

The Lord Is Righteous

Devotional Reading: Hebrews 12:18-29

Background Scripture: Psalm 145

Psalm 145:1, 10-21

¹ I will exalt you, my God the King;
I will praise your name for ever and
ever.

¹⁰ All your works praise you, LORD;
your faithful people extol you.

¹¹ They tell of the glory of your kingdom
and speak of your might,

¹² so that all people may know of your
mighty acts
and the glorious splendor of your
kingdom.

¹³ Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and your dominion endures through all
generations.

The LORD is trustworthy in all he promises
and faithful in all he does.

¹⁴ The LORD upholds all who fall
and lifts up all who are bowed down.

¹⁵ The eyes of all look to you,
and you give them their food at the
proper time.

¹⁶ You open your hand
and satisfy the desires of every living
thing.

¹⁷ The LORD is righteous in all his ways
and faithful in all he does.

¹⁸ The LORD is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.

¹⁹ He fulfills the desires of those who fear
him;
he hears their cry and saves them.

²⁰ The LORD watches over all who love him,
but all the wicked he will destroy.

²¹ My mouth will speak in praise of the
LORD.

Let every creature praise his holy name
for ever and ever.

Key Text

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations The LORD is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does. —Psalm 145:13

A King Forever and Ever

Unit 2: Our God Reigns

Lessons 6–9

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify instances of Hebrew poetic parallelism in Psalm 145.
2. Explain the significance of those parallels.
3. Write a prayer that mimics the Hebrew parallelism of Psalm 145 and shares its themes.

Lesson Outline

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- A. Responding to Wonder
- B. Lesson Context

I. Praiseworthy God, Part 1 (Psalm 145:1, 10-13)

- A. What's So! (vv. 1, 10-12)
Contagious . . . in a Good Way
- B. So What? (v. 13)

II. Compassionate God (Psalm 145:14-20)

- A. Strengthens and Provides (vv. 14-16)
Our Generous God
- B. Willing and Able (vv. 17-20)

III. Praiseworthy God, Part 2 (Psalm 145:21)

Conclusion

- A. Psalm 145 in the Psalter
- B. Psalm 145 in Life
- C. Thought to Remember
- D. Prayer

Introduction

A. Responding to Wonder

We know of great preachers and prolific writers, but can someone be both and do them well? John Chrysostom (AD 347–407) was one who could. A tribute to his preaching skills is the second part of his name, which isn't a "last name" as we have today. Rather, the designation *Chrysostom* is a combination of two Greek words that mean "golden mouth"—an acknowledgment of the persuasiveness of his preaching.

John Chrysostom is recognized today as one of the "early church fathers" who were influential in the fourth century AD. The power of his influence was rooted not just in his preaching but also in his writings. More than 350 of his works exist today, one of which is a commentary on Psalm 145, today's text.

In that commentary, John stated, "Since you have a great Lord, be uplifted yourself and rid yourself of this world's affairs. Adopt a purpose which is superior to the lowliness of the present existence." He exhorted his audiences in Antioch and Constantinople, which included powerful political leaders, to remember the greatness of God and their smallness in comparison. Recognizing God's greatness would put their own lives into a proper context. John's counsel is just as appropriate today.

B. Lesson Context

Psalm 145, today's text, is an acrostic. That means that each line, verse, or section starts with a word that begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet, which has 22 letters. There are nine psalms that are acrostic in nature, the other eight being Psalms 10, 25, 34, 37, 9–10, 111, 112, and 119. (Psalms 9 and 10 count as one because the acrostic spans both; see discussion in lesson 6.) Other acrostics in the Bible are Proverbs 31:10-31 and the entire book of Lamentations. Regarding the latter, notice that chapters 1, 2, 4, and 5 have 22 verses each and that chapter 3 has 66 verses, which is a multiple of 22.

A sharp eye will notice that Psalm 145 has only 21 verses. So why the mismatch with the

22-letter Hebrew alphabet? It comes down to an uncertainty in the ancient manuscripts. In most of those manuscripts, Psalm 145:13 lacks a line of text that would have included the absent Hebrew letter. This was noticed in antiquity, and the ancient Greek translation of the Bible, known as the Septuagint (translated at least 200 years before Christ), includes an extra line between verses 13 and 14; see more on this in the commentary below.

Last week's lesson noted that the 150 chapters of the Psalms are traditionally seen as a collection of five sub-books. Within the fifth of those sub-books, Psalm 145 is the final chapter before the extended coda of Psalms 146–150 begins.

I. Praiseworthy God, Part 1

(Psalm 145:1, 10-13)

A. What's So! (vv. 1, 10-12)

1. I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever.

Other lessons from the Psalms this quarter have introduced us to *parallelism* as a feature of Hebrew poetry. We saw last week in Psalm 103:1 that there are various synonyms or near-synonyms that express the concept of *praise*. That fact continues to hold true here in Psalm 145:1 as we see the words *exalt* and *praise* alongside the words *praise* and *extol* in the verse that follows (which is not included in today's lesson text). See also Psalm 34:1.

The psalm's opening phrase *I will exalt you* is repeated exactly, in the original language, in Psalm 30:1. A slight divergence between the two texts is seen in the next phrase: the text we are studying is directed toward *my God the King*, while 30:1 has "Lord." They are clearly one and the same!

God's actions can be categorized in three ways: he creates, rules, and redeems. In proclaiming

How to Say It

Antioch	An-tee-ock.
Corinthians	Ko-rin-thee-unz (th as in thin).
Habakkuk	Huh-back-kuk.
Septuagint	Sep-too-ih-jent.

God as his king, the psalmist acknowledges the second of those three. The psalmist invites the reader to consider God's character as good and powerful in that regard.

What Do You Think?

What do psalms in general teach you about exalting the Lord as king?

Digging Deeper

What actions take our exaltation of God out of the realm of mere words?

10. All your works praise you, LORD; your faithful people extol you.

The phrase *all your works* expands the scope beyond merely Israel and the entirety of humankind to encompass the inanimate elements of creation. The praise of God concerns all aspects of the universe (see Psalms 8, 19). The *faithful people* are those who live in solidarity with both God and other people. They see themselves as carrying a responsibility for others, owing others respect, care, and concern shown in tangible actions. Those who live in such a way find room for praising God, even during difficult times, and those sincerely praising God have no problem being loyal to other people.

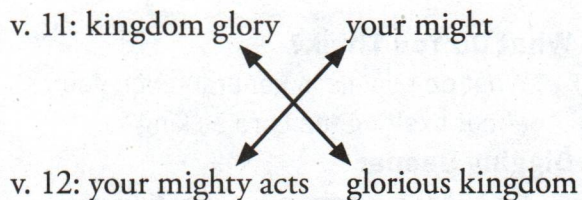
Contagious . . . in a Good Way

Rome's Sistine Chapel is celebrated for its awe-inspiring frescoes, painted by the famous artist Michelangelo (1475–1564). This grand structure embodies the theme of praise and exaltation of God through various visual images. The chapel's architecture, characterized by its attention to detail, exudes a sense of the magnificence and grandeur of God. Visitors can't help but be caught up in the motifs that overwhelm the senses—it's contagious!

We may say the same about David's intent when he wrote Psalm 145. Does it have that effect on you? If not, why?
—O. P.

11-12. They tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might, so that all people may know of your mighty acts and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

We group these two verses because they illustrate an X-shaped parallel construction similar to what we saw in last week's lesson. It is visualized this way:



Glory is an attribute belonging to God (see Exodus 16:7; Deuteronomy 5:24; John 17:5). By extension, it also belongs to his *kingdom*. But we may ask ourselves, *Who can be in this glorious kingdom besides God?* In one sense, only those included in the “faithful people” of the previous verse are or will be kingdom-citizens (compare Philippians 3:20; etc.). In a broader sense, however, we see this declaration in Psalm 103:19: “The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.” There is only one ultimate king, and the rule of his kingdom is not limited. Satan has his own kingdom (Matthew 12:26), but in the end, it is temporary. People, both ancient and modern, also set themselves on the thrones of their hearts to be self-kingdoms or kingdoms-of-one; that is folly as well (Isaiah 14:13-15; Daniel 4:28-32; Ezekiel 28:2-3; etc.).

God’s all-encompassing kingdom does not equate to a human political structure (see John 18:36). Even so, we humans have God-ordained roles to play in it. One of those roles is found in the phrases *they tell . . . and speak*. This speaking and talking isn’t aimless chatter; rather, it aims to make God and his kingdom known to others. We don’t talk about God’s kingdom only amongst ourselves. We make his kingdom known to the whole world.

Verse 12 largely restates verse 11—that’s the nature of this X-shaped parallel. But verse 12 clarifies the subject of the faithful people’s communication: they should speak of God’s specific deeds, as in the recital of the saving acts of the exodus in Psalms 78, 105, and 136. The people also are to speak of God’s work in their personal lives, as do many psalms of praise. The *mighty acts* keep occurring because God’s mercy never ceases.

B. So What? (v. 13)

13. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The LORD is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does.

The psalmist understood that God’s rule extends beyond any given moment or era. The New Testament writers understood this as well (1 Timothy 1:17; 2 Peter 1:11). While all earthly things pass away, God’s merciful concern for his creation does not.

The Lesson Context above mentions that a small text may have shifted elsewhere in the ancient manuscripts, leaving the acrostic of this poetry one letter short in the Hebrew alphabet. Right here is where the line would be placed. The old Greek version (the Septuagint) does indeed include that segment. It reads, “The Lord is faithful in his words, and holy in all his works.”

II. Compassionate God

(Psalm 145:14-20)

A. Strengthens and Provides (vv. 14-16)

14. The LORD upholds all who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down.

Parallelism in thoughts continues. Even so, this verse shows extra poetic creativity. The original words translated *upholds* and *fall* are quite common in the Old Testament in general and the Psalms in particular. By contrast, the word translated *lifts up* is rare, occurring only here and in Psalm 146:8 in the entire Old Testament.

But the primary challenge concerns the word translated *bowed down*, which is found only here and in Psalms 148:6; 58:5; and Micah 6:6. Reading all the texts that have “bowed down” reveals that the word doesn’t have the same meaning in all contexts. There seem to be two possibilities: it refers to great distress or a posture of worship. Which of these does the writer of Psalm 145 intend? Is the one “bowed down” humbled by negative life experiences, or does the person seek to worship God?

A third possibility is that the ambiguity is deliberate, with the psalm pointing us to both meanings being intended. In that case, the mes-

sage would be that whatever experiences bring us humbly to God will result in our ultimate benefit.

15-16. The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.

The parallelism continues as these two verses make essentially the same point but in different ways. The psalmist describes worshippers almost as children waiting for a parent to give them something they need. They recognize that all people, indeed *every living thing*, depend on God similarly. That is true even if not everyone recognizes it as truth. God graciously feeds all. This idea underlies Jesus' statement that it rains on the just and unjust alike, with both benefiting from the life-giving things God bestows on them (see Matthew 5:45).

The text does not promise wealth, and a spiritually mature person would not expect God to be a purveyor of such. But God does give us what we need (compare Psalms 104:27-28; 136:25). To open the *hand* implies giving a gift. God's gifts may go beyond the bare essentials to things that bring appropriate forms of pleasure.

What Do You Think?

In times of scarcity, what gives you confidence to wait for God's timing for provision?

Digging Deeper

When would it be appropriate to reference this verse to someone experiencing a great need? What action might also be required?

Our Generous God

Heavy rainfall throughout the year plays a vital role in the ecosystem of the Amazon Rainforest. The average amount varies depending on the location within that jungle, but 100 inches is not uncommon. Think about that: 100 inches is over 8 feet of water! The health of this ecosystem is thought to interact with other ecosystems throughout the world in various ways.

We live in a fallen world, with deprivation and lack resulting from sin—sometimes in general, sometimes specifically (examples: Joshua 7:10-12; Haggai 1:1-11). But even in times of deprivation, God *wants* to be generous. What might you be doing to stand in the way of God's generosity?

—O. P.

B. Willing and Able (vv. 17-20)

17. The LORD is righteous in all his ways and faithful in all he does.

This verse is worded very similarly to the "missing" part of Psalm 145:13, discussed above.

The phrase *all his ways*, which parallels *all he does*, includes the generosity of the previous verse. The word translated *righteous* occurs about 50 times in the Old Testament, but almost always it refers to godly people. It refers to a characteristic of God in no more than a half dozen places, and this is one of them. Throughout history, those who have questioned God's righteousness or justice have discovered that this is an area where humanity lacks, not God (examples: Job 38-41; Ezekiel 18:25-29; Habakkuk 1-2).

What Do You Think?

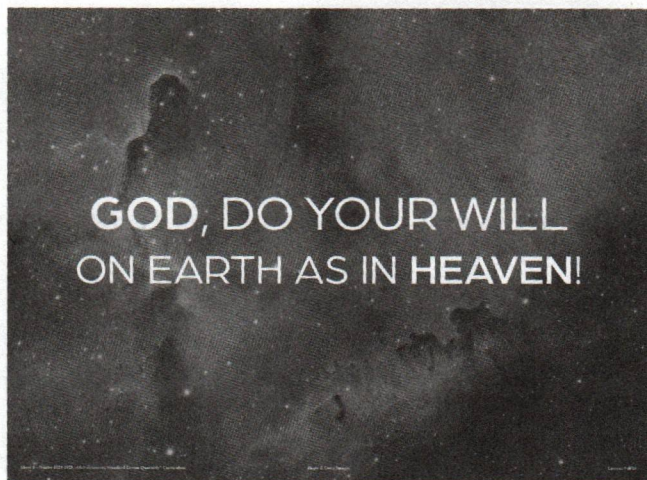
What psalms can give you voice if God doesn't seem to be acting at all?

Digging Deeper

What gives you confidence in God's holiness and righteousness in the face of the evils in the world?

18. The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.

Psalms of lament often express regret that God seems so far away, and they request God's tangible presence (examples: Psalms 22:11, 19; 35:22; 38:21; 71:12). On the other hand, there are biblical cases where people do *not* desire God's nearness (compare Jonah 1:3; Revelation 6:15-17; etc.). But here, it would be helpful to see a distinction between the two senses of the near/far issue. We might call one sense "literal nearness" and the other "spiritual nearness." The fact of God's presence and activity within the world is summed up in the word *immanence*; we are in the presence of



Visual for Lessons 9 & 10. Ask learners to pair up to discuss how today's lesson reveals what God's will is in the world.

the immanent God at all times—and note that this is not the word *imminent* (Jeremiah 23:23-24; Acts 17:27-28). That's the literal nearness.

But in another sense of near/far, the fact of God's holiness results in his ethical distance from sinners; the more that people engage in unholiness, the more they are spiritually separated from the holy God. Jesus experienced this kind of separation as he took humanity's penalty for sin upon himself while dying on the cross (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34 [both quoting Psalm 22:1]). In so doing, Jesus solved the distance problem between God and humanity (compare Isaiah 55:6-7).

What Do You Think?

How do circumstances affect your sense of God's presence?

Digging Deeper

Does God's literal nearness comfort you even when he feels far away? Why or why not?

19. He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them.

The second part of this verse clarifies the first part since God does not fulfill each and every imaginable desire that people have. The most striking example of God's hearing a *cry* and effecting deliverance is the exodus from Egypt (Exodus 3:7-10; 14:30).

The promise *saves them* can be understood in

two senses in the various places it is used: it can mean rescue from a physical threat or from a spiritual threat of unholiness. Sometimes, the two senses are both present if rescue from a physical threat accompanies rescue from a spiritual threat (compare Ezekiel 37:23; Hosea 1:7).

We know from modern experience and Bible history that God does not always deliver godly people from the loss of their physical life; sometimes, his larger plans include such deaths—and those deaths are temporary, given the promise of our resurrection (Daniel 12:2; 1 Corinthians 15). But he always is ready, willing, and able to deliver us from spiritual threats (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Many psalms of lament (also called prayers for help) explore the apparent gap between human need and divine response. This psalm, however, does not explore that set of issues. It remains at the level of generalized praise. Whatever we may face in this life, God's final word will be one of salvation and healing.

20a. The LORD watches over all who love him,

Psalms 31:23; 91:14; and 97:10 also reflect the reality of this praise thought. *Watches over* carries the idea of "protection." The wording of the original Hebrew of the phrase *all who love him* is also translated "his friends" in Esther 5:10, 14; 6:13. Those who love God rejoice (Psalm 5:11) because of repeated acts of goodness toward them (119:132).

20b. but all the wicked he will destroy.

Psalm 94:23 is similar. In contrast to the experience of those who love God, *the wicked* can expect a terrible fate. This statement confesses a general truth, though the psalms also know a great deal about forgiveness of sins. The wicked are those who refuse to repent while deliberately pursuing the harm of others (compare Psalm 10:2-11).

III. Praiseworthy God, Part 2

(Psalm 145:21)

21. My mouth will speak in praise of the LORD. Let every creature praise his holy name for ever and ever.

The psalm concludes, as many do, with a prom-

ise to praise God. This personal commitment by the one praying this psalm also extends to others (*every creature*). The psalmist hopes that all beings capable of praise, especially humans but not necessarily limited to them, will acknowledge the rightness of God's good reputation for saving works and do so in perpetuity (*for ever and ever*). This phrasing serves as an appropriate "bookend" to the psalm, with the first of the two bookends occurring in the opening verse of our lesson today.

What Do You Think?

How do you address any disparity in your life between speaking God's praise and living out that praise?

Digging Deeper

What stories serve as examples to guide both your words and deeds of praise?

Conclusion

A. Psalm 145 in the Psalter

On a first reading, Psalm 145 may seem to lack the emotional intensity and attention to life's struggles that appear in many other psalms. It may appear to be a collection of general truths or even platitudes about the life of faith. Such platitudes do not stand up to the challenge of life, and so the psalm may appear less substantial than others.

It is better, however, not to read this psalm alone but to recall its function in the overall book. The book of Psalms contains both prayers for help and prayers of thanksgiving. Early in the book, laments or prayers for help overwhelmingly predominate, but as the book goes along, the balance changes in favor of hymns of praise. The concluding five psalms are loud, exuberant songs praising God. Psalm 145 is closely connected to them. In other words, if we consider the book as a whole, we see it move from times of distress, during which we call out to God for help, to times of rejoicing over God's saving works. That same shift appears in many individual psalms that begin with lament and end with a promise to praise. In other words, the organization of the book tries to move its readers along the spiritual road to greater confidence in God's mercy. Psalm 145 marks the

conclusion of that movement. When understood this way, Psalm 145 is much more than a bundle of clichés.

B. Psalm 145 in Life

Psalm 145 celebrates the permanent nature of God's kingdom and his work in the lives of people. It reminds anyone singing it that God aims at the highest and best possible things, including the best possible outcomes for our lives. God desires that we be saved and rescued from all the manifestations of sin and death in this world and the next. God has communicated that desire through the prophets and apostles, and most fully through the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Awareness of that communication leads to a life filled with wonder and practical attention to spiritual and moral growth.

It is not easy to adopt a superior purpose when we are trying to live our best life now. The superior purpose calls upon us to reexamine ourselves and reform aspects of our lives. We refine our values, redirect our affections, and reshape our behaviors in the direction of God. Even our language becomes infused with grace and mercy, as God's is. To give up on the possibility of growth is to lose hope itself.

The wonder of God's love for us compels us to rise above the passions of the moment toward the splendor that awaits us in God's presence. This psalm points us to that splendor as it celebrates the compassion and beauty of God as it challenges us to pursue noble causes rather than short-term goals of pleasure or power.

C. Prayer

Heavenly Father, we praise you even though our best praise falls short. Help us to become people of the truth, who state our amazement at your goodness and kindness to us. Accept our words of praise and gratitude because they are the only things we can give you that matter. In Jesus' name. Amen.

D. Thought to Remember

Make your acts of praise and worship contagious!

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Distribute blank index cards. Have each participant write on a card something in this world that lasts a long time. Then, have participants share their cards with one another and rank-order them in chronological length. Ask, "How long do you think the longest thing in the arrangement of cards will last, and why?" Discuss.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Yesterday, Today, and Forever" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Allow one minute to complete as indicated. Ask, "How many of your 'always' statements are really true? What would life look like if they were all true?" Give opportunities for participants to discuss.

Make a transition as you say, "Things of earth do not stay the same forever. But in today's lesson, pay attention to that which is praised for being eternal and constant."

Into the Word

Have Psalm 145:1, 10-12 read aloud in the following way. Divide the group into three parts: one individual (designated **Personal**), a group of three (designated **Corporate**), and the rest of the class (designated **Universal**). Arrange participants so that the Corporate is surrounding and facing the Personal, and the Universal is surrounding and facing the Corporate.

Have **Personal** read verse 1 aloud alone, emphasizing the words *I* and *my*. Have **Corporate** join **Personal** to read verse 10 together, emphasizing *all* and *faithful people*. Then have **Corporate** turn around to face **Universal** and read verse 11. Finally, have **Universal** join in with **Personal** and **Corporate** to read verse 12 together.

Follow this reading by inviting participants to discuss the distinctive benefits of personal, corporate, and universal worship of God. What are the advantages and limitations of each? This can be a small-group exercise.

Option. Use a role-play debate among the three reading groups to argue that its own format is the "best" among the three.

Ask a volunteer to read Psalm 145:13-17. Instruct participants to listen for all instances of the words *all*, *every*, and *everlasting*. Write the phrases on the board as they are spoken. Invite participants to identify what strikes them as especially powerful, and why. (*Recommended:* create your own "cheat sheet" ahead of time with correct responses to ensure that none are missed.)

Ask a volunteer to read Psalm 145:18-21. Divide participants into four groups and assign these verses, one per group: Matthew 11:28; Luke 9:23; John 3:18; and Revelation 3:20. Instruct them to discuss how their assigned verse relates to Psalm 145:18-21. Write this question on the board: "How would you describe the relationship that God calls people toward?" Allow time for ensuing whole-class discussion.

Option. Distribute the envelopes you have prepared before class per the instructions on the "He Does, We Do" facilitator exercise (it's on the activity page that you can download). Instruct participants to match the first and second parts of the verses as quickly as possible. *This is a closed-Bible speed drill!*

Into Life

Use the Lesson Context to explain the nature of Psalm 145 as an acrostic poem, with every verse or line beginning with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Say, "We're going to try doing the same with the English alphabet."

Assign each learner one or more letters of the alphabet. Distribute index cards on which participants are to write one word or short phrase that begins with their assigned letter(s) to describe an attribute of the Lord. Participants are not to write their names on the cards as you collect them. Read cards aloud.