

Scripture: Psalm 92

Sermon: A Call to the Good Life

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Dear People of God,

Last week I asked six of the children at church to tell me one of the healthy habits you've been teaching them. You might be able to predict their answers. I heard:

- eat vegetables
- wash your hands
- tidy your bedroom
- brush your teeth
- Listen!

These are good things to do, no matter our age. These kinds of habits should lead us to a good life, the life of health and wholeness.

But the psalm writer brings to our attention one more good thing that's probably not on everyone's checklist: "It is good to praise the LORD." That's how this jubilant song starts. Please say it with me as a refrain throughout the message. I'll signal you by holding up my little tambourine. It is a call to the good life focused on praising the LORD.

It says in the notes after the title that this psalm was designated as a song for the Sabbath, the Jewish day of rest and worship. After the exile, in the rebuilt temple, the Levites sang this song during the morning and evening sacrifice every Saturday. Once a week, this psalm called people to the good life, a life with God at the centre.

Whenever we hear the adjective "good" in Scripture, it's meant to take us back to the beginning, when God created the world. At the end of each day of creation, God saw that it was good. The word good (tov) in Hebrew includes the concepts of being "right, pleasing and beautiful."¹ It is **right** to praise the Lord. It is **pleasing** to praise the LORD with our

¹ Marshall D. Johnson (2007) *Psalms Through the Year: Spiritual Exercises for Every Day*, p. 220.

voices, in any language, as my grandfathers did. Both of them loved to sing in church, and one of them sang in the Hosanna choir in the village of Maasland, the Netherlands. They both knew by heart the words of psalms and hymns they had learned in childhood, even after they forgot day to day happenings. It's no surprise, then, that their funeral services, eleven years and an ocean apart, both featured this opening verse from Psalm 92. It is good to praise the Lord and in Dutch: "Het is goed de Here te loven."

It is **beautiful** to praise the LORD with musical instruments, too. Harps and lyres are mentioned here, but whatever is at hand in today's world can be directed to praise—organ, piano, guitar, and drums this morning. Even our hands clapping with the rhythm.

The psalm writer ties together praise with proclaiming, and his jubilation is contagious. When shall we praise? Well, today, right now. We can begin first thing in the morning and carry on until nightfall. The sunrise wakes us up to praise the LORD, and the sunset marks another time to proclaim God's love and faithfulness.

The African Bible Commentary reminds us that song birds set a wonderful example of praise.² Through open windows, we hear their melodies at dawn: robins [American Robin Song](#) and cardinals, chickadees and finches. Maybe some of us have also heard the dusk chorus of loons, [Common Loon Calling - YouTube](#) great horned owls, and whip-poor-wills when camping in the summer or fall. It is good to praise the Lord.

The psalm writer calls us to jubilant praise for good reason. No matter our circumstances, says the Psalmist, the LORD is loving, wise, exalted and eternal. It is good to praise the LORD. In Eastertide, we notice that Jesus embodies each of these divine qualities as well.

Loving- We are used to hearing about the love of God, and when we read here "to proclaim your love [khesed] in the morning and your faithfulness at night," we may gloss over it. The Bible Project video explains that "the Hebrew word khesed ... is hard to translate into any language because it combines the ideas of love, generosity, and enduring commitment

² Nupanga Weanzana, Samuel Ngewa, Twoldemedhin Habtu and Zamani Kafang (2006) *African Bible Commentary*, p. 717.

all into one. Khesed describes an act of promisekeeping loyalty that is motivated by deep personal care.”³ This loving-kindness of our LORD is first spoken of in the stories of Moses, Miriam and Aaron. The LORD rescued His people from Egypt, where they were treated badly by cruel bosses. In a similar way, The LORD lovingly sent Jesus to rescue us from our slavery to sin and selfishness. It is good to praise the LORD. And in French: “C’est beau de louer l’Eternel.”

Wise- The psalmist says, “I sing for joy at what your hands have done. How great are your works, LORD, how profound your thoughts.” The way God planned out every detail of creation, so that every living thing has a habitat and a food supply, shows his perfect wisdom. From the tiny hummingbird nests made of dried grass to the ocean playground of the blue whale, the Lord has fashioned a wonderful world. And that’s not all. The LORD’s wisdom has worked through a long line of broken people to bring about the birth and life of Jesus.

Exalted Forever- The verse in the exact centre of this psalm is its punch line: “But You, O LORD, are **exalted forever**.” These words come right after some discussion about those who do evil and appear to be getting away with it. The psalm writer is certain that, ultimately, it is the LORD who is in the highest place. Our LORD’s exaltation is not about ego—the fact that the LORD is exalted gives us confidence that things will be set right. The New Testament echoes this in Philippians 2: “Therefore God exalted [Jesus] to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9). This groaning creation can and will be good, pleasing and beautiful once more, and ruled with justice, because of Jesus, our Lord, whose “kingdom will never end” (Luke 1:33).

³ The Bible Project video, “Character of God: Loyal Love” transcript, https://d1bsmz3sdihplr.cloudfront.net/media/Study%20Notes/Loyal%20Love_Script%20References_fi nal.pdf

The writer of Psalm 92 wants to share some observations with us about the wicked and the righteous community. Just a quick note to prevent any misunderstanding here. Comparing evildoers and righteous people in this passage might sound like a formula of how to receive God's material blessings, but that is not what it is about. The Psalm writer is talking about something much deeper—the way we thrive as a whole person and community when we centre ourselves on God through praising Him and following His ways.

The Psalm writer acknowledges that the enemies of God “flourish like grass.” Right after Easter this year, you might have noticed just how quickly the dull and dormant grass turned a vibrant green after heavy spring rains. In ancient Israel too, the flourishing of grass was a special event: a rare rain or heavy dew would bring a sudden greening of grass and plant life, but it was always short-lived under the strong Palestinian sun.⁴

Don't be tricked, the writer says. Grass is over-rated. The life cycle of wicked ways may be showy, but it is inevitably short.⁵ Think back to Psalm 1 and its reference to the chaff that the wind blows away.

Those who love God, the writer points out, flourish and proclaim God's goodness on a scale that puts grass in its place.

In contrast, he mentions two huge trees, namely, the date palm and the cedar of Lebanon. They are the images of true life we should consider. If you decided to measure the height of a tree once a week, you would not notice much change. But each year it grows a little taller and its trunk becomes a little thicker.

The palm tree described here is a giving tree. Each year, its blossoms produce sweet fruit that feeds people. A Palestinian company that sells medjool dates, says on its website that a seven-year old palm tree can produce 80-100 kilograms of fruit per year.⁶ That would be more than 160 containers (½ kilo) like this, enough for every household here today to take one home. And with care, date palms can live over 100 years.⁷

⁴ W. Dennis Tucker Jr. and Jamie A. Grant (2018) *The NIV Application Commentary*, p. 363.

⁵ Dianne Bergant (2013) *New Collegiate Bible Commentary Psalm 73-150*, p. 335.

⁶ <https://ardalkhair.ch/en/blog/our-articles/mejdool-dates-a-taste-of-tradition-and-fruit-of-the-future>

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Date_palm

The cedar of Lebanon is not a fruit tree, but it's a true evergreen that grows in the mountains. These trees can live 1000 years or longer. Their wood was used to build the temple in Solomon's day.

The righteous, as represented by these two types of steady, tall, and long lasting trees, are transplanted into the house of the LORD, where they are nourished by grace. It is good to praise the Lord. And in Yoruba: "Ohun rere ni lati máa fi ope fun Oluwa."

What's one practical way you can centre your life on the LORD? Find it in the book of Psalms. Consider making it a daily practice or habit to read one psalm. It can be out loud or silently, alone or with others, spoken or sung. Even psalms of lament usually include an element of praise and thanks, recognizing God's eternal love and wisdom. If you read them one by one, you can praise the Lord using all 150 psalms in half a year. And then, you can begin again. This pace is realistic, even if you miss a day or two and if you spread Psalm 119 over a few days. You've already made a start this morning!

When we take in the panorama that the Psalm writer sees—the work of God's hands and the way God's children "still bear fruit in old age and will stay fresh and green," —we understand that the good life is centred on the LORD. We jubilantly praise Him and eagerly proclaim His trustworthy and loving character to all who have ears to hear. The flourishing of those who praise the LORD will pass on the blessing to those around them. The children bring us their blessing each week. And the oldest seniors among us still contribute through their heartfelt singing, their wisdom, the clothing they knit, their testimonies, and their prayers.

Every generation, from young to old, **together** is a living witness of God's grace and blessing, in this place and wherever we go from here. It is good to praise the Lord and to make music to God Most High. And all God's people say, AMEN.