

Psalm 147 “Why We Sing”

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- [0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- Amen. You are getting me very, very excited. Right now and for tonight, 10,000 reasons to praise the Lord.
- I think we've about hit that number this morning that we've called out. But I'm going to give us a few more here. More reasons to come back to worship night.
- I hope by the time we're through this morning, you will be so overflowing and eager to come and praise God with us. Should be a great night.
- Can you even imagine coming in here on a Sunday morning and there's no music at all? No singing the whole service?
- [0 : 57] Sermons over an hour long? Wow. See, I knew y'all would be excited about that. I can't even imagine that, right? But thankfully, thankfully God has actually in His Word told us that part of worshiping Him individually and together is to sing His praise.
- We've seen lots of other words and emotions that the Psalms direct us to sing. But we're talking this morning about a hymn of praise.
- Maybe you've wondered when in this series will we actually get to the type of Psalm that we all think about first. Well, today. Actually, these last five Psalms, not just 147, but 146 through 150, all begin and end with the Hebrew hallelujah.
- Which means, praise the Lord. We say it. We sing it. We read it now in God's Word and then we'll talk about why we sing.
- Psalm 147. Praise the Lord. For it is good to sing praises to our God. For it is pleasant and a song of praise is fitting.
- [2 : 23] The Lord builds up Jerusalem. He gathers the outcasts of Israel. He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. He determines the number of the stars. He gives to all of them their names.
- Great is our Lord and abundant in power. His understanding is beyond measure. The Lord lifts up the humble. He casts the wicked to the ground.
- Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving. Make melody to our God on the lyre. He covers the heavens with clouds. He prepares rain for the earth. He makes grass grow on the hills. He gives to the beasts their food and to the young ravens that cry.
- His delight is not in the strength of the horse nor his pleasure in the legs of a man. But the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him. In those who hope in his steadfast love.
- Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem. Praise your God, O Zion. For he strengthens the bars of your gates. He blesses your children within you. He makes peace in your borders. He fills you with the finest of the wheat.
- [3 : 26] He sends out his command to the earth. His word runs swiftly. He gives snow like wool. He scatters frost like ashes. He hurls down his crystals of ice like crumbs. Who can stand before his cold?

He sends out his word and melts them. He makes his wind blow and the waters flow. He declares his word to Jacob. His statutes and rules to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any other nation.

They do not know his rules. Praise the Lord. Let's pray. Father, we do praise you. We gather for that purpose.

And we ask now that you would help our hearts. Help our very souls at the core of who we are. To praise you. Give us eyes to see your glory and worth in a fresh way this morning.

Holy Spirit, show us. From the word of God, the glory of God. We ask in his name. Amen. Amen. Why do we sing?

[4 : 40] In the car? In the shower? Especially perhaps here as we gather together? Why do we sing? When I started to answer that question, I did what perhaps many of you would do as well.

I thought first about how singing impacts me. I guess that self-focus is the air we breathe, isn't it?

If I'm going to do something, what's in it for me? And we will get to that in just a minute. But this psalm helpfully reminds us that the primary reason that we sing praise to God is that he is worthy.

Worthy of all praise. Look at verse 1. Praise the Lord. Hallelujah. Why? For it is good.

It's right. It is pleasant. It reflects his beauty and glory. And a song of praise is fitting.

[5 : 52] In other words, whether it has any positive effects on us or not, praising God is always appropriate, deserved, and right.

You know, the idea of worship means ascribing worth to someone or something. Many people are worthy of being celebrated, even in song.

Our hearts often express worth in song, don't they? When you go to a party for someone, you sing happy birthday to you, to them.

If you are deemed especially worthy of someone's affections, he may write you a love song or poem. That seems fitting. What is always fitting for our God, Yahweh, the faithful, personal, covenant-keeping, one true God of the Bible, is songs of praise.

No matter what is going on in our lives or in our world, God is always and uniquely worthy of praise.

[7 : 09] He is worthy of praise for no other reason even than who he is. If you read through the Psalms alone, when they call us to praise God, they also tell us what he's like to inspire our praise.

I just want you to marvel for a few minutes this morning at some of these descriptions of God. I'm going to go through quite a few aspects of God's great character for which we are told to praise him.

Just in the Psalms alone, I'm not even going to go beyond that. We'd be here all day. Every one of these would be worthy of all the praise we could give.

I just want you to ponder them as I read through some of them. Close your eyes if you like. He is great and greatly to be praised.

Yes, he's the mighty one in total control who deserves not just a small compliment, but all the praise we can muster. In fact, he has been king of all the earth from everlasting.

[8 : 15] There is nothing in this universe. He has ever been unaware of or out of control of. He has always been and always will be in charge.

God is robed in majesty, clothed in light, so amazingly bright that we can't look upon his glory, right?

Splendid in his holiness. It's radiating out from the glorious light. He's utterly unlike anyone or anything else. And he's good to all.

He is the essence of goodness. Good is good because it's like him. As the one in charge, we're told to praise him as the righteous judge.

To the point we praise him that justice and righteousness are the foundation of his throne. You can absolutely count on his doing what is right.

[9 : 24] Whether you can see it or not, in the grand scheme, from his throne over the whole universe, outside of time, he judges justly. And yet, he's slow to anger.

Oh, yes. Praise the Lord, right? If he was eager to pour out his just wrath, to let off some steam, we wouldn't stand a chance.

But he's patient. His very nature is forgiving. Yes, an answer to all of our sins.

In fact, the Psalms repeatedly praise God for his steadfast love. They say the earth is full of it and it's better than life itself. Praise him that he keeps his promises to love, to provide.

His very nature is love you can count on never to let you down and never to let you go. It's abounding, rushing out from his deepest heart, out through every pore of his being, steadfast love.

[10 : 41] So that he is abundant in mercy. Praise him. His mercy is more than our sins. It stretches to reach us when we're far off.

It keeps coming when we're at our weakest, when we're at our worst. There's more mercy. And as a result, he's a stronghold for the oppressed.

As amazingly great and awesome as he is, he is always a safe place to run. Whenever life hurts, we can run to him.

His love never fails. So the psalmist praises Yahweh as his rock, his fortress, his deliverer, his shield.

This God is utterly reliable. He's constantly protecting us, powerfully fighting for us. Nothing and no one can change his great character.

[11 : 44] In fact, as great as he is, praise him that he is faithful to all generations. All these glorious attributes of his character have been true since eternity past.

They've shown up in relationship with his people for thousands and thousands of years. And they will never, ever change or diminish or stop.

Praise the Lord, right? Praise the Lord. Isn't someone like that worthy of our songs of praise?

Praise the Lord. And we haven't even gotten to all the things this glorious God has done. I get to keep going. His great deeds demonstrate his great character.

Just a few. Consider his power and creativity in creation from this psalm. He determines the number of the stars. He gives to all of them their names.

[12 : 46] He covers the heavens with clouds. He prepares rain for the earth. Verse 16. He gives snow like wool. He scatters frost like ashes. He hurls down his crystals of ice like crumbs.

Who can stand before his cold? And he sends out his word and melts them. He makes his wind blow and the waters flow. This is like Elsa like you can't imagine.

It's beyond spinning out the ice. And then all he has to do is blow and it melts away. We can't even comprehend the number of stars in our galaxy.

And he names the stars in all the galaxies and holds them in his hand. All of them.

The universe at times humbles me. I hope it does you. Just knocks me to my knees at the powerful winds of a storm.

[13 : 46] The loud clash of thunder. The glorious majesty of the mountains. How about the sunrise at the beach? And y'all he powerfully spoke all of those into existence.

How great and majestic and beautiful must he be? Consider his gracious acts of redemption.

Verse 2. The Lord builds up Jerusalem. He gathers the outcasts of Israel. He heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds. The Lord lifts up the humble.

Can he even begin to imagine all of the grace and love and forgiveness and mercy he has shown through generation after generation.

He remembers his covenant forever. When he leads his people through the Red Sea, they sing songs of praise. When he sends his son to the cross, immediately hymns of praise are written and we're still singing them and we're writing more of them.

[14 : 57] Other psalms praise him for raising the poor from the dust. Lifting the needy from the ash heap. Giving the barren woman a home.

Oh, how he loves. Do you hear it over and over? Consider here his incredible deeds to sustain day by day. Verse 9.

He gives to the beasts their food, to the young ravens that cry. Verse 13. He strengthens the bars of your gates. He blesses your children within you. He makes peace in your borders.

He fills you with the finest of the wheat. He sends out his command to the earth. His word runs swiftly. Elsewhere, he gives food to the hungry. He watches over the sojourners.

He upholds the widow and the fatherless. He upholds all who are falling and raises all who are bowed down. He satisfies the desire of every living thing. Y'all, that's a lot of people held in his heart and in his hand day by day.

[15 : 58] Isn't it? That is a tremendous creation being sustained by the word of his power. So, so many reasons to praise God for what he has done.

And the psalm tells us these deeds are so great that we must sing. When I cry out and God delivers me from the mire.

He sets my feet on a rock. Right? And what else? And he puts a new song in my mouth.

It's a song of praise to our God. In fact, so many reasons for praise that people don't seem to be enough. The psalms depict singing trees, singing hills, singing mountains, and rivers clapping their hands.

I don't even know rivers had hands. But they're clapping them in praise of God because he is great and greatly to be praised and all creation joins in.

[17 : 04] You remember when people were singing praise to him and others told Jesus, tell him to stop praising you. What did Jesus say? If they stop singing praise to me, these very stones will cry out.

Friends, we better be singing his praises because if we leave it to the stones, you know that the tunes will all be rock and roll. And that, yes, that was as good as I thought it was going to be.

Amen. Don't, I said that just so you'll remember. Don't leave it to the stones. It is our job to praise him.

And all of creation joins in. If you're not convinced to sing praise to God by the direction of the psalms, one last reality to reflect on this morning.

My dad taught me that music is the language of heaven. Yes, God tells us to sing praise to him.

[18 : 16] And when we get a glimpse of what's happening in the throne room of heaven, if you could pull back and peek around the corner right now this morning into the throne room of heaven, how do all of those there who are perfect, how do they respond in the presence of our glorious God?

The chorus begins with four living creatures who day and night sing, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty who was and is and is to come.

And 24 elders worship, saying, worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power. For you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.

And when they look up and see the Lamb, together they sing more of his worth. Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

And this chorus builds as they're joined by myriads and myriads of angels singing loudly, worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.

[19 : 33] And taking up the cue from myriads of angels are every creature in heaven and earth and under the earth and in the sea singing to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever.

And finally, as this great crescendo builds, a voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and the sound of mighty peals of thunder crying out, hallelujah, salvation and glory and power belongs to our God, for his judgments are true and just.

Hallelujah for the Lord our God, the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exalt and give him the glory. Heaven agrees.

There's nothing more fitting, more pleasant, more good than singing praise to the God who is greatly to be praised.

He is worthy. He is worthy. Amen? But we're living in the midst of a crisis of worth and worship.

[20 : 54] Let me tell you what I would say to describe that. Imagine, if you will, that thieves break into Target overnight.

Overnight. Okay? It's a big heist. Okay? They disable the alarms. They stay in the store undetected for several hours.

And they leave and take absolutely nothing with them. Instead, what they do is they run around all over the store swapping price tags and barcodes on different items.

They do that all night. They swap things all over the store. So tomorrow morning, when you go in to Target, what happens before anyone notices is that a new flat screen smart TV is \$5 and a new pair of socks is \$500.

A package of filet mignon steaks is \$1 and a pack of gum is \$50. The Star Wars Superstar Destroyer Lego set, bigger than you can fit in the trunk of your car, is \$10.

[22 : 07] And the tiny little box of baby Legos, \$1,800. What? The thieves are making out great.

How many TVs would you buy at \$5? And all they had to do was swap some price tags and barcodes, change what things were worth, and they'd do a lot of damage, right?

Our culture has told us that we can determine what's valuable, what's worthy. We can do that for ourselves.

Everybody can. In a sense, we've all been allowed in to swap price tags with the impression that it won't hurt anyone. What's really worthy?

A good friend who is there for you over the long haul? Or fitting in with the in crowd? Impressive personal experiences or enriching the lives of others?

[23 : 25] Loving parents or people who make you feel cool and comfortable? What's really worthy? The God of the universe? Knowing Him? Walking with Him? Praising Him forever and ever?

Or being who you want to be? Doing what makes you feel good? Ringing everything you can out of life in this world every day you get.

That's a crisis, I say. Because if we're not clear on what's worthy, how in the world do you live a life with any sort of purpose for what's really worthwhile?

How would you know what's worth living your life for each day? In this world where people have switched values up, the values of God's kingdom seem upside down, and we often struggle to discern for ourselves what's really worthy, don't we?

[24 : 37] Quite often, our lives and our lips don't praise the God who is most worthy. Our hearts need help.

We sing to help our hearts as well as to honor our God. C.S. Lewis, in his *Abolition of Man*, writes about what he calls men without chests, people, all of us who need emotions organized by trained habit into stable sentiments.

What he means, I dare say, is we need hearts that value correctly, that see price tags put back on the correct items, that recognize what is really worthy.

We desperately need hearts like that. That's what it would mean to love God with our whole hearts, right? Lewis, agreeing with Aristotle, writes, the transition from thinking to doing in nearly all men at all moments needs to be assisted by the appropriate states of feeling.

If we're going to invest our lives in worthwhile pursuits, if we're going to spend our energies on the truly valuable, if we're going to sing to the truly praiseworthy, our hearts, our deepest affections, our deepest affections must be set right.

[26 : 15] Find what is lovely and excellent and praiseworthy and think about such things. This sets our minds right, Philippians 4 says.

If we sing about such things, we help set our hearts right. So we sing praise to God, not only because He is worthy, and He is, but also to direct our hearts towards God's worth, to draw them back from the worthless idols that they tend to chase after.

What things do we sing about? We sing about bodies looking good. We sing about unrestrained violence and self-indulgence. We sing about football and touchdowns.

We sing about all of those things. And sometimes, because we do, we begin to think that those things are more worthy of our heart's affections than the incomparable God that we've been talking about from His Word this morning.

Henry Scugel wrote centuries ago, the worth and excellency of a soul is to be measured by the object of His love.

[27 : 44] How do you know whether you truly are at your innermost person? Who that is, is excellent and on track? How do you know? What do you love?

Do you see the most worthy as the most worthy? That will set the course of your life.

That's why we sing, I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold, houses or lands, worldwide fame, men's applause, anything this world affords today.

That may not be always the emotion of my heart when I stand before a tempting decision, but I'm singing to shape my heart that way.

I may feel like much of my life is lived for me, for my goals, my comfort, my success, but I sing all for Jesus, all for Jesus, all my thoughts and words and doings, all my days and all my hours because I want more and more to live for Him because it helps me remember when I don't want to enter into conversation, it's not convenient to talk to one of those three people that I'm praying for this year like you are, that I want them to come to know Jesus.

[29 : 15] it reminds me that I'm here for Him, not for my schedule and agenda. Y'all, I struggle to start those conversations, but by God's grace, it's happening.

Some, it's starting. If my affections are right, they help my actions. What is the object of my soul's love?

God tells us to train our hearts with our songs, to do that for one another. Ephesians chapter 5, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.

In Colossians chapter 3, it's a similar idea. The word of Christ is going to dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

Yes, we sing first and primarily to God, but God directs us also to sing to one another to call our hearts back to what is truly worthy because our hearts are prone to wander, yes?

[30 : 27] Because our hearts need to be tuned in order to sing God's grace. Notice how this psalm briefly turns its attention not merely to praising God, but at the same time to the emotions of our hearts.

Verse 7, sing to the Lord with thanksgiving. Not just what to do outwardly, what's happening in here, thanksgiving. What an appropriate emotion, right?

In light of all that God has done for us, for the gracious gift of relationship with Him, eternal salvation, we sing, thank you, Jesus for the blood.

For His daily provision and His faithful care, we sing, great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father. Then verse 11, as we sing, we realize God's delight is in those who fear Him.

We grow in appropriate awe of Him as majestic creator and sovereign king and gracious redeemer. how great thou art.

[31 : 36] Doesn't singing that help your heart in ways that listening to me talk doesn't? Doesn't it move you in a different way? Doesn't it touch something different in you?

God gives His people songs to sing to that end because He cares about our hearts. Finally, our hope. Friends, we hope in a lot of things, don't we?

Can we be honest about that for a minute? They include our own strengths and abilities. Verse 10 warns about that. Our own experiences and pleasures, our own possessions and comforts.

But we need our hearts to hope in one place. In God and His steadfast love that endures forever.

That's really hard, isn't it? Moment by moment to have your hope set there. And so we sing of the day when our faith is made sight and the clouds are rolled back as a scroll and the trump resounds and the Lord descends and it is well with my soul.

[32 : 53] I am bound bound for the promised land where we will feast in the house of Zion. We will sing with our hearts restored.

And we call our hearts as we do. We shape our hearts as we sing those songs to hope there and in Him rather than hoping and feeling better now or finding fulfillment fulfillment here.

No, it's in Jesus. I remember talking with Delilah Harris. Some of you know her.

Precious early Southwood member who was widowed for many years before just a few years ago herself going home to be with Jesus.

I remember a conversation where she said how much she struggled with loneliness. We talked about how she battled that and maintained this hope in God that she seemed to have.

[34 : 02] She prayed so much. She said for her if she could only sing an old hymn when she didn't feel like it it would remind her of who God was and that and that He was really there with her that He really loved her and that all the time as the song she loved went He was walking and talking with her and I can still hear her saying that's true that is true He will do it.

some of you have told me you struggle to sing when you're really hurting a couple of our older members have told me that's part of why they love being here so much with God's people to worship they don't like to hear their own voice singing alone perhaps off pitch but you come here and others can sing with you even for you when you can't you come here and the amen the hallelujah sounds from God's people again and helps your heart point again to true north the God who is worthy who is great and greatly to be praised Father we bow before you in worship we praise you because you are greater than our minds can comprehend this morning you're here with us inhabiting the praises of your people you're with brothers and sisters of ours who are not here this morning and are broken hearted and you're meeting them there how great you are how awesome is your name forgive us for forgetting put a new song in our mouth a hymn of praise to our God may we not merely sing it this morning may we not merely gather and sing it tonight give us hearts to sing moment by moment in our lowest and darkest places from the mountaintops your praise we worship you

Lord Jesus and pray in your name amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org the there you