

**Neighborhood Communion Group**  
**Discussion Questions**  
**The Psalms, part 1**

**Background**

The idea behind neighborhood communion groups arose from the earliest Christian communities that gathered regularly in homes for a time of eating and talking, something often missing in our busy lives. As you gather with friends, think of it as a throwback to the early church, or a dinner party in our day. Below, you'll find a Scripture passage, along with some suggested questions. Neighborhood Communion is a chance to enjoy food and food for thought.

**Scripture Passage**

**Psalms 103:1-5, 10-14**

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. <sup>2</sup>Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits—<sup>3</sup>who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, <sup>4</sup>who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, <sup>5</sup>who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.... <sup>10</sup> He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. <sup>11</sup>For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him; <sup>12</sup>as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us. <sup>13</sup>As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him. <sup>14</sup>For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust.

**Discussion**

The preeminent Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann divides the psalms into three types: orientation, disorientation, and reorientation. The first category describes life when all is right with the world. These psalms not only reflect praise and thanksgiving but generate it when read and prayed. With this in mind, think about the following questions:

- 1) In the first verses the poet addresses his own soul, telling himself to bless the Lord. Mental health experts tell us that the kind of self-talk we engage in makes a difference in the quality of our lives. What do you think of the idea of telling your soul/self to bless God? What do you think it means to "bless" the Lord?
- 2) The psalmist then goes on to list some things for which we can be grateful, what he calls "benefits." These include: forgiveness of sin, healing of disease, redeeming us from despair, crowning us with love and mercy. What else might you add to the list of "benefits" God bestows upon creation? What are you most grateful for as a blessing from God? What are we to make of the notion of diseases healed when that is not always the case?

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- 3) The latter part focuses on forgiveness with a series of images. For example, sins removed from us as far as east is from west. Given the ancient view of a flat earth, this distance becomes even more impressive. How do you think of sins being forgiven in your own life? In addition to conceiving of God as a loving father, what do you think of other images found elsewhere in the Bible, like a tender mother?