

# **Psalms: God's Worship & Prayer Guide**

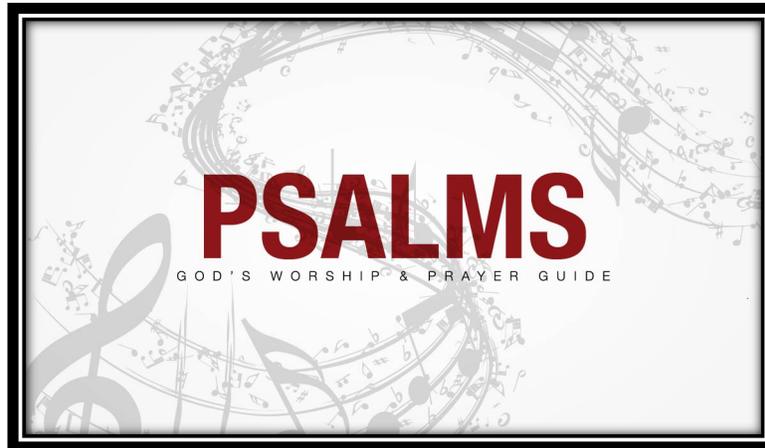
## The Path Of Praise

Selected Texts

Written By

©Dr. Marty Baker

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**H**ow often, or how readily, do you actually give God your praise? Giving Him praise comes naturally from one who knows and walks with Him. Giving Him praise is, for the believer, as natural as breathing clean, fresh air. So, stop and ponder for a brief moment just how regularly joyous praise flows from your lips when you approach God's throne. It is an excellent sign of a spiritually maturing saint.

Beyond this, you need to ask yourself an additional question: When I praise God, what exactly should I praise Him for? To get your praise pump primed, David shares his coveted answer in Psalm 33, a song whose lyrics were originally derived from a lifetime of enjoying an intimate with the Almighty. Just what did the king discover? What tasty praise tidbit does he make us privy to in this long-forgotten, and once quite new, worship tune? Here is the main message:

### We Should Praise God For Who He Is And What He Does (Psalm 33)

Too often I fear we appear before God with all of our weighty and worrisome prayer needs, while forgetting we should first, as Jesus taught us, focus on "our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name" (Matt. 6:9). We should come before Him first with recognizing who He is. He's our divine eternal Father and He is the essence of pure holiness. This is who He is and it should serve as the gateway of our praise to Him for He is worthy.

David knew this and that is why this praise Psalm drips with words describing God.

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

Lest you not be convinced your life should be all about praising God, I think the first three verses lay this ill-founded notion to rest . . . permanently. With five imperatives/commands (not suggestions), David, by way of divine inspiration, challenges us to be consumed with perpetually praising God. I have highlighted the Hebrew commands for our consideration.

David, who played the harp, which we could say is the ancient equivalent of a really good Gibson guitar, hits praise from every angle here. He tells us we should

- “Rejoice in the LORD.” Who? The righteous, which is from the Hebrew *saddiqim* ( צַדִּיקִים ), a pluralized noun denoting persons who live according to the ethical norms wedded to the person and character of God. And when they offer praise it is, well, a beautiful thing. Why? They are doing what God designed them to do.
- “Praise the LORD” with an instrument of our choice if we play. Do you play anything? Do you use it to bring praise to God privately and publically? If you do the former but not the latter, I must ask, “What are you waiting for?”
- “Make a beautiful melody” to Him with an instrument we love . . . like a harp with ten strings, or a trumpet, a piano, drums, flute, oboe, etc.
- “Sing to Him a new song,” if you can’t play instrument, and, by the way, don’t just sing the worship oldies, but get into new music which extols Him. Do you? Will you?
- “Play skillfully” is most interesting. If you are using your instrument to joyously worship God, then make sure you practice and know how to play it. After all, should you choose to worship God with your instrument it stands to reason you will play well when you appear before Him, right? Who would ever want to play before, say, the President, and stumble all through the number? Not I.

As I said, David leaves us no quarter for living lives not focused on praising God. Will you praise Him more often than not when you leave this house of worship? Praise is a given if you want to grow up in the faith.

Moving beyond these commands, we must now attend to what constitutes great praise of God. David gives us much to think about and apply as we move down through these intriguing, challenging, and memorable verses. We will bob and weave with him as he emotionally moves through the verses of this divinely inspired song intent on showcasing who God is and what He does which is praiseworthy.

## Praise Him For His Person (Psalm 33:1-2)

Who is this God we worship? David give us the answer, as he has done many times before in the Psalter (Psalm 1:2, 6; 2:2, 4, 7, 11; 3:1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8; 4:3, 5, 6, 8; 5:1, 3, 6, 8, 12, *et al.*).

<sup>1</sup> Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous! For praise from the upright is beautiful. <sup>2</sup>  
Praise the LORD with the harp;

The divine name as employed here is Yahweh, and it is woven like a beautiful thread throughout the passage (Psalm 33:1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 18, 20, 22). First used in Genesis 2:4, it describes the God who gives us the history, not the mythology, of how the cosmos came into being. As such, this particular name, as we have said before, is of utmost importance for its association with the Hebrew verb “to be” underscores God as the externally existent one, the only One capable of setting our temporal cosmos in motion, the un-cased One who created our iron-clad chain of cause and effect.

His existence answers so many cosmological questions, doesn't it? How did we get here? Why is there something rather than nothing? Since the Law of Causality in logic tells us that nothing cannot cause something, especially something as complex as the cosmos, we are logically led to conclude our “something” was caused by “someone” bigger and more complex than the effect we enjoy. That someone is the eternal LORD. Further, His mere name, which highlights His utter eternity, coincides with our logical analysis and conclusion that everything about us is only potential. We are actualized at birth, however, prior to this we were just potentialities, with no power to cause the effects of our births. God, conversely, is, by definition, without any potentiality for He just *is*. No wonder He called himself the great I AM in Exodus 3:14-15 to Moses, and He employed the same terminology when He, as God incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ, boldly identified himself as the great “I AM” inside and outside all time and space (John 8:58).

Since God is the LORD, and all that this Hebrew name implies, there is good reason to praise Him. Because He is I can face tomorrow for He will be there with me, I can have hope for He who set this all in motion will guide it to His desired favorable end, I can know no matter how deep the waters of life are the great “I AM” is with me (Isa. 43:2, “*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you.*”). No wonder David starts out with praise for this facet of God's person. Do you? Will you? Martin Luther did when he, the great theologian, wrote these lyrics to this famous hymn, “A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing (see the emphasis upon God's eternity), our helper He amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.” Those words rightly praise the God who is, and this is exactly what praise is all about. It praises and lifts up the Person of God by focusing on His rich, comforting, and lofty characteristics.

In the rest of the Psalm, David turns and waxes eloquent recalling the great and wondrous things God has done, does, and will do for us. In this vein, I believe David calls us to move beyond praising God for His person to offering precise . . .

### Praise Him For His Practice

Moving beyond the name of God as the LORD, David pauses in verse 4 to give us some viable reasons for praising God. The opening preposition readily and grammatically gives us these reasons:

<sup>4</sup> For the word of the LORD is right, and all His work is done in truth.

We praise God because His practice is all about giving us the right moral word. This is always how He rolls toward us. What does this mean? The Hebrew for “right,” *yashar* ( יָשָׁר ), literally means that which is “straight.” Of course, its antonym is to be “crooked.” As such, the word in ancient times applied to a straight path versus a twisted one. From this definition, it was only natural to apply the word to ethics and morals where God as the standard of measurement is concerned (Deut. 32:4; Mic. 3:9). The ellipsis of the main copula, “to be,” as is reflected in the KJV and the NKJ, serves to make David’s statement here quite emphatic. He boldly grabs his reader and says, by way of a Martyr paraphrase, “Never forget that the eternal God is all about giving us the right moral word through His Word.” Whether it is the Ten Commandments, or any commandment embedded in the teaching of the New Testament, God, who is the unchanging, inexorable standard of what is moral (and holy), makes sure we know what is morally straight versus morally crooked behavior . . . so we can live to please Him and move toward holiness.

Should I covet what another person has? No. And I should not even think about devising selfish, sinful rationalizations for doing so. Should I steal from someone? No. And I should not think that rioting and looting is ever justified, no matter how noble I think my cause is. Should I dissolve my marriage because we are not compatible? No. God did not give you that option when He laid out limited reasons for a viable divorce. Should I think that all love is love, as my culture does? No. If the object of the love is contrary to what God says is acceptable, then you have your answer. Should I provoke my son in order to make him a real, tough man? No. Provocation is sin and is not a sign of godly parenting (Eph. 6:1-2). We may not, at times, like the right word of God, but when we obediently submit to His perfect and holy standard we not only please Him, we know our lives are headed in the right direction. Installing some new cabinets for Liz last weekend, I lived with my trusty four-foot level. Why? Because I could not trust that my eyes were telling me the truth about whether everything I was doing was level or not. Just when I thought the cabinets looked good enough to screw to the back wall, I found out from the level I needed some minor adjustments. So, it is with God’s Word. It is straight and when you build your life with it you are headed in the right direction and you know it. And that, my friend, is reason to praise Him, is it not?

Our world, however, is about calling the crooked, straight, much like Israel did before they fell (Isa. 5). It is about having opinions and preferences but no prevailing, over-arching moral truth. It is about elevating relative ethics over absolute ethics. Concerning this, Greg Koukl remarks, “When truth dies, all of its subspecies, such as ethics, perish with it. If truth can’t be known, then the concept of moral truth becomes incoherent. Ethics become relative, right and wrong matters of individual opinion. This may seem a moral liberty, but it ultimately rings hollow.”<sup>1</sup> Hollow how? It leads to sinful, wicked living taking the place of righteous, holy living, and this, in turn, leads to guilt and unrest. It also leads, as we know, to chaos since everyone is doing their own thing. And it leads to a person or a people having really no morals at all because all moral viewpoints, no matter how obscure, evil, or bizarre, are treated as equals. The result of this is what we are seeing in our country: rioters are suddenly heroes who draw major traffic for their YouTube videos filming them in action. Why are they heroes? Because they are nobly

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<sup>1</sup> Greg Koukl and Francis Beckwith, *Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), 20.

committed to their ideology and what they believe is true for them, even if it is detrimental and destructive to others.

Once you, however, abandon the straightness of God's view of morality and proper ethical behavior you have embraced a position riddled with flaws which will not bring peace nor utopia. Just the opposite occurs. Koukl, who is a lover of the straight ethical ways of God, helpfully identifies the seven major flaws of relativism:

- Flaw 1: Relativists can't accuse others of wrongdoing. Why? Because everyone's actions are, well, true to them. Hence, the concept of wrongdoing is out.
- Flaw 2: Relativists can't complain about the problem of evil. Why? Evil cannot exist if morals are relative to each person.
- Flaw 3: Relativists can't place blame or accept praise. Why? Because there is no absolute external standard to really gauge what is blameworthy or praiseworthy.
- Flaw 4: Relativists can't make charges of unfairness or injustice. Why? Because those words only make sense when you believe in a God of fairness and justice, which is exactly what David says about God in Psalm 33, verse 5, "The LORD loves righteousness and justice . . ."
- Flaw 5: Relativists can't improve their morality. Why? Because if every moral decision is relative to what you think is moral, there is no upward moral ability. Just as the level objectively tells me when the cabinet is crooked, and I adjust it so it is better, God's straight moral word tells me how to improve myself. Once I say there is no absolute, objective moral standard, viz., God, then all bets are off for ever getting morally better for there is no way to measure the improvement.
- Flaw 6: Relativists can't hold meaningful moral discussions. Why? Because there is no way to tell which moral view is better, nicer, and more beneficial over another which might be meaner, ruthless, and even barbaric. They are all equivalent; hence, there is nothing to debate.
- Flaw 7: Relativists can't promote the obligation of tolerance. Why? Because true tolerance means you both believe there is absolute truth worth debating about. You tolerate the other person as you consider the evidence for one way of living in relation to another. However, if there is no straight moral word which never changes, then there is nothing to tolerate because all views are equal. What happens to the relativist at this juncture? You are seeing it on your televisions: they become ruthlessly intolerant because in their minds there is no reason to be tolerant. Life is just about might making everything right to them.<sup>2</sup>

What's the result? Personal and public chaos.

What's the solution? Getting back to recognizing there is a God who gives us a straight, true word about how to live life and about how not to. Happy and wise is the person who

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<sup>2</sup> Koukl and Beckwith, *Relativism*, 61-69.

understands this reality and not only lives in accordance with its reality, but who never fails to praise God for clearly giving us life-giving rules to live by, rules which, if followed, bring true righteousness and justice. Praise the God who dared tell us, Thou shalt not . . . That absolute moral, ethical standard shows us, as sinners, how to live as saints when He is our Lord and Savior. It also brings much joy to our lives because we know our lives are being lived in accordance with the kind of life He, who is holy, approves of.

So praise Him. Praise Him for who He is: the eternal God of the seen and unseen worlds. Praise Him for what He does in relation to making sure moral law and truth is always readily available and visible to anyone and everyone. Those who efface this embrace judgment. Those who embrace this and praise Him for it embrace blessing. When's the last time you expressly praised God for leaving us no room to doubt what it moral and what it not? Praise Him for this for He loves to know that you see the great gift He has entrusted to you.

In addition to this motif, *we praise Him because He is a God who absolutely loves righteousness and justice.*

<sup>5</sup> He loves righteousness and justice; The earth is full of the goodness of the LORD.  
(Ps. 33).

Righteousness, as I said in the introduction, is from the Hebrew word denoting that which conforms to the character of God. When your life, therefore, lines up, by your free-will choice, to obey God's moral/spiritual/ethical norms, you become righteous, and you also demonstrate you are honoring the God in love with right behavior. Further, when you live rightly according to what God prescribes, not your carnal, godless culture, a natural by-product is true justice. Again, this is just another facet of God's character He cannot wait to bring to our sin-twisted, and morally tainted world.

What's missing in our world today? Right living and justice. When one ethnicity treats another as inferior, that is contrary to God's desire for He has made us all equals in His image. Of course, when this occurs, injustice quickly trails behind as one race is showcased above another. When politicians devise restrictive laws for us serfs to abide by, while they, at the first chance, flaunt them to their own advantage, this is not right living and it leads, ipso facto, to injustice. When people burn other people's businesses to the ground before the facts are in regarding a given police operation, this is not right living and, again, it creates injustice of the first order for the victims in question had nothing to do with the police altercation. When a state can revise its laws so that an adult does not have to feel criminal/sinful for being in love with an underage person of the same sex, this is far afield from proper living according to God, and it will, by definition, lead to great injustices perpetrated upon the innocent. When facts are trumped by vile and vicious rhetoric, who could ever say before God they were living rightly? And when a person does this, when they won't listen to reason and evidence in a given situation, choosing rather to be inflamed and angry, it won't be long until injustice rears its hoary, ugly head. How so? The inflamed, angry person will typically intimidate the reasoning person, causing them to fold and retreat into silence. When a parent's estate is left to the children, and one of them creatively abscond with the parent's nest egg, this is wrong living and it is also the epitome of injustice for the trust should be carried out as defined by the parents. Need I go on? Our world, unfortunately, and sadly is awash in the acid of wrong living followed by a never ending stream of injustices.

God, on the other hand, is a lover of righteousness and justice. Psalm 89, verse 14 tells us these two concepts actually form the bedrock of His holy throne:

<sup>14</sup> Righteousness and justice *are* the foundation of Your throne; mercy and truth go before Your face (Ps. 89).

What is most exciting about this Psalm is it is entirely messianic. From beginning to end it speaks of the great, godly messianic king who will come to rule and reign over this earth in the Millennial Davidic empire. We, of course, know this messianic king as none other than Jesus from the line of Judah and David (Matt. 1). When He comes to earth at the end of the Tribulation, and deals a definitive blow to the godless governments of the day arrayed against His chosen people, Israel, He will, according to this Psalm, erect a kingdom known for righteousness and justice. I long for the day, don't you? It is the day when . . .

- Right living will replace wrong living.
- Moral people will replace immoral people.
- Godly people will replace godless people.
- The first shall be last, and the last shall be first.
- The meek shall replace the fierce and arrogant.
- The peacemakers will replace the war-makers.
- True spiritual belief will replace false spiritual belief.
- Treating others with respect will replace treating them with disdain.
- When, you can fill in the blank.

Yes, when the Messiah, Jesus, appears, righteousness and justice will finally be the order of the day. What will happen as a result? There will be peace like mankind has never known.

What are we to do in the meantime? Good question.

- Wrong living should be quickly replaced by right living. Do you have any area of your life where an exchange is needed? What you do when no one is looking? What you say on *Twitter*? Have you withheld forgiveness when wronged? Where have you traveled on the internet you should have steered clear from? What you do with others when you are away from home on business trip? And so on and so forth. Since God loves righteousness, and you call yourself a believer, you should take radical steps to love what He loves.
- Injustice should be rooted out of your life, regardless of who you are. Do you favor one child above another? Are you tempted to hire someone who is not qualified for a job just because you are friends with their father, while purposefully overlooking a truly qualified person? Are you an attorney working on a pivotal case? Are you really working to secure justice? Are you a salesperson who is thinking about withholding key data on a product so you can keep and make a sale? Are you a divorcee who is meanly mistreating your ex's new wife? Is any of this just? No. It smells of injustice . . . the very thing which God is not. If you are a saint who worships God, then I think you have

- your marching orders. Do what you need to do to create and establish justice.
- Give God praise for being a God of righteousness and justice. Because this is who He is, we know who we are supposed to be until He appears. Because this is who He is, we know that all hope is not lost either because the King is coming and His reward is with Him.
  - Lastly, despite how dysfunctional, destructive, and devious our old world becomes, never forget the promise David utters to close out verse 5, “The earth is full of the goodness of the LORD.” “Goodness” is from the Hebrew, *hesed*, which is the word for loyal, unfailing, unshakable love. No matter what the Devil does in and through wicked people, he cannot remove the love God has for His creation. Though we sin, His love reaches out to us and calls us to repent. Though we turn our backs on Him, His love motivates Him to come toward us so we can come to know Him. Though we slip and fall, spiritually speaking, His love is always readily available to restore and rejuvenate. Though wickedness seems, at times, to flourish unhindered like crabgrass in your once lovely yard, God’s love will eventually win the day.

So have hope and praise the God who is working overtime to make love, not hate, the way we live.

