



The Praises of God's People

THEOLOGICAL THEME: Worship is bringing glory to God for His Word, His works, and His promise.

We are part of a generation that has largely forgotten how to pray and sing the psalms. Perhaps for the first time in all of church history, the psalms are no longer the bedrock for our individual devotion or corporate worship. This puts us out of step not only with the rest of church history but with the earliest Christians. The apostles quoted more from the Psalms than any other book in the Old Testament. They were steeped in the rhythms and poetry and theology of their people's prayer book.

Voices from the Church

"The Psalms are the steady, sustained subcurrent of healthy Christian living."¹

—N. T. Wright

 What are the psalms you are most familiar with?

 In what settings have you encountered these psalms? How were they used?

Date of My Bible Study: _____

Today we come to a pause in the Old Testament storyline. God's covenant people wrote the psalms over a long period of time. Many are written by King David, a few come from other kings, one comes to us from Moses, and many are from Asaph. The purpose of the psalms was to recall the mighty acts of God for the people. Some of the psalms focus on praise. Others cry out and lament the evil in this world. Some are confessions of sin. Others point forward to the coming Messiah.

In this session, we will look briefly at three different psalms. The first, Psalm 1, sets the stage for all the psalms, showing us a vision of God's people who delight in God's Word. Next we see how Psalm 100 shows how the psalms call us to celebrate who God is and give thanks for what He has done. Then we look at how Psalm 110 points forward to the coming Messiah, who will make all things right. As we read and pray and sing the psalms, we identify with the people of God who offer our lives in worship for His great name.

1. The psalms call us to delight in God's Word (Ps. 1).

¹ Blessed is the man

*who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;*

*² but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.*

*³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.*

In all that he does, he prospers.

*⁴ The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.*

*⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;*

*⁶ for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.*

The more we study and reflect on this psalm, the more we realize it is ultimately about delight. It's not simply a lesson about doing the right thing or learning the right doctrine or following the right rules. It's about worship and joy. The psalms do teach us, but the *way* they teach us is by training us to find our satisfaction in the Lord. Psalm 1 claims that the believer who is blessed is the one whose delight is in the Lord's instruction. It's more about our heart's delight than our mind's choice.

Not long ago, the two of us were walking on the sidewalk with our kids in their strollers. We passed by a recently built mosque in our town. It was packed with people praying. The parking lot was full. It seemed like every time we walked by, we saw that people were there. A few days later, we were talking with a pastor who was struggling about what to do with the Sunday night service in their church. It burdened us to think that there was always a crowd at the mosque but not at the church. *What does this say about where we find our delight?* we wondered. *What does this say about our commitment to each other as believers?*



What is the difference between studying God's Word or attending a worship service out of duty versus delight?



Why do you think Psalm 1 focuses on "delight" in God's Word?

Psalm 1 paints a picture of a believer who delights in God's Word, but this delight is not something that only happens spontaneously. It is built into the pattern of everyday life. "Day and night" this person meditates on God's Word. In other words, delighting in God's Word is not something that will happen by chance. It takes intentionality and preparation.

Voices from the Church

"The activity of meditating on the Bible follows the disposition of delighting in the Bible."²

—Jonathan Leeman

The psalms are a companion to everyday life. But they are so much more than a simple stress-reliever. They reorient us to God and His salvation. They help us delight in the Lord and walk in His ways. We can't really do one without the other. We walk in His ways *because* we delight in the Lord, and we show our delight is in the Lord *by* walking in His ways. Furthermore, we focus on the Lord because we want to be fruitful, not in gaining material prosperity for ourselves but living prosperous, spiritual lives that bear fruit for God's kingdom.

 What is the relationship between delighting in God's Word and delighting in God Himself?



Voices from Church History

"We must ask how we can understand the Psalms as God's Word, and then we shall be able to pray them. It does not depend, therefore, on whether the Psalms express adequately that which we feel at a given moment in our heart. If we are to pray aright, perhaps it is quite necessary that we pray contrary to our own heart. Not what we want to pray is important, but what God wants us to pray."³

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer
(1906-1945)

2. The psalms call us to celebrate God's character and work (Ps. 100).

¹ *Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth!*

² *Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!*

³ *Know that the LORD, he is God!*

It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

⁴ *Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise!*

Give thanks to him; bless his name!

⁵ *For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.*

Psalm 100 is a classic example of preparing your heart to “enter his gates with thanksgiving” and “his courts with praise.” Notice that the psalm doesn’t give us the image of praising God only once the people were present. They had praise on their hearts and minds as they entered.

What would our worship services be like if we intentionally prepared ourselves beforehand? My grandfather would arrive at church 45 minutes before the service so he could still his mind and prepare his heart. He knew he needed to prepare himself before worship. Of course, you might be thinking, *I have kids. It’s impossible for me to prepare myself. It’s a struggle to get everyone ready on time in the first place!* We face some of the same issues, but we are doing our best to create rhythms of life that help us prepare our own hearts and the hearts of our children. That will look different for people at different stages of life. But surely we should prepare ourselves.

 The psalmist talked about attending worship with praise and thanksgiving already in our hearts. What do we do when we don’t “feel” like praising God?

 What should we do when our hearts seem cold to God?

This is a psalm that celebrates God’s character and work. Like all the psalms, it shapes our view of God.

Reminding is one of the central purposes of worship. Even the sad psalms usually remind us of God and His promise. They are the psalmist’s way of reminding the people of what God has said and what God has done. Reminding matters. We take the Lord’s Supper *in remembrance*. Why? Because sometimes we haven’t even left the church’s parking lot and we’re already living like the cross and resurrection didn’t happen! The human act of worship—responding to God—is something that shapes and refocuses us.



What are some ways you can use the psalms to remember God's grace to you throughout the week?



How would constant reminders of God's faithfulness impact your spiritual life?

Psalm 100 reorients us to the big picture of a glorious God and His wonderful creation. Our society promotes people who are “self-made” and “self-sufficient.” Psalm 100 shows us the difference between “self-made” people and “God-made” people. It reminds us that God is in control. Our times belong to Him. All Christian worship is wrapped up in the reality that humanity is both frail and beautiful—created in the image of God (beautiful) yet broken and sinful and mortal (frail).

Like all the psalms, Psalm 100 elevates our mind and shifts our gaze from the things of this world to the Creator of this world. It stirs our affections and guides us to see God as more attractive and glorious than anything else in the world. This kind of worship is what stirs up our desire to tell others about Christ. Our witness flows from our worship. And yet our worship is also part of our witness! When we show our love for God, outsiders see us transfixed by God's beauty and desire to see that God for themselves.

99 Essential Christian Doctrines

89. *Worship*

While many reduce worship to an event or the singing of worship songs, worship is first and foremost something of the heart and extends to all areas of life. The aim and focus of worship is God, giving Him the exact due of praise and adoration that He deserves. Worship should be carried out not only at a personal level within a Christian's life but also in joining with other Christians in the corporate act of worship and stewarding our gifts for the glory of God. Corporate worship serves to edify and strengthen other Christians, but it also serves as a witness to non-believers of the greatness of God.



What is the connection between celebration of God's work and involvement in God's mission?

3. The psalms call us to look for the coming Messiah (Ps. 110).

¹ *The LORD says to my Lord:*

“Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.”

² *The LORD sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter.*

Rule in the midst of your enemies!

³ *Your people will offer themselves freely*

on the day of your power,

in holy garments; from the womb of the morning,

the dew of your youth will be yours.

⁴ *The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind,*

“You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”

⁵ *The LORD is at your right hand;*

he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath.

⁶ *He will execute judgment among the nations, filling them with corpses;*

he will shatter chiefs over the wide earth.

⁷ *He will drink from the brook by the way;*

therefore he will lift up his head.

There is so much in this psalm to unpack and not enough time in this session to unpack it all! The main thing to keep in mind, however, is that the psalms focus our attention on Jesus. The first readers of this psalm might see this as anticipating the coming of their Messiah. Today we read it and think of Jesus' work in the past and His coming again in the future.

Many of the psalms that point to Jesus contain an element of judgment. Consider the line about God coming back to “execute judgment among the nations” and “fill them with corpses” and “shatter chiefs.”

We find it hard to greet such an example of God’s judgment with joy and delight, but perhaps this is because we do not know what it is like to be part of a society where unjust leaders tyrannize the people. When we get a taste of injustice, we long for the world to be made right, and God—the just Judge of the universe—is the One who will execute vengeance when He brings justice to the world. And so, with the psalmist, we say, “Yes, Lord, come and judge the nations!” and remember that the Judge of the universe is the Jesus who once was on a cross, dying for our sins before rising to new life.



Voices from Church History

“Raise your eyes to the Judge, see who it is that is seated, with whom he is seated, and where. Christ is sitting at the right hand of the Father.”⁴

—Ambrose (circa 340-397)



In what ways do the psalms help form our prayers so that our hearts’ desires align with God’s heart?

Conclusion

The Book of Psalms was the hymnbook of Jesus. We are told that Jesus sang a psalm with His disciples (Mark 14:26), and we see Jesus quoting from the Psalms more than any other book in the Old Testament. But the psalms do not only belong to Jesus; they are also about Him. This is the beauty of seeing Christ in the psalms. For those of us in Christ, His songbook becomes ours. We sing about Him and to Him, and slowly but surely, we become more like Him. Don’t neglect the psalms. They show us Jesus.

CHRIST CONNECTION: The psalms cover the spectrum of life. We praise God for His goodness and grace, we confess our sin, and we lament the brokenness of this world. When Jesus came, He stepped into the pain and brokenness of this world and sang these psalms with His people. But Jesus not only sings the psalms; He is the King whom these psalms are ultimately about.

HIS MISSION, YOUR MISSION

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: God calls us to join all of creation in praising Him for who He is and what He has done and to point others to the Messiah that they might join in worshiping the King.

1. In what ways can you prioritize reading the psalms as part of your daily schedule?

2. How should our worship impact our witness to the gospel?

3. Choose one of the psalms from this session, and using the language and purpose of that psalm, write a prayer asking God to work in the hearts of unbelievers you know that they might see Jesus in faith and join in His worship.
