

INTRODUCTION

Does the Christian world really need another daily devotional book? Does the ancient Book of Psalms really need one more expository treatment? Does any one of us really need more stuff to clutter our bookshelves or one more daily obligation to cram into our already over-committed lives?

Probably not. However, experience has taught me that when I neglect God's Word, when I'm too noisy to hear Him, when I'm too frantic to just "be," I'm the one who loses out. I'm afraid I've learned this the hard way.

On the other hand, when I allow God's Word to penetrate me, when I'm still enough to listen, when I invite quietness and confidence in His Word into my life, I find I'm infused with strength, trust, and encouragement for the day. And who among us couldn't use a little more of that?

Of course, this isn't my original thought. The ageless collection of writings we call the Psalms prods us over and over to meditate on God's law, to delight in His precepts, to rejoice in His statutes. In all of these we find life as it's meant to be lived. Refreshingly honest, these words of David, Moses, Asaph, and others remind me of how gritty our existence can be. I relate to these men—their passion for worship, their love of God's Word, and, unfortunately, their colossal failures. There's warmth and comfort in these utterances. There's also plenty to make us squirm with conviction. Most of all, when we consider the Psalms all together, we're driven to the one who inspired them in the first place.

So, pastors, worship leaders, and all those following hard after God (see Ps. 63:8), I invite you to plunge in with me as we soak ourselves in the water of God's truth. I so look forward to joining you for a few minutes each day as we're moved to praise, adoration, confession, and thanksgiving through the direction of our original Book of worship.

Take your time. Be intentional about being open. Breathe in His Word. Listen closely.

TRUE SIGNIFICANCE

Psalm 1

*His delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.*

—Ps. 1:2

If my life is going to count, if I'm to make a difference in my world, then I'll walk with those who can build up my faith. I'll concentrate on the law of God—all His precepts.

If you're at all like me, you can do without the distraction of critical, negative, or indifferent people in your life. You don't need to listen to those who try to persuade you with every new intellectual fad or spiritual philosophy that comes along. Life is challenging—and so “daily,” as some put it—that sometimes it's only because of the grounding I receive in God's Word and the delight that comes to me through His promises that I'm able to make it at all! Sound familiar?

Today we begin a trek through the ancient Book of Psalms, Israel's original hymn book and the world's greatest worship treasury. The Psalms open with a benediction and the word “blessed.” The actual Hebrew word used here for “blessed” is *'esher*. It indicates happiness sort of as an exclamation, as in “How happy!” It implies happiness that bubbles over into every aspect of life, so much so that others can't help but notice. Interestingly, this word is closely related to and is actually derived from another Hebrew word, *'ashar*, meaning “to be straight or level; to go forward; to be honest—to prosper.”

I would like to think my life is marked by some type of significance—in my work, my relationships, and my family. We probably all yearn for happiness and for prosperity, but deep inside, don't you long for life to really count for something? I'm finding that happiness and prosperity are the inevitable byproducts of a life rooted and established in God's Word—not happiness and prosperi-

ty as the world defines them, but characteristics that grow in us as God orders our attitudes and increases our hunger not only for His Word but also for Him. And in Him is our true significance.

Prayer: *God, please fill me fresh again with your Spirit, and plant me firm in your Word. Help my relationships be significant and my worship authentic. In Christ's name I pray. Amen.*

Thought for the Day: We will be called truly blessed when we've drunk from the "fount of every blessing."

PRAISE BEFORE OUR BATTLES

Psalm 9

*Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, LORD,
have never forsaken those who seek you.*

—Ps. 9:10

There's something about praising God that not only attracts people but also turns away evil. When we recount the deeds of God and proclaim His incredible greatness, I'm certain that the enemy of our souls is shaken. That's one of the vital aspects of worship—Satan is brought down when God is lifted up in unity.

Yesterday we reflected on some of the names of God, and you were encouraged to list some of those most meaningful to you. I'm pretty sure David engaged in this practice from time to time. I can almost see him diligently creating a list of descriptive titles for the God he knew so well. Sometimes he would write them down in tender gestures. At other times only bold strokes of his pen could convey the weightiness of a name.

Here, in verse 9, he calls on *Jehovah Mishgabbi*, The Lord My Stronghold. That sort of assurance in a name is accompanied by comfort, strength, and security. And I just imagine that God himself is delighted when we, like David, express our total confidence in Him.

It's quite possible that David was also reviewing his history lessons a bit. It's very likely that he was taking his cues from one of Israel's earlier kings, Jehoshaphat, who responded to the very real threat of an enemy's attack not by consultation with the secretary of war, not by convening a meeting with the joint chiefs of staff, not even by mustering the warriors and preparing for combat. Instead, he organized a choir to go out proclaiming the greatness of God! For the results and full account of this unusual strategy, read 2 Chron.

20, remembering that for Jehoshaphat, for David, for you and for me, praise goes before the battle.

Prayer: Lord, many times I feel surrounded by enemies that threaten my life in physical and spiritual ways. These attackers presume to destroy my very relationship with you. At these times, Father, be my refuge, my stronghold, my comfort, and my deliverer. And I, like David, will praise you forever and ever. In your Son's name I pray. Amen.

Thought for the Day: God has always protected His worshipers.

A WORD ON THE WORSHIP WARS

Psalm 83

Let them know that you, whose name is the LORD—
that you alone are the Most High over all the earth.

—Ps. 83:18

It's easy to assume that "our way" is "God's way." If others don't agree with us, then they're obviously less spiritual than we are. In our current day and age, there may be no place that this is more evident than in the issue of worship style.

I may have just touched a sensitive nerve here, but it's worth thinking about. Most of the battles in our current—and dreadfully unfortunate—worship wars revolve around music, more particularly around musical style. Rarely in these skirmishes are we upset over theological issues, the authority of Scripture, or the deity of Christ. It's not *what* we say so much as it is *how* we say it.

Here's a little quiz. Ask yourself—

- What kind of music does God like?
- What's His preferred order of worship?
- Is He partial to stained glass over theatrical lighting?
- Is He into projected lyrics rather than hardback hymnals?

We chuckle at questions like these, but don't we all get caught up sometimes in worship-related issues that are just as trivial? We disdain the "superficiality" of modern worship songs with no regard for the fresh expression they bring. We dread the "boredom" of classic hymns and forget the theological depth they bring to our understanding. And regardless of which "camp" we support, the use of any musical instrument that's not within our accepted arsenal is seen as suspect in its godliness. We ignore the fact that dozens of musical instruments are listed in Scripture.

The truth is, our way is often not God's way. And I'm pretty sure that God's not even concerned with what our way is. In the end, it's not about us anyway. It's about Him. It's not about what we get out of worship—it's about what we give. It's not about whether our needs are met—it's about whether His name is exalted.

Prayer: Most high God, forgive me when I've placed my desires and wants above your name and majesty. What I give in worship really is all about you. In the name of your wonderful Son I pray. Amen.

Thought for the Day: God is above any style, any preference, any tradition.

WORSHIPPING IN TUNE

Psalm 150

Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.

—Ps. 150:6

We've come to the end of our journey through the Book of Psalms. There's so much of God we've discovered, yet so much more we'll never comprehend. But then, who wants a God we can fully explain or understand? We serve a God whose greatness is vast beyond our imagination. His creativity is mind-boggling in its diversity. His power is awesome! His love is everlasting! Creation shouts, "Hallelujah!"

It's fitting that today's reading closes out the Book of Psalms. Its universal call to worship addresses all of creation, heaven and earth alike, and even meanders through the orchestra and choir as it invokes worship of the Creator. Perhaps Ps. 150 was actually written as a concluding statement, a grand finale to the symphony of praise we've been living with these past days. It feels much like the conclusions of the smaller "books" within the Psalms (41:13; 72:19; 89:52; and 106:48). Only this time, it's on a grander scale, with a pounding, insistent theme: "Praise the Lord!"

As a musician, I love the sound of an orchestra playing in tune. There's something incredibly right when the subtleties of intonation are mastered. And there's something terribly jarring when they're not. I've learned to recognize out-of-tune playing not so much because I have a great ear, but more because I know what "in-tune" sounds like. And nothing else matches up.

It's the same with our worship. In-tune worship is not about flash and dazzle, musicianship and expertise, technological brilliance, or even theological depth of knowledge. In-tune worship happens when every creature engaged is focused on our Lord. Do you remember the story of Solomon bringing the ark back to the Temple in 2 Chron. 5? As part of the proceedings, a large orchestra

accompanied a huge choir as they praised the God of heaven. The upshot of the story is that God's glory so filled the Temple, in the form of a cloud, that the priests could not continue their ministry.

Now this is important. Read it slowly: God's glory did not fill the Temple because of the size, expertise, or volume of the music and musicians. God's glory filled the Temple because, as verse 13 of 2 Chron. 5 states, "The trumpeters and singers joined in unison, as with one voice." That's in-tune worship. Let every creature that has breath praise the Lord.

Prayer: *O God, in my worship of you, may I keep you foremost, above any distraction and beyond any triviality. I want to praise you according to your excellent greatness. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*

Thought for the Day: God's unequalled greatness deserves our unhindered worship.