that authentic praise must be spontaneous — that if we have to work at it, it must

somehow be less real. But David knew better. He understood that the soul, left to its own devices, will drift toward anxiety, self-pity, bitterness, or despair. The circumstances of life press in upon us, and before long our inner world becomes a place of noise and shadow rather than light and song. And so David does something extraordinary: he talks to himself. He commands his own soul to orient itself toward God.

Notice also what he commands himself to do in verse two: 'forget not all his benefits.' This is not mere positive thinking or emotional self-management. This is a theological discipline — the conscious, intentional practice of remembering who God is and what God has done. Memory is a spiritual act. When we choose to recall God's faithfulness, his mercy, his provision in the past, we are building a foundation beneath our feet that holds firm even when the present feels uncertain.

This is the beginning of the devotional life: not waiting until we feel like praising, but choosing to praise — and then discovering, as we do, that our hearts begin to follow. The discipline of gratitude, practiced with intentionality, has a way of reshaping us from the inside out. It draws our gaze upward and outward, away from the narrowness of our immediate circumstances and toward the vast, unchanging goodness of God.

As you begin this week, consider what it might mean to preach to your own soul. What truths about God do you need to speak over yourself today?

Reflection Question

When circumstances press in and your heart grows heavy, what is your instinctive response — and what would it look like to deliberately choose to redirect your soul toward praise and remembrance of God's goodness?

From Sunday's Sermon

"We often assume that for praise to be genuine, it must be spontaneous, which is not true. Sometimes it's hard to find hope in the words if we don't believe or we can't relate to it. We learn here that we can command ourselves, talk to ourselves, encourage ourselves to praise God."

Today's Application

This week, begin each morning by writing down three specific things God has done for you — not in general terms, but in concrete, personal detail. Perhaps it is a relationship he has restored, a fear he has quieted, a provision that arrived at just the right time. Let this become your daily 'call to praise.' When you notice your thoughts spiralling toward worry or negativity today, pause and speak aloud — even quietly — a truth about God's character. This is not denial of difficulty; it is the deliberate choice to anchor yourself to what is ultimately true. Consider keeping a small notebook this week as a 'benefits journal,' recording God's mercies as you notice them. By Friday, you will have a tangible record of grace that can strengthen your faith and your prayer life for weeks to come.

Morning Prayer

Heavenly Father, I come to you this morning not always with a heart that feels ready to praise, but with a will that chooses to. Teach me the discipline of remembrance. Help me to recall your goodness when my circumstances tempt me to forget it. Speak to the deeper places of my soul today, and let the truth of who you are be louder than the noise of what I am facing. I choose to praise you, Lord — not because everything feels easy, but because you are always faithful. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Evening Devotion

Did You Notice His Goodness Today?

Evening Reflection

As this day draws to a close, it is worth pausing to ask a simple but searching question: where did you see God's goodness today? Not in the grand or dramatic moments necessarily, but in the quiet, ordinary ones — a conversation that went better than expected, a moment of unexpected peace, a small kindness extended or received. The discipline we explored this morning — choosing to remember God's benefits — is not merely a morning exercise. It is a way of training the eyes to see throughout the whole of the day.

David wrote Psalm 103 from a place of real experience. He had known betrayal, failure, grief, and

guilt. And yet he chose to rehearse the mercies of God rather than the catalogue of his wounds. This evening, perhaps you can do the same. Let the events of the day pass gently before you, not in anxious review, but in grateful reflection. Where was God present, even in the places you did not initially notice him? What small benefit did you receive today that you might otherwise have overlooked? Rest now in the knowledge that the same God who called your soul to praise this morning has been with you every moment since.

Evening Reflection

Looking back over today, where did you glimpse God's goodness — and is there anything you received today that you have not yet thanked him for?

Evening Prayer

Lord, as I rest tonight, I thank you for the gifts of this day — seen and unseen. Forgive me for the moments I forgot to look for you. Quiet my heart now, and let gratitude be the last word on my lips before I sleep. Amen.

Tuesday - The Boundless Mercy of God

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. 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. (Psalm 103:10-12 NIV)

Devotional Thought

If you were to design a religion from scratch, you would almost certainly build it around the principle of what you deserve. Do good, receive good. Do evil, receive evil. It is the logic of fairness, of ledgers kept in perfect balance. It is also, if we are honest, the logic that governs much of our inner life. We assume — often without realising it — that God must feel about us the way we feel about ourselves on our worst days. That our failures have accumulated into a debt too large to be forgiven. That his patience must surely have a limit.

And then we come to Psalm 103, and David dismantles all of that with breathtaking clarity. 'He does not treat us as our sins deserve.' Not as we deserve. This is the very heartbeat of mercy — not getting what we have earned. And the measure of this mercy? It is as high as the heavens above the earth. It is as far as the east is from the west. These are not merely poetic images; they are deliberate gestures toward the infinite, toward a love that exceeds all human calculation.

The east-to-west image is particularly striking. North and south are directions that eventually meet — you can travel north until you reach the North Pole, and then you are travelling south. But east and west never converge. They are perpetually, infinitely apart. This is how far God has removed our transgressions from us. Not filed away for later use. Not kept on record for the day we step out of line again. Removed. Gone.

This is not a licence for recklessness — the psalm is not suggesting that sin does not matter. Rather, it is a proclamation that God's mercy is not a fragile, conditional thing that we can exhaust.

As the sermon reminded us, God's mercy is not a safety net for reckless living — it is a trampoline that launches us into a deeper, loving relationship with him. Mercy received rightly does not make us careless; it makes us undone with gratitude. And gratitude, in turn, shapes us into people who live differently — not to earn love, but because we have already been found by it.

Reflection Question

Is there a particular failure, regret, or sin from your past that you have struggled to believe God has truly forgiven and removed? What would it mean today to take him at his word?

From Sunday's Sermon

"God's mercy is not a safety net for reckless living. It's a trampoline that launches us into a deeper, loving relationship with him. We cannot out sin his grace. God does not treat us as our sins deserve. He removes our sin."

Today's Application

Today, take time to sit quietly with Psalm 103:10-12 and read it slowly, several times. As you do, bring to mind something specific — a failure, a regret, a pattern of sin — that you have carried with a sense of lingering guilt or shame. Then do something concrete and intentional: write it down on a piece of paper, and then tear it up or burn it safely, as a physical act of receiving what God has already declared true. This is not a magical ritual, but a tangible way of embodying the truth that your transgressions have been removed as far as the east is from the west. If you are carrying guilt about something that also requires a human conversation — an apology owed, a relationship in need of repair — let God's mercy embolden you to take that step today. Mercy received should always flow outward.

Morning Prayer

Father, I confess that I have sometimes lived as though your mercy had a limit — as though my failures were larger than your grace. Forgive me for doubting the reach of your love. Today I choose to believe what your word declares: that you have removed my transgressions as far as the east is from the west. Let that truth settle into the deepest places of my heart. Help me to live not under the weight of what I deserve, but in the freedom of what you have freely given. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Evening Devotion

Resting in Mercy You Did Not Earn

Evening Reflection

There is something deeply restful about mercy — or at least, there ought to be. The trouble is that many of us have spent so long living by the logic of what we deserve that we find it genuinely difficult to rest in what we have been freely given. We keep returning to our failures, turning them over in our minds, as though our continued guilt somehow demonstrates the seriousness with which we take our own sin. But God does not ask us to keep punishing ourselves for what he has already forgiven. That is not humility — it is a subtle refusal to trust him.

This evening, as you reflect on the day, notice whether there are places where you have been harder on yourself than God is. Notice whether the mercy you explored this morning has actually settled into your bones, or whether it has remained at the level of intellectual assent. Mercy is meant to be inhabited, not merely acknowledged. It is meant to change the way we move through the world — with a lightness, a freedom, a generosity toward others that comes from knowing we ourselves have been treated far better than we deserve. Let that be the invitation of this evening: to rest, truly rest, in the mercy of a God who has removed your transgressions and will not retrieve them.

Evening Reflection

Have you allowed yourself to truly rest in God's mercy today, or have you been carrying a burden that he has already lifted from you?

Evening Prayer

Merciful Father, I lay down tonight what I have been carrying that was never mine to carry. You have removed my sin — help me to stop picking it back up. Let me rest in your grace tonight, and wake tomorrow lighter. Amen.

Wednesday - The Father Who Runs

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. (Psalm 103:13-14 NIV)

Devotional Thought

In the ancient world, a father running was an undignified sight. Men of standing and authority did not run — they waited, they presided, they received. And yet in the parable Jesus tells in Luke 15, the father — upon seeing his returning son while he is still a long way off — does something utterly scandalous: he runs. He gathers up his robes and he sprints toward the one who had squandered his inheritance, who had wallowed in a pig pen, who had rehearsed a grovelling speech on the long walk home. He does not wait for the apology. He does not stand at the door with arms folded. He runs.

This is the image Psalm 103 is reaching toward when it says, 'As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.' The word 'compassion' here in the

Hebrew is rich and tender — it shares a root with the word for 'womb.' It speaks of a deep, visceral, gut-level love. The kind of love that does not calculate before it responds. The kind that moves before the mind has finished reasoning.

And then the psalm gives us the reason for this compassion: 'he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.' God's compassion is not naive. He is not unaware of our frailty, our inconsistency, our tendency to wander. He knows it completely — and he loves us completely anyway. This is not a God who is perpetually surprised and disappointed by our failures. He is a God who looks at his dust-formed children with the eyes of a father who understands exactly what they are made of, and who runs toward them regardless.

The question the sermon posed is a searching one: can we identify not only with the younger son or the older son, but with the father? Are we becoming people who run toward others with compassion — who love before the apology arrives, who welcome before the performance is perfected?

Reflection Question

Is there someone in your life — a prodigal, a difficult person, someone who has hurt you — toward whom God might be calling you to run rather than wait, to extend compassion before it is deserved?

From Sunday's Sermon

"Apart from waiting with opened arms, God also runs towards his children to bring them to the table richly prepared for them. The father does not wait for a grovelling apology upon seeing his son from a distance. He is filled with compassion, runs to him and embraces him."

Today's Application

Today, think concretely about one relationship in your life where you have been waiting — waiting for an apology, waiting for change, waiting for the other person to make the first move. Ask God

honestly whether his call to you in that relationship might be to run rather than to wait. This does not mean excusing harmful behaviour or removing healthy boundaries; it means examining whether your posture is one of compassion or of withheld love. Consider writing a letter — even if you do not send it — to someone from whom you have been distant, expressing something of the compassion you have received from God. Alternatively, make one small, concrete gesture of welcome or warmth today toward someone who does not expect it. Let the running father shape how you move through your relationships this week.

Morning Prayer

Father, thank you for running toward me before I had finished rehearsing my apology. Thank you that your compassion was not conditional on my performance. Help me today to see the people around me through your eyes — to notice who needs to be run toward rather than waited upon. Give me the courage and the grace to be, in some small way, a reflection of your running love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Evening Devotion

Known in Your Dust

Evening Reflection

One of the most tender phrases in all of Scripture is tucked quietly into Psalm 103: 'he remembers that we are dust.' There is no condemnation in this remembering — only compassion. God does not look at your frailty with disappointment. He looks at it with the knowing eyes of the one who formed you, who knit you together, who has always understood exactly what you are made of and has chosen to love you anyway.

This is deeply freeing, if we will let it be. So much of our inner life is spent trying to hide our dust — presenting a more polished, capable, spiritually impressive version of ourselves to God and to others. But God is not fooled by the performance, and more importantly, he is not put off by the reality. He remembers that you are dust. He ran toward the dusty, pig-pen-smelling son. He will run toward you.

As you reflect on this day, where did you feel most aware of your own frailty? Where did you fall

short of who you want to be? Bring those places now not in shame, but in trust, to the Father who already knows them and whose compassion is not diminished by them. You are dust — and you are beloved. Both are true at the same time.

Evening Reflection

Where today did you feel most aware of your own weakness or frailty — and can you bring that specific place to God now, trusting that his compassion is not diminished by what he finds there?

Evening Prayer

Father, you know what I am made of. You know where I fell short today. And still you run toward me. Thank you. Let me rest tonight not in my performance, but in your compassion. Amen.

Thursday - Both Sons Were Lost

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.' (Luke 15:28-29 NIV)

Devotional Thought

It is easy to identify with the younger son in the parable. His lostness is dramatic, visible, undeniable. He ends up in a pig pen, hungry, humiliated, far from home. When he comes to his senses and returns, we cheer for him. We understand his journey. But the sermon drew our attention to something we often overlook: the older son was lost too. And his lostness, in some ways, is the more dangerous kind — because it is so much harder to see.

The older son has done everything right. He has stayed. He has worked faithfully. He has obeyed every instruction. And yet, inwardly, something has gone profoundly wrong. He has become a servant in his father's house rather than a son. He speaks of 'slaving' for his father. He has kept the rules without keeping the relationship. And when his brother returns and the feast begins, he stands outside — not because he has wandered geographically, but because he has wandered in his heart. His obedience has curdled into resentment, and his faithfulness has become a transaction he expected to be repaid.

This is a form of lostness that is particularly common among religious people. We can be present in the Father's house — in church every Sunday, fulfilling our duties, maintaining our disciplines — while inwardly growing increasingly bitter, joyless, and distant from the Father's heart. We work for God rather than with him. We obey out of duty rather than delight. And we find ourselves, like the older son, unable to celebrate what God is celebrating — because we have lost sight of grace.

The extraordinary thing in the parable is that the father goes out to the older son, just as he ran to the younger. He does not wait for the older son to come in. He goes to him. He pleads with him. He says, 'My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours.' The father wants both sons at the table. And he will go to extraordinary lengths to reach both of them.

The question for today is not merely which son you resemble, but whether you are willing to come in — to leave the place of resentment or duty-driven distance and return to the warmth of the Father's presence.

Reflection Question

Is it possible that you have been living more like the older son than you have realised — present in the Father's house but inwardly distant, serving out of duty rather than love, or harbouring resentment toward someone whom God is welcoming?

From Sunday's Sermon

"Although on the exterior he did all the good things a good son should do and was faultless. Interiorly, he had wandered away from his father. Working hard and being dutiful, he became increasingly unhappy and unfree. He refused to go in when he found out about the feast for his younger wayward brother."

Today's Application

Today, take some honest time in quiet reflection to examine your inner world. Ask yourself: am I serving God out of genuine love and gratitude, or has my faith become more about duty, performance, and what I feel I deserve in return? If you notice the older son's spirit in yourself — resentment toward someone God seems to be blessing, a sense of being unappreciated for your faithfulness, or a joylessness in your spiritual life — do not condemn yourself for it. Instead, bring it honestly to the Father. Tell him exactly how you feel, as the older son did. And then listen for his gentle response: 'You are with me always, and all I have is yours.' Consider also whether there is someone in your life whose restoration or blessing you have struggled to celebrate. Ask God for the grace to rejoice with those who rejoice — even when it is costly.

Morning Prayer

Father, I confess that sometimes I have been more like the older son than I have wanted to admit. I have served you faithfully on the outside while growing distant on the inside. I have kept the rules while losing the relationship. Forgive me. Come out to meet me as you did for him. Remind me that I am not a servant earning wages, but a son — a daughter — loved and welcomed at your table. Help me to come in from the cold and join the celebration of your grace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Evening Devotion

Coming In from the Cold

Evening Reflection

The older son stood outside the feast. He could hear the music. He could smell the celebration. And he refused to go in. There is something aching familiar about that image for many of us. We know the feast is there. We know the Father's love is real. And yet something keeps us on the threshold — pride, perhaps, or unresolved hurt, or a deep sense that the way things are being done is simply not fair.

But the father does not leave him there. He goes out. He pleads. He reminds his older son of something the son had apparently forgotten: 'You are with me always.' Not 'you have been with me when you performed well.' Always. The father's love for the older son was never in question — only the older son's awareness of it.

This evening, consider whether there are places in your own life where you have been standing outside the feast. Where you have known, intellectually, that God's love and goodness are real, but have struggled to enter into them. The invitation tonight is simple and gentle: come in. The music is playing. The table is set. You are already beloved. You do not need to earn your place at it. Just come in.

Evening Reflection

Is there a particular area of your life where you have been standing on the threshold of God's goodness, unable or unwilling to step fully into it? What would it take to come in tonight?

Evening Prayer

Father, thank you for coming out to meet me even when I have stood in the cold of my own resentment or pride. Draw me in tonight. Let me hear the music of your grace and find my place at your table. Amen.

Friday - Becoming the Beloved: Known Before We Could Choose

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (Romans 8:16-17 NIV)

Devotional Thought

We have spent this week exploring the mercy of God, the compassion of the Father, and the different ways in which we can find ourselves lost — even in the Father's house. Today we arrive at what is perhaps the most foundational truth of all: before we could choose God, he chose us. Before we could love him, he loved us. Our identity as God's children is not something we have achieved or earned or maintained through faithful performance. It is a gift, given before we were capable of receiving it.

The sermon spoke of this with beautiful clarity: 'It was not we who chose God, but God who first chose us. The Bible tells us that we are hidden in the shadow of God's hand, that God formed us in secret, he knit us together in our mother's womb. God loves us before any human can show us love — with a first love, unlimited and unconditional.' This is the ground beneath all the ground. Before your parents knew you, before your failures accumulated, before your faith was formed or faltered — you were known and loved by God.

Romans 8 tells us that the Spirit himself testifies to this truth within us. It is not merely a theological proposition to be assented to; it is a living reality to be inhabited. And the implication is staggering: if we are children, then we are heirs. Heirs of God. Co-heirs with Christ. The inheritance of the Father — his love, his life, his glory — is ours not because we have earned it, but because we belong to him.

The sermon asked a searching question that is worth sitting with today: 'Our question should not be, how am I to know God, but how am I to be known by God? Not how am I to love God, but how am I to let myself be loved by God?' This is the great reorientation of the spiritual life. It is not primarily about our striving toward God, but about our willingness to be found, held, and loved by him. And from that place of being beloved — truly, deeply, securely beloved — we become people who can love others as the Father loves: freely, generously, without condition.

As this week draws to a close, the invitation is to settle into your identity as God's beloved child — and to let that identity shape everything: how you see yourself, how you treat others, and how you move through the world.

Reflection Question

What would change in your daily life — in your relationships, your work, your sense of self — if you truly lived from the settled identity of being God's beloved, chosen child rather than someone who is still trying to earn a place at the table?

From Sunday's Sermon

"Our question should not be, how am I to know God, but how am I to be known by God? Not how am I to love God, but how am I to let myself be loved by God? Once we are in God's house, as sons and daughters of his household, we can be like him. We can love like him. We can be good like him. We can care like him."

Today's Application

As you close out this week, take time to do two things. First, revisit the 'benefits journal' you began on Monday. Read back through what you have written and let it become an act of worship — a concrete record of the God who has been faithful to you in specific, personal ways. Let gratitude consolidate the week's learning in your heart. Second, identify one person in your life who may need to be reminded of their belovedness — someone who is living like a servant rather than a son or daughter, someone who has forgotten that they are an heir. Consider how you might, this

weekend, reflect the Father's love to them in a concrete way: a message, a visit, a word of genuine affirmation. You are an heir of God — and heirs are called to be successors, stepping into the Father's compassion and extending it to others.

Morning Prayer

Abba Father — that most intimate of names — I come to you this morning not as a servant hoping to earn favour, but as your child, already loved, already chosen, already held. Help me to live today from that place. When I am tempted to strive and perform and prove myself, remind me that I am already yours. When I find it difficult to love others freely, remind me of how freely I have been loved. Let the truth that I am your beloved child — hidden in the shadow of your hand, knit together by your care, running toward by your compassion — be the deepest truth I carry into this day and every day. In Jesus' holy and merciful name, Amen.

Evening Devotion

Forevermore: A Week in the Father's House

Evening Reflection

You have spent this week in the company of a remarkable psalm and a remarkable parable. You have been invited to preach to your own soul, to receive mercy you did not earn, to meet a Father who runs, to examine the hidden lostness of the older son, and today to settle into the extraordinary truth of your identity as God's beloved child.

The words of the song quoted in the sermon come back now with fresh resonance: 'Father God, I wonder how I managed to exist without the knowledge of your parenthood and your loving care. But now I am your son, I am your daughter, I am adopted in your family, and I can never be alone. Because, Father God, you're there beside me. I will sing your praises forevermore.'

Forevermore. Not just this week, not just when the devotional is fresh and the insights feel vivid, but forevermore. The Father's love is not a seasonal experience. It is the permanent, unshakeable ground of your existence. As you close this week, rest in that. Let the music of his grace play on in you. And carry into the weekend — and beyond — the settled, quiet confidence of one who knows whose they are and where they belong: at the Father's table, welcomed home, beloved and found.

Evening Reflection

As you look back over this week, what is the one truth about God's love or your identity as his child that has taken deepest root in you — and how do you want to carry it forward?

Evening Prayer

Father, thank you for this week. Thank you for your mercy that does not end, your compassion that runs toward me, and your love that chose me before I could choose you. I am yours. Let that be enough — tonight, and forevermore. Amen.