

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

When It's Time to Worship

(Psalm 145)

Study #9

Sermon Series: Learning to Pray
(Studies in selected Psalms)¹

Introduction: The time is right...

When it's time to fix something, you go to YouTube. When it's time to get in shape, you go to the gym. When it's time to vote, you go to the polling location. When it's time to get serious about a career, you pursue education, training, coaching.

And, when it's time to worship God, Jews and Christians have long made their way to Psalm 145.

Since beginning this series of studies in the Psalms a couple of months ago, this is our 9th Psalm to explore, and it's the 4th one we've looked at that was written by King David.²

¹ For reference, the Psalms we have studied over the past couple of months, in order, are:

Psalm	Author	When...
1	Unknown (Ezra?)	...you want to follow God
90	Moses	...you are considering the future
73	Asaph	...you've got doubts
46	sons of Korah	...life's storms hit
51	David	...you've sinned
103	David	...you're grateful to God
42	sons of Korah	...you're thirsty
55	David	...you are opposed
145	David	...it's time to worship

Like all the Psalms, this one is a prayer to God. The fact that they are prayers to God is why I've wanted to look at them with you.

I haven't wanted to bring these messages about "Learning to Pray" because I have *arrived* in my prayer life and I want you to *arrive*, too. No, I am speaking today out of a sense of deeply felt need. After all these years, I am still wanting and needing growth in my prayer life.

I have not yet become the prayer warrior I hope to one day be. It may be that in this, I am much like you. I suspect that you, like me, long to grow as a pray-er.

And, if that's you, I can recommend books to read and seminars to attend and podcasts to help you grow. But, when push comes to shove, the source to turn to for any help in growing in prayer is the Bible. So, to the Bible - specifically to Psalm 145 - we turn today.

This Psalm is a prayer. But, like all the other Psalms, it is also a song that was meant to be sung by a choir or by a soloist to a worshipping congregation.

So, imagine that you have gathered for the performance of David's latest Psalm/song at the place of worship in ancient Jerusalem. The temple had not yet been built in David's day, so this worship service might have been held in any wide-open space in the city.

You watch David walk to the front of the crowd and you expect him to introduce the singer or the choir who will present this Psalm.

² Few Bible characters are "covered" as thoroughly as David. he was anointed to be the king of Israel by Samuel when he was a teenager. However, a giant was killed, a wife was married and alienated, a best friend was lost in battle, and years of fleeing for his life would pass before David actually became king. He led Israel to political and military supremacy in the Ancient Near East, reigning as a good and God-honoring king. He sinned against God by violating Bathsheba and murdering her husband to cover up his sin. Graciously, God led David to repentance, forgave him, and restored him. By the time he wrote Psalm 145, he is an older man reflecting on the God-lessons of his life.

Suddenly, you and everybody else realizes that King David himself is going to lead. He's covering his own song. He introduces you to the Psalm, naming it "Praise"³ and belts out the first lines.

First thought: David Commits to Worship God, the KING (vv. 1-2)

[1] I will extol You, my God, O King,

And I will bless Your name forever and ever.

[2] Every day I will bless You,

And I will praise Your name forever and ever.

David was Israel's king. God is David's King.

If David had learned nothing else during his long life, he had learned that he reigned as a human sovereign under the sovereignty of a greater, completely sovereign God.

Today, you and I 'get' that - and we don't get it in the way a Jew of David's day would have "gotten" it.

Because the Jews of the Old Testament lived under a monarchy, they were at a tremendous advantage over us Americans when it came to the worship of God.

With respect to worship, our political system (for which I am very grateful) works against us in that it diminishes our capacity to appreciate what kingship, sovereignty, and rulership means.

When we read the words, "***O King***" in our Bibles, we don't react emotionally the way the subject in a monarchy does.

If you're like me, when you hear reference made to the Queen of England or to England's princes and their wives, you think it's interesting. But it doesn't strike you as awesome. (That might be the same for a 2019 Britisher...)

But that - awesome - is exactly how it would have struck an 18th century Englishman or an ancient Jew.

Throughout our national history, when an American president walks into a room, he generally receives respect. (Clearly, that is not always the case) "*Hail to the Chief*" plays loud as the president enters.

But, in our society, there is no reverence, no recognition of the king's power to bless or curse or wage war or grant life or condemn to death as he sees fit. We're an egalitarian lot. Not the Jews.

A Jew of David's day - and therefore, David - knew that the proper posture when approaching a king was kneeling, bowing, or lying prostrate. That's how David approaches God.

And King David promises that he will praise and worship his King - as He deserves to be worshiped - every day.

Looking into the far distant future, he sees worship as his eternal preoccupation. Then, he opens his Calendar and makes sure that he's got "worship" checked in the box marked TODAY.

David is not going to start worshipping as soon as it is convenient. No. Starting today, "***EVERY DAY I will bless You.***" Period.

With this commitment made, David proceeds to lead us into a time of worship.

Worship the LORD - He is Great (vv. 3-7)

The LORD's Greatness is Unsearchable (v. 3)

***[3] Great is the LORD, and highly to be praised,
And His greatness is unsearchable.***

The cars we drive are great to get around in. But, what with "smart corner" technology, autonomous imaging radar sensors, connected mobile apps, and automatic emergency braking (among many other features), who can figure them out? Your car is, to use David's word, "***unsearchable.***"

³ This is the name the Jews gave to this Psalm.

Smart phones are amazing. You can turn on your home's heat and A/C from work, use it to start your car, and even make a phone call. But your phone, even before 5G, is also *"unsearchable."*

The universe has been explored by telescopes, space stations, and satellites. The microverse has been probed by microscopes.

But would anyone ever say that they understand the expanding universe out there or the sub-atomic universe we can't see? No, they're *"unsearchable."*

When King David considered the God who created everything there is and who brought into being by a spoken word all that we see, he was utterly stumped. God is *"unsearchable."* Un-figure-out-able.

David's sings on, telling us that when we each come to that point of recognizing the inscrutability and the unsearchableness of God, something magic happens between us.

Multi-Generational Praise (v. 4)

[4] One generation shall praise Your works to another, And shall declare Your mighty acts.

One way to think of a "generation" is to say that everyone alive today is living in this generation. No matter your age, 9 or 90, you are a part of the present generation. And I like that thought.

But when you and I think about a "generation" we generally think in terms of similarly aged people. That's David's thought, too.

We haven't always been so generationally aware. But since the mid-1900's and the rise of the Baby Boom, we have taken to naming the different generations and ascribing general traits to them.

Most prominently, there are Builders (1925-45) and Baby Boomers (1946-64), Busters (1965-79) and Millennials (1980-94), and now Gen Z (1995-2010).⁴

⁴ Wonder what we call the group after Gen Z? We call them "Alphas."

Each of these generations have things to be proud of and things to regret, reputations, and a camaraderie based on shared memories and experiences.

King David paints a picture of a worshiping community where each generation - Builders and Boomers and Busters and Millennials and Gen Zers - interact about God with each other.

The thought certainly includes that of the older generation communicating God's truth to the younger generation. But the verse doesn't say that. No, the point is that there is to be a back-and-forth sharing between the generations of God's mighty acts.

Not only are the grandparents and great-grandparents declaring God's works to those who are actively parenting; not only are the moms and dads speaking to their kids - of all ages - about God and His works.

It works the other way around, too.

The young ones sharing what they know about God and His works with the older ones.

I get excited when I think about that happening around dinner tables in homes, in Sunday Schools, and at gatherings when the church family comes together.

So, we have this mental image of young and old busily telling God stories to each other, and David goes on to sing about something he will do, and regularly.

The LORD's Glorious Splendor (v. 5)

[5] On the glorious splendor of Your majesty And on Your wonderful works, I will meditate.

The Hebrew word we translate "meditate" comes from a word that means "to stroll." The idea is that we're taking a leisurely walk and ruminating, cogitating, contemplating on a theme.

Meditating on God's "*majesty, and...wonderful works,*" means that we take a truth about who God is - say, His majesty - and what He has done - this or that miracle - and we mull it over in our minds until we see God's character and His actions to be as great as they really are.

You could do that this coming week.

Why not take on a "meditation project"? Why not spend time meandering through a theme that will connect you with an appreciation for God's greatness?

You could meditate on God's majesty in Heaven or His work of creation. You could mentally explore the wonder of some of the Old and New Testament miracles, or the greatness of God as seen in His plan of redemption.

Meditation leads to an enlarged concept of this God we serve and an enhanced passion to know Him.

The last verses of this first stanza of David's song highlight how important it is for us to talk with one another about God.

Speaking of the LORD's Greatness (vv. 6-7)

***[6] Men shall speak of the power of Your awesome acts,
And I will tell of Your greatness.***

***[7] They shall eagerly utter the memory of Your abundant goodness
And will shout joyfully of Your righteousness.***

Catch the talking words: "*Men shall speak...I will tell...They shall eagerly utter...shall shout joyfully...*"

The more David thinks about God, the more star struck he is with God.⁵ We would call this "hero worship". David invites us to rehearse out loud the great things God has done in history.

⁵ In what arena of our cultural life are we in 2019 most likely to engage in hero worship? The sports world? The entertainment world? Politics? Business success stories?

"Can you believe what He did? The Red Sea parted and the Jews walked right through it! The walls of Jericho fell down flat! The Shekinah glory filled the Tabernacle! Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead!!"

And on and on we could go, including things that God has done in our own lives or on behalf of our friends and loved ones.

David's song tells us that cultivating a worshipful heart involves rehearsing God's greatness out loud, with each other.

As we move to the song's second stanza, David sings of another facet of God's character. Now, he sings of God's amazing grace.

Worship the LORD - He is Gracious (vv. 8-13)

The LORD is Merciful and Good (vv. 8-9)

***[8] The LORD is gracious and merciful;
Slow to anger and great in lovingkindness.
[9] The LORD is good to all,
And His mercies are over all His works.***

In those words, we hear three of the most important words in the Hebrew language. The words are "grace" "mercy" and "lovingkindness."

- Grace (*chanan*) describes a blessing given by a superior to an inferior who has no real claim for blessing.
- Mercy (*racham*) refers to a deep love that is rooted in a natural bond. A related Hebrew word is a mother's "womb," the place of safety where a child grows and is nurtured until birth.
- Lovingkindness (*chesed*) describes God's commitment to deal with His people in loyal love, especially in light of the covenant into which He has entered with them.

God deals with His people in grace, mercy, and loyal love today, and He did in Old Testament times as well.

There are dozens and dozens of examples of God's grace in the Bible. Perhaps surprisingly, we find one of the most powerful in the Old Testament book of Judges.

When the judges ruled Israel (before the kings), the nation repeatedly got involved in idolatry and immorality. And yet, time after time after time, God came to their rescue. He delivered them from trouble when they cried out to Him - because He loves them.

That's grace. That's mercy. That's God's loyal love.

And the more we get to know God, the more clearly we see that loving posture toward us. So, David sings, again.

Thanking, Blessing, and Boasting in the LORD (vv. 10-12)

***[10] All Your works shall give thanks to You, O LORD,
And Your godly ones shall bless You.***

***[11] They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom
And talk of Your power;***

***[12] To make known to the sons of men Your mighty acts
And the glory of the majesty of Your kingdom.***

There is a natural internal pressure to express gratitude for grace received from God.⁶ That's true in other arenas of life, too.

The *outward* expression of praise fulfills an *inner* necessity. If we eat a fantastic meal, we've got to say something to somebody. If we see a great movie, we've got to tell a friend.

⁶ Consider these words from C.S. Lewis: "*It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed. It is frustrating to have discovered a new author and not to be able to tell anyone how good he is; to come suddenly, at the turn of the road, upon some mountain valley of unexpected grandeur and then to have to keep silent because the people with you care for it no more than for a tin can in the ditch; to hear a good joke and find no one to share it with.*" (from Reflections on the Psalms, p. 95)

We want our friends to go to the great restaurant and to see the amazing film.

When we "taste and see that the Lord is good" and then tell a friend who is still on his way to faith in Jesus, we are inviting them to take a taste, too.

That's right. You may actually plant a seed of faith in a friend's soul by your simple act of expressing gratitude to God.

The grace of God highlights the soft, tender side of God. Our tender, gracious God is strong, and His rule is enduring.

King of an Everlasting Kingdom (v. 13)

The kingdoms of this world are short-lived dominions. Think of the empires that have risen and fallen in Western civilization.

The great Babylonian, Assyrian and Persian Empires lasted for a couple of hundred years apiece. The Greeks were pre-eminent little longer than the lifespan of Alexander the Great and the Roman Empire's power was done after about four centuries.⁷

Our American experiment has lasted about two hundred and fifty years and counting. The Soviet Union was dismantled by internal pressures after only 75 years and African borders are regularly redrawn.

By contrast, David sings,
***[13] Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
And Your dominion endures throughout all generations.***

God is presently ruling over an invisible kingdom populated by people (like us!) who submit to His Lordship under Jesus. And He will one day rule more overtly when He ushers in the full measure of the kingdom at Christ's return.

⁷ The greatest of the Chinese dynasties survived in the hundreds of years.

Yep, one day Christ will reign in righteousness on earth. We will finally have what humanity has always needed: A Sovereign who is as just as He is powerful, as good as He is great.

David's song has another stanza. This one affirms that those who experience hardship and suffering - either at the hands of others, or by shooting themselves in the foot - need special provisions. When that person is us, God meets us at our point of need.

Worship the LORD - He Provides (vv. 14-16)

The LORD Helps the Weak and Failing (v. 14)

***[14] The LORD sustains all who fall
And raises up all who are bowed down.***

David, of all people, knew about falling. He knew first-hand how easy it is to fall from high places. He fell into sexually violent immorality. He fell into plotting and scheming murder.

News Flash!

People still fall. I do and so do you. Some of us may fall off the same heights David did. But there are also possible falls into the pits of self-pity, pride, cheating, gossiping, selfishness - and more.

David knew first-hand about the dangers of falling. He also learned from personal experience that God can raise up those who fall.

I have long wondered what David might say if we could take him off to the side and ask him, *"David, how does a king best show off his power?"*

I suspect he might tell us that it is not by putting on a show or by parading past gawking crowds. I think, based on his own life story, David would tell us that a king's power is best seen in his capacity to restore broken people to usefulness in the kingdom again.

Is that king willing and able to raise up the fallen?

God raised up David after he fell. And in the centuries since David, God has raised up fallen people over and over again.

- He raised up Simon Peter after his fall on the night of Jesus' arrest.
- He raised up the Apostle Paul, after his career of killing Christians.
- He raised up John Mark after his cowardly retreat on the First Missionary Journey.

Brothers and sisters, worship a God who will raise you up if (or better, **WHEN**) you fall.

There is hope for those who fall because there is a God in Heaven who *"sustains the fallen and raises up all who are bowed down"* by defeat.

God provides forgiveness and restoration. He also provides something He alone can provide.

The LORD Meets Needs (vv. 15-16)

***[15] The eyes of all look to You,
And You give them their food in due time.
[16] You open Your hand
And satisfy the desire of every living thing.***

David speaks first of food. We remember that Jesus' hands never came up empty when they reached into the basket to draw out food for the five thousand. He satisfied the desire of that hungry crowd.

Now, looking back at a long life, King David sings of God's day-to-day provision for Him, whether he was watching sheep as a youth, running from King Saul, or at the battlefield.

The last line goes beyond food. David's song says that our God satisfies the deepest longings of our hearts and offers us water (John 8) that quenches our deepest thirst.

In the final stanza of this song, David sings of a final facet of God's nature that moves him to worship: His righteousness.

Worship the LORD - He is Righteous and Kind (vv. 17-20)

***[17] The LORD is righteous in all His ways
And kind in all His deeds.***

***[18] The LORD is near to all who call upon Him,
To all who call upon Him in truth.***

***[19] He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him;
He will also hear their cry and will save them.***

***[20] The LORD keeps all who love Him,
But all the wicked He will destroy.⁸***

Here we find the amazing balancing act that only God could pull off when it comes to how He deals with His world: righteousness AND kindness.

Righteousness without kindness is coldhearted scorekeeping. Kindness without righteousness is sentimental mush. Combine the two and there is strength and beauty.

When David thought of the combination of righteousness and kindness, he might have had in mind the sacrificial system of his day.

God's righteousness was seen in the demand for the shedding of blood for the remission of sin; God's kindness was seen in His forgiveness of the one who faithfully offered that sacrifice.

But when we read these words today about the marriage of righteousness and kindness, we can't help but think of Jesus because He, on the cross was JUSTLY punished when He KINDLY took upon Himself your sin and mine.

What a deal. And it has to be that way, or there will be no salvation for any of us.

⁸ The combination of love and fear is crucial. Love without fear becomes bold-faced familiarity which dishonors the King of Kings. Fear without love is a slavish relationship which dishonors the Lord of Grace, Mercy, and Lovingkindness.

David's song (v. 20) reminds us that there is no hope for the one who refuses to admit to their need for forgiveness and who never turns to God for the grace He offers.

But when we run to Jesus for forgiveness, we find God's amazing grace and receive the gift of eternal life, a gift that cost Jesus everything - He paid it all - but is absolutely free to us (after all, eternal life is so valuable that it is either given as a gift or it is unaffordable).

David ends the psalm with a reprise, repeating his opening commitment to worship and praise God forever.

Last thought: David Commits to Worship God, the LORD (v. 21)

***[21] My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD,
And all flesh will bless His holy name forever and ever.***

There, that is Psalm 145. Finished. And that's nine messages from the Psalms. Done.

Conclusion: First things first...

Now, if I can be blunt after delivering a sermon, let me ask this: Having just invested the last thirty minutes of our congregational life working our way through this Psalm and nearly five hours looking at all nine we've studied, what benefit have we gained?

The question might be framed, "What good did that do?" (or, more negatively, "A lot of good THAT did.")

If that seems like something of a crass question, relax. It isn't. and I'm not offended if you ask it. It's really not a bad question to ask after you hear any sermon, including this one.

I mean, I haven't mentioned any of the dozens of problems our society is facing - family squabbles, mass shootings, substance abuse, social injustice, refugee needs, our church's service to the poor.

On a personal level, we face relational tensions, child-rearing questions and problems, household economic pressures, seemingly uncontrollable urges and lusts that would consume us, and issues as practical as *"How do I live with my neighbors?"*

What we have done, today and over these weeks has been to work our way through a few Psalms from the Bible on the way to helping us learn how to pray to God.

These looks into the Psalms have been an exercise in "First Things First."

No doubt that our world has an abundance of needs and problems. We can all see that.

So, it might seem reasonable - certainly it would seem American - to take some action.

Yes, by all means, put feet to your faith and serve, give, love in Jesus' Name. But...first things first.

First, express your dependence on God in prayer. First, love the Lord your God with heart, soul, mind, and strength.

What our friends are longing to see are followers of Jesus living from the core, not the crust. They hunger to see men and women and young people whose character has been shaped by time with God.

The power of Jesus, unleashed in the service and love of Christians who have been with God in prayer is what will transform our homes, schools, and workplaces.

First things first. Pray.