



Psalm 145 - The Greatness and the Goodness of God

Praise. Of David.

Introduction

This is the last of the psalms of David, and it introduces the hymns of praise that finish the Psalms. This hymn or song of praise specifically praises the Lord for his goodness and generosity toward his creatures, especially to his people, both corporate and individual.

One remarkable feature of this psalm is the way it uses so many different words for praising: extol, bless: to speak well of God for his generosity, praise: to glorify God for his magnificent qualities, laud: to speak highly of God, meditate, proclaim, celebrate, sing aloud and give thanks. The author has exploited all the vocabulary he can muster to describe this great activity, praising God for his greatness and goodness. Further, there are repeated terms for the enduring nature of this praise: for ever and ever, the generations, and everlasting.

This psalm follows an acrostic pattern. Like the other acrostics from David, this one, at least in most Hebrew manuscripts, is imperfect, in this case lacking the n-verse between vv.13-14. Verse 13b is included but is supplied from Q, Masoretic, Greek and Syriac texts. The Septuagint and Dead Sea Scroll evidence may witness to an earlier text, but they may just as easily witness to an early editor helpfully adding what he thought was a missing verse; the evidence is finely balanced. The sentiment of v.13b, of course, is fully in line with the psalm and with the Bible as a whole.

Although Psalm 86 was called A Prayer of David, this is the only one titled 'Praise. Of David', and it is a summit peak of praise. James Montgomery Boice commented, "Psalm 145 is indeed a monumental praise psalm, a fit summary of all David had learned about God during a long lifetime of following hard after the Almighty."

Psalm 145:1-3 - O God, I Will Ever Bless Your Name.

The psalm opens by stating its theme of joy and celebration. Each member of the congregation pledges himself to this, i.e. 'I will'.

- 1 I will extol you, my God and King,
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;
his greatness is unsearchable.

Psalm 145:1-3

I will extol you, my God and King. In this sense, to extol is to praise, to lift high, to exalt. David honoured and promoted the name of God in the most personal of ways:

- He did it with the direct address (you)
- He did it with the personal reference (my God)
- He did it with a surrendered heart (my King)
- He did it unending (for ever and ever, every day)

My God and King. For the different nuances of God's kingship, refer to the comment made on Psalm 93. Here it is God's acknowledged kingship over his people, which the members of the congregation personally grasp – he is 'my king' and not just 'our king.'

Every day I will bless you. Charles Spurgeon commented, "To bless God is to praise him with a personal affection for him, and a wishing well to him; this is a growingly easy exercise as we advance in experience and grow in grace." And again, "Observe that David is firmly resolved to praise God. My text has four 'I wills' in it. Frequently it is foolish for us poor mortals to say 'I will,' because our will is so feeble and fickle; but when we resolve upon the praise of God, we may say, 'I will,' and 'I will,' and 'I will,' and 'I will.'"

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised. David piled praise upon praise, declaring God's greatness and worthiness to be praised, and that greatly: <<*I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies*>> (2 Samuel 22:4). It is apparent that David felt it would be wrong and dishonourable to withhold his praise to God or to give him half-hearted praise.

His greatness is unsearchable, that is, past the capacity of the human mind to fully describe or comprehend: <<*He does great things and unsearchable,*

marvellous things without number>> (Job 5:9). It will take many worshippers, and a long duration, i.e. for ever and ever (v.1, v.2 and v.21), even to begin to do justice to what the Lord deserves.

Psalm 145:4-7 - Each Generation Shall Tell Your Praise to the Next.

This section focuses the praise on God's great deeds that have protected his people and fostered the conditions in which they can flourish in true piety, providing references to his works, mighty acts, wondrous works, and awesome deeds. These actions express God's abundant goodness (refer to the comment made on Psalm 100:5), and his righteousness, i.e. his faithfulness to keep his promises; refer to the comment made on Psalm 31:1-2.

- 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.

Psalm 145:4-7

One generation shall laud your works to another. This is the biblical pattern for households: <<*No, for I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice; so that the Lord may bring about for Abraham what he has promised him*>> (Genesis 18:19), <<*Now this is the commandment – the statutes and the ordinances – that the Lord your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, so that you and your children and your children's children may fear the Lord your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long. Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has promised you. Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when*

you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates>> (Deuteronomy 6:1-9), and: <<*We will not hide them from their children; we will tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done>>* (Psalm 78:4), and the Passover makes this a ritual: <<*And when your children ask you, “What do you mean by this observance?” you shall say, “It is the passover sacrifice to the Lord, for he passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt, when he struck down the Egyptians but spared our houses.” And the people bowed down and worshipped>>* (Exodus 12:26-27), and: <<*You shall tell your child on that day, “It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt”>>* (Exodus 13:8). David looked for God’s people to encourage each other in praise. An older generation may inspire a younger generation to praise by remembering God’s mighty acts in the past. A younger generation may stir praise in an older generation by declaring the fresh and new things God does. Spurgeon remarked, “The generations shall herein unite: together they shall make up an extraordinary history. Each generation shall contribute its chapter, and all the generations together shall compose a volume of matchless character.”

On the glorious splendour of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate. Praise comes not only from a place of emotion, but of careful thought - of careful meditation. Certainly David also meditated on the great things God did (his **wondrous works**), but he also paid attention to God’s **glorious splendour**. The idea is of the glory and wonder of who God actually is. Spurgeon observed, “It seems, then, dear friends, that David studied the character and doings of God, and thus praised him; knowledge should lead our song. The more we know of God the more acceptably shall we bless him through Jesus Christ.”

When Christians reflect on the aspects of God’s **glorious splendour** - his majesty, his wisdom, his constant presence, his complete knowledge, his unlimited power, his loving and wise plan and purpose - all this should stir up praise within them. When think think of God’s **wondrous works** - his works of planning, his works of creation, his works of providence, his works of rescue, his works of salvation now and in the age to come - all this should stir up praise within them. Alexander Maclaren commented, “The flashing brightness with which, when gathered, as it were, in a radiant mass, they shine out, like a great globe of fire.”

The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed, and I will declare your greatness. To give emphasis, David repeated the idea of praising God for who he is and for what he has done. Repeating the idea a third time, the singer or reader remembers the demonstration of God’s great goodness in what he does, and they declare that he himself is full of righteousness in who he is.

They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness. Spurgeon observed, “The Hebrew word has something to do with bubbling up: it means they shall overflow, they shall gush with the memory of thy great goodness.”

And shall sing aloud of your righteousness. Praise to God should be a noisy, joyful celebration. It lifts the spirits of the singers and it is pleasing to God.

Psalm 145:8-9 - Theme: God’s Goodness.

These two verses fill out the idea of God’s ‘goodness’ and ‘righteousness’ from v.7.

- ⁸ The Lord is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
- ⁹ The Lord is good to all,
and his compassion is over all that he has made.

Psalm 145:8-9

The Lord is gracious and merciful. These verses are based on the Lord’s own declaration to Moses: <<*The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness’*>> (Exodus 34:6). Maclaren commented, “But greatness, majesty, splendour, are not the Divinest parts of the Divine nature, as this singer had learned. These are but the fringes of the central glory. Therefore the song rises from greatness to celebrate better things, the moral attributes of Jehovah.”

Slow to anger. Showing wrath is not God’s preferred option; he gives humans time to repent: <<*The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance*>> (2 Peter 3:9).

The Lord is good to all. God’s covenanted grace came to Israel in a special way, but it was never meant to be for them alone; Israel was to be the vehicle by which God’s goodness and mercy became evident in all that he has made.

The Lord is good to all. David expressed the idea sometimes called common grace - that God spreads some of his goodness to all humanity. Jesus said: <<*for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous*>> (Matthew 5:45b).

His compassion is over all that he has made. David saw the beautiful care of God pressed upon all that he did. All creation and all providence were the demonstration of the greatness and goodness of God.

Psalm 145:10-13a - God's Kingdom Is Everlasting.

This section celebrates the wonder of being part of God's kingdom. This refers to God's acknowledged kingship, as seen from the mention of the saints, i.e. the faithful among his people as in Psalm 37:28, and his mighty deeds, which God has done to further his purposes for his people. God's people are to see his kingship as a gift of his goodness, not a burden.

- ¹⁰ All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord,
and all your faithful shall bless you.
- ¹¹ They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom,
and tell of your power,
- ¹² to make known to all people your mighty deeds,
and the glorious splendour of your kingdom.
- ^{13a} Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and your dominion endures throughout all generations.

Psalm 145:10-13a

All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord. Creation itself praises God, and is duty bound to do so. Yet even more than the rocks and hills praising God: <<**Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy**>> (Psalm 98:8), God's people, i.e. your faithful, have an obligation to praise and bless the Lord.

They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom. This is a wonderful subject for the speech of God's people. There are many things Christians talk about, but all too little do some of them speak of the glory of God's kingdom and of his great power.

On 'and tell of your power' Maclaren noted, "The recipients of his grace should be the messengers of his grace."

To make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendour of your kingdom. David again sensed the responsibility of God's people to tell the wider world the greatness of what God has done, i.e. your mighty deeds, and who the King is by revealing the the glorious splendour of your kingdom. Spurgeon added, "As the State cannot teach these holy histories, the people of God must take care to do it themselves. The work must be done for every age, for men have short memories in reference to their God, and the doings of his power."

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. One reason why praise should continue forever (as in v.2) is because God's kingdom will last forever. His dominion is unending, lasting throughout all generations. These words are similar to

Nebuchadnezzar's confession: *<<When that period was over, I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me. I blessed the Most High, and praised and honoured the one who lives for ever. For his sovereignty is an everlasting sovereignty, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation>>* (Daniel 4:34), although Nebuchadnezzar is there granting God's universal rule. In Daniel 7:14 and 7:27 the reference is to God's kingship over his people administered through the Davidic Messiah.

Psalm 145:13b-20 - God Provides Generously for His Creatures.

Building on vv.8-9, these verses develop the notion of God's kindness to all his creatures (vv.15-17), which is especially received by his chosen people (vv.18-20), particularly those who call on him in truth, the same people who fear him and love him.

^{13b} The Lord is faithful in all his words,
and gracious in all his deeds.

Psalm 145:13b

Verse 13b is supplied by Q, Masoretic, Greek and Syriac texts and is missing from most Hebrew scripts. Derek Kidner explained, "One letter of the alphabet (*nun*) is lacking from the standard Hebrew text; but most of the ancient translations and now a text from Qumran (11Q Ps) supply the missing verse, which RSV and subsequent translations include at the end of verse 13."

Faithful, Hebrew *ne'eman*, supplies the 'missing' n-segment; a similar usage is found in: *<<Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who maintains covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations>>* (Deuteronomy 7:9), and: *<<Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers, 'Kings shall see and stand up, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you'>>* (Isaiah 49:7). The second line is the same as the second line of v.17 but translated slightly differently in the NRSVA.

Gracious, Hebrew *hasid*, means that he shows 'kindness' (Hebrew *hesed*, which is also rendered 'steadfast love').

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.

Psalm 145:14-16

The Lord upholds all who are falling. God's compassion is especially evident towards those who fall and fail. He does not despise or reject them; there is a sense in which he especially draws near them to hold them up. This is most evident in those who allow their fall to rightly humble them, so that God can raise up those who are bowed down. In view of vv.18-20, all who are falling and all who are bowed down would apply to the faithful: <<*though we stumble, we shall not fall headlong, for the Lord holds us by the hand*>> (Psalm 37:24). Kidner added, "The phrase, all who are falling, is unusually expressive; and this timely help at an early stage is coupled with God's power to revive lost hope and failed abilities: NEB, 'and straightens backs which are bent'." Spurgeon observed, "Many are despondent, and cannot lift up their heads in courage, or their hearts with comfort; but these he cheers. Some are bent with their daily load, and these he strengthens." And Maclaren commented, "The last portion of the psalm is marked by a frequent repetition of 'all,' which occurs eleven times in these verses. The singer seems to delight in the very sound of the word, which suggests to him boundless visions of the wide sweep of God's universal mercy, and of the numberless crowd of dependents who wait on and are satisfied by him."

The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. The humble put their expectation on God, looking to him for their needs. They pray: <<*Give us this day our daily bread*>> (Matthew 6:11), and God answers their prayer in due season. Most commentators connect this with the words every living thing that follow, and see that all creation is in view. Adam Clarke commented, "What a fine figure! The young of all animals look up to their parents for food. God is here represented as the universal Father, providing food for every living creature." God's enduring kindness and provision for all his creatures is the theme of Psalm 104 and 147:8-9.

You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing. God's care for creation extends beyond his provision for men and women. As Jesus would later say, God also cares for the birds and the grass of the field; refer to Matthew 6:26-30. God does this with a wonderfully open hand and heart to his creation: <<*when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things*>> (Psalm 104:28). As David's amazing description of God is absorbed by the reader, it becomes clear just how different Yahweh is, the true and living God, compared to the idols of the nations. Those supposed gods were often angry and petulant, caring little for either humanity or creation. Christians are or should be surprised and grateful for the love and care for the God who is really there.

- 17 The Lord is just in all his ways,
and kind in all his doings.
- 18 The Lord is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.
- 19 He fulfils the desire of all who fear him;
he also hears their cry, and saves them.
- 20 The Lord watches over all who love him,
but all the wicked he will destroy.

Psalm 145:17-20

The Lord is just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings. Throughout Psalm 145 David has spoken much about how people should praise God for who he is and what he has done. Here again David gives reason to praise the Lord, recognising the incomparable combination of being righteous and gracious: <<*O Lord, God of Israel, you are just, but we have escaped as a remnant, as is now the case. Here we are before you in our guilt, though no one can face you because of this*>> (Ezra 9:15). Later the apostle Paul would write about this idea, how in the person and work of Jesus God did demonstrate at the present time his righteousness, that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus; refer to Romans 3:26. The combination of being both just and the justifier is much the same as being both righteous and gracious.

The Lord is near to all who call on him. God's responsiveness to his people in prayer is an example of the graciousness mentioned in the previous lines. He will fulfil the desire and hear the cry of his people: <<*He has not beheld misfortune in Jacob; nor has he seen trouble in Israel. The Lord their God is with them, acclaimed as a king among them*>> (Numbers 23:21), <<*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble*>> (Psalm 46:1), and: <<*Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near*>> (Philippians 4:5). Maclaren added, "They who long for God will always have as much of God as they long for and are capable of receiving."

The English brings out the mirror pattern of the Hebrew: the verb watches over or preserves, then the object all who love him; object (all the wicked), then verb (he will destroy). The verbs and objects are the opposites of each other; and the two verbs even sound alike (watches over, Hebrew *shomer*; destroy, Hebrew *hishmid*). True faith is the key to the full enjoyment of the goodness of God celebrated in this psalm.

Psalm 145:21 - Let All Flesh Bless His Name Forever.

With several echoes of the opening section (praise, vv.2-3; bless his holy name, v.1; for ever and ever, vv.1-2), the psalm closes with the only fitting response to such a meditation on God's goodness: to look forward to praising God forever and ever, and the faithful soul looks for this in all its fullness, and to wish that every creature might join in this glad song.

²¹ My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord,
and all flesh will bless his holy name for ever and ever.

Psalm 145:21

My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord, and all flesh will bless his holy name for ever and ever. The sense is that David meant this as a declaration: <<*My mouth is filled with your praise, declaring your splendour all day long*>> (Psalm 71:8 NIV). Having written so eloquently about who God is and what he has done for his people, David's firm decision was to use his mouth to praise and bless God again and again. Spurgeon commented, "Whatever others may do, I will not be silent in the praise of the Lord, whatever others may speak upon, my topic is fixed once for all: I will speak the praise of Jehovah. I am doing it, and I will do it as long as I breathe." Kidner added, "So ends David's contribution to the Psalter, on a note of praise which is wholly his own (v.21a), yet as wide as mankind and as unfading as eternity."

Boice concluded, "The last verse of Psalm 145 is the last word we have from David in the Bible. It is his last will and testament. If he had said nothing else in his long life, these words would be a fine legacy for future generations. In it he praises God and invites others to praise God also."