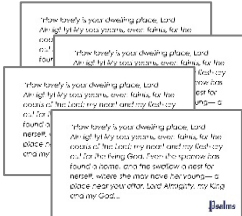




Praise the Lord!

Psalms #2 | Oct 15, 2023 | 8:00, 9:30, 11:00 AM | Preached by Steve Howell



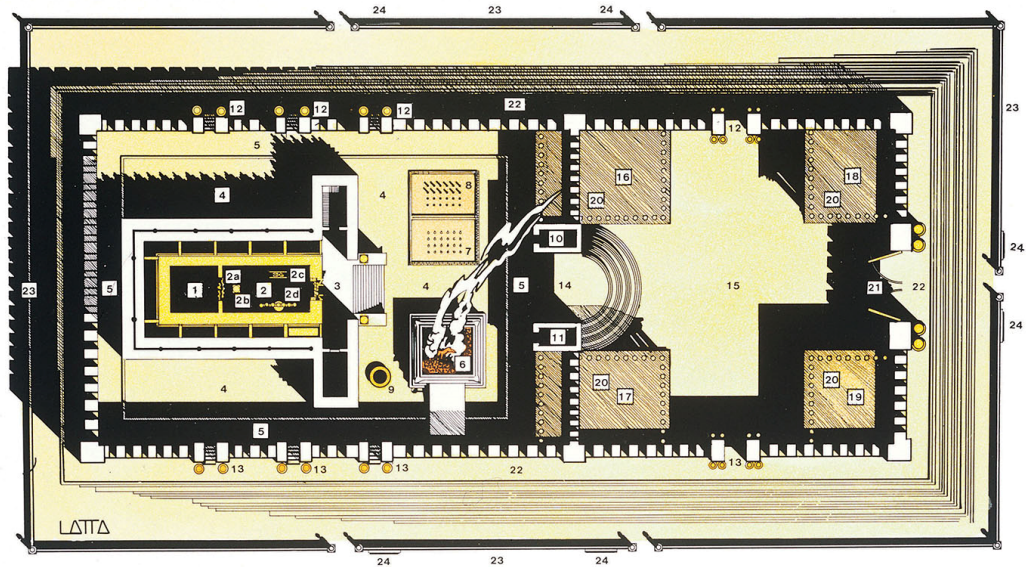
Psalm 84:1-12 (NIV)

- PS 84:1 How lovely is your dwelling place,
 O LORD Almighty!
- PS 84:2 My soul yearns, even faints,
 for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and my flesh cry out
 for the living God.
- PS 84:3 Even the sparrow has found a home,
 and the swallow a nest for herself,
 where she may have her young--
 a place near your altar,
 O LORD Almighty, my King and my God.
- PS 84:4 Blessed are those who dwell in your house;
 they are ever praising you.
- PS 84:5 Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
 who have set their hearts on pilgrimage.
- PS 84:6 As they pass through the Valley of Baca,
 they make it a place of springs;
 the autumn rains also cover it with pools.
- PS 84:7 They go from strength to strength,
 till each appears before God in Zion.
- PS 84:8 Hear my prayer, O LORD God Almighty;
 listen to me, O God of Jacob.
- PS 84:9 Look upon our shield, O God;
 look with favor on your anointed one.
- PS 84:10 Better is one day in your courts
 than a thousand elsewhere;
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
 than dwell in the tents of the wicked.
- PS 84:11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
 the LORD bestows favor and honor;
no good thing does he withhold
 from those whose walk is blameless.

Selah

Selah

- **Courts** – The outer areas of the temple were known as the courts. This was where believers could congregate and celebrate God. The court contained the altar where burnt sacrifices were made to God. Certain levels of access were closer than others (Priests, Israelite men, Israelite women, then Gentiles – at increasing distance).



This temple complex is called God’s “dwelling place,” and it is “lovely” according to the author of Psalm 84. While the physical structure was impressive and ornate, the temple seems to be most beautiful to him because of its proximity to God’s presence.

He “yearns” for the courts (signifying that he was probably not a priest, and his closest level of access to the “living God” was simply to be outside the temple). The longing is so intense that he can feel it! Even birds, he sings, (as insignificant as they are) have built nests in portions of the courts near the altar, a fact that the author seizes upon to show the universal desire to be near to God. God cares for the sparrow (Matthew 10:29 – not one falls to the ground apart from God’s notice), and they want to be close to Him!



Transition – “Selah”

The first section ends with the term “selah,” a word found throughout the book of Psalms. It is a word that means...something (pause, reflect, praise?). We just don’t know what that something is! It never contains contextual words around it. However, since it appears in song, we assume it is a musical term, maybe signifying a pause or a musical interlude (guitar solo? Or more cowbell?).

Whatever it means, the song moves on to its second section.



Section 2 – Pilgrimage (84:5-8)

This next section moves to new imagery. We move from the temple complex to the roads as people make their way to the temple. Because of their love for God, they make the pilgrimage (the journey) to His temple.

The terrain surrounding Jerusalem is mountainous, with lots of hills and valleys. So, when you and I read a phrase like the “Valley of Baca,” we typically assume it is just one of those ravines near the city. However, if you were to pull up a map of the area to find it, you would be looking for a while. No such place exists! Instead, we need to consider the alternate translation. Instead of a place name, it is a descriptor: the “valley of weeping.” It is likely symbolic, much like the “valley of the shadow of death” in Psalm 23.

Linguists also point to a related word in Arabic, *baka’a*, to suggest a further layer of meaning. That root means ‘to be sparsely watered.’ If that’s the case, then one can then see the play on words. Those whose strength is in the Lord make this sparsely watered place of weeping into a place of springs and pools. In fact, the word “pools” could also be a play on words as it sounds like the word for “blessings!” Tears and desolation turn to abundant life and blessings when God is involved!

In this section, the author makes the claim that everyone who trusts in God and calls upon His name is given strength, even as they go through adversity or weakness.



Section 3 – Blessings (84:9-12)

After another “selah,” we read the final section of Psalm 84. It starts with a reference to the king of Israel, “your anointed one.” Anointing, or pouring oil on the head, was the symbolic way in which God had signified who would be king (first Saul, then David, later it refers to Jesus himself, The Anointed One or The Messiah). In Psalm 84, the psalmist asks God to bless his protector/king (“our shield”)...and continues by meditating on the blessings of living in God’s presence.

He is blessed to spend even *one* day in the courts of the temple (which is better than a thousand days anywhere else). It is even better to *serve* on the clock in the temple than it is to *lounge* in luxury and comfort in a tent... if that tent is outside of God’s special presence (a “tent of the wicked”).

God blesses him with favor and honor, with protection and light. He cares for those who follow His commands!



Review

This song gets a 10/10, “would definitely recommend!” It is a beautiful piece of poetry...but it is also powerful spiritually!

Designed to Praise

The reason I started out today's sermon with this particular psalm is that it highlights a major feature of the book of Psalms. Psalm 84 is a shining example of a "Psalm of Praise."

In our new sermon series on the book of Psalms, we want to help you see the *range* of Psalms, help you learn to *read* them well, and help you *cultivate a brain/heart* that thinks like them!

Last week we began this series, and we were challenged by the words of Psalm 1 to "meditate" on God's Word – to play these songs again and again, allowing the content to form and transform our thinking. The *variety* of Psalms available for us to consider in meditation is large – the Psalms cover SO MANY different emotions! – but when we spend time with them and in them, we develop a way of *godly thinking* that informs our life and our praise.

And *praise* is the goal! Of course, we want to see a godly use of emotion in these songs; yes, we want to learn how to handle our sadness, our troubles, and our victories rightly. Yet, while we hope to gain better emotional and mental health when we spend time with the Psalms, there is a *bigger goal* than personal improvement.

Praise is the goal!

Designed to Praise...the Creation

Humans are designed to praise! We are built in such a way that we look for and long for things that we can praise!

Example: I love BBQ. Anyone with me? It's delicious! And in Kansas City we have no shortage of places that can serve it up. There are the generic options you can get anywhere: the McRib (when it's in season) at McDonald's, or the Riblets at Applebee's. But those are "meh" when it comes to ribs. In the KC area, we know what "better" tastes like!

- **Shout out one place that has ribs better than McDonald's...** (*wait for answers*)
- Biemer's BBQ in Lawrence, Q39, Joe's Kansas City, etc.

We might argue about their merits, but you and I know that when you get that perfect bite – with the complexities of the rub and the sauce and the perfect temperature and the bark and the fall-off-the-bone-while-staying-on-the-bone texture – it is sublime! It is a moment you must stop and savor.

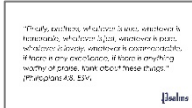
And when you find it, what do you do? You tell everyone about it! You dream about it! You make sure you go there for special occasions to enjoy yourself and bask in the experience...with others...giving each other knowing looks!



We want to praise the perfect rib because that's what we do as humans. We celebrate the most *flavorful* barbeque. Or the *strongest* pickup. Or the *most intricate* quilting pattern. Or the *most fashionable* shoe. Or the *most amazing* one-handed football catch.

Don't get me wrong - we are really good at being critical! But we were DESIGNED with a need to discover praiseworthy items so we can declare and enjoy their worth!

This is why Paul writes to the Philippian church:



“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”
(Philippians 4:8, ESV)

Praiseworthy things should occupy our minds! ...and then our minds should make the logical leap to worshipping God.

Designed to Praise ...the Creator



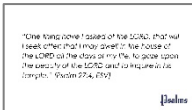
It is only natural for our praise to extend from the created item to the creator. We love the ribs, so we honor the pitmaster and restaurant with awards and accolades. We love the concertos, so we make statues of Mozart and Beethoven.

How much more with the Creator of all things!

In his book *The Explicit Gospel*, Matt Chandler puts it this way:

*We **worship** God **when**, while we partake of his good gifts, something occurs in the deepest parts of our soul that **forbids glory** terminating on the **gift** itself or on our **enjoyment** of it but that **runs deeper into** and **extends out to** the **Giver**.¹*

We don't just praise the gift; we praise the Giver! The psalm-writers agree with this focus. We heard it in Psalm 84, and we hear it again in Psalm 27.



“One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.” (Psalm 27:4, ESV)

Everything that is praiseworthy has its origin in God. And the God who created them – imagined them, designed us so that we could perceive and enjoy them – is certainly worthy of more praise than his creation! We serve an infinite God, so there is no amount of praise that is “over the top” when it comes to our adoration of him!

This is worship, and it is the heartbeat of the Psalms.

¹ Chandler, Matt. *The Explicit Gospel* p. 36



Songs of Praise

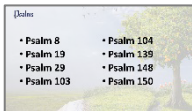
The worship and praises we want to declare find their voice in the words of the Psalms. These songs provide the necessary language and examples to help us express God's transcendence. They create beautiful pictures of praise.

Remember the title of the book? The Greek word ("Psalms") focuses on the *medium* of instrumental song. The Hebrew title, though, focuses on the *content* of the songs: "Praises."

Now, that title might seem surprising for a collection of songs that touch on the entire range of human experience. There are songs that face terror, songs that are written in the midst of enemies, songs that cry out from the depths of despair – hardly the normal setting for praise. The range of songs and emotions are vast, yet *every one* of these songs exhibits praise as the author moves from difficulty to trusting God.

We will spend more time discussing those sub-categories of Psalms in the coming weeks. But today, our focus is on songs that are unapologetically positive and full of acclamation for God.

Psalm 84 was a great start. If you want to read more like it, jot down and take a look at the following songs of praise:



Psalms 8; 19; 29; 103; 104; 139; 148; 150

These songs include classic lines of praise:

"O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"
(Psalm 8:9, ESV)

"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork." (Psalm 19:1, ESV)

"Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!"
(Psalm 103:1, ESV)

"Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!"
(Psalm 150:6, ESV)

Their words have formed the backbone of many hymns and praise songs over the years. People have taken these words and incorporated them into their own songs of adoration...the list of which grows longer and longer each day. The work of ascribing worth to God himself is an unending privilege, as hymn writer Fredrick Lehman once wrote:



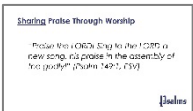
*Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made,
Were every stalk on earth a quill, and every man a scribe by trade,
To write the love of God above, would drain the ocean dry.
Nor could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from sky to sky.”²*

The book of Psalms may not fill the skies, but these 150 chapters demonstrate a wide variety of praise, expressed in many ways....including:

- Exaltation of God
- Expressions of gratitude for His works
- Expressions of longing to be in His presence
- Exclamations of joy
- Decisions to submit to Him
- Reverence for His nature

The types of praise demonstrated in these songs are personal and intimate, but they are also intended to be shared with a community.

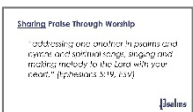
Sharing Praise Through Worship



*“Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the **assembly of the godly!**” (Psalm 149:1, ESV)*

Praise generates excitement that is worth sharing. It gains value when we spread it. It is an emotion that begs to be community property!

The songs of praise are intended to be part of our experience together. Psalms often use plural language – the nation, the assembly, the people, “our,” “us” – to discuss praise. It’s not just individual; it is communal. The New Testament carries this theme forward, as people like the church at Ephesus were encouraged to be filled with the Spirit and express it in worship:



*“addressing **one another** in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,” (Ephesians 5:19, ESV)*

Singing praise is a “one another” assignment. For our church community at TCC, that “togetherness” is critical as we worship God. We don’t have to love every song equally or enjoy every musical performance. But we must share our praise as we worship.



- Shared praise helps us to worship **without worry**. When everyone has the same heart, you aren’t worried about the reactions of others. They are joining in, too!

Ex: Think about the pure reaction at a sporting event when the home team pulls off an unexpected victory. Strangers high five and hug. They chant in

² Quoted in Cosper, Mike. *Rhythms of Grace: How the Church’s Worship Tells the Story of the Gospel* p. 27

unison. In the moment, you aren't concerned about anyone looking at you...instead you are only thinking about celebrating.

- Shared praise helps us worship **without interruption**. By myself, I can be distracted by any number of sounds, movements, tasks, or notifications. But together, I am pulled back to the community of praise.

Ex: During third service, my mind might drift to lunch plans, but then I see a hand raised out of the corner of my eye and I think, "Lunch can wait! I'm going to keep my focus on Jesus."

- Shared praise helps us worship **without loneliness**. As we all share our praise, we highlight the kinship with have in Christ. We are brothers and sisters because of the cross. The lyrics apply to us all!

*Ex: Look around. These are the people in Tonganoxie who share your love for Jesus. So many around us in the community don't know what it is like to worship Jesus! But these people next to you do! Imperfect though we may be, we are **His** people...and so we are **our** people. We will stand beside each other in heaven singing out "holy, holy, holy" (with redeemed vocal chords!). We are never alone in praise!*

The psalms of praise provide common language for us to worship God. And they connect us not only with each other, but with other Christians across the globe and across history (past, present, and future). We share these lyrics as our common language of praise. We use them to communicate our love for God, to encourage each other to share that focus.

Praise songs exalt God and glorify His attributes while shouting to others, "Join us!"



Closing

The things we admire and love need to be experienced. I can't fully enjoy a grilled steak by looking at it and smelling it – it should be eaten. I can't fully enjoy and love my kids by looking at photos – I should participate in their life and make memories. And neither can I praise God fully by just reading some lyrics.

The praise and love of God must be something we strive to *experience* and enjoy. He covets our praise, and we are designed to give it!

The book of Psalms gives us more than lyrics; they give a pattern to follow. They show phrases we might choose as we worship together. They express emotions that we might also experience (or that we want to experience) as we enter God's presence. They model feelings that can enhance our commitment.

In short, they create a template for praise!

It's my hope that reading and meditating on these "psalms of praise" will elevate your relationship with God. I hope they will equip you to draw closer and closer to Him – to know that one day in his courts is better than thousands elsewhere! I want you to yearn for and long for His presence! I want your praise to never stop.

"Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you."
(Psalm 84:4, NIV)

Prayer

Invitation

For our time of invitation, we're going to sing the modern version of Psalm 84, "Better is One Day." The invitation is to praise without inhibition! Allow your heart to reflect on God's majesty and goodness. Allow your soul to celebrate the mercy and grace Jesus poured out on the cross. Honor God with all you have as we stand and sing!

PRAYER REQUESTS:

Notes

A Song Examined (Psalm 84)

Section 1 – God’s Dwelling Place (84:1-4)

Transition – “Selah”

Section 2 – Pilgrimage (84:5-8)

Section 3 – Blessings (84:9-12)

Designed to Praise

Designed to Praise...the Creation (Philippians 4:8)

Designed to Praise ...the Creator (Psalm 27:4)

Songs of Praise

Psalm 8; 19; 29; 103; 104; 139; 148; 146–150

(Psalm 8:9; 19:1; 103:1; 150:6)

Sharing Praise Through Worship

(Psalm 149:1; Ephesians 5:19)

Sermon Discussion ?s

Use the following questions based on today's sermon as a starting point for spiritual discussions with your family or a small group of Christian friends this week.

Fellowship—Relationship with a Purpose

- A song of praise is also known as a “hymn.” Do you have a favorite hymn or praise song? Share it...or sing it!

Growth—Thinking About Spiritual Matters

- Does praise come naturally to you? Do you find yourself talking positively about things often? Why or why not?
- Read Psalm 84. What lines or phrases stand out to you as most important? Why does the songwriter want to be so close to God?
- When was the last time you felt a similar emotion of praise about God? Is it a regular occurrence or an infrequent event? Are you happy with your answer? Explain.
- When you express praise to God, what tends to be the focus of your praise? (Ex: gratitude for His works, reverence for His nature, longing to be near to Him, etc). What other areas could you intentionally add?
- In what ways does TCC show praise for God in our services? Are there ways we could improve that praise? If you have constructive ideas, share them with the ministry staff.
- Why should we regularly praise God with others, like we see in Ephesians 5:19? What benefits does praise within a community bring?
- Choose one of the following psalms of praise: Psalm 8, Psalm 103, or Psalm 150. Read it and make two lists. One list should include all the attributes of God that are listed as praiseworthy. The other list should include all the actions that we can take to praise Him. How can you incorporate both lists into your own praise of God?

Prayer – Taking Your Thoughts to God

- Praise God for His mighty acts and for all that He is! Spend time just talking to God and declaring His praise!