

Call to Worship

I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: “Hallelujah!” (Revelation 19:1).

Scripture: Revelation 19:1-10

Song: “To God Be the Glory”

A renowned choir performs the world’s largest virtual “Hallelujah Chorus.” The ensemble includes 300 members plus 2,000 voices worldwide. Their stirring rendition of Handel’s music written in praise to God evokes deep emotion and compels listeners to rise. Picture a huge pipe organ, white dresses, tuxedos, an orchestra, and virtual faces of every kind.

Yet, this pales in comparison to the heavenly chorus of God’s people from every nation, tribe, and language (Revelation 7:9). Among the worshippers are the 24 elders. These are not clothed in self-righteousness, but in the righteousness of Jesus imparted by God to believers. Angels are present, but the focus is on the throne of God and on Jesus, the Lamb. The multitude erupts into a celebration of praise!

If you haven’t been to church in a long while or your attendance is sporadic or your worship is more duty than adoration, don’t give up on meeting together (Hebrews 10:25). If you are the only believer at your workplace or in your family, you are not alone. You are part of a community of believers, locally and worldwide. Worship not just on Sundays but every day. Praise God not just in song but by living a life that brings Him glory.

Father, help me worship You with renewed vigor as I recall that I am not alone and as I remember what lies ahead. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Bright Morning Star

How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him (Psalm 147:1)!

Scripture: Psalm 147:1-6, 12-20

Song: “Praise Him! Praise Him!”

I might add one of these three locations to my bucket list: the Atacama Desert in Chile, Tenerife on the Canary Islands, or a nature reserve in Namibia. Far from light pollution and equipped with observatories and powerful telescopes, they offer great opportunities for stargazing. I could spend the night in a tent with an open ceiling or in a timber cabin with a glass roof. I could lie on a stargazing bed on a veranda or take an astronomer-led star walk as I consider that “[God] determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name” (Psalm 147:4).

As believers, when we take in the beauty of creation—a sunset, a waterfall, a newborn—we are reminded of God, who made the heavens and earth and all they contain. As we read the Bible and learn of God’s attributes, and as we experience Him at work in our lives and in the world, we become more aware of His goodness and greatness. Daily we are surrounded by so many reasons to praise God, and it is fitting for us to do so.

Circumstances change, but God does not (James 1:17). Whether you are lighthearted or brokenhearted right now, He remains our great and loving God who strengthens, blesses, and satisfies us and who grants us peace (Psalm 147:13-14).

Father, regardless of how I’m feeling today, You are worthy of my praise. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Heaven and Nature Sing

Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his splendor is above the earth and the heavens (Psalm 148:13).

Scripture: Psalm 148

Song: “How Great Is Our God”

As we entered the butterfly house, we walked into a tropical garden accented with a waterfall, orchids, and pitcher plants. But the main attraction was the Blue Morpho, a beautiful butterfly specimen from Costa Rica that flitted about to the delight of visitors, old and young.

Today’s psalm calls for all creation to praise the Lord. The apostle Paul said that God’s invisible qualities can be clearly seen and understood from what has been made (Romans 1:20). God made large and small creatures and their habitats. As we explore this earth and what lies beyond it, we can be filled with awe for God, the creator and sustainer of it all.

To praise God’s name is to praise His character and the sum of all His attributes. When Jesus made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, He was praised as “the king who comes in the name of the Lord” (Luke 19:38). The religious leaders objected, but Jesus quoted from Psalm 8 when He said that from the lips of children God ordained praise (Matthew 21:16) and that “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out” (Luke 19:40). Our God is worthy to be praised, and we can join His creation in declaring who He is, and we can rejoice in all that He has made.

Father, all You have made points to Your splendor and majesty, and I praise Your name today. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Mary's Song of Praise

[Mary declared,] “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior” (Luke 1:46-47).

Scripture: Luke 1:46-55

Song: “Standing on the Promises”

After a decade of longing and difficulty, my husband and I finally adopted a little girl named Abigail, whose name means “my father’s joy.” She didn’t spend nine months in my womb, but she did spend over 5,000 miles tethered to my body—on my lap or in a baby sling—and she is forever attached to my heart. We didn’t have an ultrasound, but we cherished the faxed photo on the refrigerator. We jubilantly announced her arrival. We couldn’t get enough of her, and we started seeing everything through her eyes of wonder.

Mary was awaiting a child—Jesus, the longed-for Messiah. She didn’t have everything figured out. She had to trust God and receive His guidance step by step. Already surrendered to God, she called herself “the Lord’s servant” and told the angel Gabriel, “May your word to me be fulfilled” (Luke 1:38). Because of her surrendered heart, she felt honored and joyful to serve the Lord, and she was bursting with praise. Though she lived in an obscure town, she would be remembered and blessed.

We, too, can trust and yield to God’s will. Blessing follows obedience. The first step can be hard—and the continuing as well—but it is definitely worth it. We give up our will for something bigger and better: participation in His plan.

Father, help me remember the mighty things You’ve done for me and to look at this familiar story with fresh eyes of wonder. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Zechariah's Song of Praise

[Zechariah said,] “You, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him” (Luke 1:76).

Scripture: Luke 1:68-79

Song: “Redeemed”

How good it is to head out on a hike! To trade concrete buildings and freeway noise for tall trees and birdsong! Inhaling fresh air and exhaling stress, I revel in this activity that benefits my body and brain. Sometimes I think about the people who create and maintain the trails. They work hard to map the best route, clear the trees and brush, and mark the path. They prepare the way for me and other hikers.

John the Baptist was called to prepare the way for Jesus. John's father, Zechariah, praised the Lord with unspeakable joy. For many years, he had served as a priest in the temple (Luke 1:5-7), and now John, the son he thought he'd never have, would be the prophet of the Most High. John's task was a challenge because people don't always see their need for the Savior. But it was also an honor because it brought hope. The gift of salvation shows the tender mercy and faithfulness of God.

We can prepare our own hearts for Jesus as we self-reflect, confess our sin, and make way for Him in our busy lives. And we can point others to Him, sharing our stories of His saving grace as we serve Him in our communities.

Father, thank You for Your forgiveness, mercy, light, and peace. Strengthen me as I serve You and point others to Your salvation. In Jesus' name, amen.

Help and Hope

Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God (Psalm 146:5).

Scripture: Psalm 146

Song: “My Hope Is in You”

A young boy in Ghana lived with his grandfather. One day the boy was taken away by men who forced him to work in the fishing industry in a boat on a large lake. The days were long, the nets heavy, and the depths of the water scary. He desperately wanted to go home but couldn't. Finally, after two years, an international organization rescued him, took him home to his grandfather, and continued to help him as he grew. What a relief to once again enjoy freedom and family!

God is a helper and defender. He is in charge and knows how to thwart evil plans. He embraces people who feel as though they don't belong anywhere, and He invites them into community. Our Heavenly Father is able to help us when we're wronged, when we wrong others, and when we can't see a way out. Whether we're laid low by disease, debt, or depression, He cares and lifts us up. God invites us to cast our anxieties on Him (1 Peter 5:7). We can trust that He is willing and able to help us.

Like the psalmist, we can praise Him *all* the days of our lives—as children, as young adults, and as we age. Whether we're in crisis or full of joy, we can praise Him.

Father, thank You for being my help and hope. Open my eyes to others who need You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Crescendo of Praise

Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre (Psalm 150:3).

Scripture: Psalm 149—150

Song: “Doxology”

“Tell me about your favorite concert” is a good conversation starter. Whether it was the Beatles, a bluegrass band, or Bach, people usually remember the venue and who they were with. Maybe they are quick to say, “I was there!” if the singer or band has become legendary. Perhaps they knew most of the lyrics and sang along. They might even recall joining in applause for an encore.

This passage is the grand finale of the Psalms. After God’s people returned from exile, they sang a new psalm. We can’t imagine how they felt, or perhaps we can if we think about a prodigal returning home, an addict finding freedom, or a cancer patient being cured. God’s people assembled in the sanctuary and sang a hymn of celebration, honoring God. The chorus may have continued to loop in their heads as they went to bed. They praised Him for His acts of power—creation and redemption—and for His surpassing greatness.

God’s Word invites us to praise Him with everything we’ve got—whether with tuba or kazoo, ukulele or electric guitar, or percussion of pot and spoon or timpani. We can freely move to the music, whether toe tapping or pirouetting. When a prayer is answered or a miracle is witnessed, we can sing with joy.

Father, thank You for the worship songs that play in my head throughout the week, providing timely reminders to lift my heart in praise to You. In Jesus’ name, amen.