

Unsearchable Greatness, Abundant Goodness Psalm 145

Main Idea: In his last recorded hymn in the Psalter, David magnifies the greatness and goodness of God, which should kindle in us God-centered hope, peace, and awe.

- I. Praise God for His Unsearchable Greatness (145:1-3)**
- II. Praise God for His Abundant Goodness (145:4-9)**
 - A. Commend God's goodness to the next generation (4-7)
 - B. Cherish God's goodness in salvation (8)
 - C. Consider God's goodness in creation (9)
- III. Praise God for His Kingly Greatness (145:10-13a)**
- IV. Praise God for His Satisfying Goodness (145:13b-21)**
 - A. The Lord helps the weak (14)
 - B. The Lord provides food for all creatures (15-16)
 - C. The Lord answers prayer (18-19)
 - D. The Lord protects His people (20)

Several years ago I made the decision to memorize various Psalms, in order to rejuvenate my weak devotional life. One of the first Psalms I chose was Psalm 145. Day after day, usually on my back porch, I would recite it out loud, meditate on its truths, and pray through it. I think it impacted me so much because this Psalm magnifies the greatness and goodness of God, and I need to be reminded of this daily! Why? Why does everyone need an elevated vision of God's greatness and goodness? I suppose we could give many answers, but let me just provide three. A vision of God's greatness and goodness will help us overcome (1) *despair*, (2) *anxiety*, and/or (3) *apathy*.

It's easy to *despair* or grow hopeless in this life. Negative cynicism, hopeless despair, is everywhere today. Many of these feelings grow out of a doubt in the goodness of God, and a disbelief in the greatness of God. Cynics live with a sense of "defeated weariness" (Paul Miller, *A Praying Life*, 77). They doubt if God will do anything great or good. But when you read Psalm 145 your cynicism gets attacked. Your despair gets confronted. If you will lift your eyes to this King, whose "greatness is unsearchable," then you can learn to hope again. You can learn to believe that "This is my Father's world" and I have every reason to hope. Psalm 145 is not teaching naïve optimism, but God-centered optimism.

It's also easy to be *anxious* in this life. Fearful or paralyzing anxiety robs you of joy, and turns you inward. But Psalm 145 shows us that God sustains and satisfies every living thing. He is worthy of our trust. We can rest in His care.

How about *apathy*? Psalm 145 addresses this problem, as well. One of the problems many Christians face is *familiarity with the things of God*. As a result of being around religious things, many Christians lose their awe of God. And there's nothing more dangerous than for you to lose your awe. If you don't live with a sense of awe before God, then it will negatively affect every aspect of your life. Relationships will suffer. You will spend money wrongly. You will make bad decisions. You will drift into idolatry, and more. We were made for wonder. Paul Tripp states, "Every human being has been hardwired by God to live in daily awe of God" (*A Dangerous Calling*, 117). So Psalm 145 is important, as Tripp calls this Psalm "one of the Bible's awe passages" (114). Allow this text to reignite childlike wonder in you.

So that's my prayer, as we consider this Psalm. May it confront your despair, anxiety, and apathy, and ignite God-centered hope, peace, and awe.

Consider a few introductory matters related to this awe-inspiring Psalm. Derek Kidner calls it "An Alphabet of Praise" (480). That's because Psalm 145 is an *acrostic*. That is, each verse begins with a consecutive letter in the Hebrew alphabet. This is the last of eight acrostics in the book of Psalms (see Psalms 9-10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, and 119). David penned no fewer than five of these acrostics. He obviously valued this rhetorical device. (Verse 13b provides the "nun" or "n" in the acrostic, a verse that is found in the documents discovered at Qumran, and is found in ancient translations, as well).

Psalm 145 is one of the most beautiful hymns in the Psalter. Some in the Jewish tradition believed that if one would recite it three times a day, with heart and lips, they would experience spiritual happiness and enjoy blessings in the world to come (Calvin, 271). Indeed, every believer in Christ today would certainly benefit from committing it to memory.

Consider a few more interesting features from this Psalm. This Psalm is the last Psalm in the Psalter attributed to *David*. Scan the titles of Psalm 145-150, and you will see that only Psalm 145 bears his name. Perhaps even more surprising is the fact that this is the only title in the Psalter that calls the Psalm "A Song of *Praise*" (ESV, my emphasis). Of course, others Psalms are songs of praise too, but only Psalm 145 includes the word "praise" in the superscription. In the Psalms following Psalm 145 (Ps 146-150), each Psalm is a "halleluiah Psalm." Each of these final Psalms in the psalter begins and ends with "Praise the Lord!" So you could call Psalm 145 the "Preface" or "Introduction" to the praise songs. David provides this introduction as he focuses our attention on the object of our praise. He gives an awe-inspiring description of both the *greatness of God* and the *goodness of God*, who is our *King*. We see a mingling of God's majesty and grace, righteousness and kindness, kingship and fatherly generosity. Indeed, the wonder of this Psalm revolves around David's vision of God, not his use of the Hebrew alphabet! I have chosen an (imperfect) outline that draws attention to God's greatness and goodness (for a more structural breakdown see VanGemeren, 860).

Praise God for His Unsearchable Greatness (145:1-3)

David wouldn't agree with Christopher Hitchens' book *God Is Not Great*. To the contrary, David magnifies the "unsearchable greatness" of God. God's greatness serves as "the fuel" for his praise (1-2). The tone is set in verse 1, "I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever" (ESV). David, an earthly king, recognizes that ultimately there's only one King. The power and sovereignty of earthly kings is limited, but God the King reigns over all (145:13; cf., Ps 93). The glory of earthly kings is fleeting, but God's glory endures "forever and ever" (1b). Consequently, it's fitting to "extol" God, and to "bless His name" now and forever. These expressions of praise are the first of many expressions of praise in this Psalm. David's personal praise is intended to stir up others to do the same.

In verse 2, David continues, "Every day I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever" (ESV). Perhaps you've been asked, or have asked, "What are the plans today?" "What should we do today?" We may do a number of things, but one thing we should do every day is David here and "bless the Lord." We should bless Him daily and forevermore.

Notice in both verses 1-2 the emphasis on "I will." As one joins in the song, each member of the congregation is committing to praise. Praise involves an act of the will. We must decide to praise the Lord, instead of other substitute gods. As noted in our studies of the Psalms, everyone

will praise something. It's not like Psalm 145 (or the other Psalms for that matter) are only speaking to a small subset of religious people who are interested in the topic of praise. Psalm 145 is speaking to every person that has ever lived. The question is how do you finish this sentence, "I will praise _____." We were made for praise – the praise that alone belongs to God, the King.

Can you say He is "my King?" (1a). You can if you have bowed the knee to Jesus Christ, and submitted your life to Him. He's the reigning King, who died and rose for sinners like us, who make substitute gods. The only King with all power and glory died for sinners? What kind of King does that? There's only one true saving King, and His name is Jesus.

David continues to talk about the stunning nature of God saying, "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable" (145:3, ESV). Here's a great reason to praise the Lord: the Lord is great. His greatness is unsearchable (cf., Ps 48:1; 96:4; 147:5).

"Greatness" is a word that is very overused in our day. People use the term greatness for things like deodorant, hamburgers, cities, and athletes. Some have even used this adjective and used it as part of their name, like "Alexander the Great." Sometimes you hear people say, after talking with a famous political leader, "I have been in the presence of greatness." I don't want to downplay the significance of influential and gifted people, but all human displays in greatness pale in comparison to the greatness of God. Only of God can we say, "How great thou art!" When we are extolling Him, then we can truly say, "I was in the presence of greatness."

Sometimes people wonder, "Doesn't it get old to exalt the Lord every day?" Not if you see that His greatness is *unsearchable* (cf., Eph 3:8). The best of minds from all ages, using the most advanced technology, can't come close to capturing the glory of God (Storms, "The Unsearchable Splendor of God"). Calvin says, "We can will only know Him as He chooses to make Himself known to us" (Source). For all of eternity we will marvel at His greatness. We can't fully fathom the depth of His majesty (cf., Job 5:9; 9:10; Isa 40:28).

The question is, does your praise of God do honor to His greatness? David says that God is "greatly to be praised" (3, ESV). He doesn't say, "He's worthy of half-hearted praised." Do you get more excited about great plays on the football field, or great movies, than you do at the privilege you have to give praise to God? If none compares to Him, then our praise to Him should be deeper and more passionate than our praise of other things.

Praise God for His Abundant Goodness (145:4-9)

Here's the good news. This infinitely great and majestic and powerful God is also *good*. Imagine if this great God were also *bad*! The Psalmist helps us ponder and apply aspects of God's goodness.

Commend God's goodness to the next generation (4-7). David looks ahead to the coming generations giving praise to the Lord for His greatness and goodness:

One generation will declare Your works to the next
and will proclaim Your mighty acts.
I will speak of Your splendor and glorious majesty
and Your wonderful works.
They will proclaim the power of Your awe-inspiring acts,
and I will declare Your greatness.
They will give a testimony of Your great goodness
and will joyfully sing of Your righteousness. (145:4-7)

David had no idea how many millions would declare God's praise in the coming generations! John says that no one will be able to number the people – a people from every tribe and tongue – that will sing praise unto the Savior (Rev 7:9ff).

Verse 4 shows us *the need to pass on* the story of redemption to the next generation (cf., Gen 18:19; Deut 6:1-9; Ps 78:4; Ex 12:26-27, 13:8). John Piper reminds us of our responsibility:

It is the Biblical duty of every generation of Christians to see to it that the next generation hears about the mighty acts of God. God does not drop a new Bible from heaven on every generation. He intends that the older generation will teach the newer generation to read and think and trust and obey and rejoice. It's true that God draws near personally to every new generation of believers, but he does so through the Biblical truth that they learn from the preceding generations. (Piper, "One Generation Shall Praise Your Works to Another")

Further, David tells us *what to pass on*, namely, the *saving activity of God*. In the Old Testament, these "mighty acts" (4) remind us of Exodus event, the great display of God delivering His people from bondage. In the New Testament, we have an even greater display of God's mighty act in the story of Jesus' death and resurrection. We must continue to teach the coming generations about the gospel of Jesus. John Piper states:

In addition, David tells us *how to pass on the gospel*. He doesn't merely say, "Impart truth to the next generation," though that's part of it. He says, "One generation shall "commend" your works to another (4a, ESV, "declare," HCSB), or "praise your works to another" (NKJV). This involves not just a commitment to the truth, but a love for the truth. It involves not merely transferring information, but demonstrating adoration. In other words, the next generation needs to see their parents and teachers praise God with passion. We need to say, "Taste and see that the Lord is good," as people who have found the satisfying pleasure of knowing God personally.

So we must cherish the gospel. We won't commend what we don't cherish. So verse 5 reminds us that we need to *meditate on the gospel*. We must daily ponder what God has done in redemptive history, so that our hearts may overflow with public acts of praise and proclamation. The reason the gospel doesn't get passed on to the next generation is largely due to this fact – God's people fail to fill their affections with the good news. They fail to meditate on it. Remember, we are always one generation away from losing the gospel. Meditate on it that you may know it, be edified by it, and that you may teach it to the next generation.

In verses 6, the responsibility of passing on the story of God's mighty acts continues, as David says, "I will declare Your greatness" (6b). He also includes a great vision for the coming generation, "They shall speak of the mighty of your awesome deeds" (6a, ESV). David shows us the way multiplication works. One declares, and others follow.

Verse 7 has become a personal prayer of mine for my kids. Here's *the goal of passing on the gospel* with passionate adoration: "They shall pour forth the fame of your abundant goodness and shall sing aloud of your righteousness" (145:7, ESV). David longs for the next generation to not only speak about the Lord, but to gush out praise! Do you long for this in your children, and in the children of your church – that they would pour forth the fame of God's abundant goodness? I long for a lot of things in my children – that they would do well in school, stay out of trouble, get a good job, and more. But this should be at the top of our list: that our children may pour forth praise to God! We should long for them to know the essentials of the faith. But that's not our only goal. We want them to speak of God's awesome deeds. We should long for them to pour forth the praises of God. The goal isn't to merely train up civil little kids who know Bible

answers. This Psalm is pushing us further – to train up God-exalting missionaries!

There are several ways we may teach the coming generations – through preaching, teaching, writing, singing, small groups, one-one-one discipleship, and helping them practice spiritual disciplines. But our teaching should always be infused with passion and zeal for the King. Otherwise, there's a great disconnect. Our words say one thing, but our emotions portray another. Effective discipleship involves both information and adoration.

The primary responsibility for training the next generation falls on the parents (Deut 6:4-7; Ps 78:5-7; Eph 6:1-4). The church supports this discipleship, and helps equip parents to do it better (Eph 4:11-12). Let's not cease commending God's works to the next generation!

Cherish God's goodness in salvation (8). In verses 8, David's words of praise about God's grace and compassion echoes God's self-revelation at Sinai in Exodus 34:6, which God provided to Moses in response to his prayer: "The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and great in faithful love" (Ps 145:8). It's one of the most quoted statements in the Old Testament (Kidner, 481). Jonah cited it in anger when the Ninevites repented (Jon 4:2, 11), because the reluctant missionary didn't think the Ninevites deserved God's salvation. Jonah wanted to preach to his own people, not "those people." But God's saving goodness extends to all sinners who repent (see also Neh 9:17, 31; Ps 86:15; 103:8; Joel 2:13).

We should never imagine that we have been saved by our own goodness. We have been saved because God is good. Titus says:

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the *goodness and loving kindness of God* our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but *according to his own mercy*, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being *justified by his grace* we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:3-7)

For all eternity, we will be singing of the Lord's goodness, mercy, and grace, which He has shown to us in Christ Jesus. Cherish God's goodness.

Consider God's goodness in creation (9). God's goodness extends in "common grace" to all creation. David says, "The LORD is good to everyone; His compassion rests on all He has made" (Ps 145:9). Think about the wonder of God's goodness displayed to evil men. Even the vilest of sinners – serial killers, rapists, wicked tyrants, sexually perverted, liars – get to see and experience the goodness of God in creation. Nero got to eat delicious steak. Hitler got to see the Alps. Manson saw sunsets. Pol Pot smelled flowers. Stalin breathed cool air. Each of these evil men experienced God's goodness in creation. Jesus said of the Father in Heaven, "For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt 5:45b; cf., Jam 1:17). Sadly, these men, and every other unrepentant person, only get to enjoy God's goodness for a moment. This life is a vapor. But for all who have entered into Christ, all who have become new creations in Christ Jesus, they will enjoy God's goodness for all eternity.

Praise God for His Kingly Greatness (145:10-13)

Verse 10 picks up the train of thought in verse 9. All of God's "works" should give thanks to Him for His common goodness (10a; 9b). And God's "saints" (10b, ESV) or "godly" (HCSB)

should give thanks to God for His saving goodness (10b; 9a). From there, the Psalmist describes God's kingship, using the term "kingdom" four times in verses 11-13.

In verses 11-12 David explains the verbal responsibility of the saints. They will "speak" of the glory of God's kingdom (11a). They will "declare" God's might (11b). They will "inform" people of God's mighty deeds and of the glorious splendor of His kingdom (12).

Kingdom people are talking people. We must never stop exalting our King – whose "everlasting kingdom" endures throughout all generations (145:13). His kingdom will never be overthrown from the outside by human dynasties, nor will it ever collapse from within due to poor leadership. There are no successors to God's reign! There's no "Yahweh I, II, or III!" There's just Yahweh! His reign endures forever.

Interestingly, verse 13 reappears on the lips of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4:3, when this earthly king confesses God's universal rule. Nebuchadnezzar's expression of praise to God, the true King, illustrates God's sweeping sovereignty over every kingdom of man.

When basketball superstar LeBron James returned to play for Cleveland, after leaving the city for his championship run in Miami, Cleveland fans rejoiced with hope saying, "The King is returning!" They believed King James would bring victory to the city. James may bring a championship, but the believer's hope is in the return of another King. Jesus Christ, who in His first coming, proclaimed the kingdom, and previewed the glory of the coming kingdom, will return to fulfill this biblical theme, and satisfy the believer's hope. King Jesus will set all things right, make all sad things come untrue, and put all enemies under His feet, and we will dwell in that eternal kingdom. You can, and should, trust in this King.

Praise God for His Satisfying Goodness (145:13b-21)

God is not only the sovereign King; He is also the gracious King. The following verses show how the Lord sustains the world. As the sovereign King, His rule extends throughout the entire creation. As the gracious King, He sustains His creation with kind provisions. This gracious King cares for creation in general. And this gracious King has special care for those who in relationship with Him.

Verses 13 and 17 show us the character of God from which these works of grace flow:

[The LORD is faithful in all his words
and kind in all his works.] (145:13, ESV)

The LORD is righteous in all his ways
and kind in all his works. (145:17, ESV)

God's provisions flow from His faithful and righteous, and *kind* character. In the King's kindness, He preserves His creatures, especially His people. Consider four ways in which the Lord satisfies the needs of all who look to Him.

The Lord helps the weak (14). David says, "The Lord helps all who fall; He raises up all who are oppressed" (14). The Lord's kindness is displayed in the way he restores the fallen. He "upholds" all who are falling (14a, ESV). He "raises up" the oppressed or the "bowed down" (14b, ESV). The Lord is mindful of the oppressed. He's mindful of those who are crushed in spirit. David says elsewhere, "The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit" (Ps 34:18, ESV). The weary believer can say with David, "But you, O LORD, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head" (Ps 3:3, ESV).

When I played baseball as a kid and then into high school, my dad was my coach. He was a very encouraging coach. When I played in college, he would take his vacation days to watch me play, often in the stands before the team showed up to road games! I'll never forget this support. My dad knew that my tendency was to be get down after making an error or striking out. He would often say to me, as I returned to the dugout things like, "Head up, 6! [my number]." Good dads help their sons pick their heads up. They encourage and lift. That's what our God does. We have the King who says, "Get your head up! I'm with you and for you." What kind of King is mindful of the brokenhearted, beaten, bruised? Our God is. Are you weak? Are you falling? Has sin overwhelmed you? Has someone oppressed you? Look to this God for help. He is our glory and the lifter of our heads. This is not naïve optimism; this is God-centered truth.

The Lord provides food for all creatures (15-16). David describes how all creation looks to God for provisions, "All eyes look to You, and You give them their food at the proper time" (145:15). A similar expression is found in Psalm 104 where the Psalmist describes how the eyes of every donkey, bird, cow, rock badger, lion, sea creature, and more depend on the Creator (104:27). The Lord's royal love for His creatures is expressed in intimate terms, as David goes on to say: "You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing" (145:16). The Lord opens His hand like a person feeding animals, giving them as much as they desire. The King is generous, not dispensing in small measured amounts, but providing abundantly (Goldingay, 703).

The Lord answers prayer (18-19). After making a statement about the Lord's "righteous" and "kind" character in verse 17, David rejoices in God's willingness to hear and answer the cries of His people:

The LORD is near all who call out to Him,
all who call out to Him with integrity.
He fulfills the desires of those who fear Him;
He hears their cry for help and saves them. (145:18-19)

In whatever situation, one may call out to the Lord. Whether one is in danger, hunger, in sickness, in panic, in fear – simply call out to the Lord "with integrity" (18b) or "in truth" (18b, ESV). Because God is sovereign, He's able to carry your burden. Because God is gracious, He's willing to carry your burden. Give it to Him.

The emphasis is on not wavering in your crying. In Israel's context, David may have something in mind like, "Don't cry out to the Lord for help but be secretly trusting in Baal." While we may not trust in Baal, we may trust in human ingenuity or worldly wealth to get out of a predicament, all the while "be praying about it."

The Lord is near to those who are *sincerely* seeking Him alone as one's ultimate help (cf., Jn 4:24). Don't worry about impressing God with big words and eloquence. Some think, "My prayers are not worth writing home about." That's okay because you're not writing home, but heaven (Jared Wilson, *The Pastor's Justification*, 69). Speak sincerely to the Father.

Verse 19 links with verse 18 as David speaks again of God hearing prayers. The people who call upon the Lord "with integrity" (18b) are the people who "fear Him" (19a). Those who submit to God, and walk in His ways are His people (cf., Ps 25:14). And they can cry out to God for help, knowing that God is faithful to respond. But "the haughty he knows from afar" (Ps 138:6b). How does one enter a relationship with God, and continue an intimate relationship with God? They humble themselves before the Lord (cf., Lk 14:11, 18:13-14).

Be encouraged here. Pray sincerely. Pray dependently. Pray humbly. The Lord hears His

people when they cry out to Him like this.

The Lord protects His people (20). David then adds this line about our King: “The LORD guards all those who love Him, but He destroys all the wicked” (145:20). Notice that those who receive God’s protection are the people who “love Him.” This is a simple expression of a Christian. When talking about God guarding His people by His power (1 Pet 1:5), Peter says that though we have not seen Him, “we love Him” (1 Pet 1:8). Those who love the King Jesus, belong to Him forever. Jesus will protect, guard, preserve, and sustain them – until the God of all grace brings them into His eternal Kingdom (1 Pet 5:10). This doesn’t mean His people will have an easy life, but they will have an eternally secure life (Lk 21:16-18).

The wicked shares no such assurance (20b). All who fail to submit to the King in repentance in faith will perish (cf., Ps 1:6; 104:35; 143:12; Ps 7:12-16).

Therefore, look to King Jesus. He saves sinners from the wrath to come. He graciously attends to the needs of all who look to Him. Martin Luther said of Psalm 145, “Christ is the King of the poor, afflicted, and fallen” (Source). It’s true. To enter into a saving and satisfying relationship all you need is *need*. Sadly, many don’t have it. They want to live life apart from Jesus. But those who admit their need find rest for their souls – not only rest in this life, but eternal rest in the coming Kingdom. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:3). Do you feel too afflicted to cry out for help? Too sinful? Too poor? Think again. You’re a great candidate for the King’s grace.

The Psalmist concludes with the only logical response to God’s goodness and greatness; to His sovereignty and sustaining grace: praise. He writes, “My mouth will declare Yahweh’s praise; let every living thing praise His holy name forever and ever” (145:21). Kidner says that this note of praise is “wide as mankind and as unfading as eternity” (483). David thus ends where he began (145:1-2), with a commitment to praise the Lord forever. He has given us a whole alphabet of reasons to praise the Lord! So let us join in this song of praise to our God, the King, whose goodness is abundant, and whose greatness is unsearchable.

Reflect and Discuss

1. How can Psalm 145 help us overcome the problems of anxiety, despair, and apathy?
2. How is the greatness of God expressed in this passage?
3. How is the goodness of God expressed in this passage?
4. How does Psalm 145 promote next generation discipleship?
5. What does the Psalmist say about God’s “common grace,” that is, His goodness displayed to creation in general?
6. Why should this passage encourage a person doubting God’s provision?
7. How does this passage encourage the weak and the oppressed?
8. How does this passage encourage us to pray?
9. How does Psalm 145 introduce the following Psalms in the Psalter (Ps 146-50)?
10. Take a few moments to pray through Psalm 145.