

# Psalm of Praise

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[ 0 : 00 ] As I said this morning, we're beginning this series in Psalm 111-118. You'll have noticed that the beginning and end of that Psalm is the kind of, the theme verse as it were for this section, Praise the Lord.

We are creatures who have been created to praise, haven't we? Praise isn't just something we do on a Sunday. C.S. Lewis, who's famous as a theologian and writing Narnia, writes that the world rings with praise.

Lovers praise their beloved, readers their favorite poet, walkers praise the countryside. We could add how we praise our favorite sports stars. We praise those who do good.

We praise those who defend the weak. We might even occasionally praise politicians if they're doing something well. Maybe President Zelensky seems to be the only one getting praise right now. We praise things that excite us, don't we? We praise things that interest us and things that we admire. We naturally want other people to join in our praise. We see that especially with something like football.

[ 1 : 03 ] We say, did you see that goal? Did you see that say? We want other people to enjoy and delight in the things that we delight in. We were made to praise.

We see that all around us. We were made to praise together. And while there's many praiseworthy things in this world, the Psalmist's aim is to remind us what is supremely praiseworthy.

Who is supremely praiseworthy? The aim of this Psalm in short is that we join in. We join in the Psalmist in praising the Lord. And the praise of the Lord we see is commanded in this Psalm and to join in the Psalmist.

But the Psalmist wants us to not just praise the Lord out of an act of duty. He wants to praise the Lord to overflow from an enjoyment of the Lord.

We think, just to illustrate that, when you see a newborn baby for the first time, whether it's the yours or someone else's, you just can't help but smile, can you? They look so beautiful.

[ 2 : 02 ] Often, I think there's, yeah, most babies. Most babies look so beautiful. You can't help but smile. And when they smile back, it just moves your heart, doesn't it? And the Psalmist intending to do the same thing.

The Psalmist has written this Psalm in order to capture our hearts, to move our hearts, to want to praise the Lord. This is a Psalm written to capture our hearts with the beauty and majesty of God. He says, he'll give thanks to the Lord with his whole heart, the whole heart, a whole inner being, all that we are, the deepest depths of our soul. Praise the Lord.

What kind of, what prompts that spontaneous outflow of praise? You know, we can't just command, we can't just be commanded to praise with our whole being, can we? And that's why the Psalmist has written in such a way that, to try to persuade us to praise the Lord.

You know, as Christians, as we read this Psalm, we should be asking, well, you know, how can I praise God like the Psalmist does? What do I need to know to be able to feel what he feels and praise like he prays?

[ 3 : 09 ] And if you wouldn't call yourself a Christian this morning, then the question is, why should you praise God like that? The Psalmist is trying to persuade you, just persuade us that God is praiseworthy.

And to persuade us, the Psalmist invites us to behold our God, to behold his God. Psalm 111 is actually an acrostic poem. I'll just show you that on the first few slides.

So each line begins with a new letter of the Hebrew alphabet. And so, and that's how the Psalmist has structured it in order to just essentially works to the alphabet, telling us all different ways and reasons why we should, of who God is and why we should praise him.

So we're going to begin with our first point. The first thing the Psalmist tells us in these verses is to study God's works. And you'll see them there beginning in verse two.

The Psalmist says that great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in him. See, the study of God's works should lead us to praise.

[ 4 : 13 ] Verse two is it were sets out that path to praise. We praise the things we know. And we also know the things we praise. There's a circular logic there. So let me just illustrate that.

For example, the person who loves football, I realize I'm talking a lot about football even in the first five minutes. The person who loves football will spend hours playing the game and watching the game and following the transfers and listening to the post-game analysis.

And the more you know about something, whether it's football or whatever your hobby is, the more you'll see things that excite you, that amaze you. And then the more you'll want to talk about and praise the game.

Praise comes from an overflow of knowing something and being excited by something. Now I'll confess the rather of Britain this, I don't actually have a huge interest in football.

I prefer rugby. But if I, I mean, yeah, I don't even know the difference between Champions League, I think, and the Premier League or who's really winning.

[ 5 : 10 ] So I'm not going to pretend I'm massively interested in football. But if I wanted to get interested in football, if I wanted to become passionate about it, well, I'd be playing it more. I'd be watching more games.

I'd be talking to people about it. Because the way that we grow in a desire to praise something is by knowing more about it. And the psalmist wants us to do the same thing.

If we want to praise God, we need to know more about him. We need to study God. And that's what the psalmist is urging us to do, great other works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them.

And so I can just say this as we, as we open really, do you feel like, do you ever feel like you're just going through the motions in praising God? Do you ever feel like as you pray, prayer feels more like a recital than speaking to a friend?

Maybe your heart even feels cold. But I think the psalmist would ask, do you know your God? Do you want to know him more?

[ 6 : 14 ] Because it's as we know God, as as we study his works, that God uses his word in that way to move us to praise, to make that praise more natural, to make that praise overflow from us.

His works are great in size, in number, in complexity. And the psalmist now invites us to study them. Let's just move on because the psalmist says, first look at his creation.

In verse three, he says, full of splendor and majesty is his work. I heard that people come to Lewis not just to see the beautiful white sands, but apparently also to see the storms.

I didn't realize this. I saw plenty of storms just in the first few months. I was here, so it's coming in January. But you know, next time you see a storm, study it. Zoom in, you know, if there's ever snow, look at a snowflake.

It's that six-pointed perfection. Every single one of them unique. And yet they're immediately kind of undervalued by the billions of others that swirl around them.

[ 7 : 16 ] Zoom in and just look at the minutiae of God's creation that he is so perfectly and creatively made. Or zoom out.

We have a wonderful opportunity to see the northern lights. Southern lights are, it's amazing to realize that they're caused by charged particles and a solar storm from the sun traveling millions of miles and then getting caught up on the earth's poles.

You know, science in some ways, it describes the wondrous works of God that we see. And as we behold, as we behold creation, as we see that all that God has made, we see in this psalm, we see in other psalms that should move us to praise.

I don't think the psalmist ever saw snow. He certainly never saw the northern lights where he was writing from, but he saw enough of God's creation to conclude, as he looked, to be knocked over with awe as it were.

To conclude verse three, that's full of splendor and majesty is his work. Creation reflects God's majesty, in other words. Northern lights ripple with the majesty of God and his righteousness endures forever.

[ 8 : 26 ] When we behold God in his word in creation, we're to respond with praise. We're to, in many ways, we naturally join in with that cry in Revelation 4, worthier you, O Lord, our God, to

receive glory and honor and power for you created all things and by your will they were existed and were created.

So praise overflows from beholding God in creation, but that turns, you might say, into a fountain that explodes as we see God's saving acts particularly.

That's what the psalmist moves on to now in verse four. He says, he has caused his wondrous works to be remembered. The Lord is gracious and merciful.

And that phrase, wondrous works, the main way it comes up in the place it comes up in the Bible, is that it normally speaks of the saving acts of God. In particularly things like the Exodus, or God rescuing his people.

And in verse four, the psalmist is reminding us that God has given us a way to remember his works. It's so, we so easily forget what God has done, both in his word and in our lives.

[ 9 : 33 ] Here the psalmist is reminding us how we can remember what God has done. We're given that in the second part of verse four. The Lord is gracious and merciful.

Now the Lord in capital letters that we have in our Bible is the way that the translators choose to express the covenant name of God that he gave to his people.

So when God said, this is me, this is who I am, to Moses, to those people before him and after him, the name he gave was Yahweh. So that's four letters in the Hebrew, Y-H-W-H.

But by giving Israel that covenant name Yahweh, God was, it's essentially like a sign of relationship. It's like the Queen saying, call me Elizabeth.

God says, call me Yahweh. This is a personal name by which you can know me. But it's more than just a personal name. It was to be, it was to be, the name was to be constantly associated with everything that God has done.

[ 10 : 38 ] So Yahweh loosely translates as, I am who I am or I will be who I will be. And so the more that the people of Israel knew of God, as more that they saw of things that God has done, the more that was attached to the name as it were.

It was so like, I don't know, imagine your kid had said to you, if you're an Israelite, your kid said, well who is God? You say, well, our God is Yahweh. He is the one who has rescued us from Egypt. He is the one who has created all things. He is the one who is more powerful than anyone else. And as the more that God did and revealed himself in his deeds, the kind of, the more that was attached to that name Yahweh.

And so that was the name that God had given Israel to remember who he was. So you say Yahweh and they think everything that God has done as it were.

So just to help us think, so we often maybe just put the Lord and God as kind of interchangeable terms. It might help to remember that God is who God is, as his title, as it were.

[ 11 : 43 ] The Lord is who he is, if that helps. But anyway, so the psalmist reminds us that God has given us his name to remember his deeds.

And it's God's deeds that the psalmist now turns to in verses five to nine. And we'll look at that under the heading, remember God's deeds. So first we saw study God's works.

Second we'll look at remember God's deeds. And in verses five to nine, the psalmist essentially gives us three examples of those deeds that we should attach to the name Yahweh.

So they all come from that great story of the Exodus, the rescue event where God took Israel and brought them out of Egypt, brought them to Sinai, gave him his law, their law, and then he took them into the Promised Land where he gave them that as an inheritance.

And God reveals his character through his deeds. He's already said that. And as the psalmist recalls the various things God has done, in each other line he kind of adds in something that tells us about God.

[ 12 : 53 ] So he recalls what God has done and then he says, and this tells us that God is X, Y, Z, whatever. And first thing we see in verse five is that God is a God who keeps his promises.

Psalmist tells us he provides food for those who fear him. Therefore he remembers his covenant forever. One of the key events in the Exodus story was on that journey out of Egypt when the people of Israel complained to God saying that even though he'd rescued them, he'd now abandoned them, he'd forgotten his covenant and they were going to starve in the desert.

And God responded by providing manna, that bread-like substance that arrived with the dew of the morning and causing quail to fall across the camp. And the purpose wasn't just to feed them, it was to remind them that he hadn't forgotten his promises, that he was the covenant keeping God who

didn't leave them and abandon them.

He stuck with his people because he had promised to be their God. And in fact, in Exodus 16 he says, in the morning you shall eat manna, eat bread, and at twilight you shall eat meat, then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.

So seeing what God has done, seeing how he has provided for his people should remind Israel in that generation and all the generations after that we have a God who keeps his promises.

[14:19] In verse 6 we find out that God is the one who is the most powerful, God is omnipotent in other words. We read he has shown the people the power of his works in giving them the inheritance of the nations.

When Israel were rescued from Egypt and then God went before them defeating their enemies as they went into the Promised Land, it was a major demonstration of God's power to all the watching world.

In fact, just the fear of God that went before them was one of the things that drove out the inhabitants. So we read in Joshua chapter 2 when the spies go into the land.

Rahab says, one of the inhabitants says to the spies, we have heard how God dried up the water of the Red Sea and what you did to the two kings of the Amrites and our hearts melted.

For the Lord your God, he is the God in heaven, above and in the earth beneath. In other words, the psalmist is saying, look, if you forget God's power, just look at what he has done.

[15:26] Look at the way that God is unmatched. Look at the way that God rescued his people. He brought them into the land. He cleared out their enemies before them and there was nothing that they could do.

There's no opposition that can stand up to God. God is the most powerful. Third, we see that God is trustworthy, faithful and just. And I realize I'm rattling through these.

But look at verse 7 and verse 8. We now rewind from going into the land to Sinai, where God gave the people his law. We read, the works of his hands are faithful and just.

In all his precepts, all his precepts are trustworthy. They're established forever and ever to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness. Now God's law might seem like a strange place to go next, but if you want to study and know what God is like, then his law is actually a really good place to go.

Because in God's law, he reveals his character. God's law contains basically instructions to love what God loves and hate what God's hates.

[16:35] So as we look at God's law, we can understand and know more about who God is and we can know God more. So just to give you some examples, have you ever wondered why there's so many laws about caring for the vulnerable in places like Deuteronomy?

He gives laws about caring for widows and orphans and foreigners because God is a God who cares for the vulnerable. They reveal something of who God is in his laws.

Or for example, that God gives us all these laws about strict warnings to the Israelites against idolatry because he tells Israel he is a jealous God.

He's jealous for his glory that only he deserves to have that kind of glory. Only he deserves to have that devotion. So we see God's concern for his glory. Or even in random laws, there's like laws like you must put a parapet on your roof.

That's just because God is concerned about life. He doesn't want people falling off their roofs. God has a concern for life and that's revealed in his law.

[17:37] In short, the psalmist says, I look at God's law. I see his precepts and they're trustworthy. And I look at God's law, the psalmist saying, and I know that God therefore is faithful and just.

And so as we read God's word ourselves, as we see all the things that God commands, whether it's in the Old Testament or we see in Jesus' commands, one thing we should ask ourselves is what does this tell me about the character of God?

What does this reveal about his compassion? What does this reveal about his justice? What does this reveal about his love, his glory, all these kind of things?

Moving on to verse nine. Verse nine essentially summarizes everything we've seen. He has sent redemption to his people. He has commanded his covenant forever. Therefore, as it were, he is holy and awesome is the name of the Lord.

The question then for us is really just, do we want to praise God more? Do we want to know God more? Because the psalmist is saying very simply, call to mind what he's done.

[18:51] Study it, remember it. And you can know God more. And supremely we look in God's word, but supremely we see who God is and we come to know him as we see what he's done in Christ Jesus.

You see all of the saving acts that we've looked at in verses five to eight ultimately find their fulfillment in Christ. In our first reading in Mark, that gives us, Jesus gives us a deliberate echo of everything that's happening in the Exodus.

I don't know if you noticed that in the description of Jesus feeding the five thousand. It happens in a desolate place. The people are scattered. They like sheep without a shepherd.

Jesus has compassion on them. He feeds them. It's meant to cast our mind back to the Exodus. Jesus essentially is saying, I'm that God.

I'm the redeeming God who looks after his people. So everything we see about God in the Old Testament is fulfilled. And even you might say, I mean, it expands.

[19:54] We see it in a bigger scale when Jesus comes. And in case we don't click that Jesus is that same God in the Old Testament, when Jesus walks on the water, do you notice what he said when he passed by the disciples?

He said, it is I, or literally I am Yahweh. They would have heard I am and they would have thought Yahweh and they would have started recalling all the things that God has done.

And we can even do that. We can read verses five to seven, five to eight, and we can see all that God has done for us in them. We see God's covenant promises to redeem his people weren't ultimately fulfilled in Egypt.

That was just a shadow of what is to come in God's sending Jesus Christ as the ultimate fulfillment, as the ultimate fulfillment of his promises to redeem.

God's power was ultimately not seen in taking Israel to the physical land of Canaan, but rather that God's promise to adopt everyone who trusts in him, that promise of a new creation, the greater inheritance, the perfect inheritance for all his people.

[21:01] What of God's law? Well that too is ultimately fulfilled in Christ and by Christ. As I was saying to the kids that that question, Mary's response was right, which is that Psalm 119 in some ways is about Jesus.

Jesus embodies everything that we see about God's law. The perfection that we see of God in his law, we see in Christ Jesus. He perfectly obeyed it.

He perfectly lived it. And so we see God in his law in Christ Jesus. And he's also given us, everyone who trusts in him. He's given us his spirit to write his law on our hearts so that we too can know him. And so that as we meditate on God's law, as we know God's law for ourselves, we can know God more and more. So if we want to praise God more, we just need to recall the wondrous deeds of Christ Jesus.

We need to gaze upon Christ in all that he is and all that he has done. And if you're a follower of Jesus, you can say verse nine for yourself. You can say he has redeemed me to be one of his people.

[22:13] He has kept his promises to me forever. Holy and awesome is the name of Yahweh, my God. These are verses that we can sing for ourselves in Christ.

So study the work of Christ. Study the climax that it comes to in his death and a resurrection. Study the gospel and we'll begin to know our God.

But there's one final piece of the puzzle that we need to get to if we're going to go from knowledge of God to praise, which is the psalmist's aim. And that is our third point, fear of the Lord.

Fear the Lord. Let me read verse 10 for us again. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. All who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever.

The knowledge of God should ultimately lead to fear of God. And it's only that going through that that leads us to praise of God. And when we talk about fear of God, that's not fear in terms of fearing an evil person.

[23:15] The fear of the Lord might be best described as awe. We fear God. We fear the Lord. We realize how utterly different God is to us. We realize how big God is and how small we are.

That God doesn't compare to us. When we see all God attributes, his character, all that he has done, we realize we're nothing like God. We're like this and he is great and awesome and vast.

And did you notice how the psalmist showed us that? Did you notice all the eternal language in the psalm? So verse three, we had his righteousness endures forever.

Verse five, he remembers his covenant forever. Verse eight, his precepts are established forever. Verse nine, his covenant is forever.

The psalmist's point is that while we are, while we change, God is unchanging. While we break our promises, God is forever faithful. The gulf between us and God in terms of all these things is vast.

[ 24 : 18 ] Which is why from everlasting to everlasting, he is God. We are, we begin, we have a beginning. God has no beginning. God is, God is all present.

We are, we are localized. There's so many ways in which we can work through and think about the ways of how different God is to us. And that is why his praise endures forever.

That's the final forever in the psalm. We could go on and talk about all of those other ways, God's perfection, his righteousness, his holiness, his trustworthiness.

God is utterly unlike us. When the disciples realize that in Jesus' life, I think they relate, one of the moments where you see they most click in realizing that Jesus isn't like them is when Jesus calms the storm.

When he simply stands up and says, peace be still. We read there that they cried, who is this? That even the wind and the waves obey him.

[ 25 : 18 ] I think sometimes we can get too used to just hearing stories like that and they lose their punch. We hear Jesus calming the storm with the same passive expression as we hear a weather report on the news or online.

Most crazy of all, maybe we hear about Jesus rising from the dead and we're so used to that. You know, we kind of shrugged just like someone just stood up from the chair. It doesn't have the same gravity when we look at God's deeds.

It's right for us, those of us who trust Jesus, those of us who trust God, to see him as our Father.

But sometimes I wonder if we need to also be reminded that, like we're told in the Lord's prayer, he is our Father in heaven.

God is almighty. We need to be reminded sometimes maybe of that distance, even as we're reminded of the intimacy that we have in Christ Jesus.

We need to recover some of that fear and all. And the fear of God, the psalmist tells us is good for want for two things. First that psalmist says the fear of the Lord leads to wisdom as we realize that how different God is to us.

[ 26 : 26 ] We realize that we really need God's help to live in this world. You know, biblical wisdom might be best described as how to live in God's world as God's creatures.

And that's something we need. J.I. Packer comments that just as it's cruel to drop an Amazon tribesman into Trafalgar Square without knowing England or English, so it's also cruel for us to live in this world without knowing God to whom the world belongs and who made all things in it.

We need to know God. We need to fear God if we're going to have, if we're going to stand any chance of living in this world and flourishing as God intends us to do. And we can kid ourselves, excuse me, we can kid ourselves that we're getting along just fine.

But anyway, as someone who is blind from birth has never known anything different and can think I'm getting on fine. But in reality, we need to see.

We need God's help to open our eyes. We need to know God so that we may have both wisdom in this world to know how to live, but also ultimately to know him.

[ 27 : 34 ] I think that's why one of Jesus' favorite miracles was opening the eyes of the blind as a demonstration of what he has come to do, to open our eyes to see who God is, to know him and to know how he might live in his world.

And that's why next the psalm says that the fear of the Lord is not just the beginning of wisdom, but that all who practice it, that is, the fear of the Lord, have good understanding, have good knowledge, literally.

And knowledge of what? Well, I think it's knowledge of God. That's the whole topic of this psalm, isn't it? If this psalm has taught us anything, it's that we need to know the Lord.

And that knowledge of God comes from studying his works. Let's just be clear. Knowing God and knowing about God are two very different things.

The demons know all about God. They've seen everything that God has done. They know about God, but they respond by rejecting his rule. In contrast to the psalmist knows God's deeds and he responds in reverent fear and awe.

[ 28 : 38 ] I think the difference is relationship as we see what God has done. The psalmist responds and says, this is my God. He praises him for the things that he has done as his God.

We praise the works of our Lord when he is our God. And the psalmist models in many ways how we to respond, doesn't he? Verse one, I'll give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart.

But it's worth saying, even as we draw to a close, that the psalmist could never actually sing this perfectly. While the psalmist wrote, I'll give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart, he failed at that. And in fact, every single person who sung from the psalms for those thousand years or so could never do that in the Old Testament, whether king or priest or man or woman.

Even with the most sincerity, they could never in fact praise the Lord unreservedly from our whole heart. It was not until about a thousand years later when a boy picked up the psalms in a synagogue and began to sing them that that all changed.

[ 29 : 48 ] And he grew from being a child to a youth to a young man. And every time our Lord Jesus heard the command to praise the Lord, he responded perfectly with yes with my whole heart like the psalmist.

And he did. In Christ's whole life, he perfectly obeyed his heavenly Father. He perfectly rejoiced in all that he had done. As he beheld the works of the Lord, as he embodied the works of the Lord, Christ perfectly praised the Lord from his whole heart.

Jesus is the only one who is actually truly able to sing this psalm. None of us can truly sing this psalm. Christ is the only one who can. The only reason that we can join in is because Christ has fulfilled this psalm.

As we've said, all of these verses of God's wondrous acts come to an amen in Christ. The redemption that we have in Christ is the reason that we can too, to can sing this psalm.

And Christ has redeemed us for a purpose. I think sometimes we can think God has saved us and that's it. And then we know we're free to just do whatever we want until Christ comes again or we die.

[ 31 : 02 ] But Christ has redeemed us for a purpose to be his people and to be a people who praise. So in 1 Peter 2 verse 9, we reminded that we are called out of the darkness and into the marvelous light in order to proclaim the excellencies of God, to proclaim who he is, to sing that, to proclaim that with our lives.

Our lives should be ones of praise. God has saved us, you might say, to be part of Christ's choir, led by Christ, praising him eternally.

So I guess the only thing left to say is, will you join in? Have you joined in? Joining in the praise of God isn't just a decision you make once in your life when you trust in Jesus.

It's an ongoing decision that we all need to make, if whether we're believers or not. It's a daily decision, as the psalmist does, to set his heart on God.

Each day to say with my whole heart, with my whole being and everything I do, I will praise you, Lord. Do we want to praise him?

[ 32 : 11 ] If we do, then let's follow what the psalmist does. Let's study God's work of redemption. Let's gaze upon Christ our Redeemer, that we might follow his direction in seeing the praise to our Lord.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you that you have saved us out of darkness into your marvellous light.

Lord, we thank you that with Christ Jesus our Redeemer, that the words of this psalm can become ours. And so Lord, we pray that with all that we are every day, not just on a Sunday when we sing, but in all of the life that we live, that we would live it to the praise of your name.

Lord, please call to mind your saving acts. Call to mind everything we know about you, that you might move our hearts to want to praise you with all that we are, with our whole hearts, our minds and strength.

We pray all this in Jesus' name, amen. Well, we're going to sing now the second half of this psalm. Hopefully, as we've studied it, that helps us to know more what it means to sing it.

[ 33 : 24 ] So we're going to sing Psalm 111 verses 5 to 10 as murder leads us in that. Thank you, murder. Let's stand and sing. Peace out.