

“Songs of Praise”

Background Scriptures: Psalms 146 – 150 **Devotional Reading:** Psalm 148

Psalm 146 (NIV)

¹ Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord, my soul. ² I will praise the Lord all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. ³ Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save. ⁴ When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing. ⁵ Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God. ⁶ He is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them - he remains faithful forever. ⁷ He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets prisoners free, ⁸ the Lord gives sight to the blind, the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down, the Lord loves the righteous. ⁹ The Lord watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked. ¹⁰ The Lord reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the Lord.

Psalm 150

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.

LESSON AIMS

- **Learning Fact:** To summarize why God is to be praised based on Psalms 146 and 150.
- **Biblical Principle:** To understand that praise is rooted in who God is and the great things He has done.
- **Daily Application:** To fill our hearts with gratitude and our mouths with praise to God.

LESSON CONTEXT

The last five psalms are the ‘Hallelujah Psalms’ that focus our attention on praising the Lord.” Each of these psalms (146 – 150) begins with the admonition to praise the Lord, which suggests that there are common links between them (see Psalms 146:1; 150:1). Some have suggested that the initial declaration, “Praise the LORD” (Psalm 146:1), is the title of the work. Many scholars believe that David wrote this psalm.

Psalm 146 and Psalm 150 are the bookends of this final grouping. At the same time, these two psalms have distinctive elements. Psalm 146 exhorts the reader to rely on God alone and praises Him in part to illustrate how reliable and awesome God is. Psalm 150, on the other hand, is a simple call to praise God. In both psalms, however, the psalmist reiterates the need to consider God’s mighty deeds and show gratitude for them.

Praise: Psalm 146:1–2

Praise the LORD is a translation of a Hebrew word most Christians know very well: *hallelujah* (see Psalm 150:1). The psalmist’s choice to begin Psalm 146 with an exhortation for himself to praise is significant.

Why? because praise is evidence of life. Not just physical life, but the life of God in the heart. Praise leaders, preachers, and other leaders do well to adopt a habit of such encouragement for themselves.

In Psalm 146:2, 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 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 (contrast Psalms 6:5; 30:9; etc.) This commitment will find fulfillment not only in discourse (146:2a) but also in song (146:2b). That distinction may imply praise both in conversation and in worship settings, encompassing all of life.

1. What commitment did the psalmist express to God? (Psalm 146:1-2)

What Do You Think?

What benefit is there in deciding to praise God for your entire life, even without knowing what will happen?

Digging Deeper

How can you strengthen praise habits now that will allow you to keep this lifelong commitment?

Trust: Psalm 146:3–10

The speaker shifts focus to warn against placing one's *trust in* human leaders, which makes 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 (2 Kings 18:11–12; 24:20).

Human leaders ultimately cannot provide true and lasting help. Even though life's circumstances can make trusting God difficult, the psalmist urged his readers to commit to affirming God's goodness by praising Him alone through it all.

The reason one should not put trust in humans (Psalm 146:3) is because people are not only powerless but transitory (see also 118:8–9). 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 (Ecclesiastes 7:1–2). The rest of the psalm picks up this point of contrast between mortal, powerless human beings and the powerful, immortal, and merciful God.

2. What warning did the psalmist give? (Psalm 146:3-4)

What Do You Think?

What experience do you have of trusting a person instead of God? (personal question)

Digging Deeper

Can this experience help you minister to someone who has been betrayed by someone they trusted? Explain.

Verse 5 returns to the one in whom trust should really be placed: *the Lord*. Jacob is singled out here among the patriarchs (see Exodus 3:15). The probable reason is that *Jacob* here refers to Israel, the collective name for God's people (Genesis 32:28; 35:10; Exodus 1:1, 7; etc.). 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 *blessed*. This trust stands in contrast to the misplaced faith in human beings (Psalm 146:3).

In verse 6a, the psalm shifts to highlight some of God's acts and characteristics that make Him worthy of trust and praise. God's role as creator of the entire cosmos and all its occupants (Genesis 1) shows how infinitely powerful He is (compare Job 38–41). Similar appeals to God's creative might as justification for hope and trust can be found in Psalms 115:15; 121:2; 124:8; and 134:3. In fact, when the people of Judah returned from exile, they and their leaders likewise confessed their sins to God and referred to God's creation of the universe in their praises to Him (Nehemiah 9:1–6).

3. Why did the psalmist say God is worthy of trust and praise? (Psalm 146:5-6a)

What Do You Think?

What aspects of creation give you confidence regarding God's faithfulness?

Digging Deeper

Beyond offering praise, how do you express your thankfulness for God's natural gifts?

In verse 6b, the psalmist introduces the next major set of reasons to trust in and praise God: His faithfulness. The claim that God *remains faithful forever* 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 (Genesis 8:21–22; 9:9–17).

God's care for *the oppressed* (v. 7a of today's lesson) 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 (examples: Genesis 24:35; 1 Kings 3:10–14), a lack of means is not necessarily a sign of divine disfavor. Even so, the psalmist notes that God pays special attention to the welfare of those who are oppressed, and those who don't have enough (examples: Leviticus 19:10; 25:35; Deuteronomy 15:7–11; Isaiah 58:6–12; Ezekiel 18:5–17).

4. What are examples of God's trust? (Psalm 146:6b-7a)

This list of God's gracious ministries to needy people are endless. However, as pointed out in verse 7a of today's lesson, one category of the oppressed are *the hungry*, pointing to a lack of necessities, which concerns God. The next three phrases should be read in parallel to Jesus' quote from this passage (Isaiah

61:1–2) when He spoke in the synagogue in Nazareth, and He applied this Scripture to Himself (Luke 4:16–21).

Verse 8b of today's lesson first highlights God's love and concern for *the righteous*. Second, there are the *foreigner*, those who are foreign to the land. God's special concern for the plight of the alien is illustrated in the Pentateuch (also called the Torah, the first five books of the Bible), as multiple laws demand the fair and generous treatment of those who are not part of the people of Israel (Exodus 23:9; Leviticus 19:34; Deuteronomy 1:16; 24:14).

The third highlights God's special care for *the fatherless and the widow* also emphasized in the Torah (examples: Exodus 22:22–24; Deuteronomy 10:18; 27:19), wisdom literature (examples: Psalms 10:14, 18; 68:5; Proverbs 15:25), and the prophets (example: Isaiah 1:17; Jeremiah 22:3; Malachi 3:5). Indeed, James 1:27 affirms that God considers care for widows and orphans as a defining component of "pure" and "faultless" religious faith.

5. In what specific ways has God shown concern for His people? (Psalm 146:7b–9a)

What Do You Think?

What is our responsibility toward people like those named in verses 7–9?

Digging Deeper

How is your church working to address needs within your community?

While God's goodness leads Him to protect the righteous, the alien, the widows, and the orphans, that same character leads Him to overturn the plans and schemes of *the wicked* (v. 9b). No one seeks to destroy the fatherless or widow without coming under the condemnation of God's wrath.

This concluding verse (10) is both a statement and a prayer. In contrast to human leaders, God will reign *forever*. Jehovah is king, and of His kingdom there shall be no end. He is never overthrown; He does not abdicate (give up); He does not die in office. He cannot give up His crown, nor can He lose it. This thought in itself is enough to make the psalmist shout, "praise the Lord."

6. How does God handle the wicked? (Psalm 146:9b–10)

It is only right that the closing Psalm (150) in the Hebrew hymnal be an invitation to praise the Lord! The word *praise* is used thirteen times here.

Exhortation: Psalm 150:1–6

Where should we praise Him? Locally and universally in the temple (church) and in the vast heavens (v. 1). In other words, wherever you are, praise the Lord!

Why should we praise Him? Because of what He does and who He is (v. 2). The better you know God's character and works, the more you will praise Him and the more you will enjoy praising Him.

How should we praise Him? With voices and instruments, including the cymbals, and with our bodies (dancing) expressing the joy we feel within (vs. 3-5). The whole person should be one living sacrifice that praises the Lord.

Who should praise Him? “Everything that has breath” (v. 6). But things that do not have breath praise Him (Ps. 148:7-9), so we have even more reason to do so! Our breath comes from Him (Acts 17:25), so we ought to use it to praise His name. Breath is the weakest thing we have, but we can devote it to the highest service, praising the Lord.

This final verse sums it up. Whether you can play an instrument or not, no matter where you live or what your ethnic origin, male or female, young or old – Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!

7. Define the different exhortations to praise God (Psalm 150:1-6).

What Do You Think?

How does it feel to know that all of creation is praising God around you?

Digging Deeper

What opportunities outside of weekly worship services do you have to join in praising the Lord of creation?

POINTS TO PONDER

1. We should have a full and firm commitment to glorifying the name of God for the entirety of our lives (Psalm 146:1-2).
2. We should place our trust in God only. Only He can provide true and lasting help (vs. 3-4).
3. Our trust is perfectly placed when put in the faithful God who reigns forever (vs. 5-10).
4. Hallelujah to God for who He is, and the great deeds He has done and continues to do (Psalm 150:1-2).
5. God deserves the praise of everything that has breath (vs. 3-6).

CONCLUSION

Praise Your Heavenly Father

We often fail to praise our Heavenly Father the same way that we praise our earthly father. We take His blessings for granted, as though these were given to us by nature rather than a loving God. We brag about what someone has done for us, but we never share with others the ways that God shows His mercy toward us. In fact, we are prone to grumbling and complaining about how difficult the circumstances of life can be.

Psalms 146 and 150 exhort us to praise God for all the great deeds He has done and continues to do for us. When we gather in praise of our heavenly Father, we not only align ourselves with the admonitions of Scripture, but we also grow in our intimacy with God and with other believers. Moreover, when we remind ourselves of and meditate on God's gracious acts on our behalf, we grow in our gratitude toward God and our resistance to grumbling. We can come to appreciate God's blessings more and find joy in our lives even in (or especially in) difficult circumstances.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, remind us daily of all Your mercies to us. Fill our hearts with gratitude and our mouths with Your praise. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

God deserves our praise.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

Next week's lesson is **"A Song of Thanksgiving"** and will help students make a plan to better recognize and seize opportunities for thanksgiving. Study Psalm 100.