

# Songs of Praise

Devotional Reading: Psalm 148

Background Scripture: Psalms 146–150

Today's Scripture: Psalms 146, 150

## I. Praise

### Psalms 146:1-2

**1 Praise ye the LORD. Praise the LORD, O my soul.**

**2 While I live will I praise the LORD: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being.**

1. *Praise ye the Lord* is a translation of a Hebrew word most Christians know very well: *hallelujah*. The exhortation to praise is given first to the psalmist—to his *soul*, the seat of the mind and will. If Psalms 146–150 are linked by the common command to praise God, then the psalmist's choice to begin Psalm 146 with an exhortation to oneself is likely significant. Praise leaders, preachers, and other leaders in times of worship do well to adopt a habit of such encouragement for themselves.

2. Here the psalmist responded to his own exhortation with a commitment to praising *the Lord* for the entirety of his life. The two sentences in this verse are parallel to one another, and their points are essentially the same. The repetition of two thoughts that are nearly equivalent in meaning creates emphasis. This technique is found frequently in Hebrew poetry.

The speaker has expressed a full and firm commitment to glorifying the name of *God* for as long as he lives. This commitment will find fulfillment not

only in discourse but also in song. That distinction may imply praise both in conversation and in worship settings, encompassing all of life.

## II. Trust

### Psalms 146:3-10

**3 Put not your trust in princes, Nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help.**

**4 His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; In that very day his thoughts perish.**

**5 Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, Whose hope is in the LORD his God:**

**6 Which made heaven, and earth, The sea, and all that therein is: Which keepeth truth for ever:**

**7 Which executeth judgment for the oppressed: Which giveth food to the hungry. The LORD looseth the prisoners:**

**8 The LORD openeth the eyes of the blind: The LORD raiseth them that are bowed down: The LORD loveth the righteous:**

**9 The LORD preserveth the strangers; He relieveth the fatherless and widow: But the way of the wicked he turneth upside down.**

**10 The LORD shall reign for ever, Even thy God, O Zion, unto all generations. Praise ye the LORD.**

3. The speaker shifts focus to warn against placing one's trust in human leaders. While this shift is initially unexpected, it makes considerably more sense when read in light of the psalmist's expression of commitment to praising God in the previous verse. Israel and Judah were tempted at various points to make alliances with pagan nations rather than trusting in God. This legacy of infidelity eventually led to the fall of both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah.

4. The reason why one should not put trust in humans is because people are not only powerless but transitory. Our earthly lives have an ultimate limit in death. And when we die, any outstanding goals we have die with us. We are no longer able to affect the land of the living directly; only the indirect effects of our legacies remain to influence others. Thus, any mortal is unworthy of the kind of trust that others often place in them. Death is the ultimate example of the frailty of human beings. The rest of the psalm picks up this point of contrast between mortal, powerless human beings and the powerful, immortal, and merciful God.

5. This verse returns to the one in whom trust should really be placed: *the Lord*. Jacob is singled out here among the patriarchs. The probable reason is that *Jacob* here refers to Israel, the collective name for God's people. The expression emphasizes God's special care for Jacob the individual in particular, then to his descendants by extension. Just as God cared for the man Jacob, so the person who calls on *the God of Jacob* for help is exceedingly *happy*. This trust stands in contrast to the misplaced faith in human beings.

6a. The psalm shifts to highlight God's acts and characteristics that make Him worthy of trust and praise. God's role as creator of the cosmos and all its occupants shows how infinitely powerful He is.

6b. Here the psalmist introduces the next major set of reasons to trust in and praise God: His faithfulness. The claim that God *keepeth truth for ever* refers to God's constant loyalty to His people. The speaker does not switch topics here; God's faithfulness is rooted in His role as the creator of the cosmos. The link between God's fidelity and His role as creator was established in Genesis. After the flood waters receded, God made a covenant with humanity and all other living creatures, promising that He would never again destroy the world as He had before.

7a. God's care for *the oppressed* would have surprised many in the ancient context, as financial prosperity was often seen as a sign of divine favor. While God has sometimes blessed His people materially, a lack of means is not necessarily a sign of divine disfavor. Even so, the psalmist notes that God pays special attention to those who don't have enough.

7b-8a. One category of the oppressed are *the hungry*, pointing to a lack of necessities. The reference to opening *blind eyes* is most likely a metaphor for freeing *prisoners*, and the state of being *bowed down* is also associated with imprisonment.

8b-9a. These phrases highlight persons for whom God has a special concern. The first are *the righteous*, whom the text specifically identifies as those whom God loves. The second are *the strangers*, those who are foreign to the land.

The third highlights God's special care for *the fatherless and widow*. Indeed, James 1:27 affirms that God considers care for widows and orphans as a defining component of "pure" and "undefiled" religious faith.

9b. In looking after the righteous, the alien, the widows, and the orphans, God specifically acts against the designs and interests of *the wicked*. This is an example of what is called "antithetical parallelism."

This feature of Hebrew poetry supports the point of the second thought from the opposite perspective of the first thought.

10. In contrast to human leaders, God will reign *for ever*. This eternity, coupled with His creative power, means that God is able to do anything He desires. And this God is the God of Zion, the name for the hill upon which Jerusalem was built. By invoking the name *Zion*, the psalmist calls the readers' attention to the fact that their God chose to place His glory in Jerusalem. With that reminder, the psalm concludes with a final exhortation to *praise ye the Lord*.

### III. Exhortation Psalms 150:1-6

**1 Praise ye the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary: Praise him in the firmament of his power.**

**2 Praise him for his mighty acts: Praise him according to his excellent greatness.**

**3 Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: Praise him with the psaltery and harp.**

**4 Praise him with the timbrel and dance: Praise him with stringed instruments and organs.**

**5 Praise him upon the loud cymbals: Praise him upon the high sounding cymbals.**

**6 Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD.**

1. Psalm 150 also opens with the exhortation *praise ye the Lord*. But right away, we are confronted with an interpretive difficulty: Do the next two exhortations speak of where God is or where the person doing the praising is to be?

The precise location of God's *sanctuary* and its proximity to *the firmament of his power* is debated. The sanctuary could refer to the temple in Jerusalem or to God's

heavenly home. The parallelism of the verses and the reference to *the firmament of his power*—a heavenly location—may support the celestial sanctuary. It is also possible, however, that the verse calls for worship in both earthly and heavenly realms. In that case, the psalmist would have envisioned the entire universe gathering to praise God.

2. Any discussion of God, whether concerning the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit, will essentially deal with (or presuppose conclusions to) two issues: *who God is* (in His nature and essence) and *what God has done* (in His acts of creating, ruling, and redeeming). To *praise him for his mighty acts* honors God in terms of what He has done; to *praise him according to his excellent greatness* is to honor Him in terms of His essential being and character.

3. These instruments are taken both from the religious rites of the priests and prophets and from the realm of the laity, which implies that every form of music should be mustered to glorify God.

4. *The timbrel* is similar to a modern tambourine, being small enough to be held in the hand. The term *stringed instruments* likely refers collectively to the various kinds of such instruments rather than a third type. The *organs* could refer to a pipe or collectively to various kinds of wind instruments but distinct from horns.

5. The percussion section is mentioned in this verse. Regardless of the exact items to which the text refers, the idea is that those present to praise God should make loud and joyful noises.

6. *Every thing that hath breath* could refer to human beings, specifically, into whom God breathed the "breath of life" (Genesis 2:7). However, animals are also said to possess the "breath of life" (7:15). Consequently, it seems likely that the psalmist has invited all creation to participate in praising the Creator.

# Involvement Learning

## Songs of Praise

### Into the Lesson

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

1. Too much praise will keep a child from reaching his or her full potential.  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. The most praiseworthy person in my life has also been the most influential.  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. I can praise you without diminishing myself. \_\_\_\_\_
4. There aren't many situations or people in my life really deserving of praise.  
\_\_\_\_\_

Today's lesson is all about praise we can always feel good about: praise to God our Father. The psalmist was effusive with his praise. Let's open our Bibles to discover why.

### Key Verse

While I live will I praise the LORD; I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being.  
—Psalm 146:2

### Into the Word

Read Psalms 146 and 150. What do these psalms say about *how to praise*?

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What do these psalms say about *why we should praise*?

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List the praiseworthy actions of God you find in Psalm 146. Besides each one, jot down ways you see God doing these things in our world today.

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### Into Life

Write down your own personal reasons to praise God from the list of reasons you compiled in your Bible study. Write or circle the encouragements to praise that mean the most to you.

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Read Psalm 146:7-9 and write down ways God could use you to do each praiseworthy work.

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### Thought to Remember

God deserves our praise.