

Psalms: God's Worship & Prayer Guide

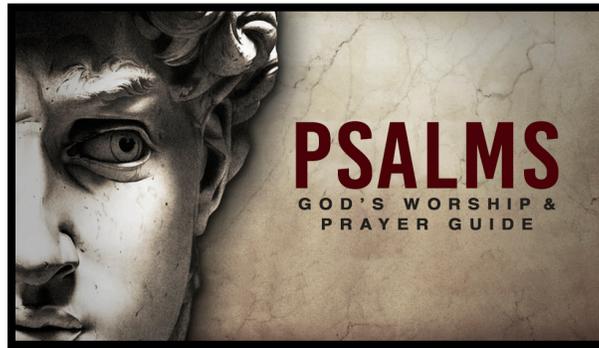
Pulsating Praise: Part 2

Psalm 147:1-20

Written By

©Dr. Marty Baker

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On one fishing excursion along the northern shore of California just north of the Bay Bridge, we stayed out a little too late attempting to catch our limit of striped bass. Darkness descended quickly as we headed for the opening of the bay. A thick, gray marine layer dropped lower and lower as well, making it almost impossible to see where we were headed. Of course, we had a realtive idea of where were because we followed the various transmission beacons located on bouys in the tossing, churning sea. But after that last bouy, things got a little dicey.



And that's when we saw it. Piercing through the thick clouds and darkness was the light of the Point Bonita Lighthouse located high on the northern cliffs of the bay entrance. While it strobed, we knew exactly where to go. Within a few minutes we sailed underneath the Bay Bridge to the safety of the harbor.

Looking back at this event years later as we conclude our study of the Psalms, Israel's ancient worship book, I see an instructive moment. All throughout our study God has called His saints who live in a sinfully dark world to shine brightly with praise. This call to live a life of praise to the living Lord is a beam of light you see all throughout the divinely inspired book (Psalm 7:17; 9:2; 21:13;

22:22, 23, 25, 26; 30:4, 9, 12; 33:1; 34:1; 35:18, 28; 40:3; 42:5, 11; 43:4, 5; 48:10; 49:18; 51:15; 56:4, 10; 61:8; 63:3; 65:1; 66:2, 8; 67:3, 5; 69:30, 34); 71:6, 8, 14, 22; 74:21; 76:10; 79:13; 88:10; 89:5; 99:3; 100:4; 102:18, 21; 104:33, 35; 105:45; 106:1, 2, 12, 47, 48; 107:32; 109:1, 30; 111:1, 10; 112:1; 113:1, 9; 115:17, 18; 116:19; 117:1, 2; 119:164, 171, 175; 135:1, 3, 21; 145:1, 2, 4, 21; 146:1, 2, 10; 147:1, 12, 20; 147:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 13, 14; 149:1, 3, 9; 150:1 . . . 3 times, 2 . . . 2 times, 3 . . . 2 times, 4 . . . 2 times, 5 . . . 2 times, 6 . . . times). The psalter builds to a wonderful praise crescendo, as you can see, in the last psalm. We are, therefore, left with clear instructions how to live our lives in a dark world: *We are to praise the living God for who He is and what He does as He works in this life to bring in the better life of the Messiah* (Psalm 2; 89; 110).

What should our praise look like? Good question. I think it should look like a lighthouse which gives a perpetual, pulsating light. Praise, then, is an apologetic to the lost of the world, pointing them to God, and it is also a constant point of your worship of the God who is with in the darkness. Psalm 147, which is the last musical piece we will cover in the psalter, rightly reminds us of our earthly duty before our heavenly Lord:

Believers In The Lord God Should Pulsate With Praise (Psalm 147:1-20)

This marvelous motif is thoughtfully built around the three structural panels of this song:

- Panel 1: Praise God For His Compassion & Character
 - Call to Praise (Psalm 147:1a)
 - Causes of Praise (Psalm 147:1b-6)
- Panel 2: Praise God For Focus & Favor
 - Call to Praise (Psalm 147:7)
 - Causes of Praise (Psalm 147:8-11)
- Panel 3: Praise God For His Involvement & Insight
 - Call to Praise (Psalm 147:12)
 - Causes of Praise (Psalm 147:13-20a)
 - Call to Praise (Psalm 147:20b)

So far, we have covered Panel 1 in detail. In this study, we turn our attention to panels two and three.

Panel 2: Praise God For Focus & Favor (Psalm 147:7-11)

As in panel one, the unknown psalmist reminds us of our divine duty with a . . .

Call to Praise (Psalm 147:7). Two imperatives, again, summon us to burst forth in praise to God when we consider two new causes:

⁷ Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; Sing praises to our God on the lyre, (Ps. 147).

The second imperatival clause here invites the musically inclined among us to praise God with their instruments. Do you play anything? A saxophone? Drums? A flute? A violin? What? Sure,

you should play it for personal pleasure, and for concerts if you are that proficient; however, playing it in worship of God should be always on your mind. I took some time Thursday night when I came home from working on this sermon and played some old hymns on the piano. Why did I do this? I wanted to worship the God I had studied in depth all day long. Do you use your instrument for private worship? You should. How about using it for corporate worship? I know playing in front of people is somewhat nerve-wracking; however, it is one of the greatest things you can do with your talent for it honors God, while permitting others to honor and adore Him. So what about it? I invite you to flood Donita's email box with requests to audition so you can play in our worship (Donita@burkecommunity.com).

Causes of Praise (Psalm 147:8-11). Turing from the command to praise, the psalmist helpfully gives us two additional divine reasons why we should pulsate with praise:

⁸ Who covers the heavens with clouds, who provides rain for the earth, who makes grass to grow on the mountains (Psalm 147).

He who spoke the complex, massive, and magnificent universe into existence (Gen. 1; Psalm 115:15; 121:2; 134:3; Isa. 40:25-26; Col. 1:16-17) should be praised for the fact He takes time to focus on using His presence and power to make sure His creation functions in a beneficial fashion. This is no closed system, but an open one wherein God is quite active on a moment by moment basis.

Scientists can give us their reasons why we have clouds, rain, and grass. Laid out in a colorful chart, it all looks so simple . . . yet it is highly complex . . . and to think I all happened by blind, random chance. Right. This intricate and predictable system for watering the earth has the fingerprints of a Designer all over it, and the fact this power system continues to function day in and day out like an amazing machine with a plethora of moving parts tells me the Designer has not stepped away from the design. On the contrary, He is intimately part of our daily cloud, rain, grass processes.

What should you do the next time you see a Cirrostratus, Cirrus, or Nimbostratus cloud? Don't just identify it to your children. Praise God for them for they are the work of His creative, thoughtful hands.

God should also be praise because He actually focuses on making sure little insignificant wild animals and birds get fed.

⁹ He gives to the beast its food, *and* to the young ravens which cry.

I know, you've probably watched nature shows depicting how hyenas hunt in the wild. True, they do the hunting, but God is the one making sure there is something to hunt to keep the cycle of life going. True, your dog probably wouldn't make it through a given week if you didn't put food in his bowl; but in theological reality it is God who is moving on you to provide for your watch dog.

How about the little birds flying around your yard? True, they probably love the meals they get from your free bird feeder or from the stale bread you toss out in the yard, but with an estimated 430 billion birds on the planet I'd dare say you are only feeding a fraction of them. God, conversely, is daily focused on making sure they all find a meal. This suggests, of course, He personally knows where all birds are at any given moment, and He has the power to line up events in their day to make sure they spy some food somewhere (If I were a bird, I'd hang out where there are outside eateries. Wouldn't you?). What's the praise point? Again, good question. The same

God who cares for the daily needs of animals and birds is most certainly mindful of you, His child. Why then do you fear and worry? What you should do is praise God for this level of intense focus because it means so much to our lives.

God's focus is praiseworthy because it is not focused on all the outer things which captivate us.

¹⁰ He does not delight in the strength of the horse; He does not take pleasure in the legs of a man.

Who is not mesmerized by the power of a mighty, muscular horse? A 2,000 pound Belgian Draft horse can pull a whopping 8,000 pounds. Most horses can actually pull three times their weight, and their mouths can bite objects with 500 pounds of pressure per square inch. No wonder the power of our cars are rated by means of horsepower. Yet to God this type of power is no big deal for His power is greater.

Additionally, macho men consumed with being in shape and able to do amazing feats with their bodies don't cause God to think their power is all that an a bag of proverbial chips. Tom Platz, who is called the Quadfather in the bodybuilding world, has so many muscles protruding from his legs he doesn't even look human. Ninety-five percent of all gym rats will never accomplish a 1,200 pound three-lift total (bench press, squats and deadlifts), and every few ever reach the coveted 1,500 pound three-lift total. But even for those who do, and as jaw dropping as these feats of strength are, God is not amused as He watches us closely.

What is of concern to God's focus? He is all for the man, woman, boy, or girl who fears Him and walks with Him (viz., they are obedient). As the Psalmist says:

¹¹ The LORD favors those who fear Him, those who wait for His lovingkindness (Ps. 147).

You could be the weakest man in the room, or the slowest woman on the track team, but God is not consumed with looking at the strongest and the fastest. Those earthly, fleshly things fade all too quickly. What is true strength? True strength is the person who humbly worships the living God and seeks to live his or her life in obedience to His teachings. All of this is why we are moved to praise God. If He were focused on the strong, then many of us would be overlooked in His concern, care, and compassion. Yet, since He is focused on greater things like reverential fear His saints have about His holiness, followed by the desire to walk with Him, we all find favor before His tremendous throne of grace.

You may never look like Arnold at his prime, nor have 2,740,000 average monthly searches on your web site like Kendall Jenner, nor have the ability to defy gravity like Michael Jordan used to when you play basketball, or sky cross-country in the Olympics and win a gold medal like Jessie Diggins, but in God's mind you are a winner because you put Him first in your life and you make sure your life conforms more and more to His each and every day. Oh, praise God for His gracious and caring focus and favor.

Lastly,

Panel 3: Praise God For His Involvement & Insight (Psalm 147:12-20)

Once more the Psalmist gives us a divine command. Do you think he is telling us something? Perhaps we get preoccupied too easily with all the stuff of life. Just when you realized your life needs to be more based on praise, you have one of those, “Oh, look” squirrel moments. Knowing what we are like, it is not surprising to bump into another command to praise God.

Call to Praise (Psalm 147:12).

¹² Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion!

Here the psalmist calls for God’s people located in their capital city to praise Him. Christians who are now the spiritual temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:16) easily identify with the ancient command here. Our lives, as we have said, must be, above all things, a constant beacon of praise for all the surrounding world to see.

This command is followed by the customary reasons to praise Yahweh the Creator.

Causes of Praise (Psalm 147:13-20a). Two major causes emanate from these verses. One, we praise God for His personal involvement in our lives, and two, we praise Him for the insight He gives us for life and living.

First, the psalmist isolates just how God is involved in our lives:

¹³ For He has strengthened the bars of your gates; He has blessed your sons within you.

And you think we are protected by our military armaments? You think our nuclear subs keep the enemy at bay? You think our satellites give us security because we can see what our enemies are up to? You think our armor, planes, missiles, attack helicopters and well-trained soldiers are why we enjoy relative safety? As important as all of these are to national defense, the people who fear and honor God are the ones who motivate God to protect them. Sometimes He will work in and through their literal defenses, as stated here, and at other times He will supernaturally and sovereignly step into time and space to bring protection . . . like He did when the Assyrians attacked godly King Hezekiah. Rabshakeh, the psych-ops man for the king of Assyria, stood outside the city gates of Jerusalem and mocked Hezekiah and Hezekiah’s God:

²⁸ Then Rabshakeh stood and cried with a loud voice in Judean, saying, “Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria. ²⁹ Thus says the king, ‘Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you from my hand; ³⁰ nor let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD, saying, ‘The LORD will surely deliver us, and this city shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria’ (2 Ki. 18).

Hezekiah’s servants first received a prophetic word from Isaiah before they headed to the king with a report about the Assyrians. In Isaiah’s words, God promised to supernaturally intervene and move the Assyrians out of their country altogether (2 Kings 19:5-7). All the king needed to do was, first and foremost, turn and trust God . . . not in his weaponry, soldiers, horses, chariots, or fortified cities. That is exactly what Hezekiah did when he received the letter from Isaiah. He went directly to the Temple, unrolled the scroll before the Lord, and prayed:

¹⁵ And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD and said, "O LORD, the God of Israel, who art enthroned above the cherubim, Thou art the God, Thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. Thou hast made heaven and earth. ¹⁶ "Incline Thine ear, O LORD, and hear; open Thine eyes, O LORD, and see; and listen to the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God (2 Kings 19).

Isaiah later informed Hezekiah that God had heard Him and would fulfill His Word in a spectacular fashion, which He did.

³⁵ Then it happened that night that the angel of the LORD went out, and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men rose early in the morning, behold, all of them were dead. ³⁶ So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and returned *home*, and lived at Nineveh. ³⁷ And it came about as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer killed him with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son became king in his place (2 Kings 19).

One angel did in one evening what all of Hezekiah's troops could have never done, and all of this transpired because a godly man, leader, and king turned to the God who, alone, can strengthen the protective bars of a nation. Oh, for more leaders like Hezekiah. Oh, for more saints who fulfill their calling to protect their nation from evil, but who also, at the same time, know that great victories in life against insurmountable odds come "not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the LORD of hosts" (Zech. 4:6). Oh, for more of us who praise the Lord for His protection as we humble ourselves before Him with the right perspective of life.

God is to be praised additionally for His personal involvement in keeping our borders safe as we lean on Him in humble faith.

¹⁴ He makes peace in your borders;

There was nothing worse in ancient Israel than to have unsecured borders. With open borders, enemies could, and did, infiltrate the land, create havoc, cause crimes against the people, steal from the nation's wealth and so forth. Israel, therefore, like any other nation, worked to secure their borders with strategically placed fortresses and troops (Megiddo, Lachish, Shechem, Penuel, Ramah, Jerusalem to name a few). Israelites knew, however, from their past that when they didn't turn to God and took matters into their own hands, things did not go well (Num. 14:31-45). Having peaceful, secure borders, then, wasn't a given just because the Lord's temple resided in Jerusalem. What mattered to God was whether the people collectively depended on His first and foremost. When this occurred, when they lived with a healthy respect and devotion to Him, He, in turn, made sure their borders were secure. Again, don't you find it interesting that God is concerned about the borders of country, especially if that country calls Him their Lord? Let us, therefore, praise Him for our security, but let us realize how this security is wedded to our divine fear and obedience as well.

God's involvement in our lives is praiseworthy because He is actively behind the weather which impacts food production and the like:

¹⁴ He satisfies you with the finest of the wheat.

A nation has bounty because He gives it bounty. That Roman Meal in your pantry is all because of Him. This is highly praiseworthy because He could, as I've said, be preoccupied with more important cosmic matters, but He isn't. He's concerned about a farmer's crop for that crop, in turn, impacts people He knows need food. Praise Him, then, for how He has poured out His rich farming blessings on this great land.

Praise Him for being involved with every facet of winter.

¹⁵ He sends forth His command to the earth; His word runs very swiftly. ¹⁶ He gives snow like wool; He scatters the frost like ashes. ¹⁷ He casts forth His ice as fragments; who can stand before His cold? ¹⁸ He sends forth His word and melts them; He causes His wind to blow and the waters to flow.

What is the advantage of snow? (None that I can think of. ☺). Here's one educated answer:

One major benefit of a good snow cover is snow functions as an excellent insulator of the soil. Without snow, very cold temperatures can freeze the soil deeper and deeper. This could lead to damage of root systems of trees and shrubs. The insulation effect of snow also helps protect perennials, bulbs, ground covers, and strawberry plantings from alternating freezing and thawing cycles. Without snow, milder temperatures and the sun could warm the soil surface, leading to damage from soil heaving, which can break roots and dry out plant parts. Snow also helps conserve soil moisture over the winter.¹

Here's more info for you snow lovers:

Snow, and more importantly snowmelt, is vital for replenishing local rivers, lakes, and sub terrain water tables. Snow cover helps protect low growing plants (and the roots of larger shrubs and trees) from extreme temperature swings and from drying out in the cold dry air. Snowy winter months are also very beneficial for native woodland and prairie seed to germinate the following spring - when (most) native seeds are developed, they are in a state of dormancy to protect them from germinating, or growing, before weather conditions are ideal. When the seed is laying on the ground, the snow, and subsequent freezing and thawing, softens the seed coat allowing the cotyledons (the first leaves to emerge from the seed) to break through. If the seed coat isn't softened, then the seed won't germinate in the spring . . . Winter snow also helps protect small mammals from predators. Small

¹ Don Janssen, *The Benefits of Snow*, accessed February 24, 2022, <https://lancaster.unl.edu/hort/articles/2006/snow.shtml>.

mammals, such as mice, voles, and shrews, live in this subnivean world where they create tunnels to navigate this winter wonderland to find food and create nests.²

The point of all this is clear: God gives the command and the cosmos reacts instantly to the desire behind His command. By His word wheat grows to feed people, and snow falls to protect and replenish the land. The entire created order functions because He is behind it on a moment by moment basis. Smart people can explain the immediate causes of these things; however, it is the wise, God-fearing person who takes this knowledge and praises the ultimate cause of it all, God. Will you praise the God who is involved in taking care of you?

God should be praised not just because He is involved at all levels of our world, but because He specifically gives His people insight into His person and character and how He desires for us to live morally and spiritually before Him. This truth emerges from the next two verses:

¹⁹ He declares His words to Jacob, His statutes and His ordinances to Israel. ²⁰ He has not dealt thus with any nation; and as for His ordinances, they have not known them.

Only one country on the planet received God's special written revelation: Israel. And that revelation came to dysfunctional, baggage-laden men like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (they all three had issues is lying and deception at times), and Moses (he could be prideful and impulsive). But He came to them anyway, sovereignly choosing them to be leaders of His new nation (Deut. 7) which, in due time, would be the people who would bring the Messiah and Savior to the world (Matt. 1). His special, unique revelation started with the Torah, or the first five books of the Bible.

- In *Genesis*, He told us how we got here, how we fell into sin, and how He was going to work to provide redemption for us through His chosen people.
- In *Exodus* we see how He is the Savior of His people, and also where to worship Him, viz., the tabernacle.
- In *Leviticus*, we learn how to approach Him who is holy and it involves, first and foremost, blood from a substitutionary sacrifice.
- In *Numbers* we learn about the consequences of living by unbelief or living by faith.
- In *Deuteronomy* He tells us through the second giving of the Law exactly what we must do to live to please Him. Of course, there was no way for sinners to fulfill all of the Law, and that served to point to the One, Jesus, who would fulfill all of the Law by living a sinless life so He could be THE sacrifice (Heb. 9).

As the Psalmist articulates. No other nation had this unique privilege, and that is why it should always lead to praise. We, of course, are no exception, for we have both the Old and New Testaments to tell us all we need to know about how to have a relationship with God through a

² Jeff Veglahn, *The Importance of Snow*, accessed February 24, 2022, <https://urbanecologycenter.org/blog/the-importance-of-snow.html>.

faith relationship with Christ (Rom. 10:9), and how to walk to please Him. In light of the special insight He has given us, how can we not praise Him? Ah, praise is the order of the day.

To make sure you fully understand your role as a saint in light of who God is, the Psalmist circles back around with one more final command to praise Him.

Call to Praise (Psalm 147:20b)

Praise the LORD! (Ps. 147)

Yes, praise the LORD for His focus and favor, and for His involvement and insight! Praise Him who is worthy with song:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow.
Praise Him, all creatures here below.
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host.
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Praise Him and might your praise be like that lighthouse which honors God in the darkest of nights, while also guiding spiritually hungry people to Him.