

DEVOTION IN THE PSALMS

March 27, 2022 | Knowing God to Praise Him

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

What causes you to praise God?

Read Psalms 98, 99, and 100.

Ask God to give you a better understanding of what He has done so you can praise Him more.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Praise God for who He is and what He has done.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

Failure to praise God is a symptom of not knowing Him.

MEDITATE

“Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations” (Psalm 100:4–5).

GETTING STARTED

+This section illustrates a key distinction in how we know and relate to others, a distinction to keep in mind as we consider the link between knowing God and praising Him.

Q: *How is knowing family different from knowing coworkers?*

Q: *What would separate knowledge of God from praise of God?*

Most Americans who work outside of the home spend nearly as much time with coworkers as they do their families, if time spent sleeping is not included. Of the sixteen to eighteen hours we spend awake, eight to ten are typically dedicated to work. The daily commute swallows up another hour or more for many of us. We spend a lot of time around our coworkers and get to know them rather well. I know the school my boss's daughter attends. I know my supervisor's political opinions. I know the health challenges another coworker is facing. In many ways, there is a lot of overlap in the things I know about the people I work with and what I know of my own family. But no matter how well I know my coworkers, it pales in comparison to how well I know my family. No matter how much time I spend with coworkers or the details I know about them, I know my family better. The difference is that I know my coworkers casually, but I know my family intimately.

Psalms 98–100 invite us to praise God because of what we know of Him. The key thing for us to realize is that the psalmists believe knowing God will lead us to praise Him. When we consider God's character and what He has done for us, our hearts will respond in praise, but for this to be the case, we need to remember the difference between knowing coworkers and knowing family. For our knowledge of God to lead to praise, it must be intimate instead of casual. Knowing facts about God is good, but it will not lead to praise on its own. For knowledge to lead to praise, an intimate, invested knowledge is needed, similar to how we know family.

Q: *How do we find intimate knowledge of God?*

Q: *How does the gospel help us know God intimately?*

APPLICATION POINT – The way many of us pursue knowledge of God will never lead to the intimate praise anticipated by the psalmist. We approach God as though He were a coworker. We know Him casually, because He is there. Our knowledge doesn't demand much effort or commitment on our part. Or we approach Him as though knowing Him simply gives us a leg up in some kind of trivia game between ourselves and anyone else who participates with us. We want to know God to impress others. Or we feel obligated to know Him because we are in His debt. We may come to know basic facts about God in these ways, but we will never learn to praise Him in

this way. The knowledge that leads to the praise is rooted in the gospel. When our outlook on life and our passions have been transformed by the gospel, the knowledge of God becomes intimate for us, like the way we know family. The gospel transforms casual knowledge into intimate knowledge.

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Psalms 98–100 each describe a call to praise based on who God is and what He has done for us. This lesson will consider the perspective offered by each psalm.

1. PSALM 98: PRAISE THE LORD FOR SALVATION

2. PSALM 99: PRAISE THE HOLY GOD

3. PSALM 100: PRAISE THE CREATOR GOD

GOING DEEPER

+*Psalm 98 calls for praise because the psalmist knows God as Savior. Psalm 99 calls for praise because God is holy. Psalm 100 calls us to praise God as creator.*

1. PSALM 98: PRAISE THE LORD FOR SALVATION

■ PSALM 98

Q: *Why does the psalmist call for a new song in praise of God?*

Q: *What kind of salvation is the psalmist envisioning?*

The psalmist begins Psalm 98 by calling for a song in praise of God, but not any song will do. He calls for a new song in response to the marvelous things God has done. God's marvelous deeds are centered on an act of salvation He has worked on behalf of His people. At first, we may be tempted to think the psalmist is referring to some kind of localized salvation. Perhaps he faced a military threat or a natural disaster, and God granted deliverance to him and those around him. The details of this psalm, however, extend beyond any isolated instance of salvation. The

psalmist declares that God's salvation has been accomplished in the sight of all the nations. Not only have the nations seen this salvation but they have evidently participated in it to some extent, because the psalmist calls them to join him in praising God. Finally, the psalmist calls for a new song to praise God with. A new song is needed because nothing compares to the salvation God has now brought. Not even the exodus from Egypt, the archetypal act of deliverance in Israel's history, can compare. Just as Moses led Israel in a new song after crossing the Red Sea (Exodus 15), the people of God must now compose a new song to acknowledge what God has accomplished for them. Praise on this scale must be in response to an eschatological (related to end times) act of salvation. The psalmist is anticipating God's future and final act of deliverance from all evil. Every resistance to God's reign will be rooted out and dispelled. The only thing remaining for the people of God is to sing His praise.

As Christians, we recognize that God's final act of deliverance began with Jesus Christ. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus decisively defeated sin and provided salvation for all who repent of sin and place their faith in Him. When Jesus returns, any remaining resistance to His reign will be conquered, and God's salvation will be recognized among all the earth.

❖: *What does the psalmist mean by saying God remembered His steadfast love?*

❖: *Why would we be tempted to wonder if God has forgotten His commitment to us?*

APPLICATION POINT – The psalmist proclaims that God remembered His steadfast love, but we know, as the psalmist did, that God cannot forget something so fundamental to His will. In times of waiting, it can often seem as though God has forgotten His commitment to us, but to say He has remembered His steadfast love is merely an accommodation of our perspective of what God is doing in the world. We may feel as though God has forgotten us as we wait for Jesus to return, but we can know that God will one day “remember” us and complete our salvation from everything that threatens us.

❖: *With how many instruments, including the human voice, does the psalmist call on his audience to praise God?*

❖: *In what ways does the use of instruments enhance our worship?*

The psalmist calls his audience to praise God with their voices and at least three different instruments. This list of instruments is likely not intended to be exhaustive. Harps, drums, and anything else at their disposal would be appropriate as well. The use of these instruments demonstrates the value human resourcefulness adds to worship. God has given us the gift of creativity, and the psalmist is calling others to utilize it in worship. Humanity created these instruments out of the raw materials God provided (Genesis 4:21). They learned to tune and blend their sounds into a pleasing melody. When all this creativity is funneled into the praise of God, His glory resounds to an increasing degree. God's people should offer praise with all the resources He has provided as long as they can do it in a manner consistent with God's holy character.

❖: *Could the use of instruments ever detract from worship?*

❖: *How can you use your talents to worship God?*

APPLICATION POINT – The psalmist calls his audience to worship God with all their resourcefulness. This is an appropriate occasion to remind ourselves that worship is not limited to a service or even to singing or musical activities. Paul referred to our devotion to God and pursuit of holiness as an act of spiritual worship (Romans 12:1). We worship God when we live out the implications of the gospel. Furthermore, to the degree that worshipping God and bringing Him glory overlap, everything we do becomes an act of worship (1 Corinthians 10:31). While musical worship is important, music is not the only way to worship God. You can use whatever talents God has given you to express His praise.

❖: *Who praises God in verses 7-8?*

❖: *How do verses 7-8 exhibit the extent of God's praise?*

After calling on humanity, with all their resourcefulness, to praise God, the psalmist turns to nature. With the psalmist's skillful wit, creation takes on human qualities and joins in the chorus of God's praise. Every square inch of land and sea is needed to create the praise that God is due. As king over humanity and all the earth, God is due praise from both arenas.

Q: *What keeps nature from fully displaying the glory of God today?*

Q: *Will God receive more praise from nature or from you?*

APPLICATION POINT – I want to invite you to join a competition. Nature displays God’s glory in incredible ways. Whether creation’s praise comes from the rays of the sun reflecting against the clouds on a perfect morning, the panoramic view from a mountain peak to the valleys below, or the intricacies of wildlife, creation sings a wonderful cantata of praise to God. Are you going to let nature outdo your praise? It is a seemingly silly contest, but the psalmist’s remarks lead me to believe he sees humanity and nature as a dynamic duo in praising God. I’m not sure if the praise I give and witness on a typical Sunday morning really measures up to what the psalmist envisions. When the Pharisees called for Jesus to rebuke the multitudes who were praising Him, Jesus declared that if they were silent, the rocks would cry out in their place (Luke 19:40). I’m afraid many Christians today have surrendered in the contest to give God praise and not because the Pharisees or anyone else has threatened them. They simply do not want to put forth the effort to praise God as He deserves. The next time you find yourself in a corporate worship service, praise God like you intend to put nature to shame.

2. PSALM 99: PRAISE THE HOLY GOD

■ PSALM 99

Q: *What descriptor is found in the beginning, middle, and end of Psalm 99?*

Q: *What do the cherubim show us about the God who sits upon them?*

The message of Psalm 99 rests on the foundation of God’s holiness. God’s holiness is what sets Him apart. An object is called holy if it is set apart for God’s use. Thus, holiness is the quality of God that most distinguishes Him from everything else. The psalmist acknowledges God’s holiness in verses 3, 5, and 9. At every point, he feels pressed to tie his praise of God to God’s holiness.

His acknowledgement of God's holiness extends beyond the mere appearance of the word. God sits upon the cherubim. Cherubim are a specific type of angel with a specific function. They are protectors of God's holiness. In Genesis 3:24, they protect the way to the tree of life at the entrance of the garden. They adorn the ark of the covenant, which typically rested in the innermost room of God's sanctuary, the holy of holies. In fact, by referencing God's throne (Psalm 99:1) and His footstool (Psalm 99:5), the psalmist is likely alluding to the ark of the covenant. Therefore, their appearance in a psalm focused on God's holiness is no accident.

❖: *What are the implications of God's holiness for us?*

❖: *How are God's justice, equity, and righteousness related to His holiness?*

APPLICATION POINT – In addition to God's holiness, the psalmist acknowledges God's justice, equity, and righteousness. God's holiness means His commitment to these qualities sets Him apart from His creation. We may be concerned for justice, equity, and righteousness, but not to the degree that God is. Because of sin, we may compromise these things at times. Even when our intentions are pure, we can only marginally achieve any of these three qualities. Not so with God. Because of His holiness, He is able to achieve perfect justice, perfect equity, and perfect righteousness.

God's holiness means His reign can be perfectly just, impartial, and righteous. When the American colonies revolted against the British rule, they did so under the conviction that the rule of the British monarch lacked justice and equity. No one can ever make this claim against God without pretense. God's rule is perfect because He is holy. While the psalmists allude to many nations who rebel and rage against God's rule, those nations do so without warrant. In the same way, if we rebel against God's rule, we do it in opposition to true justice, equity, and righteousness. God's holiness demands our submission to His rule.

❖: *What is the dilemma of God's holiness?*

❖: *Who were Moses, Aaron, and Samuel?*

God's holiness presents us with a dilemma. How can any fallen human being escape the punishment of a holy God? We have all rebelled against God's authority. The psalmist felt this dilemma as much as we do, which is why he also acknowledges God as forgiving (Psalm 99:8). Psalm 99 mentions three key figures from Israel's past (Psalm 99:6). Moses and Aaron led the Israelite exodus from Egypt. Moses continued in his leadership role and sometimes assumed the role of a prophet (Numbers 12:6–8; Deuteronomy 34:10). Aaron became Israel's chief priest (Leviticus 8). Samuel was Israel's final judge (1 Samuel 7:15) and also served as a priest. The psalmist's purpose in mentioning these three figures is unclear. In Psalm 99:8, the psalmist says God was a forgiving God to "them." The nearest antecedent to the pronoun "them" is Moses, Aaron, and Samuel, but many people believe, based on the intermediary nature of their ministries, the psalmist is referring to the forgiveness received by the people of Israel in Psalm 99:8. If this is the case, the psalmist is highlighting the need for a mediator to dispense God's forgiveness. If it is Moses, Aaron, and Samuel who received forgiveness, the psalmist is underlining the universal need for forgiveness, because even Israel's greatest leaders were far from perfect. Either interpretation fits well in the context of the message of Psalm 99 and illustrates the importance of forgiveness from a holy God.

❓: *How is forgiveness mediated to us?*

❓: *How is the tension between God's holiness and His forgiveness of sin ultimately resolved?*

APPLICATION POINT – Even though God is holy, He forgives sin. This is good news for all of us. Apart from His forgiveness, we would have no hope. Furthermore, we never need to do anything to earn His forgiveness because it cannot be earned in the first place. Forgiveness is a free gift from God. Ultimately, His forgiveness is centered on Jesus Christ. He maintains His holiness and forgives our sin because of the ministry of Jesus Christ on our behalf. Our sin was counted to Him. His righteousness was counted to us. Although we are undeserving, God will pronounce everyone who places their faith in Christ Jesus "not guilty."

3. PSALM 100: PRAISE THE CREATOR GOD

❑ PSALM 100

❓: *What new theme does the psalmist use as a reason to praise God in Psalm 100?*

Q: *What common metaphor appears in Psalm 100 and how is it related to praise?*

In Psalm 100, the psalmist introduces the theme of creation. God created all of humanity. As our creator, He rightly rules over us, and we are accountable to Him. The psalmist extends this line of thought by comparing us to the sheep of the shepherd. We are guided by His direction, and He protects us. As our creator and owner, God deserves our praise.

Q: *What benefits do we have because we belong to God?*

Q: *Why is it good to be held accountable?*

APPLICATION POINT – It is a privilege to belong to God. God is committed to us. He cares for us. He sustains us in times of need. He holds us accountable to His righteous standards. Today, it is popular to think a commitment to God inhibits happiness by restraining our desires. Nothing could be further from the truth. Those who belong to God are able to seek happiness within the confines of His perfect will.

NEXT STEPS

Psalms 98–100 focus on the praise of God. Worship extends beyond the times of formal praise in a church setting. Nevertheless, our times of formal praise are a major component of our worship lives, and for many of us, these times can become stale. It is easy for our minds to wander, to sing the words without thinking about them, or to give no voice to the words at all. One problem may simply be a lack of familiarity; we are not drawn to church worship because we are not familiar with the songs used during worship. Many of us do not encounter these songs apart from Sundays. Even on the car ride home after church, many of us transition back to our preferred style of music. If this is the case for you, challenge yourself to become familiar with the songs Oakwood regularly sings so you can sing them with meaning along with the congregation. Commit one day to listening to worship music as you commute to and from work. Doing so may reinvigorate your praise of the God who is worthy of all our praise.



PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

God, you are the God of my salvation. You are the beginning and the end. Remember your steadfast love for me.

Lord Jesus, you make forgiveness possible. You died so that I may live. You have taken away all my sin so that I may praise the holy God.

Father, help me to praise you with a whole heart. Help me not to divide my attention when I am seeking to give you praise.

God, you are my creator and sustainer. I belong to you and so does all my praise.