

PSALM 145: 1-9, 14-21

- ¹ I will extol you, my God and sovereign,
and bless your name for ever and ever.
- ² Every day I will bless you,
and praise your name for ever and ever.
- ³ Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;
God's greatness is unsearchable.
- ⁴ One generation shall laud your works to another,
and shall declare your mighty acts.
- ⁵ On the glorious splendour of your majesty,
and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.
- ⁶ The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed,
and I will declare your greatness.
- ⁷ They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness,
and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.
- ⁸ The LORD is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
- ⁹ The LORD is good to all,
and God's compassion is over all that God has made.
- The LORD is faithful in all God's words,
and gracious in all God's deeds.
- ¹⁴ The LORD upholds all who are falling,
and raises up all who are bowed down.
- ¹⁵ The eyes of all look to you,
and you give them their food in due season.
- ¹⁶ You open your hand,
satisfying the desire of every living thing.
- ¹⁷ The LORD is just in all God's ways,
and kind in all God's doings.
- ¹⁸ The LORD is near to all who call,
to all who call on God in truth.
- ¹⁹ God fulfils the desire of all who fear God;
The Holy One also hears their cry, and saves them.
- ²⁰ God watches over all who love God,
but all the wicked the Mighty One will destroy.
- ²¹ My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD,
and all flesh will bless God's holy name for ever and ever.

Psalm 145 is a psalm of praise to God. Not only will the psalmist and their people praise God every day, but they will praise God and tell stories about God from one generation to the next.

But why praise? "The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all, and God's compassion is over all God has made." (v.8-9) But how is this true? If life has gone really well for me and I have many reasons to feel blessed with health or recovery, the blessings of a happy family, financial

stability and the experience of being valued and appreciated by others, then praising God for the blessings is a wonderful thing. Rather than arrogantly presuming my blessings are self-earned, humble gratitude and praise to God is a beautiful practice. Psalm 145 is a good psalm for me.

But what if life has been difficult in ways I still have not got over? What if my most difficult days are still being lived or I anticipate them to come in the near future? Is praising God still a worthy practice even if I do not feel any fulfillment with God's goodness, compassion, care and blessing?

Well, perhaps praise is empowering. Perhaps praise is a way to live the difficulty very differently than simply brooding in my misery or carrying a fatalism about what can yet be. Perhaps the praise of psalm 145 positions me to anticipate God's goodness, compassion, empowering strength, courage and blessing coming my way. Perhaps the whole point of psalms like this one are intended to empower and strengthen and even change the brain chemistry so that positive brain waves open up new doors of possibility, courage and perspective in my life. Perhaps...

Well, the Hebrews who composed and worshipped reciting and singing these psalms faced the kinds of challenges many of us will never have to face. They were colonized by foreign invaders repeatedly. Many of these psalms were composed while many were in foreign lands treated as foreign worker-servants rather than citizens. Psalms of praise are about taking back your power in a personal way even when the world around you is beyond your control.

Is it any surprise then that psalms like this one have been recited at funerals as much as at weddings, to people in hospital beds and those imprisoned as protesters against repressive regimes as much as during a worship service in a synagogue or church? Maybe this psalm was being recited by people staying in motels evacuated because of fires in their communities... Perhaps...

Psalms are not philosophical poems simply trying to answer the question: where is God in my suffering and pain? They are powerful songs to be recited and sung to give people power and hope so that they rise up and face the troubles with an: "all things are possible with God" spirit. They are also about comfort, trusting in a larger goodness than what we can see right now or have so far experienced. How we situate ourselves in our hearts and spirits sets us up to experience what we are living very differently. Read this psalm again, slowly. Pause after every assertion. Embrace it (minus the last part of v.20 about God destroying the wicked. That may be what the psalmist wants in their anger and hurt. But it is not worthy of them or the God they worship).

PRAYER: We come before you, O God, in good times and in difficult ones. We open our hearts to praise you for all your goodness. You have blessed us in many ways. Give us the strength and motivation to praise you even when things don't go so well. Open our hearts to your goodness even when bitterness at life's disappointments keeps eating into us. Make our hearts gracious even when people hurt us whether this has been their

intention or not. Companion us whenever we feel isolated in our pain or alone in what we can share and with whom. May you be an ever present source of fullness for us and of peace. In Jesus' name;
Amen.