

Vital Worship



Many people deal with breathing difficulties, which range from seasonal (eg hay-fever and bronchitis) to chronic lung conditions. An act that is spontaneous, voluntary and unconscious, can become a major (even life-threatening) concern and a very conscious act, to hang onto life. We read in Genesis 2:7, that God breathed life into us. Jim Mays comments that:

“The breath of life is, in the long last, the human being’s only possession, and in this the human being is dependent upon the LORD (Isa. 2:22). No other use of breath could be more right and true to life than praise of the LORD. No other sound could better speak the gratitude of life than praise of the LORD.”¹

ICEBREAKER: How often do you verbalise (whether silently or audibly) the words: ‘Praise God!’? Is this something that you do spontaneously? Or is it something that you have to consciously think about doing? How could you train yourself to be more spontaneously responding to acts of God’s grace in your life and around you?

READ: Psalm 150 (below)

Hallelujah! [ie Praise the LORD!]

Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in the firmament of his strength.

Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him as befits his exceeding greatness.

Praise him with the blast of the horn; praise him with harp and lyre.

Praise him with timbrel and dance; praise him with strings and pipe.

Praise him with clashing cymbals; praise him with loud crashing cymbals.

Let every breathing thing praise the LORD!

Hallelujah!²

Nancy deClaissé-Walford gives us the following introduction. [Note: There’s a couple of theological words in here. The word ‘doxology’ means to ascribe praise to God. Ps 150 is a hymn or liturgy for the community to sing together, to ascribe praise to God. ‘Psalter’ is another name for the collection or book of Psalms. The word ‘Hallelujah’ combines the Hebrew word for ‘praise’ and the name of God given to Moses, ie ‘Yahweh’ or ‘I am who I am’. (Ex 3:13-15)]

“Psalm 150 is the last of the five “Final Hallel” psalms that close the Hebrew Psalter. It, like the collection’s other four psalms, begins and ends with “Praise the LORD” (*hallelû yāh*), but in Psalm 150 the verb “praise” (*hālal*) ... (forms) a resounding doxological close to the Psalter. The first two verses of the psalm describe the God to whom the worshippers are called to offer praise; vv. 3–5 describe the method by which the worshippers are to offer praise; and the final verse of the psalm includes all of creation in the praise of God.³

- How many times are we told to praise God?
- The phrases ‘Praise God’ and ‘Praise the LORD’ (or Hallelujah!) are repeatedly voiced as ‘imperatives’. What is the Psalmist trying to impress on us?
- What two things are we supposed to praise God for?
- What sorts of “mighty deeds” would people in the Psalmist’s day, have attributed to God?
- Where are we told to praise God? Where do you think these places are?
- How are we told to praise God?
- What is implied re the volume level of this praise?
- What/ who are told to praise God?

¹ Mays, J. L. *Psalms*. (1994). Louisville, KY: John Knox Press. p450-451.

² deClaissé-Walford, N., Jacobson, R. A., & Tanner, B. L. (2014). *The Songs of the Ascents: Psalms*. In E. J. Young, R. K. Harrison, & R. L. Hubbard Jr. (Eds.), *The Book of Psalms*. Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. p1009.

³ deClaissé-Walford, N., Jacobson, R. A., & Tanner, B. L. (2014). *The Songs of the Ascents: Psalms*. In E. J. Young, R. K. Harrison, & R. L. Hubbard Jr. (Eds.), *The Book of Psalms*. Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. p1009.

Robert Webber notes that “Biblical Worship remembers God’s saving deeds”:

“the content of God’s saving deeds is the content of eternal heavenly worship. God loves his own story. God’s story is to his glory, why wouldn’t he love it? So God loves our worship when we remember his saving deeds in Jesus Christ. Our worship tells that old, old story. That’s the story God gave the world, and that story is the content of our worship.”⁴

Webber notes that, over the centuries, the Christian church has recited the story of God through preaching, creeds and songs and re-enacted the story of God through rituals including communion and baptism.

READ: Ephesians 1:3-14 (below)

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people, to the praise of his glory.” (NRSV)

In this passage, the apostle Paul recites what God has done for us in Christ. In Greek, this passage is one very long sentence – and would require one very long breath. It takes the form of a Jewish blessing:

“In the New Testament the word *blessed* (*eulogētos*) is used only of God. He alone is worthy to be blessed. People are blessed when they receive his blessings; God is blessed when he is praised for all that he freely bestows on humanity and on his world.”⁵

- Psalm 150 tells us to praise God as ‘befits his exceeding greatness’ and for his ‘mighty deeds’? What does Eph 1 teach us about the greatness and ‘big-ness’ of the attributes and actions of God?
- What do we learn about the generosity of God towards us?
- How is God’s glory reflected in the magnitude of his grace towards us?
- Who do you think is involved in “praise of his glorious grace” (Eph 1:6)? What does it mean for us to “live for the praise of his glory” (Eph 1:12)?

READ: Ephesians 2:4-9.

- How do these verses describe and what do they tell us about God, as well as God’s grace, God’s love and God’s mercy? How is this grace described in Eph 2:7?
- What have we received as a result of God’s great grace, love and mercy?

Writing about Eph 1:3-14, Frances Foulkes comments that:

“Three particular notes sound right through this great doxology [ie hymn of praise]. First, from eternity to eternity God works all things according to his perfect plan. All history, all people, all that exists in heaven and on earth are included in his purpose. Past, present and future are all embraced in this doxology, and the work of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Secondly, that purpose is fulfilled in Christ, and thus in him every blessing that men and women can have is found. Thirdly, **its goal is the very practical one, that God’s people should live ‘to the praise of his glorious grace’** (v. 6).”⁶

REFLECT & SHARE: How do you keep God’s story as a central focus in your life? What habits can you create, to help you and your family, count your blessings and praise God for his grace in your life?

⁴ Webber, R.E. *Ancient Future Worship. Proclaiming and Enacting God’s Narrative.* (2008) Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books. p43-44.

⁵ Foulkes, F. *Ephesians: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 10). (1989). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. p54.

⁶ Foulkes, F. *Ephesians: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 10). (1989). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. p54.