

# Psalms: God's Worship & Prayer Guide

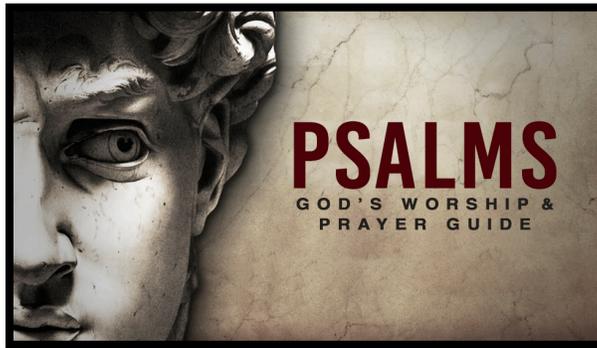
## Pulsating Praise

Psalm 148:1-20

Written By

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Wikipedia, which is helpful for quick information on most topics, has this to say about pulsating stars:

Variable stars may be either *intrinsic* or *extrinsic*.

**Intrinsic variable stars:** stars where the variability is being caused by changes in the physical properties of the stars themselves. This category can be divided into three subgroups.

- Pulsating variables, stars whose radius alternately expands and contracts as part of their natural evolutionary ageing processes.
- Eruptive variables, stars who experience eruptions on their surfaces like flares or mass ejections.
- Cataclysmic or explosive variables, stars that undergo a cataclysmic change in their properties like novae and supernovae.

**Extrinsic variable stars:** stars where the variability is caused by external properties like rotation or eclipses. There are two main subgroups.

- Eclipsing binaries, double stars where, as seen from Earth's vantage point the stars occasionally eclipse one another as they orbit.
- Rotating variables, stars whose variability is caused by phenomena related to their rotation. Examples are stars with extreme "sunspots" which affect

the apparent brightness of stars that have fast rotation speeds causing them to become ellipsoidal in shape.<sup>1</sup>

Since we saints of the Lord Jesus will shine like the stars for all eternity because of our exposure to His radiant glory (Dan. 12:3 “*And those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.*”), we should be shining now. How? By pulsating with praise.

Psalm 148 has twenty verses devoted to this one main motif:



## Believers In The Lord God Should Pulsate With Praise (Psalm 148:1-20)

The emphasis on pulsating is based on the form structure of the ancient, post-exilic worship song. Three panels reveal this memorable and helpful layout:

- Panel 1: Praise God For His Compassion & Character
  - Call to Praise (Psalm 148:1a)
  - Causes of Praise (Psalm 148:1b-6)
- Panel 2: Praise God For Focus & Favor
  - Call to Praise (Psalm 148:7)
  - Causes of Praise (Psalm 148:8-11)
- Panel 3: Praise God For His Involvement & Insight
  - Call to Praise (Psalm 148:12)
  - Causes of Praise (Psalm 148:13-20a)
  - Call to Praise (Psalm 148:20b)

How can anyone miss this variable pulsation? Moving from commands at the beginning of each panel, the author calls us to burn brightly with praise. The causation of praise which symmetrically follows these imperative could readily be described as a luminosity change as we ponder the various reasons we offer praise to the living God. Using the rhetorical device called inclusion, the wise and creative author finishes where he began by reminding us to burn brightly with our divine praise. Do you? Will you? What or who is impeding your pulsating praise? May our analysis of these panels move you to becoming a brilliant point of praise as God's redeemed son or daughter.

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<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia, Variable Stars, accessed on February 17, 2022, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Variable\\_star](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Variable_star).

## Praise God For His Compassion & Character (Psalm 147:1-6)

*The Command to Praise* (Psalm 148:1a). Before the Psalmist dives into the reasons our lives should pulsate with praise to God, he begins with his customary Hebrew command.

<sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD!

Because the command is in a participial form ( הַלְלוּ ) informs us that our duty to praise the Lord is either durative, pointing to its constant presence in our lives, or iterative, denoting it is what occurs at various moments. Knowing what a given day is like, I think I'll opt for the second classification of the verbal command. Pragmatically, this means praise really does pulsate in our lives as we think about God, notice His handiwork in various life events, and stop an offer adoration to Him who is worthy. True we are under divine command to do this, but for those who love and worship Him the command is really a pleasure from a grateful, humble life.

*The Cause to Praise* (Psalm 148:1b-6). Turning from our obligation to surround God's glorious throne with intermittent praise, the Psalmist clicks through the foundational causation of said praise. Here he zeros in on two concepts: God's compassion toward us which, in turn, is grounded on His amazing, jaw-dropping character.

The psalmist begins this section with two prepositional phrases informing us about two main reasons praise should fill our hearts, minds, and mouths:

<sup>1</sup> For it is good to sing praises to our God; For it is pleasant *and* praise is becoming.

Why is praise good? Two answers are probable. One, praise shows you are being obedient to God's command, and as Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). Much praise, therefore, reveals much love. Two, praise is just the natural activity for one who's in love with God. Within the second prepositional clause, the author says it this way: "for it is pleasant *and* praise is becoming." The adjective *pleasant* is from the Hebrew *na'im* (נעים) which is used in Psalm 81, verse 3, of a sweet sounding harp. When it is played it is just soothing to the listener's ears. The second adjective, *becoming*, is from a Hebrew word, *na'veh* (נאה), which speaks of that which is appropriate. Solomon uses it three times in the Song of Solomon to describe the beauty of his wife (Song of Solomon 2:14; 4:3; 6:4). Men, when you tell your wife how beautiful she is, she will not only respect and love you more, you will have done that which is most appropriate in a marriage relationship. Such is the nature of praise. It is lovely insofar as it just the natural thing we do for the God, Elohim, who created all things by the word of His mouth.

From verses two through six, the Psalmist bobs and weaves between talking about God's wonderful compassion of His people, coupled with His fathomless character. Both, of course, serve as major reasons for praise on our part:

<sup>2</sup> The LORD builds up Jerusalem; He gathers the outcasts of Israel. <sup>3</sup> He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds.

Moving from mentioning the Creator in verse 1 by employing His name as Elohim (Gen. 1:1), the author returns, as he will numerous times in this psalm, to mentioning Yahweh, or the great, loyal

covenant God will always be there for His chosen people, which in the OT was Israel, and in our day it is the Church (Matt. 28:19-20).

Verse two, which was probably written after the captivity when Nehemiah took Jews back to rebuild the broken, shattered walls of their capital (Neh. 1-2), informs us that Yahweh covenant/promises to always be there to build up what is destroyed in our lives. The participial form of the verb, *builds up*, *bo'neh* (בִּוְנֶה) tell us this much, and as before it is probably an iterative denoting what God does at various times. Sin, inside and outside our lives, destroys and demolishes, but at the right time Yahweh, the LORD, *always* moves to reclaim the years the locusts have eaten. Building up is written all over the LORD's words to sinful Israel at the opening of Isaiah:

<sup>24</sup> Therefore the Lord God of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel declares, "Ah, I will be relieved of My adversaries, and avenge Myself on My foes. <sup>25</sup> I will also turn My hand against you, and will smelt away your dross as with lye, and will remove all your alloy. <sup>26</sup> Then I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning; after that you will be called the city of righteousness, a faithful city. <sup>27</sup> Zion will be redeemed with justice, and her repentant ones with righteousness (Isa. 1).

Peter sinned horribly by willfully denying the LORD three times; however, as we have denoted, the LORD forgave Him post-resurrection and then challenged him to go and feed His sheep (John 21:17). You are God's spiritual Jerusalem, in a sense, and He is all about making sure you move from a place of discipline and disarray to one of peace and productivity.

Contextually, as I have said, the primary meaning, however, spoke to ancient Israel post-captivity. The statement that the LORD, as a loyal covenant partner, gathers is an imperfect Hebrew verb, which can be grammatically classified as a habitual imperfect. Practically and theologically this means God is always working in your shattered, tattered life to bring you back to Him and a place of profound blessing and peace. The word *outcasts* here is a code word for Jewish exiles, and it is translated as such in Isaiah 56:8 and Jeremiah 49:36. Their rebellion against the Lord and His prophets, coupled with their failure to observe His law and Word, led to their captivity; however, this was not to be the end of the love story for their lover, God, redeemed them by bringing them back to the land of Promise. Of course, this temporal return only served to point to the magnificent return to the land according the prophets wherein Israel would *never* lose the land again, nor their intimate relationship with the LORD (Isa. 61; Jer. 31:38-40). Is this not cause for major praise? Indeed.

Personally what does this mean in the NT age? The same God who faithfully reclaimed His people and, as verse 3 suggests, worked to heal their broken hearts and bind up their emotional, psychological, and spiritual wounds, is the same God who is there for you when you, like Peter, walk off the spiritual reservation. Have you committed an unthinkable sin against your wife, your husband, or your children? Have you lived a double life wherein you have deceived saints, but not God, and now you are being disciplined by Him? Have you, like the carnal Corinthian believers (1 Cor. 3:1ff), dabbled in your fair share of sin as a saint? If so, realize the same God who disciplined Israel will get your attention, and then He will, like the Good Shepherd, go out to bring you back to the fold where He can bring healing and health to your life. Divine compassion like this is hard to fathom, but it is oh so praiseworthy. So praise Him for it.

Verses four through 5 highlight the LORD's magnificent character, which, in turn, serves as the causation for our praise:

<sup>4</sup> He counts the number of the stars; He gives names to all of them. <sup>5</sup> Great is our Lord, and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite.

These verses underscore two jaw-dropping facets of God's character: His omniscience (v. 4) and His omnipotence (v. 5).

According to Dr. Wayne Grudem,

“. . . God knows ‘all things actual and possible.’ This means all things that exist, all things that happen, and all things that might happen. God’s knowledge of all things actual applies to the entire creation, for God is the one before whom ‘no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do’ (Heb. 4:13; cf. 2 Chron. 16:9; Job 28:24; Matt. 10:29-30). God also knows all things possible, including events that might happen but do not actually come to pass . . . Our definition of God’s knowledge speaks of God knowing everything in one ‘simple act.’ Here the word simple is used in the sense ‘not divided into parts.’ This means that God is always fully aware of everything . . . he always knows all things at once. He does not have to reason to conclusions or ponder carefully before he answers, for he knows the end from the beginning, and he never learns and never forgets anything (cf. Ps. 90:4). Every bit of God’s knowledge is always fully present in his consciousness; it never grows dim or fades into his nonconscious memory . . . God’s knowledge never changes or grows.”<sup>2</sup>



Ostensibly, this means He really doesn't have to sit around and count each star. The psalmist merely present God in anthropomorphic terms so we can somewhat relate to Him and His vast, fathomless mind. At any given time, you could ask Him, “Lord, how many stars are there exactly in the entire universe? How many are located in the various galaxies you’ve created?” According to Space.com, Hubble telescope pictures show us there are an estimated 100 million galaxies, and this is capable of going up to 200 million galaxies as telescope technology advances. Can you wrap your small, limited mind around these massive figures? I can't. And to

think that God doesn't have to estimate you asked Him a precise number of stars in said galaxies.

<sup>2</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teachings of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 88.

Not only could God give you the number of stars, He could give you all their names. Really, who could come up with billions and billions of names and NEVER repeat one? God. That's the answer. Why did He give them names? Don't creators typically like to give names to their creation, especially when it is uber special (Sorry for the German). All of this naming just shows how creative and thoughtful God is with stellar, glowing objects we will never see or know.

Pragmatically, what does this omniscience of God mean to us? Here, I think, is the logical answer: A God who has intimate, precise, and impeccable knowledge of inanimate, lifeless objects floating in space, has, by definition, just as much knowledge about us who represent the crown of creation. Wow, the same God who knows all facets of the complex, expanding cosmos, knows you, His child intimately. He knows your joys and sorrows, your fears and anxiety, your strength and weaknesses, and your past, present, and future. Along these lines, we'd do well to recall the words of Jesus, the Savior: <sup>14</sup> *I am the good shepherd; and I know My own, and My own know Me* (John 10). If this is reason for praise, I don't know what it.

Wedded to the Lord's massive, perfect mind is His unlimited, unstoppable power:

<sup>5</sup> Great is our Lord, and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite.

We have covered this theological ground before, but, as I've said many times, repetition and restatement are wonderful things because we forget so easily, and there might be more to the subject we need to cognitively grasp. Finally, we must re-educate ourselves with God's omnipotence because the divinely inspired psalmist thought it necessary.

The late apologist Norman Geisler, Ph.D., defines omnipotence with these words:

Theologically, 'omnipotent' means that God can do whatever is possible to do. Or, God can do what is not impossible to do. His power is unlimited and uninhibited by anything else. Negatively, omnipotence does not mean that God can do what is contradictory. The Scriptures affirm that God cannot contradict His nature (Heb 6:18; 2 Tim. 2:13; Titus 1:2) . . . Further, omnipotence does not mean that God must do all that He can do: It simply means that He has the power to do whatever is possible, even if He chooses not to do some things.<sup>3</sup>

A being who holds both infinite knowledge and infinite power can do infinite things. Take a saint like Daniel. His life could not have been more detrimental. Hauled into captivity as a teen, opposed by older, "wiser" men because of his keen insight, thrown into a lion's den for his failure to bent his spiritual knees to culture, and given a new political position when a warring neighbor overran the people who overran his people . . . his life was, as young people would say, jacked. However, all through his ups and downs, trials and tribulations, he not only had the omniscient God on his side. He had the all-powerful God who used both of these divine characteristics to help His spiritual son.

And the same God is with you.

- As you consider what to do in retirement.
- As you wonder what to do with a special needs child.

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<sup>3</sup> Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2003), 159.

- As you work through a painful personal loss.
- As you don't think the toxic nature of your office could get any worse.
- As you wonder what you will do now that your wife/husband has deserted you.
- As you figure out how to function with a debilitating illness.
- As you try and wrap your mind around an unwanted diagnosis.
- As you dream of what to do with a major promotion you didn't anticipate.
- As you think about what do with your degree when you (finally) graduate in May.

Yes, the God of infinite thinking and power is not so busy running the cosmos and our planet He has forgotten about you. On the contrary, He, who is the Good Shepherd, is ready and willing to help you. He has already done off-the-chart things in your life if you are honest, right? These wonderful facets of His character are why our prayer pulsates before Him. Sometimes we are cognizant of them, while at other times we aren't; however, when He does "show up," we know what to do, don't we? We praise Him.

The Psalmist wraps up his analysis about how God's character serves as the foundation of our praise, by zeroing in on two areas near and dear to Him . . . and ultimately, to us.

<sup>6</sup> The LORD supports the afflicted; He brings down the wicked to the ground (Ps. 147).

The participle here, *supports* ( **תִּיַעַץ** ), denotes encircling something/someone so as to protect it. Again, we can classify it as either an iterative or durative use, meaning God either does this all of the time, or He does it as the need arises. The word *afflicted*, *anav* ( **אָנָו** ), narrows down our thinking regarding who is on God's heart especially: the afflicted, which is frequently used in the OT for the poor (Prov. 14:21). It is also rightly translated "meek" (KJV) or "humble" (NIV). These latter two nuances point to people who are not full of themselves, who are in love with power and prestige, and who think they are all that and a proverbial bag of chips. They are the people who realize their limitations, who don't lord themselves over others, and who are not pushy but peaceful. Unfortunately, such type of people get run over in our wild and wicked world. Just go and interview the peaceful, patriotic truckers in Canada.

As we learn here in verse 6, God always supports those who are unjustly afflicted. How does He support them?

- He sends people to stand with them.
- He helps them find ways to ease their affliction.
- He causes events to unfold to unmask their afflictors (if I can coin a word). Such is what He did with men like Nebuchadnezzar and Pilate.
- He gives them victories here and there so they don't lose hope.
- He moves in the legal system to cause things to support justice instead of injustice. He did this on numerous occasions when the Roman, Paul, was arrested.

His support is never static and still, but dynamic and identifiable.

His support, as the Psalmist, teaches is always at work to completely topple the works of evil and darkness. While it may not seem, at times, that truth and holiness will prevail for falsity and sin seem to be making major headway, the wise saint who knows God, knows He's always working behind the scenes to destroy the works of evil. Sometimes it is through a court case a Christian wins, at other times it is in a bill which passes. Sometimes it is through a cartel which is shut down by U.S. Agents so drugs are not so readily available, while at other times it is through the revelation of evidence which brings sins committed in darkness to the light . . . so justice can be realized, finally.

Such is God's nature and that nature which works now is but a small taste of what is to come. Yes, each victory of good over evil, right over wrong, justice over injustice is but a small event of the grand event with the Messiah appears (Rom. 2:5; Jude 14; 1 Pet. 4:4). So, what should you do with such grand, glorious information? Praise Him. Should you praise Him all the time? That's probably not possible given your life schedule. So, what should you do? Let your praise pulsate as you find instances of His compassion and character .