

Psalm 103:13–14 | “Fatherly Compassion”

*Preached on June 21, 2026 by Pastor Matt Brown*

You can turn in your Bibles to Psalm 103 today, and we will be in verses 13–14 this morning. *[pauseeee]*

Since it’s Fathers Day, I figured I would do something related to fathers, and then next Sunday my plan is to resume our study in Ecclesiastes. *[pauseeee]*

There are a lot of various thoughts when people think about fathers. *[pauseee]*

For some of you, you have negative thoughts when it comes to this topic...

Maybe you grew up in a fatherless home, and so maybe there’s some bitterness residing in your heart because there wasn’t anyone to fill that father role for you. *[pause]*

You just think of absence or neglect when you think of your dad. *[pauseeee]*

Others of you may have had a father in your home growing up, but he wasn’t around much.

He was always working and when he *was* around, he wasn’t truly “present.” *[pauseeee]*

Still others of you had an unkind, grumpy, or cruel father—he was downright mean! *[pause]*

He was extra hard on you, said lots of mean stuff, and was easily angered. *[pauseee]*

When you walked in the door, you were scared of what kind of dad you’d find that day.

Would he be calm today or would he fly off the handle again? *[pauseee]*

For you, when you think of a father, you can’t help but think of someone temperamental, harsh, or demanding. *[pauseeee]*

Others of you have had great, godly fathers, and praise the Lord!

For you, when you think of a father, you think of kindness, love, godly strength, and care—that’s great! *[pauseeee]*

The truth is that our experience with our own dad influences our view of what a father is to be because it’s what we have seen day-in and day-out.

But we aren’t *only* influenced in our thinking from our own experience, for the culture around us influences us, too. *[pauseeee]*

In the media, fathers are often portrayed in a bad light.

Either they aren’t present, they are mean, or they are pushovers. *[pause]*

It's rare to see a modern-day portrayal of a father, who isn't a goofball, absent, or mean.

*[pauseeee]*

So let's do a mental exercise: when you hear about what a father is to be like, what are your thoughts?

What comes to mind? *[pauseee]*

Maybe you think that they are to be protective, knowledgeable, or strong. *[pause]*

Maybe you think they ought to be a hard-worker, present with their kids, and provide for their family. *[pause]*

All of those are good things, and they should be those things, but I wonder if *compassionate* ever comes to mind? *[pausee]*

Listen to what Psalm 103:13–14 says about fathers, and especially about our Heavenly Father.

*[READ]*

Psalm 103 is a psalm that praises the Lord for His blessings of forgiveness and redemption, among other things. *[pause]*

It proclaims the Lord's gracious character, and amidst that worship of the Lord, the psalmist reminds us of God's fatherly compassion in verses 13–14. *[pauseee]*

Now before we get any further, I want to first define what "compassion" is since it's used here. *[pause]*

The Hebrew word used here for 'compassion' is a word that means to be moved to show mercy to someone.

It involves pity, love, kindness, forgiveness, and tender affection. *[pauseee]*

Sometimes what's helpful is to think of the opposite, so the opposite of being compassionate is to be cruel or heartless. *[pause]*

In Jeremiah 50, God is speaking about the Medo-Persian empire, and it says, "They are cruel and have no mercy."<sup>1</sup> *[pausee]*

That word translated as "mercy" is the same word used here for compassion.

So to not be compassionate is to be harsh, mean, and cruel towards someone—it's to withhold mercy and grace. *[pauseeee]*

Let's say someone walked by a young child, who was hurt, crying, and all alone. *[pause]*

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 50:42.

To not be compassionate would be to walk by and not care, but to be compassionate means that you would be moved to action because you are moved by mercy. *[pauseeee]*

You see, true compassion comes ultimately from a heart of love. *[pause]*

In Lamentations 3:32, it says of God: “He will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love.” *[pauseeee]*

The amount of compassion you have towards others is directly related to the amount of love. *[pauseeee]*

This compassion is expressed in various ways, and one way compassion is expressed is through comfort for the afflicted. *[pause]*

Isaiah 49:13 calls upon the universe to praise God, “For the Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion on his afflicted.” *[pauseeee]*

So a compassionate person is a person who comforts others in their affliction.

They see that you are hurting, and want to help in some way (any way) that they can. *[pause]*

This is because compassion is not an idle thing, but when possible, it is accompanied by action.

It’s a person who “steps in the gap” to provide, protect, guide, or help with what another person needs.<sup>2</sup> *[pauseeee]*

A compassionate person is also a forgiving person. *[pause]*

There are many people who would proclaim from the housetops that they are compassionate, all the while they refuse to forgive a person who sinned against them. *[pause]*

They are filled with resentment, and yet are the first to say that they are merciful. *[pauseeee]*

There’s a major discrepancy between their statement and their action. *[pause]*

If you say that you are compassionate, then show it by forgiving others who sin against you, or are they “barred” from compassion in your eyes? *[pauseeee]*

In Micah 7:19, it’s speaking of the Lord, and it says, “He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.” *[pause]*

God’s compassion towards us is demonstrated in His forgiveness of us, and aren’t you so thankful for that?!

Due to the compassion of God, our sins are cast into the depths of the sea! *[pauseeee]*

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<sup>2</sup> See Isaiah 49:10.

A compassionate person is a person ready to forgive, to show mercy and pity even towards a person that sinned against them. *[pauseeee]*

Lastly, compassion is demonstrated by tender affection. *[pause]*

Listen to the tender affection of God in Jeremiah 31:20...

“Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he my darling child? For as often as I speak against him, I do remember him still.

Therefore my heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, declares the Lord.”  
*[pauseeee]*

Did you hear the words used? Dear son, darling child, remember him, heart yearning. *[pauseeee]*

This tender affection is directly connected with mercy or compassion.

So compassion doesn't stand at arms length, but moves closely in care—it is tender, affectionate, caring. *[pauseeee]*

In the story of the Good Samaritan, the priest and Levite pass by on the other side of the road when they see the injured man, but the Samaritan has compassion...

He draws near, binds his wounds, and cares for him.<sup>3</sup> *[pauseeee]*

If you cracked open ‘compassion’ like an egg it would be filled with tender care. *[pauseeee]*

So that's Biblical compassion: it's when someone is moved to mercy, showing pity, love, kindness, forgiveness, or tender affection. *[pauseeee]*

Now looking at these verses, we see that before the psalmist gets to the Lord's compassion, he points to an earthly father's compassion to illustrate it.

And so what I'd like to do this morning is for my outline to follow that progression: from earthly fathers to the Heavenly Father. *[pauseeee]*

*So first, we see that...*

### **I. A good, earthly father is compassionate towards his children.**

Listen to verse 13 once again: “As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.” *[pause]*

I want you to really consider the way that that's written, for the way that it's written shows that this is an assumed truth: a father is to be compassionate. *[pauseeee]*

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<sup>3</sup> A reference to Luke 10:30–35.

Think about if we were talking about a lifeguard—what would be some assumed truths? *[pause]*

It would be assumed that a lifeguard can swim and that they seek to save people from drowning.

These are “givens” when it comes to lifeguards. *[pause]*

Well according to the Bible, compassion and fatherhood are so tied up together that it’s *assumed* that a father will be compassionate, if he’s living as a father should. *[pause]*

That means that compassionate fatherhood is to be normative and it is good. *[pauseeee]*

Certainly, the author David, knows that there are bad fathers out there, for he knows who Saul is, and how Saul once threw a spear at Jonathan<sup>4</sup>...

But he’s spotlighting how good fathers relate to their children. *[pauseeee]*

There are many things that as fathers we see as important...

We know that we must provide for our kids by working hard at our job—that’s such a good thing, don’t ever diminish the value of that. *[pause]*

We know that we must train them up so they learn, mature, and have a stable life—that’s important. *[pause]*

We impart knowledge to them and discipline them, but how often do you view ‘showing compassion’ as an important part of being a dad? *[pauseeee]*

Fathers, compassion is NOT optional, but it’s a vital part of your role. *[pauseeee]*

If you taught them how to do practical things, disciplined them, and provided food and lodging...

But didn’t show compassion, you neglected one of the most foundational ways that you were to relate to your kids. *[pauseeee]*

What a sad thing it would be for your child to grow up and say, “My dad taught me how to work hard, but he didn’t show me compassion.” *[pause]*

And if we don’t think that’s sad, then it may very well show how far we are from what the Bible calls fathers to be. *[pauseeee]*

Compassion and fatherhood go hand-in-hand, so that fathers should see ‘showing compassion’ as high up on their list of responsibilities. *[pauseeee]*

When we lay down at night, we should evaluate, “Did I show compassion today?” *[pauseeee]*

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<sup>4</sup> A reference to 1 Samuel 20:32–33.

So fathers, are you compassionate with your children? *[pause]*

This is what a father is to be, and that's why elsewhere in the Bible, it calls fathers not to provoke their children to anger.<sup>5</sup>

Specifically, Colossians 3:21 says, "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged." *[pauseeee]*

To follow this Biblical command, you have to have compassion for your children.

You must think, "I don't want my kids discouraged, so I don't want to do anything to provoke them to anger." *[pausee]*

That shows a compassionate dad, who truly cares for his kids because the truth is that a harsh, uncompassionate, mean dad will provoke his child to anger and so discourage him. *[pauseeee]*

For many of us as men, our sinful tendency is to be more harsh and less compassionate.

So I want you to evaluate yourself today: do you show compassion to your children or are you characterized by harshness? *[pausee]*

Do you comfort them, or do you only criticize? *[pausee]*

Do you forgive them when they sin against you or do you simply get angry and that's it? *[pause]*

And do you show tender affection and care? *[pause]*

It's not unmanly to show tenderness and affection, but that's what fathers are to do.

They are present, they hug their child, they say, "I love you," and "I'm proud of you." *[pauseeee]*

Fathers, this is what we should strive for through the empowering of the Lord.

You can't do this on your own, so trust God to give you what you need—depend on Him daily. *[pauseeee]*

Maybe you feel like you have failed as a father when it comes to compassion—you are filled with regret and maybe some guilt. *[pausee]*

Apologize to your children, telling them specifically where you have failed, but don't just stop there: rest in the forgiveness of Christ. *[pausee]*

Know this—God doesn't just expect compassion from you, but He shows compassion *to you*. *[pause]*

He's tender, affectionate, forgiving, loving, kind, and so draw near to Him. *[pauseeee]*

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<sup>5</sup> See Ephesians 6:4.

*That leads me to the second point...*

## **II. Our Lord has fatherly compassion towards us.**

Let's re-read verses 13–14 again...

“As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.” *[pauseeee]*

There is something profound here, and it's this: earthly fatherhood is meant to reflect God's Fatherhood. *[pauseeee]*

**Isn't that amazing?!**

As people experience a good, earthly father's compassion, they are experiencing a *snippet* of what God's fatherly compassion is like.

**So if you have ever experienced the compassion of a father, you have gotten a taste of the feast of God's compassion for you.** *[pauseeee]*

This means that when you experience that compassion from your father, you can think, “Just imagine the compassion of my Heavenly Father!” *[pause]*

**And even if you have *never* received compassion from your dad, you can know that there is truly a good Father, whose compassion will never run out or fail to be shown to you.** *[pause]*

So one reason why the Lord created earthly fathers was so that we could get a picture of His fatherly care for us. *[pauseeee]*

**Fathers, this is such a high and holy privilege, may we never take it for granted...**

The way that we treat our kids can teach them something about God, or it can distort that image. *[pauseeee]*

**God's Fatherly compassion is infinitely better than mine, and I'm thankful.** *[pause]*

As I encounter His mercy, I can think, “Yes, this is what fatherhood was meant to be.”

**And as I come to know His compassion more, it motivates me to show it to others, more and more.** *[pauseeee]*

Our Lord is our Father—now that's crazy to consider. *[pause]*

**Our Lord is no mean despot, our Lord is our Father, and He shows compassion “to those who fear him.”** *[pauseee]*

Those who fear God are really those who honor Christ, believing in Him through faith.

That's why John explains that receiving Christ leads to becoming a child of God. *[pausee]*

Listen to John 1:12: "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." *[pause]*

To know God as Father, you must believe in Jesus Christ, who died for our sins.

So when you trust in Christ alone for salvation, you are given the right to become a child of God, and what a good Father He is! *[pause]*

We can't help but say with John, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are!"<sup>6</sup> *[pauseee]*

That the Lord God would show you and me compassion, who were once sinners against Him is love beyond measure. *[pause]*

He doesn't show compassion to nice, sweet, completely obedient, perfect children.

He shows compassion to us, who are often sinful messes, who have failed Him, time and time again, who struggle, and who can't seem to get our act together.

Yet His compassion pierces through all of our muck and wraps us with love. *[pauseeee]*

His compassionate love reached down to us in our sin, and has saved us through the cross of Christ, lifting us up not only in forgiveness, but in adoption as children.

So now we cry, "Abba! Father!"<sup>7</sup> *[pause]*

We were like the prodigal son, who didn't deserve anything, yet when he returned, his father "felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him."<sup>8</sup> *[pauseeee]*

You see, God's compassion towards us is not based on our amazingness, but based on our weakness.

We are told here that, "He knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust." *[pauseeee]*

A reason why God is so compassionate towards us is because he remembers how weak and frail we are. *[pause]*

He doesn't think, "You are such an amazing person, you know what, I'm going to be compassionate towards you today."

Instead, it's the idea that God knows that we are frail, weak, and needy, and so He shows us compassion. *[pauseeee]*

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<sup>6</sup> 1 John 3:1.

<sup>7</sup> Romans 8:15.

<sup>8</sup> Luke 15:20.

I don't earn compassion through my impressiveness, I need compassion in my infirmity.  
*[pauseeee]*

The One who formed us knows our form—He never forgets what we are made of.

He *knows* that we are weak, limited, fragile, mortal, and takes that into account as He deals with us. *[pauseeee]*

Consider our frame...

We get sick, we are limited in our ability to do things, we run out of strength, we have to depend on others, and our lives are like a vapor. *[pause]*

Life is frail—there's no getting around it, but the amazing thing is: God is compassionate.

So though our physical lives are like dust, God's compassion is steadfastly there. *[pauseeee]*

I have young children, and as a father, you consider your child's age and weaknesses in knowing what to expect from them. *[pause]*

Since I know that my children are weak, I don't expect them to carry a super heavy suitcase because I know they can't.

So also, God works with us in those kinds of ways. *[pauseeee]*

I'm so thankful that God remembers my frame. *[pause]*

I am like dust—I feel my weaknesses, limits, mortality, and failures every single day, so I need compassion from my Heavenly Father. *[pauseeee]*

There's a story of "A young man [who] was to be sentenced to the penitentiary. *[pause]*

The judge had known him from childhood, for he was well acquainted with his father—a famous legal scholar [and author]...*[pause]*

Trying to probe the offender's conscience, the judge said, 'As you are about to be sentenced and as you think of your wonderful dad, what do you remember most clearly about him?' *[pause]*

There was a pause. Then the judge received an answer he had not expected...

'I remember when I went to him for advice. He looked up at me from the book he was writing and said, 'Run along, boy; I'm busy!' *[pause]*

When I went to him for companionship, he turned me away, saying, 'Run along, son; this book must be finished!' *[pause]*

Your honor, you remember him as a great lawyer. I remember him as a lost friend.' *[pause]*

The magistrate muttered to himself, ‘Alas! Finished the book, but lost the boy!’”<sup>9</sup> *[pauseeee]*

Aren’t you thankful that God our Father isn’t like that? *[pause]*

He never says, “Run along, I’m busy.” But He says, “Come here, I love you.” *[pause]*

And He knows you in and out, He knows your frame, and so is compassionate, keeping that in mind as He relates to you. *[pauseeee]*

*What we found today is that...*

### **The Lord’s compassion towards us is perfect, fatherly compassion!**

Fathers are to show compassion towards their kids—that’s an essential part of being a father.

And like a good, earthly father, but infinitely better, God the Father is perfectly compassionate towards His children, who are those who fear Him. *[pauseeeee]*

The application today is simple: thank your father *and* your Father. *[pause]*

If you had a good, earthly father, be thankful that he was compassionate towards you.

Praise God that you got to experience compassion in your need—that was a grace and a mercy shown to you. *[pause]*

But here’s the thing: even if you didn’t have a father who was compassionate, you actually do have a compassionate Father: your Father in Heaven. *[pause]*

He is always and ever compassionate, no matter how little compassion you got from your father here on earth.

So thank your Heavenly Father, who shows you compassion beyond measure. *[pauseeee]*

This Father in Heaven loved us so much and had so much compassion towards us that He sent His Son to this earth to save us. *[pause]*

As one commentary put it, “God...has pity on us. In the Incarnation, God takes the next step. He becomes one with us and shares in our humanity.”<sup>10</sup> *[pauseeee]*

Jesus took on our frame and experienced this frailty in His life and death—He knows firsthand what it’s like.

But this action wasn’t merely to know our frame, but to mercifully save us from our sins and give us eternal life. *[pause]*

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<sup>9</sup> Found at: <https://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/f/father.htm>. Original source: *Homemade*, February, 1989.

<sup>10</sup> Donald Williams and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Psalms 73–150*, vol. 14, *The Preacher’s Commentary Series* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1989), 229.

Now because of Christ's death and resurrection, when our bodies are raised up from the grave, the mortal will put on immortality, and we will no longer be dust.

Instead, we will have glorified bodies that live on forever, and we will proclaim like Paul, "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"<sup>11</sup> [*pauseeee*]

Praise the Lord God our Father, who has shown us compassion on the Cross, continues to show us compassion today, and will show us compassion forevermore.

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<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:54–55.