

# Shifting Our Focus

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Date: 27 July 2025

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[ 0 : 00 ] Our sermon text tonight is Psalm 145. So again, these are on the screens, and you can have a look at the Bibles at the back! If you want to follow along there.

Okay. I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable.

One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.

They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds, and I will declare your greatness. They shall pour forth in the fame of your abundant goodness, and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.

The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made. All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord, and all your saints shall bless you.

[ 1 : 05 ] They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power, to make known to the children of man your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations.

The Lord is faithful in all his words, and kind in all his works. The Lord upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season.

You open your hand, you satisfy the desire of every living thing. The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and kind in all his works. The Lord is near to all who call on him, and to all who call on him in truth.

He fulfills the desires of those who fear him. He also hears their cry, and saves them. The Lord preserves all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy. My mouth will speak in praise of the Lord, and let all flesh bless his holy name forever and ever.

So we're looking at Psalm 145. This is David's last psalm in the book, and I think maybe even as we heard it read, we're seeing that David is pulling out all the stops.

[ 2 : 17 ] He gives us 21 verses of extolling, and praising, and blessing God, and he lists reason after reason for why he is going to praise God. And I think maybe this is perhaps not the David that we give much time to.

We think of David's psalms, and what do we think about? We think about the valley in Psalm 23.

We think about him reckoning with his sin, and the awful mistakes he's made in Psalm 51.

A couple of weeks ago, we were looking at Psalm 61, and there, what do we see? He's crying from the ends of the earth. That's the David, I think perhaps, we most often resonate with.

And then we come to something like Psalm 145, and we say, okay David, I don't really feel like this right now.

This praising and extolling and blessing is great, but being in the valley, dealing with sin and shame, struggling along, that is what I'm doing right now.

[ 3 : 25 ] When I was little, I used to get very carsick when I was really young, and especially sitting in the back, and on longer journeys, I wouldn't really help myself.

We didn't have phones. We had Lego magazines and Action Man magazines, so I was sitting in the back, reading my magazine, feeling iller and iller. And my mom would always say to me, Lewis, you need to look up and look out of that window before you throw up, or before you make yourself any sicker, because it's in raising your eyes and looking out the window that you'll feel much better.

This Psalm, in many ways, is about changing our focus, shifting our focus, and looking out of the window.

It's about having the discipline of doing something that perhaps we don't feel like doing. So, we can say, look, adoring God, praising God, looking to Him is just not what I feel like doing right now. That's not what my circumstances make me want to do. I need God to act. I need Him to lift me up. I need Him to save me from this pain that I am experiencing. And David comes in Psalm 145, and he says, no, no, this is not about your circumstances changing.

[ 4 : 51 ] This is about shifting your focus from your circumstances and praising God still. So, just two things from this Psalm. What is praise?

In Psalm 145, what is it that David is describing? And then secondly, why praise? When we don't feel like it, when we don't want to do it, when it's the last thing on our minds, why?

Why praise God even still? So, firstly, what is praise? In Psalm 145, you'll see at the top of the Psalm, it's titled, A Song of Praise.

And that word praise comes up again and again and again in the Psalms all the way throughout the Bible. This is the only time that that word is used in the title for a Psalm.

And so, that's worth thinking about just because, firstly, it sets up the end of this book, 150 chapters, and we are nearing the crescendo of praising God, the Hallelujah Psalms.

[ 5 : 54 ] with this title, it also separates itself from many of the other Psalms that we are familiar with, which describe praise in many ways as a response or as an overflow of our feelings.

very often praise is reactive. So, in Psalm 40, we sing it a lot. What do we have? He's in the pit and God lifts him up.

And what does he say? He put a new song in my mouth, a song, a hymn of praise. It's reactive. God has lifted him up and he responds in praise.

Psalm 126, the people are freed from exile, they are released from Babylon, and what do they do? What do they sing? Songs of joy, it says.

So many more Psalms and places in the Bible that we read about this. Praise can absolutely be reactive and it can be feelings-based.

[ 6 : 58 ] You know, perhaps tonight, you look back on this past week and you say, God has worked in this situation that I've been dealing with in a way that I never thought he would.

You can think about your health, your finances, your work fears. And when those things are relaxed and you feel these things are lifting, praising God is absolutely the right response.

And we see that over and over again in the Bible. But Psalm 145 gives us no hint whatsoever at what David is experiencing or what David is going through.

It's likely that he did write this later in his life, maybe towards the end of his reign. And some commentators, you know, they'll look at this and they'll say, David appears much more mature in this Psalm than perhaps his earlier ones.

And if David is, if he is nearing the end of his reign, as he thinks of Saul chasing him into the wilderness to kill him, as he thinks of his affair with Bathsheba and having her husband killed so he doesn't find out, as he thinks about his own son, Absalom, trying to seize the throne from him, in spite of all of that, his reaction, his discipline, his attitude is to praise God.

[ 8 : 22 ] In reflection, looking at a life with many highs but many, many, many lows, he says, his attitude has to be one of praise.

Great is the Lord, he says, and greatly to be praised. You can see, we're just going to push this a bit more, you can see that the Psalm has 21 verses. The end of verse 13 is in brackets because some question over whether this is original or not.

This is one of the few cases where a lot of the scholars would say it most likely is original. So you have 22 lines in this Psalm. There are 20, we're getting into the rabbit hole here and I don't want to lose you but we'll be quick.

There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Each line follows the next letter in the alphabet. It's an acrostic. So David, David frames this poem in this way using every letter of the alphabet for every line to say that there is a structure, there is a completeness, there is an actual discipline in praising God.

So just as this poem takes up all of the alphabet, praise is a discipline which should surround, which should take up all of life.

[ 9 : 46 ] So yes, praise is often a response to changes in our circumstances but David, you know, he doesn't mention any of that. He doesn't point out any particular area in his life that would lead him to praise God.

If anything, he's reflecting on the whole of it and he shifts his focus and he says, whether I feel like it or not, my attitude has to be one of praise.

Look at verses 1 to 3, what does he say? He says, I will extol God. Every day, I will bless God and praise Him forever and ever. he's speaking about discipline here.

Primarily praise needs to be a discipline, a part of life. David says, whether we feel like it or not, it's firstly a continual act of the will, a choice, not a feeling.

Okay, a bit more specific. When David says that he will extol, he will bless and he will praise, praise carries this meaning of celebrating God.

[10:54] The word bless follows that and it just means in a way to speak well about God and extolling means to lift Him up. And so, what is praise in Psalm 145?

We could define it really simply like this. Praising God is not first a feeling, but it is your regular discipline in celebrating God and speaking well of Him and in lifting Him high and acknowledging that He knows far better than us in all ways.

Now, what do we do on a Sunday when we come together? We come together for worship and a part of that is praise. We've sung tonight.

We're singing in celebration of who God is. it's an outward expression of celebrating God. What do we do in the middle of the week when we pray not my will but yours?

We are praising God and acknowledging that He knows far better than us in all ways. His understanding is far beyond us. See just one point that David makes here.

[12:08] He mentions speaking well of God in verse 4 and he says that one generation commends your works to another. One reason that we have tonight for being sure that God is faithful all the time is because David's generation still speaks to us.

The prophets still speak to us. The writers of the Gospels and the New Testament liars still speak to us. Through God's word they speak to the world today about God and they say what David says in verse 8.

The Lord is gracious and merciful. Now just to end this point we can apply this really specifically. Do we make it a regular practice in our lives to speak well about God to one another?

we spend time together praying for one another caring for one another. Do we make it a practice to speak well about what God has done in our lives?

One thing that's really encouraged me in my time in St. C's one thing that's really encouraged me has been meeting up with some of the people here some of the guys over the weeks and some of these guys are beyond me by a few decades.

[13:37] I don't know how to word that politely I don't think that was it but getting to know them and spending time with them and hearing about what's brought them to where they are and hearing about how God has worked over the years in so many situations in their lives hearing that I've come away being encouraged in my faith and encouraged in how I think about God and David says speaking like that to one another is a form of praise what is praise it's the regular conscious effort and discipline of celebrating God of speaking well of him and acknowledging that he is higher than us in all his ways and doing that still in light of how we feel so secondly why why would we do it why praise God maybe we want to say in light of all this I can't do it the pain and the doubt that we experience we have we experience these things to different degrees some of us you know some of us tonight might have more questions about why life is the way that it is tonight we talk you know we talk about these acts prayers adoration confession thanksgiving supplication we jump right to the end sometimes and we get straight to sing

Lord I need you to do this for me right now I need you to help me we jump right past praise how do I celebrate God right now and speak well of him and acknowledge that he knows better than me when this week or this month or this year is far from what I think is best for me if that's the place you're at and you know we all say that at times to different degrees in our hearts if that's the place you're at I think David gives a great answer in verse three he says great is Lord and greatly to be praised and his greatness is unsearchable David's reason for extolling and praising and blessing God is the fact that we will never fully understand how great God actually is this word greater greatness is so common we see it in the Bible and we just skim over it and yet David is making a huge claim he's saying

God's greatness is unsearchable in other words he goes beyond every limitation that we live with God's unsearchable greatness is the reason for praise so what is it that makes God great that's what we have in the rest of the psalm and we're not going to do it verse by verse but the rest of the

psalm answers that question in two big ways I think God is great in his cosmic rule on one end and he is great on the other end in the fact that he is near to us at the same time he's near to his people why praise why be disciplined in celebrating God because he is great in his cosmic rule and because he is great in how near at the same time how near he is to his people a lot of commentators they would say they would note that there's not really a clear structure in this psalm if you're looking at a bible or a bulletin you'll just see that

David talks about God's love his power his care his kingdom his common grace he lists all these things the roughest or simplest outline that some writers give the psalm is to say David is moving from a wide lens view of God and he's taking us down to the end to a narrow lens view it's almost a contrast he brings out from being distant to being near at the same time so he talks amongst other things about his rule which includes his power and kingdom and towards the end about his nearness his presence with his people so David calls God his king verse 13 he says your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and your dominion endures throughout all generations you think about David at the end of his reign Saul before him has caused so much confusion and upset in his reign David in many ways has done the same we know after that we meet these kings in the Old Testament who are never the kings that we want or expect them to be David turns and he says God God is king and his kingdom is everlasting in other words this isn't about area or land or political order or political power he's referring to God's he's referring to God's rule and power over all creation and every single thing that happens we live today in a world which praises self sufficiency we walk out there and what does the world tell us it tells us to be self dependent it tells us to be self reliant if we're going to survive if life is going to be the beautiful true thing that we want it to be then that's down to us psalm 145 comes to that and says no that's not how it works at all actually there is a higher wisdom and authority which governs without fail verse 17 the

[19:14] Lord is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works God knows what he's doing all of the time he is kind in all that he does above the universe God does all things well and he is kind in every single thing that he does we might not feel that and we might say that we would do things a bit differently to how they've been done how they've been worked out in our works is not crippled in any way by the limitations that we face when you get up in the morning if you have trusted in Christ when you get up in the morning you wake up with one who's commanding the universe out of kindness for your sake he has done it for generations and nothing will stop that and when we look at our lives and we say why

I think it's a huge comfort to know that there is one who knows what he is doing all of the time we get worn down by upset and things not going the way we want them to go and not being as strong or as reliant as we think we should be David simply invites us to look up to shift our focus and see that there is one who cannot be distracted or hurt or confused by any circumstances that we face but one who works kindness into the most out of control areas of your life why praise God why be persistent in praising him when we say life is not what we want it to be because the Lord reigns and all of his works are kind he knows what he is doing all of the time and nothing can stop that his rule his kingdom endures forever does knowing that does believing that bring us to praise what about the other side then and distantly

God rules over all things that's that's the picture that David is painting for us on the other side of that look at verse 18 the Lord is near to all who call on him in truth he fulfills the desire of those who fear him he also hears the and saves him so praising God for his distance and his absolute control is one thing at the same time David says he is very present it's not that he does works of kindness but at the same time he's somehow far from you leaving you still alone in your fear and in your doubt no God is with his people wholly other and yet so involved in your life that he would stoop down like a father to his child and hears every single cry now what does he mean what does David mean calling on him in truth David is saying that

God is near to all who are genuine in faith tonight tonight tonight you might be asking questions about Christianity you might read a part of the Bible like this and wonder is this just a case of me calling out for help when I need it and the maker of the whole universe bends over backwards and comes and helps me out not at all David is saying calling on him has to be done in truth! in other words your prayer for help a prayer for help is a prayer from an honest heart a heart that says I am broken and lost and without hope on my own in every way but there is a God who is perfect and who deserves my all God's nearness is not a sweeping promise it's for those who know they are weak broken sinful people but who know that they need a!

[ 23 : 41 ] who is higher and wiser than them to come down and save them and give them freedom Jesus Christ fulfilled God's promise to be near by coming as a baby and spending the next 30 years of his life experiencing the tears and pain and temptation and rejection that we all face and eventually dying the very death that we deserved and coming near to us the son of God has given us life as it's meant to be Jesus went outside the gate we read in Hebrews 13 and his blood was spilt where we wondered looking for self dependency and self control and authority Christ drew near and he died the Lord is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works if you ask tonight is God near is he really near me if you feel he is distant his his his nearness is not based on what you feel it is based on what you know!

you and in faith calling on him tonight to stoop down and comfort why praise God when my circumstances don't encourage me and it feels so difficult to why why praise him because he is far above us in every way he is kind in all that he does and he knows what he is doing all the time and at the same time he is near and he is with his people always ready and able to help when we cry out in genuine faith just to close the writer to the Hebrews says that we have no lasting city but we're waiting for the city to come we're waiting for life to be fulfilled and beautiful and true like it's meant to be and he says in that time in this in between he says we praise God through him through Christ praise God for power over all aspects of life and for his nearness through

Christ he says what does he mean how do we praise God through him it means that it means that even when you are weary and you feel discouraged in your faith and in your walk and you don't think you can praise it simply means that Christ is your praise leader already and when you feel inadequate he has already given you the power to praise that's what it means to praise through him praise is the task of every Christian we have so much to be thankful for God God's cosmic rule and his nearness and everything in between that we've read tonight why do we praise God because he deserves it because he deserves to be praised Martin Luther on the psalm he says Christ is the king of the poor afflicted and fallen the king went outside of the gate to save us and he gives us the power to praise will we be people who praise

God as we ought let's pray together Lord we thank you for the ways you have worked in the universe working kindness into our lives knowing the end from the beginning doing all things well and not being limited by what limits us and at the same time you're near and you're present with your people Christ came near so near that he died to make us children of God help us to praise you well in light of these things and to grow in being people of praise we ask for Jesus sake Amen