



**Studies in the Psalms**  
**Keys to the Joyful Life 5**

Summary: The joyful life involves singing and hearing worship of a worthy God.

This summer we are doing a study in the book of Psalms where we have discovered keys to the joyful life, the blessed life, the peace-filled, divinely guided, and strengthened life. Those keys are found scattered all over the Psalms and you find them by looking for this phrase: [blessed is the man who](#) or [blessed are the people who](#) and then noting whatever specific instruction follows.

Today, we examine a key that some of you have already discovered: there is a blessing that comes from singing and hearing songs of praise and worship focused on God.

Look with me at

[Psalm 89:15 Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound!](#)  
[They walk, O LORD, in the light of Your countenance.](#)

The joyful sound he's speaking of is the sound of people praising God.

And that sound has an effect on us – whether we're the people making it or the people hearing it. Worship can bring us joy, encouragement, instruction and blessing, look at the very next verse with me:

[16 In Your name they rejoice all day long,](#)  
[And in \*\*Your\*\* righteousness \*\*they\*\* are exalted.](#)

Now, I don't know if you noticed it or not, but something peculiar happened there. The Psalm says when God is exalted, the people who praise Him are also exalted – and that focusing on Him leads to rejoicing. The NIV doesn't quite let this come through, but every other major Bible translation does. And it's important because it helps us see that you can lift yourself up and lift up the people around you, by praising God. So, sometimes, when you're feeling down, depressed, anxious, confused or even angry, the best thing you can do is turn and worship God.

A few weeks back we said that sometimes we praise our problems more than we praise our God. We know more about our problems than we do about our God. We think more about and talk more about, our problems than we do about our God. The Scriptures encourage us to flip that upside down. Don't ignore your problems, or pretend they don't exist, but see your problems in light of your God.

Praise helps us do that which is why Ethan wrote this Psalm – he talks about his problems and struggles, but not until after he’s reminded himself and others of what is true about God. Read with me and notice what he says:

*A Contemplation of Ethan the Ezrahite.*

**Ps 89:1** I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever;

With my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations.

**2** For I have said, “Mercy shall be built up forever;

Your faithfulness You shall establish in the very heavens.”

Ethan has a goal. He knows worship benefits his soul, and he wants to make sure other people benefit too. He wants to use his mouth to make God’s mercy and faithfulness known to all generations, he wants to pass on the knowledge of God’s glory to the kids and the grandkids and everyone else.

And that’s important for us to understand, because we tend to make spiritual things a personal matter - something private and individual. But in Scripture faith has a very prominent communal aspect. Scripture shows over and over again that we are to be connected as believers – that I will do things that benefit and help you, and you will do things that benefit and help me.

Which is why Ethan says, I’m not just going to worship God myself - there are times for that, that should be part of our life, to know and worship and pray in private, but there are also times to make God known with our mouths, to build Him up publicly, to sing His praises in the hearing of others, to join our voices in corporate praise reminding each other of and instructing each other in what is true.

So, Ethan committed to praising God and being heard. We could say it like this: his praise was **for** God, but **BEfore** others.

Let me say something about each side of that equation. First, praise and worship are for God and singing, to God, is the natural behavior of those who have been redeemed. The exact phrase “I will sing” occurs at least 22 times in the Psalms and it’s almost always “to You” or “to God.”

The phrase “sing praise” occurs 31 times, always to God. And it’s not just the Psalms, the Bible is full of songs and singing from Genesis to Revelation, from front to back. Which helps us understand regardless of who you are, what your voice sounds like, or what kind of music you like or don’t like, singing, to God, is the natural behavior of those who have been redeemed. If you find yourself struggling to sing, ask God for help. Ask Him to help you praise Him. You’re not trying to be noticed for yourself, you’re trying to do it for Him.

Now, this leads us to something else important to note – the singing the we see in Scripture often occurs in public and communal settings. Ethan’s praise is *for God* but *before others* because He wants them to hear and know and remember certain things about God, especially in light of the difficult times they’re going through. He wants their heads and

hearts to be full of the things that *have been* true about God, *are* true about God and *always will be* true about God and he knows music has the ability to help those things get stuck in our heads and hearts – when it comes to music what we listen to is important, it affects what we think about and meditate on.

So let's look at what Ethan has to say in his song, what are the ideas he wants others to be thinking about. If you're taking notes, we'll see that he emphasizes: God's covenant with us, His relation to Creation, His capacity or strength, and His character.

We begin in vs 3:

3 "I have made a covenant with My chosen,  
I have sworn to My servant David:  
4 'Your seed I will establish forever,  
And build up your throne to all generations.'"Selah

The first thing Ethan does is remind himself and others of the promise God has made to Israel, a promise God cannot break or forget, a promise forever, for all generations. This covenant was a reason to praise God for His mercy, election, and kindness. And, when things were not going well in the nation, it was important for them to be able to look back on their calling and the promises God had made.

But what about us? We don't live in Israel under King David. Well, Jesus was a descendant of David through his mother Mary, He is the one, the seed, that God established forever, the one whose throne has been built up to all generations, and who made a new covenant in His blood that Christians celebrate and remember each time we take communion.

Christian, you need to know, and remember, God's covenantal promises to you. Especially when things are not going so well in your life. You need to marvel at the fact that God has chosen you, adopted you, and brought you into His Kingdom. You need to know His promises and the oaths He has made so that you can rest in them and rejoice in them and let the praise of God lift you out of your present circumstances.

God's covenants are one reason we should praise Him. His relationship with the created world is another.

5 And the heavens will praise Your wonders, O LORD;  
Your faithfulness also in the assembly of the saints.  
6 For who in the heavens can be compared to the LORD?  
*Who* among the sons of the mighty can be likened to the LORD?  
7 God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints,  
And to be held in reverence by all *those* around Him.

Here is a theme that occurs over and over again in Scripture: God rules over all Creation, there is nothing else that compares to Him, and the entire created world testifies to His glory. Whether you look through a microscope, a telescope, or even as oscilloscope, you will

find evidence of a glorious, majestic, creative God. At the cellular level as well as the cosmic, Creation declares the wonders and glories of God: [the heavens will praise Your wonders, O LORD](#).

Now, Creation doesn't answer all of our questions about God, it's not meant to, but the world around us *and Scripture in front of us*, work together to get our attention and then provide us instruction about the God who made everything we see, hear, touch, taste, sense, and smell.

The Bible begins by declaring, with authority

**[Genesis 1:1](#)** *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*

That's the first thing you need to know. That's the opening line. [In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.](#)

This is how we are introduced to who God is – by pointing out what He has done. This is the starting point for understanding who you are, where you are, what is happening in the universe, and who God is.

That means you have a theological imperative to explore the world with wonder, and worship God in response to what you discover. It also means we have a theological imperative to care about the world. Environmental issues do not belong to conservatives or liberals, they have a significant theological root and I want to encourage you, as individual Christians, to consider the environment from a theological perspective. What does it teach us about God, and how can preserving, protecting, and defending it be an act of worship and discovery that points us to the God who made it all and then turn to the Scriptures where we learn even more about Him?

The fact of the matter is, when you look out on the world, you can draw one of two major conclusions. You can say it all came from nowhere. Something banged and began a series of chain reactions that eventually produced life and then produced consciousness, and somehow the goo produced you – a walking, talking, collection of matter driven by chemical reactions and electrical signals that will one day die, decompose and return your body's share of oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, calcium, phosphorus, sulphur, potassium, sodium, and other elements back to the earth no different from any other form of life on the planet.

One hundred years from now you'll be mostly forgotten as everyone who knew you dies too and none of it really matters because it's all just one big evolving accident anyway. That's one way to look at life, a way that is relatively new to the human experience being put forth only in the past 200 years or so.

Or, you can look out into the world and see evidence of intentionality and design – that someone or something made all of this, that it is tremendously well designed, functional and full of wonders and let that lead you to discover who made it and why. This is what

every major civilization has believed throughout human history. And Scripture is firmly in this camp. It says the world, when rightly understood, points us to God. In fact, Scripture says creation praises God to anyone who has eyes to see and ears to hear. And our psalm this morning says, that should compel us to praise Him too, and be blessed when we do.

The psalm continues:

8 O LORD God of hosts,  
Who *is* mighty like You, O LORD?  
Your faithfulness also surrounds You.  
9 You rule the raging of the sea;  
When its waves rise, You still them.  
10 You have broken Rahab in pieces, as one who is slain;  
You have scattered Your enemies with Your mighty arm.  
11 The heavens *are* Yours, the earth also *is* Yours;  
The world and all its fullness, You have founded them.  
12 The north and the south, You have created them;  
Tabor and Hermon rejoice in Your name.

Ethan praises God for being sovereign in the heavens – praised by the stars and skies, greater than all the angels and then he comes down to earth and points out that God is also sovereign over the seas and everything in them including Rahab which most likely refers to a creature they told stories about that lived in the sea – it could have been a whale, or maybe a dinosaur, like a plesiosaur, the point is – there's this big body of uncontrollable water out there and this really big, scary thing that lives in it, and God can still easily defeat it. He can do what no human can.

The gospels tell us of a time when Jesus and His disciples were in a boat on the sea of Galilee and a storm came along and began to pummel them, and these men, several of whom were fishermen, accustomed to being on the water, were scared and asked Jesus to do something so He spoke with authority and calmed the wind and waves – basically stopped the storm, and they freaked out (Luke 8:25) *saying to one another, "Who can this be? For He commands even the winds and water, and they obey Him!"* They recognized that Jesus had power over the forces of nature, over things they could not control.

Ethan says God is actually sovereign over the whole earth – the north and south, and mountains like Tabor and Hermon and not only is He sovereign over these things, *He owns them*. Notice vs

11 The heavens *are* Yours, the earth also *is* Yours;  
The world and all its fullness, You have founded them.  
12 The north and the south, You have created them;

And, the biology, oceanology, and geology of this earth praise the God who made them, just like the heavens above:

(12 cont) Tabor and Hermon rejoice in Your name.

Friends, let Creation point you to God. The world around you, the skies above you, the cells within you, they're trying to tell you something important about God and then Scripture is explaining the rest. Men and women get excited when they make a scientific discovery, when they discover a new application for some law of physics, and that is good. But do you ever praise the God who made the laws in the first place?

Do we praise the God who buried the elements in the earth that we extract to make an iPhone? Do we praise the God who formed the mountains and set the boundaries for the oceans? Do we praise the God of the heavens and earth? Do we listen to the way they praise Him? The world around us and beneath us and above us is trying to tell us, there is a God and we're here for a reason – listen to them.

13 You have a mighty arm;  
Strong is Your hand, *and* high is Your right hand.

Ethan praises God for his Covenant, His creation, and now, His capacity, His strength – what He has done and can do. He praises God for His majesty and might, for His strength and ability. It is good to know we serve a God who is not limited or constrained or locked in battle with another god and only occasionally able to gain the upper hand so He can help us.

Scripture is very clear – there is no one else like God, no one and nothing else comes close. That is very important for you to know when you feel vulnerable, exposed, or at risk. God is strong, mighty, and able to save. No one has ever defeated God. No one has ever backed Him into a corner. There is nothing you need that He can't provide and nothing you've gotten yourself into that He can't get you out of. You need to know that if God is your only hope, you've got all you need.

And you can trust Him, because not only is He strong, He is good. Look at the fourth and final reason Ethan gives us to praise God: we praise Him for His character.

14 Righteousness and justice *are* the foundation of Your throne;  
Mercy and truth go before Your face.

Once you know that God made the world and rules and reigns over it, once you know He is strong and mighty it's good to know that His throne is actually built on righteousness and justice. It's good to know that He is merciful and true, which, actually has been the theme laying underneath everything else Ethan has said about Him. Remember, the Psalm opens with Ethan saying

**Ps 89:1** I will sing of the **mercies** of the LORD forever;  
With my mouth will I make known Your **faithfulness** to all generations.

Praise helps us remember, and helps others learn, that we can expect God to remember His covenant and promises *and not change*. You can expect Him to be and remain 100% true. He is not capricious, changing, or forgetful.

That's very helpful to know and remember when your world turns upside down. During the past 18 months I have tried to regularly remind myself and all the rest of us that according to Scripture,

**Hebrews 13:8** *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*

Why is that important to know? Because, if He was merciful in the past, faithful in the past, righteous, just, and true in the past, then He still is today, even if the world turns upside down on us.

And knowing that, knowing Who God is, what He has done and what He has promised for the future, knowing His covenant, His power over Creation, His capacity and ability, knowing His character give us fuel for worship which then circles right back in upon us. Like Ethan the Psalmist, our worship is directed to God, but recalling all these wonderful things about Him benefits us.

15 Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound!  
They walk, O LORD, in the light of **Your countenance**.  
16 In **Your name** they rejoice all day long,  
And in **Your righteousness**, they are exalted.  
17 For **You** are the glory of their strength,  
And in **Your** favor our horn is exalted.  
18 For our shield belongs to the **LORD**,  
And our king to **the Holy One of Israel**.

Notice the connection between God and His people. They walk in His light and see things His way. They Rejoice knowing that He is real and that He is there. They exult in His character. They receive glory and strength and protection (shield) from Him.

Happiness comes from submitting to a God like this. Peace comes from trusting a God like this. Worship reminds us that the answers to our biggest problems lie in the character and works of God and that when we feel insignificant, unseen, or unheard, God's eyes are still on us and He loves us like a father.

Throughout history people have turned to worship and praise to find strength to carry on through difficult times. One of the richest sections of the church's collection of music comes from African American spirituals. That very term comes from Ephesians 5:19 which encourages Christians to speak to one another in Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

According to the website of the Library of Congress, "Songs like "[Sometimes I feel like a motherless child](#)," and "[Nobody knows de trouble I've seen](#)," describe the slaves' struggles and identification with the suffering of Jesus Christ."

In a sense Ethan would have been proud of this, because even the Library of Congress recognizes that these brothers and sisters of ours in Christ were trying to bless one another, and instruct us through worship by reflecting on who God is and how He relates to our present struggles.

If you are not familiar with songs like Swing Low Sweet Chariot and It's a me, o Lord: standin' in the need of prayer, I encourage you to seek them out and discover what they have to teach us about praise and worship and about turning to God to find strength in your darkest hours. Because they, and all other songs of praise and worship are meant to remind us of things that are true about God and give the instruction and encouragement we need for this life.

Of course, worship and praise is not all about lament, mourning, and expectation, it's also meant to be a spark of rejoicing and response to the goodness you've seen and experienced.

We may all have different preferences for musical style, different instruments we prefer, and different ideas of what a worship service should be like, but I need to point out that the worship we see described in the Psalms is often a little more energetic, loud, and enthusiastic than middle-aged congregations in the suburbs are comfortable with.

Listen to what some of the other Psalms say about public praise:

**Ps 33:1** Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous!  
*For praise from the upright is beautiful.*  
2 Praise the LORD with the harp;  
Make melody to Him with an instrument of ten strings.  
3 Sing to Him a new song;  
Play skillfully with a shout of joy.

And

**Ps 47:1** Oh, clap your hands, all you peoples!  
Shout to God with the voice of triumph!  
2 For the LORD Most High *is* awesome;  
*He is a great King over all the earth.*

Church, there is a blessing for those who sing, and those who hear, the praises of God. Worship and praise encourage us, instruct us, and remind us who God is. This psalm especially reminds us of His mercy and faithfulness – things that are very important to hang on to as we attempt to make sense of the world around us.

I encourage you to make room today for worship and praise in your head and heart, in your home and car. Find ways to join in worship, take opportunities to be around worship, and especially when you feel overwhelmed, distant, depressed, distracted, or tempted, find worship that will point you back to God. There's a blessing in it for you.

Let's pray.





## Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

### Studies in the Psalms Keys to the Joyful Life 5

Summary: The joyful life involves singing and hearing worship of a worthy God.

- Do you find praise and worship something that is easy to do, or a struggle? What makes it enjoyable for you or hard?
- What style of worship do you most enjoy: contemporary praise, traditional hymns, gospel, other?
  - Do you prefer songs that are quiet and reflective or energetic, or both? Why is there a need for both styles?
- What are some worship songs that you would call your favorites?
  - Why? Is it because of how they sound, what they say, or the way they connected with a particular moment in your life?
- Music often serves as a soundtrack for our lives. Has there been a song or album that carried you through a season of life? What did it say about God and why was that relevant?
- How does knowing God has made a covenant with you help you worship Him?
- How does knowing God's relationship with Creation help you worship Him?
- How does knowing God's capacity, power, and strength help you worship Him?
- What aspects of God's character compel you to worship Him?
- Some of our favorite worship can be found on The City Gates Church's YouTube channel.