

Adult Teaching Resources

November 6, 2016



A Time for Gratitude: Songs of Thankful People (November 6-27)

Psalm 145:1-5, 17-21 – “Justice Always Counts”

Psalm 98 – “A New Song for a Lasting Love”

Psalm 46 – “When All Else Fails”

Season of Advent (November 27-December 25)

Psalm 122 – “Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem”

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Justice Always Counts

Psalm 145:1-5, 17-21

FIT Teaching Guide

by Rick Jordan

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Before the Lesson: Make copies of the handout, “Selections from Psalm 145,” which will be used for the Information session and Transformational Exercise. Have pencils for class members.

Fellowship Question

(Use *one* of these to break the ice, to begin some discussion and lead into the study):

What is one favorite thing about one of your favorite persons?

Think of a person that you admire and respect. What is one characteristic or skill of theirs that you do not have or cannot do (yet)?

Information

One acronym that is used to help persons include a variety of styles within their prayers is ACTS. It stands for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication.

Supplication is not a word we use very much. We might say “asking” or “requesting.” (But then it would be ACTA or ACTR, neither of which have the same ring.) Thanksgiving we understand – we thank God for blessings and answered prayers. Confession, again, is fairly easy to understand. We agree with God that we are not perfect, that we are sinners. We confess our sin and accept God’s forgiveness. Adoration may need a little more unpacking. Is it praising God? Is it blessing God? Is it a state of awe before God? Today’s psalm is a psalm of adoration. No doubt, God is worthy of our adoration. This psalm offers us one model of prayer to offer such adoration.

Our psalm is Psalm 145. It is one of several psalms that are acrostics. Acrostic poems begin each line with the succeeding letter, so the first line (in an English poem) will begin with A, the second line with B, the third with C, all the way until the last line, which begins with Z. The Hebrew alphabet has 22 letters.

What do you think the reasons were for creating a poem with this style? (easier to memorize; a challenge for the poet; shows completeness – everything from A-Z; etc.)

“In the psalm there is no development of plot or building of intensity. Indeed, it is essentially static, articulating what is enduringly true of the world... What is true from beginning to

Information *continued*

end is that Yahweh securely governs, and that he can be counted on. We are given a series of affirmations that could be rearranged without disrupting the intent. The present order is necessary, however, because the poem is an acrostic... Though this is inevitably lost in translation, we may appreciate its intent. It is to assert the fullness and comprehensiveness of creation, to praise God for a world well-arranged and oriented, from A-Z. This is Israel in its most trustful, innocent, childlike faith." [Walter Brueggemann. The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary. Minneapolis: Augsburg. 1994. pp. 28f.]

So, our psalm is going to be saying much of the same thing over and over again, line after line. We will not be reading the entire psalm, but will get the gist by reviewing ten of the verses.

[Distribute the handout, "Selections from Psalm 145" and pencils.]

[Have a class member read Psalm 145:1-5.]

Let's look through this passage and circle all the verbs that have to do with the psalmist's adoration of God.

[Allow time to circle words.]

What did you come up with? Do you think these are distinct actions or are they synonyms for the same act?

Now, let's put a box around the words that describe God.

[Allow time to box words.]

What did you come up with? How specific were these words?

When you are complemented, are you satisfied with a broad stroke (like, "you are awesome") or do you prefer a more specific complement (like, "I appreciate how you are so patient with children")?

When we use adore, it is most often in a phrase such as "I adore those shoes you are wearing" or "Isn't my grandchild adorable?" How do you think adoration in prayer might be similar or different?

Douglas Steere compares prayerful adoration to our awe at a natural scene, such the view of a mountain range. "You do not want to climb the range, to photograph it, to paint it, to survey it, to quarry it, to mine it, to own it. Your one longing is to be left in quiet before it to marvel that anything on this earth could be so wonderful. Adoration is something like that. There is an ancient Hindu prayer that says simply, 'Wonderful, Wonderful, Wonderful.'" [Douglas V. Steere. Dimensions of Prayer. New York: Harper and Row. 1963. p. 59.]

When have you experienced nature in such a way that it led you to adore God?

Steere offers a second illustration - traveling with a close friend. "There has been talk, but it has now faded, and we can [travel] along mile after mile together without a word but in perfect communication - each glad for the other's presence, each glad the other is alive, each

Information *continued*

grateful to be his [or her] friend, each feeling understood, each cherishing the other.” [Ibid.]

How do you think this could be considered a form of adoration of God?

Quoting from Steere again, “The adoration of God in prayer is a mixture of gratitude and reverence and awe...Adoration in prayer is a time for God alone. George MacDonald has it in a single line, ‘It is not what God can give us, but God that we want.’ The peasant who confessed that in his prayer ‘God just looks down at me and I look up at Him’ witnesses to the same mood.” [Steere, 60.]

Have you experienced this type of prayer? If so, what was the setting? Can you share what the experience was like for you?

The psalmist insists that God is “great...and greatly to be praised.” That may seem to be “God” by definition. Of course, God is bigger and better than us and therefore worthy of praise. But one commentator says that there is a deeper meaning.

[Read or summarize the following paragraph:]

“What does it mean when the psalms praise God in His greatness and sublimity? Never in any sense are they thinking of greatness and majesty in themselves. In terms of the human body, to be outsized is to be something negative, even something grotesque. Nor do the psalms mean ‘greatness of spirit’ as we might use the expression in speaking of a great writer or thinker. What is meant...is, His plans and designs are inexhaustible...To acknowledge this greatness...is also to recognize and accept the limitations of humanity and all the rest of creation. Praising God’s greatness is necessary to reject any acknowledgement or glorification of human greatness of human sort, political or spiritual.” [Claus Westermann. The Living Psalms. Translated by J. R. Porter. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 1984. p. 225.]

How does recognizing God’s greatness keep our pride in check?

The psalmist wants this type of prayer to be passed along from generation to generation. How do we do that? How could we do that better?

In our next passage, the psalmist gives assurance of God’s care for those in need of justice, kindness, and deliverance.

[Have a class member read Psalm 145:17-21.]

The themes of distress and deliverance that we find in this section of Psalm 145 are repeated by Mary, the mother of Jesus, when the angel tells her that she will give birth to the Son of God. As she sings a song of adoration, she includes the trust that this God she adores will ultimately be the world’s savior.

[Have a class member read Luke 1:46-55.]

In this psalm and in Mary’s song, there is adoration for the greatness of God as Creator but also as Judge.

Information *continued*

“We may pause with verse 20...God’s relatedness is always two-sided: *to rescue* and *to judge*. Up to this point, this psalm (and especially vv. 8-9) has offered only the positive side. But now we have the antithetical parallel... This verse is a harsh and sobering qualification of the grand claims of the psalm. Perhaps this verse is the voice of realism: that is, creation does work within the boundaries of obedient responsibility.” [Brueggemann. 31. (author’s emphasis)]

It is fairly easy to adore a God who rescues. How can we adore a God who judges?

In verse 21, the psalmist becomes inclusive: “My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord, and all flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever.”

“Israel’s faith is rooted in the human situation in which all men are involved. Man is a historical being, who remembers the past, lives toward the future, and is called to decide and act responsibly in the present. The questions, ‘Who am I? Where have I come from? Where am I going?’ are not monopolized by a special people...[T]he God whose Name (identity) is disclosed in Israel’s history is the God upon whom all men are dependent. The meaning of existence which Yahweh lays bare in Israel’s historical experience is actually the meaning of existence in every man. Thus the invitation to praise is addressed not just to Israel, but to all peoples.” [Bernard W. Anderson. Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today. Philadelphia:Westminster. 1974. pp. 116f.]

Transformational Exercise

Adoration is a key element of our prayer life.

“Von Hugel once declared, any religion that ignores the adoration of God is like a triangle with one side left out.” [Steere, 58.]

What do you think would happen to our spiritual life if we were more intentional to include adoration in our prayers?

You may have noticed the prayer at the bottom of your handout. This is a prayer by an Old Testament professor given as a seminary class began. As we close today’s class, I invite you to read through this prayer silently. After a minute of silent prayer, we will read this prayer together out loud.

[Allow time to read the prayer in silence, then say, “*Let us pray...*” and read the prayer together.]

“We are people who must sing you, for the sake of our very lives. You are a God who must be sung by us, for the sake of your majesty and honor. And so we thank you, for lyrics that push us past our reasons, for melodies that break open our givens, for cadences that locate us home, beyond all our safe places, for tones and tunes that open our lives beyond control and our futures beyond despair. We thank you for the long parade of mothers and fathers who have sung you deep and true; We thank you for the good company of artists, poets, musicians, cantors, and instruments that sing for us and with us, toward you. We are witnesses to your mercy and splendor; We will not keep silent... ever again. Amen.” [Walter Brueggemann. *Awed to Heaven, Rooted to Earth: Prayers of Walter Brueggemann*. Edited by Edwin Searcy. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 2003. p.133.]

Comments or Questions for Rick Jordan? You may send comments to the lesson plan author at rjordan@cbfnc.org. Rick is also available to lead workshops and conferences on Christian Education, with particular emphasis on how best to use the FIT Faith model.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Why so choppy? – Why does today’s text include the first five and last five verses of a 21-verse psalm? Psalm 145 was a popular text with those who first devised the Revised Common Lectionary. The entire psalm is recommended as a reading on Independence Day. Psalm 145:1-7 is a text suggested for Year A (Proper 20); while Ps. 145:7-9, 17-21 is an option for Year A Proper 13. Psalm 145:7-14 is offered for Year A Proper 9, and 145:9-18 is an option for Year B Proper 12. Today’s text is designated as the Psalm reading for Year C, Proper 27. Some of these texts overlap, and for practical purposes, we cannot use all of them. Since the psalm is fairly long, we are studying vv. 1-5, 17-21 today, and will use the central part of the psalm at another time.

Who wrote Psalm 145? – Psalm 145, like 72 others, bears a superscription that suggests a connection to David. Because of this, the book is sometimes called “the Psalms of David,” even though other psalms are clearly attributed to other authors.

David was known for his skill with the lyre (1 Samuel 16:14-23). The KJV translation of 2 Sam. 23:1 calls him “the sweet psalmist of Israel,” though other translations are possible. Texts such as 1 Chronicles 16, 2 Chronicles 29:25-30, and Ezra 3:10 all associate David with the establishment of music as an integral part of Israel’s worship, but he is properly seen as a patron and encourager of Israel’s music and liturgy, not its sole author.

No less than 116 of the psalms have superscriptions in the Hebrew text, including 87 of the first 100. These are old traditions but not as old as the psalms themselves: they were added by later scribes and should not be considered a part of the original text. In some cases, what appears to be a superscription for one psalm may originally have been a postscript for the previous one. In the LXX, other superscriptions were added to all but the first two psalms. Some superscriptions suggest authorship; others appear to give instructions to the musicians or song leaders regarding which instruments or tune is to be played.

Among the superscriptions, 101 include attributive names, and *ledavid* appears 73 times. This doesn’t necessarily mean “by David,” however. The Hebrew prefix *l* more typically means “to” or “for,” rather than “by.” It could mean “of” in reference to a collection. Psalms are also attributed to (or for) Asaph (12), the sons of Korah (11), and Solomon (2), plus Heman, Ethan and Moses (1 each).

Steadfast love – The use of *chesed* to describe God’s steadfast love is common in the Hebrew scriptures. Genesis 24:12, 14, 27; 39:21; Exod. 15:13; 34:6; and 2 Chr. 20:21 are just a few examples from the narrative literature. The term was also a favorite of the psalmists, notably in Psalm 136, where each of the 26 verses concludes with “for his steadfast love endures forever.”

Digging Deeper *continued*

In truth – The psalmist’s assertion that God is near to “all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth” uses both repetition and the term “in truth” to stress the sincerity of one’s plea. The use of “in truth” to mean “sincerely” is also found in Isa. 10:20 and Jer. 4:2. In contrast, Isa. 48:1 speaks of those who “invoke the God of Israel, but not in truth or right,” that is, under false pretenses, and not sincerely. A similar use in Greek occurs in 1 John 3:18: “Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.” That author challenged believers to love sincerely, not merely with lip service. In Psalm 145, the faithful are urged to call on God sincerely, not merely through rote or ritual prayers.

Wordplay – Hebrew readers might note a subtle wordplay in vv. 19b-20, which begins and ends with the psalmist’s desire to bless and praise God’s name (*shem*, vv. 2-3, 21). God’s response to humans who do or don’t seek divine favor is expressed with several similar words containing the letters *shin* and *mem*, in that order. Yahweh “hears” (*shām’a*) those who call and “watches over” (*shāmar*) those who love God, but “will destroy” (*shāmad*) the wicked.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

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What does it mean to “bless God’s name”?

The author of Psalm 145, like many Hebrew compatriots, sought to “bless” God’s name. He began the psalm with a personal promise: “I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever,” and he closed it with an assertion that “all flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever.”

We normally think of a blessing as the bestowal of a benison in which the one blessing does something good for the benefit of the one being blessed. We speak of how God has blessed us with life, health, children, or the grace leading to salvation – but how could mere humans do anything for God?

The biblical writers understood that nothing we can do will make God any greater or more wonderful than God already is. What we can do is to offer God our obedience and our praise. Whether God needs our praise or not, the Hebrews believed it was gratifying to God to hear the sincere praise of God’s people, which was sometimes expressed by means of the word “bless.”

According to Deut. 8:10, Moses told the Israelites that in the Promised Land they could “eat your fill and bless the LORD your God for the good land that he has given you.”

When David led the people in bringing freewill offerings for the construction of the temple, according to 1 Chr. 29:10, he “blessed the LORD in the presence of all the assembly; David said: ‘Blessed are you, O LORD, the God of our ancestor Israel, forever and ever.’” To call God blessed is to affirm our allegiance to the source of all blessing.

The psalmists were especially fond of using the term “bless” as a euphemism for praise: “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits” (Ps. 103:2) is a familiar example. Psalm 104 begins and ends with “Bless the LORD, O my soul,” and we could cite other examples.

In the ancient world, names were so closely associated with someone’s identity that to bless God’s name was another way of expressing one’s praise to God. Thus, the writer of Psalm 145 could speak of blessing God’s name as an alternate way of saying “praise Yahweh,” which added variety to the vocabulary of praise. Likewise, the author of Psalm 96 exhorted his hearers to “Sing to the LORD, bless his name, tell of his salvation from day to day” (v. 2). In the familiar strains of Psalm 100, the psalmist invited worshipers to “Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name.”

Thus, though it may seem impossible for a human to bestow any real blessing upon God, the expression is primarily an alternate expression for giving praise to God, something we certainly can – and should – do with regularity.

Handout: Selections from Psalm 145 (NRSV)

1 I will extol you, my God and King,
and bless your name forever and ever.

2 Every day I will bless you,
and praise your name forever and ever.

3 Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;
his greatness is unsearchable.

4 One generation shall laud your works to another,
and shall declare your mighty acts.

5 On the glorious splendor of your majesty,
and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.

...

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 fulfills 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.

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

“We are people who must sing you, for the sake of our very lives. You are a God who must be sung by us, for the sake of your majesty and honor.

And so we thank you, for lyrics that push us past our reasons, for melodies that break open our givens, for cadences that locate us home, beyond all our safe places, for tones and tunes that open our lives beyond control and our futures beyond despair.

We thank you for the long parade of mothers and fathers who have sung you deep and true; We thank you for the good company of artists, poets, musicians, cantors, and instruments that sing for us and with us, toward you. We are witnesses to your mercy and splendor; We will not keep silent... ever again. Amen.”

[Walter Brueggemann. Awed to Heaven, Rooted to Earth: Prayers of Walter Brueggemann. Edited by Edwin Searcy. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 2003. p.133.]