

What's Good About God: Our Response

Psalm 107:1-8

I read a story once of a five-year-old girl who had been attending the church's kindergarten. Every day as the children were being dismissed, the teacher would have them sing the *Doxology*. That little girl loved to sing that song! But she had her own rendition of it. *"Praise God from whom all blessings flow, Praise Him all creatures, here we go!"*

Over the past month we've looked at several ways we can know that God is good—His creation, His grace, His forgiveness, and His wonderful watchcare. There are so many other things we could name, that should we try to list them all, our lips would never stop repeating the blessings of God upon our lives. But we've made a good start.

But what are we supposed to do with all this? When we hear that God is good, and as proof of His goodness point to the things He has made, and His amazing and wonderful grace, forgiveness and care over us, we naturally know that such amazing love demands a response of some kind. When we are overwhelmed with the goodness of God in our lives, what should be our response? Well, as with all other topics we explore here, we turn to the Scripture. This is what God's Word in Psalm 107 says that our response should be:

"Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever" (v. 1) "Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men" (v. 8)

Now let's look at those same two verses in the King James Version. Verse one reads, *"O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good: For his mercy endureth for ever....O that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men."* Psalm 107:1,8

Let me point out a couple of things for those who don't have King James Bibles today. First, in verse one, it reads *"give **thanks** to the Lord"* while in verse eight it reads *"O that men would **praise** the Lord."* In the original language, the words

“thanks” and “praise” are the same. They both basically mean “to throw,” which is the idea behind the idea of “giving thanks”—to “throw” our thanks toward God.

Now, if you can, picture in your mind a professional baseball pitcher as he stands on the pitcher’s mound. Watch him wind up as he prepares to deliver the pitch. Watch his entire body become engaged in this effort—his eyes are focused, his muscles strain, his feet dig into the dirt, his leg stretches out toward home plate. With one massive effort, his pitching arm comes up over his head as he launches that little white orb at 90 miles an hour toward a relatively small leather catcher’s mitt 60 feet, six inches away. He gives it everything he has, because that is the way it’s done.

Can we “throw” our thanks to God with any less effort? Should we not pour our beings into it, rather than just toss a meager, mumbled “thank you” to Him? Should it not require of us an investment of our time and energy, considering all He has done for us? What should our response be to this God who has lavished us with such blessings we could never list them, this holy God who has offered us forgiveness and grace when we least deserve it? *“Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love.”* Our response should be nothing less than whole-hearted thanksgiving and praise.

But how do we do that? Some Christians worship and praise God by lifting their hands and closing their eyes. There isn’t a thing wrong with that. In fact, there is some Scriptural evidence to support this particular way to worship God, found in Psalm 63:4—*“Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift my hands in thy name.”* And also Psalm 134:2—*“Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the Lord.”*

The problem comes, however, when we get the idea that that is the only way to worship God, that a person isn’t really praising God unless his hands are in the air and his eyes are closed.

Or there are Christians who say “Praise the Lord” repeatedly, until it becomes almost a by-word, just something to say to fill in the gap. I remember that I went through this as a teenager, that I thought I could fool others and fool myself that I was really spiritual if I could be heard saying, “Praise the Lord” every time something happened or somebody said something. There were times, of course,

when I said, “Praise the Lord,” with a genuine heart and spirit, but as time went on, I found that I was too busy saying “Praise the Lord” for the sake of putting on a front, that I didn’t have time to *really* praise the Lord.

There is not a single thing wrong with people who do lift up their hands in worship and praise of the Lord God, neither is there anything wrong with a person speaking out loud in private conversation or in public worship to say “Praise the Lord.” And we should not act as though people who worship and praise God those ways are odd-balls. Praise is frequently misunderstood in our churches and in our individual lives. The Bible has a great deal to say about it, and since it does, certainly it must be an important subject. Here is a brief summary:

The Bible tells us that we can praise God in a number of ways. ***One is through singing:*** “*Sing praises to the Lord, who dwells in Zion!*” (Psalm 9:11). Psalm 33:2, among many other verses, tells us that we can praise God through musical instruments: “*Praise the Lord with the lyre, make melody to him with the harp of ten strings.*”

We also learn in the Bible that ***praise is to be continuous:*** “*I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth*” (Psalm 34:1). Also, our praise of God is a quite natural expression. What was the reaction of the shepherds to the good news that the Messiah was born? “*And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen ...*” (Luke 2:20).

Then we learn that the Bible speaks of ***heavenly praise***. When the angels appeared to the shepherds in Luke 2, it is recorded that “*suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased*” (Luke 2:13-14). In the vision John received on the Isle of Patmos, he said that he “*heard around the throne [of God] the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!*” (Revelation 5:11-12). And there are many, many other instances of heavenly praise recorded in Psalms and Revelation.

Then, there is *nature's praise of God*. The Psalms are actually “praise songs,” as we’ve explored before, so we turn to them once again. Perhaps the most familiar is Psalm 19:1, “*The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.*” But there are others: Psalm 69:34—“*Let heaven and earth praise him, the seas and everything that moves therein.*” The earth reflects God’s glory, and that is what we see in Psalm 98: “*Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who dwell in it! Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together before the Lord*” (vv. 7-9a). And then one verse from Isaiah: “*Sing, O heavens, for the Lord has done it; shout, O depths of the earth; break forth into singing, O mountains, O forest, and every tree in it!*” (Isaiah 44:23).

Lastly, the Bible speaks of the *sacrifice of praise*. God’s people are instructed here in Psalm 107:22, “*Let them sacrifice thank offerings and tell of his works with songs of joy.*” From the belly of the whale, Jonah cried out to God, “*But with the voice of thanksgiving I will sacrifice to thee; what I have vowed I will pay*” (Jonah 2:9). Hebrews 13:15 tells us what this sacrifice of praise is to be for the Christian: “*Through him [Christ] let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that, is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.*”

So as you can see, the Bible does have a lot to say about praise! The Bible also has a great deal to say about the birth of Christ, about stewardship, about the Bible itself, about the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, and about the return of Christ for His people, because those things are important. Since there is so much included in Scripture about praise, then it is obvious that praise is important, as well. What is so important about praise?

1 Praise is important because it reveals the majesty of God, Psalm 113:1-9

Psalm 113 begins and ends with the words, “*Praise the Lord.*” And between the opening and closing verses, the psalmist gives us many reasons *why* we are to praise the Lord. But first and foremost the child of God is to praise the Lord because of His majesty. “*Let the name of the Lord be praised, both now and forevermore. From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the Lord is to be praised. The Lord is exalted over all the nations, his glory above the heavens. Who is like the Lord our God, the One who sits enthroned on high, who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth?*” (Psalm 113:2-6).

When you and I praise God, when praise becomes incorporated into our very beings, then we will have a fresh vision of the majesty of God. His greatness will be revealed to us in a new way. We'll see God as we've never seen Him before. When we praise God we simply acknowledge Him for Who He really is—God!

The God you and I worship can be compared to no other thing. If you summoned all the collective might of the nations, with all their pomp and circumstance and wealth and pride and rich history, they still could not be compared to our God. If we were able to paint on a single canvas all the marvels of the heavens, from the glory of the rising sun to Halley's Comet to the vast reaches of outer space, we still would not be able to paint the majesty of God. His majesty defies description and it defies comprehension. We can never fully come to understand God's might and power and majesty.

But when you and I immerse ourselves in the praise of God, we begin to recognize a small part of His majesty. It comes to us slowly, like the dawning of a new day, but it comes. And the realization of the majesty of God grows and grows until we see ourselves as so infinitesimally small in the sight of God. That's so important, because we can't serve a God we can't worship. We can't submit ourselves to a Christ we can't worship.

2 Praise is important because it gives proper perspective to life, Psalm 22:1, 22, 25

Psalm 22 was written by David, but we are most familiar with it because Christ quoted from it while hanging on the cross. It begins with the familiar words, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" It's important to us today because it shows how praising God can change your entire outlook on things.

When the Psalm opens, David feels that he is forsaken by God, completely and utterly forsaken. He feels that God is far off, and that his prayers are unanswered (v. 1). It seems to him that he is so near death, that his relatives and friends have already started to divide his property. That's the way the Psalm begins—but look at the way the Psalm ends!

It begins in the darkness and ends in the light of triumph! Notice verse 22: *“I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you.”* There’s a different perspective in verse 25: *“From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly...”* And in verse 28: *“For dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations.”*

When we praise God, our minds and spirits are reshaped and reformed, so that we come to view life from a different perspective. Everything looks different to us when we praise God, because then we remember that God is God, and that He is in charge, and that He has everything under control. We need this proper perspective if we are to maintain our balance in a world that is so out of balance.

3 Praise is important because it crowns God as Lord, Psalm 22:3

Psalm 22:3 reads, *“Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel.”* Imagine that, if you can! God sits enthroned on the praises of His people! When we praise God we are crowning God as Lord of our lives. We are saying that we acknowledge Him as Lord of the universe, and we want Him to be Lord of our lives, as well. A person for whom praise has become part of his life is the person who strives to make Christ Lord in everything, every area of life.

You see, God does not now force us to praise Him. One day, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of the Father, but in the meantime, God does not force us to praise Him. That response is something which must come from within, from a heart of love and devotion to the Lord. It can’t come from anything else. Sure, you can mumble “Praise the Lord” or you can even shout it aloud, but it will always have a hollow ring to it unless and until this praise comes from your heart, where Jesus sits enthroned as Lord of your life.

When you praise God, you are crowning Him as Lord of your life. You are saying, in effect, that God is holy, and you are a sinner, and that only through His grace is your life worth anything in His Kingdom. You are giving Him complete control of your life, your possessions, your dreams, your goals, your friends, you marriage, your job,--everything about you falls under His Lordship when you praise God. God is holy, and He sits enthroned on the praises of His people.

4 Praise is important because it brings personal victory, **2 Chronicles 20:22**

In this final passage, we see that Jehoshaphat is king of Judah. Word comes to him that a great army is coming against him to do battle, an army so vast and so overwhelming that Jehoshaphat is struck with fear at the mere thought of it. What does he do? As king, he proclaimed a fast, and “*set himself to seek the Lord,*” which is a good example for us whenever we find ourselves in overwhelming circumstances.

Word comes from God: “*You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you...*” (v. 17a). So early the next morning, the people of Judah gather, as God had commanded. The Levites, as priests, go before the people. But look at verse 22: “*As they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated.*”

Friends, that was no accident! It was no mere coincidence! When the people began to praise God, the victory came! Notice something very important: the people began to praise God *before* the victory came. From that we are to learn that praise must begin in our hearts and throats even before the victory is in sight! Praise is to be based on the promises that God has given us, and it is to be based on faith that God is able to accomplish all that He has promised.

When you and I are faced with trying circumstances and overwhelming problems, we can know personal victory if we will praise God for the victory, even when we cannot yet see how that victory will come. Just simply saying, “Praise the Lord” will never accomplish victory, as if the words were some magic formula. But when we praise God for victory that will come as a result of His promises to us, then we can be victorious in our personal lives.

A beautiful, vivid example of this is to be found in 1 Corinthians 15, called by some to have been Paul’s greatest sermon. When Paul wrote this masterpiece, he had never tasted death, though he had come close several times. He had never known what it was like to die. He had never personally experienced the victory that God promises to give those who die in Christ.

But Paul believed the promises of God, that he could be victorious over death. So he begins to praise God for that victory, even before the victory is in sight! He says, *“Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Corinthians 15:54b-57).

You and I share in that, as well. Today we can praise God for the victory that will one day be ours as we share in the conquering of death. It isn't ours yet, but based on the promises of God and the saving acts of Christ, we can praise God for it now! The principle works in other matters as well. If you are facing financial strain, base your faith on the promise of God that says, *“Give, and it will be given you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back”* (Luke 6:38). Base your faith upon the promise of God, and claim the victory through praising God the Father!

Yes, praise is *very important!* In fact, I would go so far as to say that praise is utterly indispensable, absolutely essential, completely necessary in the life of a Christian. If your world seems small, if you struggle with pride and ego, if your life seems to come unraveled at times, if you really want to know Jesus as Lord, if you are in desperate need of victory—then praise God! The act of praising Him will begin in you a transformation that will literally change your life and heart.

Make the words of Psalm 146:1-2 your words and motto for life:

Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord, O my soul. I will praise the Lord all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.

Then sing with the five-year-old girl, *“Praise God from whom all blessings flow, Praise Him all creatures, here we go!”*