

God's Playlist Sermon Series  
Psalm 150  
March 22, 2026  
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Every person in arena knew it was coming. For many of us, it was the one song we wanted to hear more than any others. Sure, the Chicks have an impressive catalog of songs, from "There's Your Trouble" to "Long Time Gone" to "Not Ready to Make Nice." But there's really only one song we all wanted to hear. So, when they came out for their encore and launched into their final number, we were all ready for it. From the opening line, "Maryanne and Wanda were the best of friends..." the entire arena sang along to every word. And when they got to the power-packed punchline, the mostly female crowd screamed in unison, "It didn't take 'em long to decide...that Earl had to die!" which made me REALLY glad my name wasn't Earl.

Good bands know you save the best song for last. And so do good psalmists. After a playlist full of bangers and ballads, songs of praise and songs of lament, carols to the divine king and curses aimed at enemies, the book of Psalms ends with a knee-bowed, arms-raised tribute to the One who makes everything possible, the One who makes us possible. We end our sermon series on the psalms today with the ultimate encore song of Psalm 150.

We started a few weeks back with Psalm 1, which talked about the importance of following God's way and choosing to be obedient to God's laws instead of following our own path. The book then chronicles humanity's joy and sorrow, wonder and skepticism, gratitude and anger, either directed to God or about the God. Along the way, we are reminded to choose God over self, and if we do, we will end up where we are today, at this gushing forth of praise to God. Psalm 150 is actually the last of five psalms called the Hallelujah Psalms, because each one starts with the Hebrew word that is translated "Hallelujah" or "Praise God." These five psalms form what is known as a doxology, which literally translates to "word of glory." It's a fitting end to God's hymnal.

Here's an interesting thing about the word "Hallelujah." In the original Hebrew, it's the combination of two words: "Hallel," which means "to praise," and "yah," which was short for "Yahweh." Now get this: the word "Hallel" is a plural imperative. It's not an invitation to one person; it's a command to a group of people. So, it would not be far-fetched to translate that into English as, "Praise God, Y'all!"

I wonder if that was in the mind of Eugene Peterson when he translated this psalm for the Message. Listen to his translation: Hallelujah! Praise God in his holy house of worship, praise him under the open skies; Praise him for his acts of power, praise him for his magnificent greatness; Praise with a blast on the trumpet, praise by strumming soft strings; Praise him with castanets and dance, praise him with banjo and flute; Praise him with cymbals and a big bass drum, praise him with fiddles and mandolin. Let every living, breathing creature praise God! Hallelujah!" Do you all realize what this means? The first worship music was a bluegrass band. Praise God, y'all!

This psalm is not meant to be read; it's meant to be performed, experienced. When you see it written in its original Hebrew, each line is a little longer than the next, as if the psalm is building momentum. It reminds me of the song "One Day More," the last song of Act I in "Les Miserables." It starts with a plaintive melody and Jean Valjean singing, "One day more, another day another destiny, this never-ending road to Calvary." And then, each line adds another

character – Marius, Cosette, Eponine, Javert – until, at the end, the entire company sings, “One more dawn, one more day, one day more.” Goosebumps!

That’s the same reaction this psalm is meant to evoke. It starts with, “Praise the Lord!” which is like the conductor tapping her baton on the music stand to call the musicians to attention. The first notes start with “praise God in HIS sanctuary,” which is different than saying, “praise God in THE sanctuary.” This is THE sanctuary, but where is GOD’S sanctuary? The next line tells us: “Praise God in God’s mighty firmament,” which is an old-timey way of saying in God’s creation. So, if you do the divine math here, God’s sanctuary equals God’s creation. Everyone, everywhere, praise.

That’s really curious, because God’s creation includes places that we may not feel like praising God. The surgery waiting room. The funeral home. The empty house. The table for two where only one person sits. Sometimes it’s really easy to praise God because all the lights are green and the bank account is positive and the kids are mostly doing what their parents tell them and we woke up with nothing hurting. But what about those other times?

The book of psalms takes us on a journey of prayer, and some of those prayers include laments like “Why have you forgotten me, God?” and “Where are you, God?” and “This isn’t how it was supposed to happen, God.” The laments are what one commentator called “praises in a minor key,” because the praise commanded by this psalm does not negate or ignore the lament. If anything, the praise is made more real, more robust, by passing through the lament. Easter hallelujahs are sung most profoundly by those who have known Good Friday. We are called to “Praise God, y’all” even in the midst of the “C’mon, God, really?”

Next, the psalm moves from where to praise God to why we praise God. “Praise God for his mighty deeds; praise him according to God surpassing greatness!” Enough said there, I can’t say it any better than that. And then, the psalmist moves on to how we are to praise God. Notice it doesn’t say anything about praising God with long-winded prayers or flowery poems. It doesn’t even say to praise God with sermons, which I find slightly offensive. No, the psalmist moves right to the most original and authentic language of praise: music.

The conductor starts by inviting in the instruments. First, the trumpets announce their arrival, followed by the melodic strings of the lute and the harp. The jangly sounds of the tambourine enter in, clasped by dancers who show their praise through graceful movements. Next comes the strings – cue the banjos! – and the pipe, which could be anything from a piccolo to a bassoon...or both and everything in between! And we finish with clanging symbols, loud clashing cymbals. I’m going to throw in a gong and a kazoo and a cannon blast for good measure. Can you just hear the beautiful, chaotic cacophony of all these instruments playing together to the glory of God? It’s like the “1812 Overture” on steroids. Goosebumps!

And then, to finish it off, the psalm command us, “Let everything that breathes praise the Lord.” Everything that breathes. Not just humans but hippos and hawks and howler monkeys. Not just golden-throated choir members but the rest of us ruby-throated warblers. Not just those who know the right key but those who’ve lost the key and those who can’t find their car keys and babies who are crying because of our singing. I once got asked by a choir director if I would be willing to sing tenor, and I sheepishly agreed. He said, “Good. Sing tenor twelve miles away.” But according to Psalm 150, that still counts as praise! Let everything that breathes praise the Lord. Everyone, everywhere, praise.

This is full-bodied praise, which may seem a bit strange to us, who are mostly stiff midwestern worshippers. I tell my African-American pastor friends that the most response I get from y’all is a vigorous eye-blink, or, when you’re really feeling the Holy Spirit, a head-nod. But

we are still moving. We enter the sanctuary, we rise and sit, we wave our hands to each other, we pass the trays, we combine our voices in responses and songs, we get up to leave. We say “Hallelujah” with our hands. We say “Hallelujah” with our feet. We say “Hallelujah” with our voices. When we engage worship with all our being, we are praising the Lord, joining our souls and bodies to each other as we live out the unity of Jesus Christ.

But that’s not the end of the song. No, what we do here is only rehearsal, practice for what is to come. Because our biggest act of praise is not in this sanctuary, but in God’s sanctuary, in all the places we go when we leave this place. How do we take what we do here, the praise we offer here, the gratitude we give here, the grace we receive here, and put it into practice out there? How are we going out there and saying “Hallelujah” with our hands, “Hallelujah” with our feet, “Hallelujah” with our voices and attention and bank accounts? Your life is an instrument of praise.

The call to praise found throughout Psalm 150 takes on an even more profound meaning when placed in the worship and praise of God in the day-to-day, especially when the day-to-day means early mornings, stomach aches, worries over bills, unemployment, social injustices, travel plans, or sick relatives. And yet, even in the midst of the ordinary, the tension of Maundy Thursday, the tragedy of Good Friday, the mundane Mondays and weird Wednesdays, the call is the same. Everyone, everywhere, praise.

The book of psalms gives us a blueprint for a life of faith, a life lived to the glory of God. God knows we will not do this perfectly, which is why there are so many psalms of lament and psalms asking for forgiveness. This faith thing isn’t easy, and the journey has a lot of potholes and rest stops along the way. But if we begin where the psalms begin, by choosing God over everything else, then I trust we will end where the psalms end, with nothing but words of praise for all that God has done for us, is doing for us, and will do for us, God’s mighty deeds and surpassing greatness. Is there really any other response to the goodness and mercy of God that follows us all the days of our lives? How can we not respond this way when we think about how blessed we are simply to be known by God, to be loved by Jesus, to be surrounded with the Holy Spirit? We are God’s children, called by name, honored without measure, forgiven without punishment, humbled to serve, called to love, chosen to shine, anointed to lead, gifted to bless, and loved...loved...LOVED. Praise the Lord, y’all!