

## SONGS OF PRAISE

BACKGROUND  
SCRIPTURE

Psalms 146–150

A VERSE TO  
REMEMBER

I will praise the  
Lord as long as I  
live;

I will sing praises  
to my God all my  
life long. (Ps. 146:2)

Daily Bible Readings			
<b>M</b>	Nov. 4	Rev. 19:1–10	The Lord God Almighty Reigns
<b>T</b>	Nov. 5	Ps. 147:1–6, 12–20	How Good to Sing God’s Praises
<b>W</b>	Nov. 6	Ps. 148	Praise God from Heaven and Earth
<b>Th</b>	Nov. 7	Luke 1:46–55	My Soul Magnifies the Lord
<b>F</b>	Nov. 8	Luke 1:68–79	Blessed Be the God of Israel
<b>Sa</b>	Nov. 9	Ps. 146	Praise the Lord, O My Soul!

## STEPPING INTO THE WORD

**I**magine how a cinematographer might create a film trailer for Psalm 146. Visualize sweeping shots of majestic landscapes representing the vastness and beauty of God’s creation. Think about the way that these shots convey a sense of awe and wonder.

Then, imagine close-ups of faces. Each close-up captures individuals who represent all of God’s diversity as it’s expressed in humanity. Each person reflects the dignity of being a creature of God’s making, showing wrinkles, tears, and eyes of joy, gratitude, and wonder. Think of a musical background for these close-up shots evoking a sense of the resilience that comes from spiritual growth and strength.

Picture a slow-motion sequence that highlights acts of compassion, justice, and liberation. The lighting might be soft and diffused with warm and vibrant colors, highlighting the positive impact of compassionate actions. Through facial expressions, we see moments of determination, empathy, and joy, conveying the depth of emotions and the significance of actions through the incredible challenges persons have faced. Maybe you see gestures between people that represent unity, solidarity, and shared power: the joining of hands, raising hands upward, or elbows linked in a spirit of community and collective efforts towards positive change.

The sound builds, timpani drums fill the tension while a major chord brings resolution to the psalmist's call to action. Daily life fills the scene, reminding you vividly of the everyday moments for which the psalmist praises God for the ordinary blessings of life. For some, that might be family scenes in all the varieties of what a family can be, sharing a meal. For others, it may be people helping one another or appreciating beauty. Imagine how this might portray the psalmist's recognition of God's presence and provision in the ordinary moments of life.

*Praise God! Let everything that breathes praise God. Living God, lead us in singing a new song of praise to you, so that your name alone is exalted. You are great and abundant in might, and your understanding is beyond measure. Open for us the liberating message of the Psalms as good news of your peace. Amen.*



## SCRIPTURE

Psalms 146; 150

**146:1** Praise the LORD!  
Praise the LORD, O my soul!

<sup>2</sup>I will praise the LORD as long as I live;  
I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

<sup>3</sup>Do not put your trust in princes,  
in mortals, in whom there is no help.

<sup>4</sup>When their breath departs, they return to the earth;  
on that very day their plans perish.

<sup>5</sup>Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,  
whose hope is in the LORD their God,

<sup>6</sup>who made heaven and earth,  
the sea, and all that is in them;

who keeps faith forever;

<sup>7</sup>who executes justice for the oppressed;  
who gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets the prisoners free;

<sup>8</sup>the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.

The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;  
the LORD loves the righteous.

<sup>9</sup>The LORD watches over the strangers;

he upholds the orphan and the widow,  
but the way of the wicked God brings to ruin.

<sup>10</sup>The LORD will reign forever,  
your God, O Zion, for all generations.  
Praise the LORD!

**150:1** Praise the LORD!  
Praise God in his sanctuary;  
praise him in his mighty firmament!  
<sup>2</sup>Praise him for mighty deeds;  
praise him according to his surpassing greatness!

<sup>3</sup>Praise him with trumpet sound;  
praise him with lute and harp!  
<sup>4</sup>Praise him with tambourine and dance;  
praise him with strings and pipe!  
<sup>5</sup>Praise him with clanging cymbals;  
praise him with loud clashing cymbals!  
<sup>6</sup>Let everything that breathes praise the LORD!  
Praise the LORD!

*Note:* Find Scripture  
Notes for this  
reading on the  
final page of the  
lesson.

## HALLELUJAH

In Psalms 146–150, the writer offers praise for God’s help and care, and for God’s wholly otherness and universality. These psalms remind readers of the essential nature of worship: to give praise to God as Creator, Sustainer, and Everlasting Breath of Life.

The psalmist begins Psalm 146 with a doubling of emphasis on “Praise the LORD! / Praise the LORD, O my soul” (Ps. 146:1). In some Hebrew manuscripts, the first word is *hallelu’yah*, “praise God!” In the *Septuagint*, the ancient Greek version of the Jewish Scriptures, Psalm 146 begins with *allelouia*. *Hallelujah* and *alleluia* are exclamations of praise that have been sung and proclaimed for generations. The psalmist finishes the opening statement with, “My soul praises the LORD” (v. 1). My *nefesh* (“soul”), my breath, my throat, my life praise the God Who Lives!

This is not a fleeting moment of praise—it endures for “as long as I live; / . . . all my life long” (v. 2). Then the psalmist shifts to sounding more like a prophet. Beginning in verse 3, they move to an exhortation, warning against giving ultimate allegiance to “princes” or “mortals, in whom there is no help” (v. 3).

Sandwiched between a heading that praises God and a conclusion that praises God, the psalmist reminds the reader there that is no human substitute for God’s help. Readers can find similar warnings about trusting in princes in other biblical texts.

For example, in Psalm 118:8–9, we read: “It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to put confidence in mortals. It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to put confidence in princes.” In Isaiah, we read, “Turn away from mortals, who have only breath in their nostrils, for of what account are they” (Isa. 2:22)? In Jeremiah, we find, “Thus says the LORD: Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the LORD” (Jer. 17:5).

Each of these examples of distrust in princes or mortals warrants its own study. Regardless of the specifics, the theme that’s reiterated is that there is no human replacement for the help, care, guidance, and glory of God. The psalmist is clear in the beginning and in the end about to whom they direct their praise: God, who is Creator, Sustainer, and Breath of Life.

**?** Check your Bible for where *hallelu’yah* appears in the ancient Hebrew manuscripts: the heading of Psalms 106; 111–113; 135; 146–150, and the conclusion of Psalms 106; 115–117; 146–150. What hymns in your church’s hymnal are based on Psalms 146 and 150? Sing these, offering praise to God.

## GOOD NEWS IN THE PSALMS

Psalms 146–150 present God as our ultimate help and source of care, being the source of life beyond what any prince or mortal could be. This is the same God proclaimed in the Gospels. We can see that in the ways the psalmist describes God as concerned with the outcast and the brokenhearted while still being the one to number the stars. This is the God to whom the psalmist sings their songs of praise and to whom the psalmist encourages us to do the same.

Spanning the greatness of God to the nearness of God, within just a few verses the psalmist names God as the one “who made the heavens and earth, the sea, and all that is in them” (Ps. 146:6), and then moves to what the Gospel-writers might call the gospel message of God as the one “executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free” (v. 7). Compare this understanding of God with Luke 4:18, where Luke’s Jesus reads the prophet Isaiah, saying, “God has sent me to proclaim release to the captives . . . to let the oppressed go free” (Luke 4:18; see Isa. 61:1–2).

The psalmist has a sense of God’s care and concern for all of God’s creation. In Psalm 147, the psalmist adds detail to God’s

concerns, saying that God gathers the outcasts, heals the brokenhearted, binds up wounds, lifts up the downtrodden, giving all creatures their food (Ps. 147:3–9). It makes sense that, in the thinking of the psalmist, if all creation benefits from God’s care and concern, then all creation would give praise to God.

In terms of praising God, Psalm 150 gives readers a who, what, where, why, and how of praise to God. Where should we praise God? In God’s sanctuary under God’s great skies (Ps. 150:1). Why should we praise God? For God’s mighty deeds and surpassing greatness (v. 2). How should we praise God? With a joyful noise: with trumpet sound, lute and harp, tambourine and dance, strings and pipe, clanging cymbals, loud clashing cymbals (vv. 3–5)! That is how we should praise God, but who should praise God? Everything that breathes (v. 6)! Let everything that breathes praise the God Who Lives! And, what should we do? Say, “Hallelujah! Praise the Living God! Amen!”

**?** How is God’s care and concern for all creation expressed in your church’s worship and ministries? Name the ways God’s care for the outcast, brokenhearted, and downtrodden is expressed through the service of your faith community. In what ways does your church praise God for ministries that address inequality, oppression, and suffering?

## STEPPING INTO THE WORLD

*Hallelujah* and *alleluia* are words of praise that are among the most widely used. Mainline Protestant hymns, Catholic hymns, gospel music, African American spirituals, and praise band music all include songs that exclaim either *hallelujah* or *alleluia*.


Why do we give praise to God instead of something else in the created world? As adults, we respect leaders who have demonstrated faithful stewardship of their offices. Why would Bible texts caution people against praising respected leaders the same way that we praise God? Being capable of recognizing the characteristics of good leadership, why not simply trust these good leaders at the same level that we give praise to God? When we can see that a leader goes to bat for us or for people that we care about, what level of praise does that warrant?

In the Jewish and Christian traditions, we may think of David, anointed by the prophet Samuel, chosen by God, and heroic as a good military leader. And yet, it would be accurate to say he did not provide care and concern for all God’s people. At times, he

scandalized and violated even those closest to him. David is a reasonably safe example to offer due to the fact that Bible stories hold him up as a model leader with undeniable flaws.

It's much riskier to dive into modern examples of leaders who are popular, because we may strongly disagree about their flaws. But the plain fact that we would so strongly disagree about the most popular leaders of our time is its own proof that none of these leaders represents all of us. Even the most powerful, charismatic, presumably caring leaders of today are incapable of being all of who they are for all of those who want their care and concern. Human leadership is part of how we work through the problems that we face. Still, invariably, we all fail.

The psalmist does not warn us against having any leaders, and history teaches us that, with a clear sense of stewardship and care for people, visionary leaders have been able to move us forward toward peace and prosperity. Unfortunately, no leader has been able to move us toward peace and prosperity for *all*. Therefore, we give our praise to God the Creator, Sustainer, and Breath of Life as our source for the peace that ultimately only God can give.

 **Print HALLELUJAH down the left side of a piece of paper to make an acrostic statement of praise. Add the attributes of God that start with those letters. For what do you praise God?**

## SCRIPTURE NOTES

*The following notes from the Church Uniform Series provide additional information about today's Scripture.*

1. Psalm 150 completes the book with a resounding call to praise God. The word *praise* is used thirteen times in just six verses. This psalm announces that all is now said and done; all that is left is simply to praise God. Nothing else matters.
2. Praise is to be given everywhere (v. 1), for God's deeds and character (v. 2), and with any means available (vv. 3–5). It concludes with a universal call to praise (v. 6) that complements the individual call to praise at the beginning of Psalm 146 (“my soul,” v. 1). The words for “soul” in 146:1 and “breathes” in 150:6 are related to each other.
3. Verse 2 continues to call for the Lord to be praised and includes the reasons for that praise: both the mighty deeds of the Lord and the Lord's surpassing greatness. The deeds are not specified, suggesting that all acts of the Lord are praiseworthy.