

Psalm 103: Meditation

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Date: 16 August 2026

Preacher: Kevin Murphy

[0:00] Father God, as we come to your word, we want you, the living God, to speak to us. We want to know what you have to say about life and about who you are. We want to discover you and encounter you in your word.

So Spirit of God, we pray, won't you speak to us through your word today? In your gracious and wonderful name I pray. Amen. Amen. Michelle, will you come and read to us, please?

Today's scripture reading is taken from Psalm 103. Please follow along in your Bible. And if you don't have a Bible, please grab one from the front of the stage or at the back near the hall.

The passage is on page 470. 470. Let us hear God's word today.

Psalm 103 of David. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me. Bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

[1:11] Who forgives all your iniquity. Who heals all your diseases. Who redeems your life from the pit. Who crowns you with a steadfast love and mercy.

Who satisfies you with good, so that your youth is renewed like the eagles. The Lord works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed.

He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.

For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

[2:16] As the 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.

As for men, his days are like grass. He flourishes like a flower of the field, for the wind passes over it, and it is gone. And its place knows it no more.

But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him. And his righteousness to children's children. To those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.

Bless the Lord, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word.

Bless the Lord, all his hosts, his ministers, who do his will. Bless the Lord, all his works, in all places of his dominion.

[3:25] Bless the Lord, O my soul. Let us believe and respond to God's true and living word. Great, thank you, Michelle.

One of the great challenges of our generation, and I suspect it's going to increasingly become a problem, is that we don't really know how to think anymore. We don't know how to think deeply.

With shorter and shorter attention spans, news coming to us in kind of bit-sized or bite-sized headlines, more and more reliance on AI to do deep work or deep thinking for us.

We are becoming a generation or a civilization that don't really know how to think deeply. How to engage with critical reasoning. How to engage with various voices.

And we don't have the mental framework or the architecture to know how to slow down and reflect and meditate. And to ponder deeply the most important things in life.

[4:28] How many of us friends like me open up an online article on our news feed, and you see how long the article is, and you just skim the first few paragraphs and then move on.

Am I the only one that does that? I suspect not. I don't know about you, but I found that I'm someone that's a little bit skeptical about technology and what it's doing to us as people and as civilizations.

And yet still, I find my attention span has been reduced to about that of an ant or maybe a goldfish. I find it so hard to give myself to 30 or 40 or 50 minutes of sustained thinking, writing, without getting distracted.

I hate distraction, what it does. And so I've tried to build all these systems in my life. I locked my cell phone in my drawer and I can't open it for a while. I turned off every notification you could possibly have on your phone.

I've deleted all my social media accounts. I've set up times in the day when I can't check my emails and can't check my emails. And still, five minutes goes by and I'm thinking, I'm sure I've got to send that message.

[5:34] I'm sure the new email has come and that's vital that I respond right now. I don't know how to think deeply. I suspect I'm not the only one.

We are a generation that is struggling to know how to reflect and meditate and think about the important things of life. And I think AI has only contributed to this.

I was talking to a professor recently at a university here in Hong Kong who said he had a student that handed in an essay that was obviously written entirely by AI. And so the professor says, listen, bad news.

We can't accept this essay. But I want to help you out. So this is what I want you to do. I want you to write a letter explaining why you did this, mitigating circumstances.

What have you learned from this experience? And if you do that, we'll be lenient on you. So what does the student do? He gets AI to write a letter for him. And he hands in the AI written letter.

[6:32] But that's the problem, isn't it? We're becoming a generation that doesn't know how to think for ourselves, how to think deeply, how to think critically about the most important things in life. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary Word of the Year for 2025, anybody know what it was?

Slop. The Word of the Year, Slop. Do you know what Slop is? Slop is mushy mud. It's the thing that pigs love to wallow in. But these days, Slop means the pervasive, bad digital content produced by AI that dominates our screens, our social media, our schools, our workplaces.

And add to that the reality of digital echo chambers, where we only hear what the algorithms think we want to hear, telling us the stuff we already know and reintroducing our prejudices, reinforcing our prejudices.

Selop engaging with opposing ideas, thoughtful dialogue, contrasting worldviewpoints. The future of critical reasoning, deep thinking, deep the ability to meditate on the most important things in life does not bode well.

And one of the consequences for this is that not only do we live in a more polarized, more fractured world, a more shallow world, our inability to think about the most important things in life leaves us with a void, a vacuum.

[7:54] Who am I? What does it mean to be a human being? Where is, what is wisdom? Where is wisdom found? What does it mean to be a created being in a created world?

Who is God? How do I relate to Him? How do I find Him? Friends, we don't even have the mental architecture, the framework to think about these things, never mind the capacity to think about them.

Who is God and how do I relate to Him? A.W. Tozer famously said, What comes to mind when we think about God is the most important thing about us. Because we tend, by a secret law of the soul, to move towards our mental image of God.

And this is where the Psalms are immensely helpful. Because in a world of slop and shallow thinking, the Psalms invite us onto a pathway of knowing God, of thinking deeply, of meditating about ourselves, and who God is, and how life is meant to work in God's universe.

And over the last couple of weeks, we've been looking at various types of Psalms. We've been looking at Psalms of lament, Psalms of confession, Psalms of praise, Psalms of trust. And today we're looking at Psalm 103.

[9:05] And Psalm 103 is a Psalm of meditation. It's a Psalm that's designed to just get us to slow down and think deeply about God.

It's a Psalm that's designed to help us in a world where we don't like to think deeply to help us do so. And you'll notice in the Psalm, this is not a Psalm of lament. There's no tears.

It's not a Psalm of confession. David doesn't confess anything. There's no requests made of God. He doesn't ask God for a single thing. He just slows down and thinks about who God is.

The goal of the Psalm is to help us meditate on God. Now, obviously, living in Asia, we know about meditation. And maybe some of you here, maybe you're not a Christian. Maybe you've engaged in meditation over the years.

You maybe do yoga, or some other kind of meditation. In Asia, we are very familiar with meditation. But Christian meditation is very different from Eastern meditation, or transcendental meditation.

[10:09] Eastern meditation, the goal is to empty your mind of thoughts and ideas, to clear your mind, so that you can find a place of peace and nirvana, having your mind clear of any ideas and thoughts.

But Christian meditation is the opposite. In Christian meditation, the goal is to fill our minds with what is true and real and good and permanent and worthwhile, to fill our minds with who God is, until it becomes visceral and real to us, until it shapes our hearts and we know how to live.

Psalm 103 is a Psalm of meditation, a multifaceted, sustained meditation, on what is most fundamentally true and real about God, and how He acts towards His people.

And the goal of this Psalm, at the end of this meditation, is to lead us to joy-filled praise and adoration and wonder.

That's what David wants us to do. A sustained meditation on who God is, and how He acts towards His people, that leads to joy-filled wonder, praise and adoration.

[11:15] So let's look at it together. So I hope you have a Bible open with you, or a scripture in front of you, and let's look at it together. You'll notice, the first verse, or the first line, and the last line are identical.

Bless the Lord, O my soul. Or the NLT says, Let all that I am, my entire being, praise the Lord.

That's what David wants us to leave with. By the end of the Psalm, he wants us to say, God, you are awesome.

Praise you, O my soul. And in between the first line, and the bottom line, he's going to give us a whole bunch of reasons, why that should be the case. He's going to give us four reasons in particular.

So, let's dive in and look at them. First reason is this. God's lavish grace. God's abundantly generous, lavish grace. Look at verse 3 to 5 with me.

So, the way the Psalm works is, there's all these, this language that is repeated. There's four different sections. Look at the first section, 3 to 5. He says, Bless the Lord, O my soul, forget not all his benefits.

[12:18] And now he lists some of these benefits. He says, this God, he forgives our iniquity. But he doesn't just do that. He heals all our diseases. Or maybe another translation would be, he heals our brokenness.

But he doesn't just do that. He also redeems your life from the pits. But he doesn't just do that. He crowns you with steadfast love and mercy. Oh, but more than that, he satisfies your soul with the good.

So that rather than lumbering through life like an elephant, that's just trying to, or like last week we said like eeyore, right? He, you, you get to soar on the thermals of God's grace.

And it's like the psalmist here, he's, he's trying to find language to describe that God is not just this moral policeman. He's not just an upholder of the law and a punisher of the slightest misgivings.

This is the language of a generous and compassionate Lord, one who loves to see those under his rule flourishing. God is not a moral policeman who is checking every line that you just put your foot outside the line by half a millimeter.

[13:28] He's calling the empire. You're out. Get out of here. This is a lavish and generous God who loves to see his people flourish.

He doesn't just forgive the small transgressions that we really sorry about. He forgives all of them. He doesn't just come to help some of our brokenness.

He heals all of our diseases. And there's a progression here, isn't there? Of this, this generosity of God's kindness. Here is a man whose life was in a bit of a mess.

He, he was in the pits. He was elderly lost. He was going nowhere. And how does it end? With a crown. It's a symbol of dignity and honor and royalty. A crown being placed on his head.

I think of the picture of the prodigal, of the, the parable of the prodigal son. Remember, here's this, the son that says to his dad, Hey, you know, I don't really need you in my life. Just give me your money. I'm going to go live my life, live life my way.

[14:25] And he goes off and he does, and he squanders it. And he ends up in the pits with the pigs eating their food. And he says, Oh, my servants had it better than me. So he humbles himself and he goes back.

And what does his dad do? His dad throws his arms around him. He says, quick, bring the ring, bring the crown, bring the best robe, kill the fattened calf.

My son is back. And that's what, what David is talking about here. Here is a God who is so lavish and generous in his praise and his, his love. And the biblical word for this is grace.

Grace means getting what you don't deserve. Get it. We deserve. Here the guy, instead of just getting the pit and judgment, he gets God's lavish kindness.

David is reflecting on life. And he's saying, God, you have been so, so good to me. You haven't just given me what I've deserved. You've given me more than I've deserved.

[15:25] You've satisfied my soul. You filled my soul. So friends, we want to be a church that is praying the Psalm. So how might you pray this section? If you this week were to pray Psalm 103, well, you might say something like this, Lord Jesus, when I stop and think about my life, you have been so kind, so generous to me.

You've given me way more than I deserve. You've not only rescued me and saved me, you've given me life. You've given me a family. You've given me a career. You've given me a community. You renew and fill me with hope and joy.

You have been so good. Thank you for your lavish grace and kindness to me. God's lavish grace. But look what else. David wants us to see something else.

He wants us to see not only God's lavish grace, but also God's immense mercy. His immense mercy. Look at verse 7 to 10. Next section. He says, The Lord, He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the people of Israel.

The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide. Chide means to reprimand or to make known your displeasure.

[16:33] He doesn't always chide, nor will He keep His anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. David's reflecting on his own life and he's remembering God's amazing mercy.

David remembers that there are times when God disciplines us. The Bible says that God disciplines the ones that He loves. But God's discipline is not His natural posture.

It's not God's natural disposition towards us. We sometimes think God is like that. That His natural posture is He's always pointing the finger. He's always showing us where we're wrong and where we've stepped out of bounds.

He's always telling us what we've done wrong this time. Maybe like some of our own parents. We think that God is hard to please. But David reminds us that that is not His natural disposition.

Who is He? What is His most natural posture? It's not the pointed finger. It's the arms of embrace. It's God's immense mercy.

[17:36] And remember in Exodus 34, God reveals Himself to Moses and the people of Israel. And He gives Himself like a signature. His sign-off name. And for all of His communications in the rest of the Old Testament, God ends all His communications kind of like with a sign-off name, a signature.

And what is God's signature? The Lord, the Lord. Gracious and compassionate. Slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. That's like God's personal name.

It's how God speaks about Himself. And David remembers that. And here he writes about God. And he says, Who is God? He is merciful and gracious. Slow to anger. Abounding in steadfast love.

He is not angry forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins. Nor repay us according to our iniquities. If grace is getting what we don't deserve.

Being lavishly God's generosity and giving us what we don't deserve. Mercy is not getting what we do deserve. And you see how those two go together.

[18:38] We deserve the pit. Judgment. Hell. And what do we get? Amazing grace instead. And David here is saying, God, your grace is lavish and generous.

And your mercy is immense and unending. Friends, I wonder if you see yourself or feel yourself to be under God's constant frown. Like God is always unhappy with you.

That God is somehow always disappointed with you. You think of God like that? If so, you've created a God in your own image. That is not God's natural disposition.

Who is He? Who is God most fundamentally? The Lord, the Lord. Gracious and compassionate. Slow to anger. And abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

So how might we pray Psalm 103 this week? Well, you may want to just prayerfully revel in His mercy and His forgiveness. Lord Jesus, when I think of my many, many faults and how you deal with me, I am astounded by your unceasing patience.

[19:42] Your amazing forbearance. Your unceasing mercy. I am astounded by your permanence and your grace. God, you do not treat me like I deserve.

You are so kind and merciful. God, it is true. My sins, they are many. But your mercy, it is more. God, where sin has abounded, your unceasing mercy has superabounded.

Jesus, thank you for your immense mercy to someone like me. God's immense mercy. But David wants us to see there is something else about God.

David is not done. And so he gives us another angle to meditate on God's character. And he comes around a third time to God. And here he wants us to think about God's immeasurable or limitless or inexhaustible goodness.

Look at verse 11 to 13. I love these verses. So he has a third angle. He says, Friends, you see what David is doing here?

[21:02] David is using what I guess is called a parallelism. He is using these three sentences where he is paralleling two things. He is saying, As this, so this. You see he does that three times.

And each one of those, the first sentence is something inexhaustible, something immeasurable, something limitless. As high as the stars or the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for us.

As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our sins from us. And just think about that for a moment. Just ask those NASA astronauts who went into space recently, right?

Ten days into space, past the moon. How high are the heavens above the earth? Well, you could keep on going forever. A hundred billion light years and you haven't reached the ends of the heavens.

So great is his steadfast love for us. Well, just think about how far is the east from the west? You know, this is not like the MTR line, right? You go to Cheyenne and he says, you've reached the end of the island line.

[22:06] But if you were to keep on going east, when would you get to the end of east? You could just go for a hundred million light years, just keep on going around the earth. Or if you go to outer space, you never reach the end.

And then think a hundred billion light years west. As far as the one is from the other, so far does God remove our sins, our transgressions. You know, God is not keeping a notebook in his back pocket.

Oh, Oscar, just once again, you know, as far, as far, friends, as the farthest galaxy we can imagine, so far does God remove our sins from us.

And David here is, he's wanting us to see the inexhaustibleness, the limitlessness of God's immense kindness and goodness. You know, when I was growing up, we had this phrase in our culture, and sometimes teachers would say to their students, okay, teachers, Iris and Zoe, that if you're testing someone's patience, they would say, I've had it up to here with you.

You know that phrase? Anybody heard that? What it means is, my impatience is running out. It's like building, building, building, building, building, building. And when it gets to the top, I'm about to explode.

[23:19] And when someone's really testing your patience, you say, listen, I've had it up to here. It's like you're right on the end. If you test me anymore, I'm going to let loose, right? I've had it up to here with you.

Friends, God never says that. God never looks at you and says, one strike to many, I've had it up to here. Next time you're done. I'm done with you. His immense goodness is inexhaustible.

As far as the heavens are above the earth, as far as the east is from the west. As a father shows compassion to his children, maybe not your father, but the very best father that you could ever imagine.

So does the Lord show love and compassion towards us. So how would we pray the Psalms this week? Maybe you want to express what David is saying here in your own words.

Lord Jesus, when I stop and think about it, you are so unlike everyone else in my life. Your love, your mercy, your grace is limitless. Thank you, Lord Jesus, that I can never exhaust, never deplete, never drain your love and compassion.

[24 : 28] Sometimes I feel like my sin must surely drive you away. But this scripture tells me that in a hundred billion years from now, you will be no less interested, no less loving, no less merciful than you are today.

Jesus, help me to see that, to know that, the immensity, the inexhaustibleness of your love, God's inexhaustible goodness. Well, David's almost done, but he comes around one last time.

And here he wants us to see God's enduring faithfulness. And so, look at verse 15 to 19. Here, he wants us to compare and contrast man's love and faithfulness with God's love and faithfulness.

And so, look what he says, as for man, verse 15, his days are like grass. He flourishes like a flower of the field, for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.

But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him. His righteousness to children's children, or generation after generation after generation, to those who keep his covenant and remember his commandments.

[25 : 32] The Lord has established his throne, and his kingdom rules over all. Friends, you see the comparison here? Between the fleeting, flimsy, fragile nature of human love and commitment and faithfulness, and God's rock-solid, granite love and faithfulness.

The steadfast love of the Lord. Friends, maybe you've experienced that. Human love, human relationships, or human covenant commitments.

Maybe you find a partner, a spouse, and they're the stuff that dreams are made of. They're the very best spouse that you can imagine, and they are faithful, and they're wonderful, but friends, they're still human.

They're still fallible. They're still going to make mistakes. They're still going to get tired and grumpy and lose their temper. And friends, even if they are as close as perfect gets, they're still one day going to die.

They're going to pass away. But God, His love is, it's not like that. It's never going to pass. He's never going to fail you. He's never going to get tired and grumpy with you.

[26 : 37] He's never going to pass away. Or think about the perfect job. Maybe you put all your hope in your job, and you find the perfect job with the perfect boss and the perfect industry, and you think life couldn't get better, and the economy turns, and you're staring a trenchant in the eye.

Or maybe your boss retires, and you get a new boss, and it all goes downhill. Friends, our world, our hopes, our dreams, the things that we put our stock in are so temporary and so flimsy and fragile.

But God, it's not like that. He's enduring from everlasting to everlasting, from generation to generation. Friends, the things that we put our hope and confidence in, it's like somebody, you give somebody flowers.

From time to time, I give my wife flowers. Not as often as I should. And I give flowers, but a week later, where are those flowers? They are in the bin, right? They don't last very long.

But God is not like that. God's love is like the granite of the Dolomites or the Alps, right? It's going to endure earthquakes and famines and heat waves.

[27 : 39] In a hundred billion years, those rocks are still going to be standing. God's love is so steadfast like the great big mountain peaks. Unshakable, unbreakable. And God wants to drive the stake of confidence and assurance deep into the rock.

And so He gives us Psalm 103. Friends, God's steadfast love, the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting to those who fear Him.

Now that phrase, the steadfast love of the Lord, I'd never noticed this before until this week. That phrase, the steadfast love of the Lord, actually appears in all four of those categories. In, look at verse 4, it says, He crowns you with steadfast love and mercy.

Verse 8, the Lord is slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love. Verse 11, as high as the heavens or above the earth, so great is His steadfast love towards those who fear Him.

Verse 17, the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting. All four sections actually speak about God's steadfast love. So what's happening here?

[28 : 45] This is like, you know in the soccer world cup, right? Someone scores a great goal and what happens? They replay the action from different angles. So you get one from the right and the

one from the left and the one from behind the goal and the one from the camera up on top.

It's the same action from different angles. David here is taking four meditations on God's unceasing steadfast love and looking at it and he comes around and says, let's look at it from a different angle. God's steadfast love is so generous and lavish. God's steadfast love is immense. God's steadfast love is inexhaustible. God's steadfast love is enduring and faithful forever.

Friends, the word steadfast love in the Bible is actually a technical word. The Hebrew word is *chesed*. It's not just any word. It's a technical word and what it means is God's loyal covenant, commitment, faithfulness.

God's loyal, covenant, faithfulness. And what it means is that God's love is not based on His feelings or His emotions. It's based on His nature, on who He is.

[29:55] It's based on the relationships between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. That if for God to be, for God to break His covenant faithfulness and His commitment, He would have to break the relationships within the Trinity.

God would have to stop being God Himself. God's steadfast love is who He is. For God to break that love and faithfulness, He would have to deny His very nature, disown Himself, tear the Trinity apart.

And so David here wants us to take a sustained meditation to reflect on the vastness, the depth, the height, the inexhaustibleness, the enduring nature of God's steadfast love.

David reflects on that from the Old Testament perspective. But friends, don't we have we much more reason to do so? David, writing a thousand years before Jesus came, could think about God's faithfulness to Israel, His covenant faithfulness, the fact that God was faithful to His Word and He loved His people and He was lavish and generous and gracious and immensely merciful.

But friends, what about us who look back upon Christ's coming and we look upon the cross where Jesus demonstrated His lavish, immense, infinite, steadfast love for us?

[31:16] And when we look at these verses in light of the cross, it gives a new sense of color, doesn't it? Just look at verse 4. Jesus is the one who redeems our life from the pit.

Why? Well, because Jesus went to the pit Himself. Friends, Jesus was laid in the grave and went to hell and endured all the worst of the pits of hell to rescue and redeem us.

Well, look at verse 14. He knows our frame that we are but dust. Why? Well, Jesus took on our frame. Jesus took on humanity. Jesus suffered all the horror and the sadness and the pain and the agony of being a human being.

Fully man. Yes, fully God, but also fully man. Jesus knows what it feels like to feel pain and shame and abandonment and loneliness. To hang on the cross and feel asphyxiation where you cannot breathe and you suffer until you cannot breathe anymore and you die for lack of oxygen.

Jesus knows what it's like to have a frame like ours. And why did He do it? Because of His steadfast love for you and me. But surely the greatest of these is verse 10.

[32:26] Look at verse 10. He does not deal with us according to our sins nor repay us according to our iniquities. Why? Because God the Father repaid Jesus for our iniquities.

Jesus Christ paid our iniquities for us on the cross. So friends, how could we pray Psalm 103 this week? Well, maybe you want to pray something like this.

Lord Jesus, how awesome is your steadfast love? More awesome than I could comprehend. Thank you that your love for me is so unlike my love for you. My love is up and down, inconsistent, fickle and flimsy, like the grass of the field, like the flowers of the field.

But your love is as enduring as the mountains, from everlasting to everlasting. Jesus, help me comprehend the permanence, the entrancement of your love. May I rest secure, confident, assured, not fretful and anxious because your steadfast love and may it result in joy-filled praise and wonder. In your wonderful name I pray. Amen. Friends, our generation is one that is losing the ability to think deeply, to slow down and meditate on the most important, the most beautiful, the most wonderful things about life.

[33:47] what we need and what David wants us to do is to think carefully, to meditate slowly on who God is and how He acts towards His people, to those who love and trust Him, to those who have repented of their sins, to those who have put their hope in Him.

Friends, have you done that? Have you trusted in Jesus? have you come to know the steadfast love of the Lord which endures forever, the immensity of His mercy, the inexhaustibleness of His goodness, the lavishness of His grace?

Friends, have you turned from other fickle loves, transient and flimsy, and rested in the steadfast love of Christ? David wants you to know the love of Christ.

God wants you to know the love of Christ. We want you to know the love of Christ. And for that to result in joyful praise and wonder. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name, forget not all His benefits.

Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, as we think about Your insane love for us, God, we are humbled and yet built up to the stars. All at the same time.

[35:03] Humble to the dust and yet built up to the stars. God, thank You for Your incredible love. Thank You for Your steadfast love that is so unlike our love. God, our love is limited, it's exhaustible, it's flimsy, it is fickle, it is not generous.

Your love, God, is everything that we are not. And so we end today saying, praise the Lord, O my soul, all that is within me. Praise the Lord. God, thank You for Your amazing love.

Write that in our hearts. God, I pray that we will be secure and confident, not anxious or worried, because we know where our hope lies. In Your great name I pray. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.