

# Psalms: God's Worship & Prayer Guide

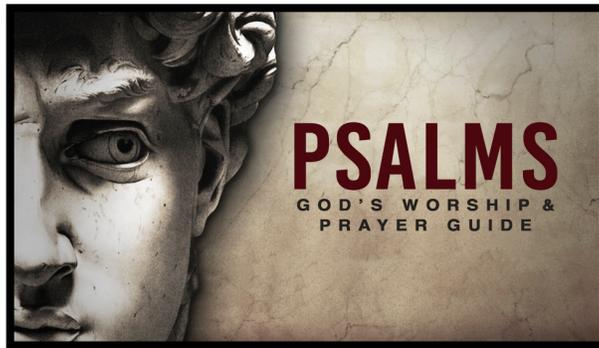
## Go Public With Praise

Psalm 111

Written By

©Dr. Marty Baker

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**H**ymns. Each one teaches you rich, meaningful theology. My sister, Marla, loved to sing *Blessed Assurance* as ovarian cancer took a toll on her body. Why did she love this old number? It meant much to her because of what it says to any saint, whether you are living a large life or facing your own mortality:

*Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine  
 Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine  
 Heir of salvation, purchase of God  
 Born of His spirit, washed in His blood  
 Perfect submission, all is at rest  
 I in my Savior, am happy and blessed  
 Watching and waiting, looking above  
 Filled with His goodness, lost in His love, oh oh  
 This is my story, this is my song  
 Praising my Savior all the day long  
 This is my story, this is my song  
 Praising my Savior all the day long.*

And to think a blind woman named Fanny Crosby, wrote this song with Phoebe Knapp back in the 1800s. A life full of darkness and difficulty couldn't keep her from waxing eloquent with lyrics full of the love of her Savior, coupled with the inexorable hope her faith gave her in seeing Him in glory one day.

Psalm 111 is no exception to the power of a spiritual song. This ancient hymn, whose musical notes were lost long ago, called ancient worshippers to publicly praise God for how He personally worked in their lives. How it taught the worshippers to do this is most creative. The lyrics were structured in an acrostic format, meaning the entire twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet appear at the head of *each clause*. This musical method had two benefits. One, it made memorization of this key hymn easier. Two, it purposefully and thoughtfully emphasized that the reason God should be praised literally covers everything from aleph to tav, or should I say, A to Z. As a side note, permit me to challenge you to create your own acrostic, using each letter of our alphabet to state why the Lord should receive your praise. And because this Psalm is all about public praise, I next challenge you to share what you come up with other believers. Perhaps you could start with your Life Group. Just in case you are interested in how the Hebrew acrostic looks, here it is:

:אָוֹדָה יְהוָה בְּכָל-לֵב בְּסוּד יְשָׁרִים וְעֵדָה: <sup>WTT</sup> Psalm 111:1  
 גְּדֹלִים מַעֲשֵׂי יְהוָה דְּרוֹשִׁים לְכָל-חֲפִצֵּיהֶם: <sup>2</sup>  
 הוֹדוּ-וְהִדְר פָּעִלוּ וְצִדְקָתוֹ עִמְדַת לְעַד: <sup>3</sup>  
 זָכַר עָשָׂה לְנִפְלְאוֹתָיו חֲנוּן וְרַחוּם יְהוָה: <sup>4</sup>  
 טוֹרף נִתַּן לִירְאָיו וְזָכַר לְעוֹלָם בְּרִיתוֹ: <sup>5</sup>  
 כָּח מַעֲשָׂיו הִגִּיד לְעַמּוֹ לְתֵת לָהֶם נַחֲלַת גּוֹיִם: <sup>6</sup>  
 מַעֲשֵׂי יָדָיו אֱמֶת וּמִשְׁפָּט נְאֻמֹּת כָּל-פְּקוּדָיו: <sup>7</sup>  
 סְמוּכִים לְעַד לְעוֹלָם עֲשׂוּיִם בְּאֱמֶת וַיִּשֶׁר: <sup>8</sup>  
 פְּדוּתוֹ שָׁלַח לְעַמּוֹ צִוְּה-לְעוֹלָם בְּרִיתוֹ קְדוֹשׁ וְנוֹרָא שְׁמוֹ: <sup>9</sup>  
 רֵאשִׁית חֲכָמָהּ יִרְאֵת יְהוָה שִׁכְל טוֹב לְכָל-עֲשִׂיהֶם תְּהִלָּתוֹ עִמְדַת לְעַד: <sup>10</sup>

What a creative way to write a worship song to God.

In the ensuing verses, the psalmist will show us how to praise for who God is and what He has done in our lives. This main idea naturally arises from the content of Psalm 111, but the divine author puts a finer point on it, as I have said, by stressing not just what we should be doing as saints, but where we should be doing it. I'll summarize the authorial intent with this overarching statement:

### Saints (Hopefully that's you) Should Live For Praising God's Goodness Publicly (Psalm 111)

Extroverted believers among us are right now on the edge of their seats ready to pump those fits and give God some praise. The introverted among us (like myself) are probably loosening the collar a little, shifting in the seat a bit, and wondering what in the world they are doing here today, or where the private prayer room is located. Don't fear or be uptight. Conversely, just be open to what the Spirit is going to teach you in these instructive texts.

From my study, I see three points readily validate the main idea about public praise. From verse one, we learn this timeless truth:

## It Should Be Your Passion (Psalm 111:1)

Passion is just another way of looking at conviction. What is a personal conviction? It is merely a firmly held belief or opinion. You, like me, probably have countless convictions, right? Based on my law enforcement upbringing, and my knowledge of criminal behavior because of that and because of what I learned as the Chaplain for 1,300 sheriff officers I shepherded in California before I moved here in 2008, it is my conviction that doors and windows should be locked at all times. It's also my deep conviction that those locks should be checked and double checked. I know, it drives my wife crazy, but, hey, it's my conviction and I'm deeply devoted to it, almost to a fault.

Conviction related to praising God is, well, on another plane altogether for it causes your words to rise up before His lofty, holy throne and coalesce with the praise of countless others. Here is how the Psalmist talks about praise as a conviction in our lives as Christ followers:

<sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD! I will give thanks to the LORD with all *my* heart, in the company of the upright and in the assembly.

The Hebrew, *Hallelu-jah* ( הַלְלִי יְהוָה ), is related to the ancient Assyrian, *alalu*, which meant to shout for joy and/or rejoice. *Jah*, is just a shortened form of Yahweh, and it is attached to the verbal stem to show you who you should be shouting to. The Piel verbal stem here is also a command, meaning it is not a suggest for saints to publicly praise God. On the contrary, it is a divine summons to speak of His goodness to you to others. Do you? Will you? Have you? If you want to not only praise God but lift up the tired, broken, and discouraged spirits of other saints, then just obey this divine command. And please note, this shout of praise is not to be done half-heartedly with your hands in your pockets. Your whole heart, or your whole being should be behind what you say to God.

The prepositional phrase, which can be grammatically classified as a locative use of the preposition *bet* ( בְּ ), informs us *where* we are to give praise like this:

<sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD! I will give thanks to the LORD with all *my* heart, **in the company of the upright and in the assembly.** ( בְּצִוּד יְשָׁרִים וְעֵדָה ).

Two locations are mentioned here. One, “the company of the upright” comes from two Hebrew words, *sod* ( סֹד ), which means a *circle of close confidants*, and *upright* or, *yashar* ( יָשָׁר ), which denotes literally something like a road which is level and straight, as opposed to crooked. Naturally, in time the word took on a moral/spiritual meaning as it described those who followed God and His Word and laws with their lives. These two words quickly tell us one place where our praise is supposed to occur: with believers we know well. This could be with a few buddies over a table full of pancakes at IHOP, or with some girlfriends at school on a lunch break at Five Guys. The emphasis is that some of your talk in this setting should be related to praising God.

Two, praising God should also occur “in the assembly.” Where is this? This is wherever saints gather to praise, worship, and study God and His Word. It can happen before, during, or after a service, or it can even happen with an on-line community, but happen it should for it is a divine mandate. There is nothing like public praise to adore God, to tell others of what He has done in your life which is praiseworthy, and to put wind in the limp sails of those who are weary of the spiritual battle (Eph. 6; 2 Cor. 10:3-6).

So what about it? Is public praise your conviction? Or is public praise for you all about eviction, or making sure you don't do it? May God loosen your tongue and fill your heart with praise which flows over the banks of your life like a mighty, powerful river.

A second instructional word about public praise emerges in the main section of this psalm:

### It Should Be Full Of Particulars (Psalm 111:2-9)

God is not interested in how vague you can be when you approach Him, "Lord, thank you for being you." That's good, but that's not really all He is looking for from a maturing believer. He wants you to purposefully move down the ladder of abstraction and do some hard, honest thinking about particulars. Let's go back to your acrostic for a moment. Each letter of the alphabet you will work on should contain something specific God should be praised for. I know it will involve some thought and you might even need to ask the Spirit to jog your musty memory, but get to it and you will be amazed how God will give you details worthy of praise. My hunch is they will all of sudden just bust forth, so have a pen and paper ready, or at least you I Phone on so you can record your voice.

What the psalmist personally praised God for is found in verses 2 through 9. As stated, the Hebrew alphabet serves to highlight these truths. What will your acrostic look like is, as a sidenote, the question of the day.

One, God's work in your life should be studied and communicated:

<sup>2</sup> Great are the works of the LORD; *they are* studied by all who delight in them.

The adjectival phrase, beginning with "great," is highly emphatic in the original text. It is emphatic insofar as the sentence begins with an adjective, not a verb, which is normal word order. Further, emphasis is seen from the absence of the copula, the verb to be. Grammatically this is called ellipsis, and it is purposefully designed to call attention to the words in question. Put differently, God wants you to focus on and remember the great works, ideally the jaw-dropping things He does in your life. Works in Hebrew is *ma'ase* (מַעֲשֵׂה) and it is used of never-to-be-forgotten things like when God calmed a violent storm for weary, seasick sailors (Psalm 107:24).

One of our founding member's years ago dreamed of attending Annapolis. When he was eventually accepted, he couldn't have been more excited. During his first week on campus, however, tragedy struck. Walking quickly up some steps, he slipped, fell and hit his head. The blow to his head damaged one of his eyes permanently. Of course, this washed him out of the governmental school.

What did he do with his life? Sitting with him in his modest home when I first moved here, I noticed large oil paintings of Navy ships all around the living room. They were beautiful and majestic. "Why do you have all of these mighty ships adorning your walls," I asked. With that he told me how he fell at Annapolis, and how that unfortunate event moved him to become a lead engineer in designing Navy vessels. These paintings represented all the ships he had been instrumental in building in his lengthy career. That, my friend, is a great work of God, isn't it?

What is the great work God has done in your life? As the psalmist notes, this might just be something you will need to study. The second clause of this verse says this much. The Hebrew is translated "studied" in the NAS, and "pondered" in the NIV. *D'rusim* (דְּרוּשִׁים) is used in the OT of someone who diligently searches out the facts in a given situation (Deut. 13:15). Think of a detective (Columbo of TV fame) with a notepad and a pen and you have the idea. As you go

through the steps of devising your praiseworthy list, you should pour through the events of your life, looking specifically for events which have the fingerprints of God all over them. Look and you shall see.

- A wayward child you never thought would return, returned.
- A husband's sharp tongue became at the moment of faith a smooth tongue.
- A move you didn't want to make turned out to be the greatest thing you ever did.
- A tragedy you thought was the end of your life became a victory.

I'm sure you get the drill. Peer and look for God to draw near with specifics.

From verse 3, the psalmist teaches us that sometimes those works of God in your life are, well, just off the proverbial charts . . . or for the math-minded among us they are complete statistical anomalies, leaving you knowing God was all over the situation, right? Here's how the psalmist puts it:

<sup>3</sup> Splendid and majestic is His work; and His righteousness endures forever.

Hold it right there with the first phrase. *Splendid* in Hebrew, *hod* ( הוֹד ) points to that which is majestic and lofty. It is used in Isaiah 30:30 to describe the majestic sound of deep, rolling thunder. It can also denote a magnificent mountain whose jagged, snowy peaks take your breath away. The following word, majesty, *hadar* ( הַדָּר ) is a synonym which carries the same emphasis. Lexically speaks of majesty in relation to something which has been utterly transformed. Isaiah 35, verses 1 and 2, use this word to denote how the desert will blossom profusely in the messianic kingdom age. Talk about a spectacular and miraculous work of God.

I remember my Grandpa Dorsey loading all of us grandchildren in his big car one spring day, along with his Choctaw Indian mother, my great-grandmother, Mary, and driving us out into the deep desert to see the sandy, trackless desert in full bloom with pink primroses. I'll never forget the sight of my 80 something year-old great-grandmother smiling and walking in the soft sand with her cane among all of those colorful flowers. It was a miracle brought about by the artistic hand of God Almighty.

You know, as you look back over your life, the Spirit will lead you to see those times when he took the barren, trackless, hostile desert landscape of your life and painted something beautiful for you to see His good hand on you. Have you got it in mind right now? If so, then praise Him.

Moving here in 2008 was tough emotionally. Anticipating leaving our daughter Amanda in California couldn't have been more gut wrenching to us, but we knew we were following God. So we worked and planned for the departure date. One main issue we had concerned Amanda getting into hygiene school. All the schools in the state at the time were full, and all new students had to be placed on a waiting list. We personally knew of potential hygiene students who have been on these lists for YEARS, but we applied anyway.

One day while I was packing in the garage, I got a call from one of the schools Amanda had applied to. "Mr. Baker, we are calling to inform you that we had one student back out of the hygiene program, so we placed all of the new potential student names in a hat and we drew one name to fill this one slot. We just happened to draw Amanda's name." Right. God just did a splendid and majestic thing! God had just caused pink primrose flowers to bloom all over

Amanda's life, showing her that He would, in fact, take care of her while we moved across the country. That's the kind of stuff you want to publicly praise God for. Why? It shows just how great and worthy He is, and how much He hears and loves His saints in tough situations.

Another thing the Psalmist praises God for is the fact that His righteousness never takes a holiday.

<sup>3</sup> Splendid and majestic is His work; and His righteousness endures forever.

“Righteousness” comes from the Hebrew *sidqato* ( **סִדְקָתוֹ** ), a word wedded to the concept of justice, especially when God is its object (1 Sam. 12:7; 1 Chron. 18:14; Jer. 22:3, 15; 33:15, Ezra 45:9). This is a comforting, hope-inspiring word for those of us, like the Psalmist, who live in a culture where true justice is perverted and even turned on its ear so injustice can masquerade as justice. True justice cannot be bought off or bribed. True justice is always fair-minded and concerned with facts, not feelings. True justice doesn't care who your family is or how much they are worth. True justice is concerned about all people, all races, all of the time. True justice is swift. True justice shows no favoritism. True justice does not remove people from jobs because you do not like what they think. True justice does not let criminals get off with light sentences. True justice does not change from year to year, judge to judge, or administration to administration. True justice cannot be warped by riotous people. True justice as founded and grounded upon God is always working in the background, leaving us with the assurance that one day the Scriptures will be fulfilled:

<sup>7</sup> Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. <sup>8</sup> Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. <sup>9</sup> Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up (Gal. 6).

<sup>40</sup> "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. <sup>41</sup> The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. <sup>42</sup> They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>43</sup> Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear (Matt. 13).

Our culture is chock-full of the sin of injustice, as in Israel's day when the people perverted it (Amos 6:12). We all see it. Thanks be to God who is a God of justice and who will one day bring justice to bear on this sin-tattered world (Isa. 28:16-17; 51:4-5).

In addition to praising God for His rich and abiding justice, the psalmist thanks God for giving us miraculous works to strengthen our faith:

<sup>4</sup> He has made His wonders to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and compassionate.

*Wonders* is from the Hebrew word used to describe great acts of God like when he brought supernatural plagues against Egypt (Ex. 4:21; 7:3), or parted the Jordan River at flood tide so His people could cross into the land of promise (Jos. 3:5). We find these wonder in Scripture for one

reason only: so we can remember them. Why does God want us to remember His past miraculous acts? They give us hope as we walk through the land of Egypt, dealing with a hostile culture. He will not forget us. He does step into history and do great things for His chosen people. When we remember these mighty works of God they keep us from walking away from Him. This is most interesting because the “wonders” of God are woven all through Deuteronomy as God challenged the next generation of Israelites to walk worthy (Deut. 4:34; 6:22; 7:19; 26:8; 29:3; 34:11). Next time you are tempted to think God does see the difficulty of your spiritual journey through Egypt and the wilderness, think again. Praise Him for what He has done in the past to show us that He does, in fact, hear and guide us as we head to Canaanland, viz., heaven.

Thinking about the great works of God either in the Scriptures or your life will cause you to see another reason to praise Him:

<sup>4</sup> He has made His wonders to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and compassionate.

The last clause is emphatic, again, by placing two adjectives at the head of the clause, and by omitting the main verb (ellipsis). No one can consider God’s miraculous activity and not surmise He is gracious and compassionate.

Remember when Moses cut two new tablets of stone to replace the ones he destroyed at the Golden Calf incident? God could have said He was finished with the fickle, faithless folks. But He didn’t. He had Moses come back up the holy mountain so the law could be written on those stones one more time, and so He could renew His covenant with Moses, a covenant designed to bless Israel and the world (Ex. 34). Just God coming down in a cloud to old man Moses to do all of this spoke volumes about His grace and compassion toward rebellious, cantankerous sinners. Ah, He was, and is, the God of second chances.

Perhaps on your wilderness wanderings you, too, have had your spiritual ups and downs, or times where you followed hard after God and times when you hardly followed Him. But He was always there, and you knew it. Perhaps He worked a miracle or two for you, you know, something which definitively showed you His presence and power. Now you are back on track. Gone is the alcohol, the drugs, the riotous, loose living. Gone is the addiction, the insatiable desire for that which is forbidden and deadly. Yes, now that you are back you clearly see how the miraculous acts of God not only saved you, but helped you get back on your feet. Yes, now you know at an emotional level, more than most, that Jesus, your Savior, is, indeed, gracious and compassionate and that is why you can’t wait to praise Him like the Psalmist.

Verses five and six seem to take us back, again, to Israel’s wilderness journey.

<sup>5</sup> He has given food to those who fear Him; He will remember His covenant forever.

<sup>6</sup> He has made known to His people the power of His works, in giving them the heritage of the nations.

The mention of food here probably refers back to the manna He sent them when they complained (Ex. 16; Num. 11). He kept that food coming for some forty years, when the complaint of the people would have worn out the gracious provision of anyone else. He gave them the food because He was, and is, a covenant keeping God. The daily manna showed His power, and it all prepared them to be His people who would be positioned to take the land of promise, Israel (Joshua 1:1ff).

Praise for His rich, bountiful provision should, therefore, be in order.

Really, you and I are no different. As we head toward our spiritual Canaan, we have moments of weakness when we falter. We have times where we gripe and complain about how hard it is to slug through the shifting sand of life. We are fearful for it has been awhile since we saw God do something spectacular. Through it all, however, God loves us and makes sure we are provided for. Do you have food on your table? Praise Him. Do you have a home He has provided? Praise Him. Do you have enough side jobs to make ends meet? Praise Him. Do you have contracts to keep your business going? Praise Him . . . and do it publicly.

Verses 7 and 8 extol God for forever being committed to what is true and just.

<sup>7</sup> The works of His hands are truth and justice; all His precepts are sure.

<sup>8</sup> They are upheld forever and ever; they are performed in truth and uprightness.

I find great solace in these words, don't you? Francis Beckwith and Gregory Koukl's book *Relativism: Feet Planted Firmly In Mid-Air* reminds us how our Christless, carnal, combative culture believes in truths (which are typically true with reference to the person, even if said truths are really not truthful), but not absolute, abiding Truth. The book also teaches how our culture's embrace of relativism has led many around us to embrace truths which are logically and diametrically opposed to each other, biological data, statistics, medicine, and so forth. Once truth goes, once truth become a person's personal preference, it logically follows that justice is turned into injustice. This short paragraph quickly describes the reason why our culture is in a moral, spiritual, political free-fall.

Enter God. He is only ever about truth, which naturally leads to true, not warped, twisted justice. Further, because God is all about truth this, ipso facto, means His precepts, His teaching, His law, His revelation . . . the Bible . . . is always sure. His law is not open to debate, it doesn't change with the times, and it is not wedded to feeling. His law about morals and holy living is unchanging and unbending because it is related to truth, and truth, by definition, is true at all times, in all cultures, and in all places. Hence, just as  $1 + 1 = 2$  is the essence of mathematical truth no matter where and when it is presented, God's moral, spiritual truth is, likewise, always true. Thus, what was considered sexual sin 5,000 years ago is still classified as such to God. Coveting, or desiring what someone else possesses, has not been made acceptable by clever people who hide this sin behind a political idea. Because God's truth and precepts are upheld forever, there is hope for us in the here and now and the future. Untruth, lies, and chaos will not reign. Truth will and so, too, will God's laws. Once more, is this not ground for public praise? Indeed.

The final verse of this section calls for praise related to the fact God has provided salvation for sinners who did not deserve it.

<sup>9</sup> He has sent redemption to His people; He has ordained His covenant forever; holy and awesome is His name.

After hundreds of years of captivity, God freed His people with a mighty hand, and He gave them a covenant which promised them a land where they could build families and worship Him. His covenant, or His deal, He made with them was a forever thing, too (Abrahamic, Palestinian, Mosaic, Davidic, and New Covenants). All of this was something Israel could always praise God for.

We are no different. Jesus redeemed you when you were enslaved to sin, and He gave you a New Covenant wherein you are now a member of His eternal family and are an inheritor of His coming kingdom. How can you not praise Him as you look back at the wonder of His spiritual deliverance? I think it should make you want to sing:

Verse 1

I will sing of my Redeemer  
And His wondrous love to me;  
On the cruel cross He suffered,  
From the curse to set me free.  
Sing, oh sing, of my Redeemer,  
With His blood, He purchased me.  
On the cross, He sealed my pardon,  
Paid the debt, and made me free.

Verse 2

I will tell the wondrous story,  
How my lost estate to save,  
In His boundless love and mercy,  
He the ransom freely gave.

*Chorus*

Sing, oh sing, of my Redeemer,  
With His blood, He purchased me.  
On the cross, He sealed my pardon,  
Paid the debt, and made me free.

*I Will Sing of My Redeemer*  
Philip P. Bliss, 1878

As redeemed people we should publicly praise the God who has redeemed us. Further, as we have seen from Psalm 111, that praise should be our conviction (v. 1), it should be full of particulars (vv. 2-9), and finally . . .

### It Should Be Prescriptive (Psalm 111:10)

What do I mean by this? I mean it should lead us to a moment of teaching people how to move from foolish to wise living. Read on and you'll see what I mean:

<sup>10</sup> The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do *His commandments*; His praise endures forever (Psalm 111).

Our world is full of foolish people doing and believing foolish things. All of them have one thing in common: they reject the reality of the existence of the LORD. Without fear of Him, they

become laws unto themselves, seeking to drag everyone down with them into their lawless, sordid worlds, be what they may. Yes, everyone who travels with them thinks they are headed toward utopia, but without God their final destination will only ever be a chaotic dystopia.

Wise people know different. They fear the living God. They know they will give account to Him one day (Ecc. 12:13-14). They know that observing His commandments will always lead to a wise, blessed, and peaceful life. And because they know these truths and live them, they become points of prescriptive praise whereby they publicly teach others the way to wise, not foolish living.

Are you a wise person in the eyes of God?

Or is foolishness the word which best describes you?

The same Redeemer who saved wayward Israel, waits to redeem you too. The moment you come to Him in faith, asking Him to redeem you, you will be a wise person for the first time in your life. Perhaps you could start praising Him at that moment of redemption by singing *Blessed Assurance*.

For those who are God's wise children, I think you know what you need to do today. It's time to go out and make that acrostic of praise.