

When You Just Don't Feel Like Praising God Anymore

Do you take the creation for granted? The splendor of a sunrise, the haunting glow of a new moon suspended without ropes or supports against a dark sky, dew glistening on a grass blade, a butterfly darting past morning glories—these awesome scenes of visual delight can be missed by the dulling of our hearts in the midst of life's humdrum or pain.

But imagine you could go back to the dawn of creation and become the first man or woman. Picture yourself with a heart unfettered by sin or disguise in Eden's paradise; endowed with the skill of a master artist and wordsmith so that through drawing and verbal expression you could adroitly describe exactly the perfect and awesome grandeur laid out before you.

That's the spirit in Psalm 104: the breathless freshness of wonder in viewing God's handiwork. There are no words of response more appropriate than these: "Praise the Lord, O my soul" (v. 1).

Where's Your Focus?

Maybe you don't feel like praising Him this day. Your life seems more like a desolation than a creation. You are tired, dejected, defeated. Experience has hammered you, and a hurricane has blown through your heart, toppling every tree and power line, ripping off your roof of protection, blowing out your windows, knocking down your walls and lifting you off your foundations. And after the violent storm passed, a dark night has come—with electrical power gone and stars hidden as though the lights in heaven themselves had been puffed out as a candle in the wind.

The psalmist takes us by the hand and walks us back in time

when all was fresh and pure. He draws open the shutters of heaven and lets us look in on God at His workbench—designing and building His master work of earth and sky. In such a setting you become still and hushed, reverent again—your mind off the terrible storm that brought you such devastation.

You are now outside your own pain-filled world of sorrow and loss, caught up in God's activity, recognizing that He who creates also desires to make all things bright and beautiful for you. If He does such wonders in hanging universes and worlds in place—will He not also perform His creative work in living flesh like yours?

Why not take a step back from your despondency and get perspective by joining an anthem in praise to God for His creation? Can you offer up your heart to God by also saying, "Praise the Lord, O my soul" (v. 1). Turn your focus heavenward and in your inward self of emotions, will and intellect, consciously praise Him. Elect not to wallow in despair or complain against His ways. Don't demean His providence toward you. Acquiesce and say, "O Lord my God, You are very great! You are clothed with honor and majesty" (v. 1).

Look What the Lord Has Done

With broad brush strokes, as a painter would commence to fill a canvas with the blues, greens and browns of sky and earth, the psalmist first quickly brushes in the vast expanses in creation's tapestry (vv. 2-4). Then, swiftly moving downward in bold strokes he fills in the world with waters, mountains and valleys (vv. 5-8). Remember, as God fashions your own existence, that He has boundaries for the waters (v. 9)—your rivers, oceans, springs or wells of sorrow cannot flow beyond the limits He ordained.

Next, the psalmist takes a finer brush and etches in individual scenes and specific vignettes of creation's morning

(vv. 10-18). Before humans are introduced (v. 22) God already is thinking of you—providing resources for you to have:

1. a gladdened heart
2. a shining face
3. a sustained heart—one that makes it through the long haul (v. 15)

The psalmist rapidly completes added details on the canvas of creation (vv. 19-22) consistent with the sequence of creation days given in Genesis 1 and 2, the creation of man coming last (v. 23). How fascinating that man is introduced to the scene as working, not at play nor at rest. It's as though the whole of life can be summed up in a day—we can only do our work until evening, and then the night comes when no man can work (John 9:4). When we stay busy, rather than idle, the roaring lions of doubt or depression steal away, lie down and sleep (v. 22 compared to v. 23). Your response, please (vv. 24-35)!

God's creation completed (v. 24), the psalmist draws our attention to the vast and spacious sea where "ships go to and fro" (v. 26). The sea is a most fitting metaphor of life itself, a journey from one shore to another across an unknown expanse filled with the unpredictability of the suddenness of a storm (Mark 4:35-41) or an unknown lurking danger (v. 26)—a leviathan frolicking who with a capricious flick of his tail can make your smooth sailing a nightmare of broken relations and shattered hopes.

But the Lord does not send us out on this voyage absent of His own presence. He remains involved in our rhythms of hunger and sustenance, dread and fulfillment, death and life (vv. 27-30).

Stand back now and look at the big picture of God's creation. Are you a critic of His art? Not the psalmist. Nor the person who truly comprehends the magnitude of God's great acts. It's time for praise, awe and adoration (vv. 31-34). All others disappear (v. 35).

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