

You Christians can be a bit strange, you know...

Imagine if you were a person, setting foot in a church, for the very first time ever... Imagine how strange it might be...

To encounter a bunch of folk:

- who sing ...
Who else does that?
- They praise a God they cannot see;
- They pray to Him and tell Him how much they love Him; and
- you hear the name “Jesus”, over and over again...; and
- They’re an eclectic mob... – people from vastly different backgrounds and all strata of society... And yet, together, they are as one...; and
- it seems they love each other... It’s not like a sporting club, where you just put up with one another because you share a common interest – you’re seeing a genuine love;
- Fellowship, they call it – where they just delight in each other’s company...

Imagine how strange it might all feel...

I used to be part of a denominational church, and I remember a bloke who was one of the Synod leaders, gave us a bit of a lecture one day: about how, to be a seeker-friendly church, we really should ditch a lot of the stuff we do...

I remember him saying, “Where else in our culture, do people sing together???” It’s just strange. Why do we have to do that???” Why be unnecessarily different, to what people are used to?

And I remember thinking at the time,,,, “Well, I know you’re a lot higher up the tree than I am, but I really don’t think you ‘get it’.” ...

And today’s Psalm (Psalm 147) addresses “why we do what we do”,,, because the theme is about “Praising the Lord”...

Psalm 147, begins and ends, with an identical sentence. And it’s a sentence of one word.... The bible we used today, made it into 3 words “Praise the LORD” (code for) “Praise YHWH”... But the original Hebrew, is a single, compound word: Hallelujah!!!! Which means “Praise YHWH”... Hallelu- **Jah** (for YHWH)...

Praise YHWH... Why??? Why do you Christians/Disciples of Jesus do that???

V1 tells us why:

For it is good to sing praises to our God;

for it is pleasant, and a song of praise is fitting.

Why do we sing in/as a church?

Because:

- it’s good.
- it’s pleasant.
- it’s fitting – it’s the right thing to do.

It would be out-of-place, if we didn’t sing...

And the **way** we sing, will be, and **should** be very different to how our culture sing.

It's not like singing the National Anthem at a community event:

- where we do it because it's the 'done-thing';
- where not many are sure they even know all the words; and
- so we all mumble along just loud enough so that nobody else can hear us.

And it's not meant to be like a concert where the talented people are up on stage and we get carried along by the atmosphere and their excellence in performing (and sing along when we're invited to in the choruses)...

And yet, sadly, (to an extent) that is becoming a picture of "modern worship", but that isn't biblical worship.

Biblical worship, is the People of God (together), praising God with their lips... It's not about generating an "atmosphere", or a feeling of those present – it is about **all** the People of God, praising The Lord with their lips.

And the roll of a worship **leader**, is to **help** the People of God to do that (to praise God with their lips). It's not about trying to generate an "atmosphere" of worship, or to have songs that show-case me (as the worship-leader),,, It is to have songs that the congregation can all manage to sing, so that we can praise our Lord together...

In some churches, their culture will involve some kind of **written** litany, where the minister reads a bit, and then the congregation reads a bit, etc. And it's really hard to do that well – for us all to voice our praise to God at the one time, without it turning into a drone...

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up you hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise

Music – singing, overcomes that difficulty. It is a way for us to praise God with our lips / for us to do it together (in time) and to do it joyfully (without it sounding like a drone)...

Praising God, isn't something to be reluctant about, or half-hearted about... And it's not something to be embarrassed about... *I reckon one of the best worship leaders I've ever known, is a lady by the name of Anne Harley.*

- *She is tone-deaf.*
She cannot sing in tune.
and I'm pretty sure she knows it... ; and
- *She sings with immense joy;*
- *She sings with gusto;*
- *She praises God with enthusiasm and with great volume (and with no tune)...*

And she is the best worship leader, because it gives the congregation encouragement to sing.

- *Some sing loudly because they try to drown out Anne's singing;*
- *but most would sing with joy and with commitment, because "if Anne can do it, I can do it" ...*

It's about making a joyful noise to the Lord.

- it is good to sing praises to our God;
- It's pleasant;
- a song of praise is fitting;

And today's Psalm (which is a song itself BTW), goes on to explain why.

It is fitting because of:

- Who God is;
- What God does;
- how Almighty God, relates to us.

Righto:

This Psalm was written in what we call the post-exilic period. You see, the People of God had sinned grievously. And they refused to repent, and God warned them, but they continued on in their idolatry/injustice/worship of other gods and oppressing the poor...

And to punish them, God allowed a super-power (Babylon) to dish-out to their nation, a jolly good flogging. And to top it off, many of the people were then, taken away as exiles – into captivity in Babylon... And for 70 years, they were exiled to

Babylon. But God is faithful, and He had promised, that after 70 years, I'll bring you home.

Well, after 70 years of exile, God in His faithfulness, brought their children and their grandchildren back to Jerusalem.

And this is a song of praise, sung by those who were now back in the promised land.

And so, we hear verses like:

² The LORD builds up Jerusalem;
he gathers the outcasts of Israel.

They're praising God, because He is:

- rebuilding Jerusalem;
- bringing the exiles back;
- increasing security against their enemies;
- making the land productive again

All of this comes through in the song.

And they praise God, for how He relates to us...

^{V³} He heals the broken-hearted
and binds up their wounds.

(You probably know God like that - He's healed my broken heart - He's bound up my wounds)

^{V⁶} The LORD lifts up the humble [oppressed];
he casts the wicked to the ground.

And God is able to do anything, because of **Who** He is. He is the creator and sustainer of all things. He not only decided how many stars to create. And He named every one of them.

According to the NASA website, Astronomers estimate that the universe contains somewhere around 1 septillion stars. That's a 1 with 24 zeros after it. In our own galaxy (Milky Way) contains more than 100 Billion stars...

There are so many stars, that when they name them, they resort to a system of letters and numbers...

But can you see what this psalm is saying: if God knows the name of around a septillion stars, don't you realise He knows your name... Do not, for a minute, entertain the thought that He doesn't know you... He loves you. He loves you so much, He sent His Son to die for you. And so, if He knows all those stars, He knows you; and me...

You see, in the context of the world, you might feel really insignificant. But God doesn't delight in the same things that the world celebrates...

V

¹⁰ His delight is not in the strength of the horse,
nor his pleasure in the legs of a man,

Now, the strength of a horse – for them, that's an image of a war machine – it's about the terrifying military capability of a battalion of heavy horse, and its ability to break an opposing

army... It would be like a song saying today, *“God’s delight is not in the strength of a carrier group and the firepower of a missile barrage...”*

Alright, military might:– Not a problem for God.

nor his pleasure in the legs of a man

We Aussies are sports-mad. I’m not really into sports, so I sorta just watch on, perplexed with those we most admire...

I remember when Lleyton Hewitt was starting out, and he would throw tantrums and he’d be cranky and a right spoilt brat... And it seemed to me, people didn’t think much of him,,, but as soon as he won a major tournament, everyone was so proud of him – he’s one of ours... Australians love winners...

Most Australians had never heard of The America’s Cup – but when Australia II won it – the only yacht to ever beat the Americans at their own game,,, Wow – what a celebration.

We love winners:

- Any kiwi movie star who ever lived (for a short time in Australia), when they make it big in Hollywood, “They’re Australian”;
- If you win a gold medal at an Olympics – you’re really special...

You know what? That is not what sets a man/woman apart in God’s eyes...

his pleasure [is not] in the legs of a man

God doesn't choose who He loves or cares for, or takes pleasure in, based on their health/strength/beauty/success,,. If he did, He wouldn't care much for me...

¹¹ but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him,
in those who hope in his steadfast love.

That's the two F's: Faith; and Fear.

We have become a culture, that has lost its fear of God. That's been a significant change in the last 60 or 70 years. To fear God, is to respect Him / Honour Him... Most today, do not.

But a **genuine** fear of God, is coupled with "Faith". The Lord takes pleasure in those who hope in his steadfast love.

It's a picture of "faith" – hoping in God – trusting in God – knowing that He's going to come through – placing our entire confidence in Him...

When this Psalm was first written, it was about those who held on, in faith, knowing that The Lord would bring them back to their land... It was about those who **knew** God – who knew His steadfast love – a love they could depend upon. And God came through – He kept His promise – He brought them back to the land...

But this Psalm of praise, isn't limited to that one historical event. And this is the beauty of worship – it's timeless. **Today**, the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him. And The Lord takes pleasure in those who hope in his **steadfast love, today**.

The timeless nature of worship, means that **we** are filled with praise, for the hope **we** have in Jesus Christ...

Isn't this our story?

That:

- in Christ, He has saved **us**, from the captivity that **we** were in – the captivity to sin;
- He heals the broken hearted and binds up our wounds;
- He gives us peace and security;

- He lifts up the humble;
That the oppressor will be judged;

- He provides for our needs; and
That He knows us, so very well;

- His power is evident in this world today, and as much as people fret over the weather and be filled with terror that the climate's going to "get 'em"..., it is God who decides when to send the ice, and it is by His breath that he melts it, into streams of water, to water the earth...

And isn't it true, that today:

- those who do **not** fear God – those who do **not** hope in His steadfast love, are ignorant of Him.
They:

- don't know Him;
- don't know His ways; and
- they cannot, for the life of them, understand why people like you and I, are filled with praise.

You see, like the people of Israel, Christians (Disciples of Jesus), have an amazing privilege of knowing Him. And to help us to know Him better, He has given us, His Word.

V

¹⁹ He declares his word to Jacob,
his statutes and rules to Israel.

²⁰ He has not dealt thus with any other nation;
they do not know his rules.

Hallelujah!

Isn't it wonderful, that God gives us His word...

I don't know about you, but me, I am so very glad, I don't have to take a university course on ethics to know:

- what is right and wrong;
- good or evil;
- delightful or despicable...

And I don't have to rely on my feelings, as to whether something is lovely or horrible...

God gives something very valuable, to His people. It is something the world do not have (or something they reject)... His Word/rules/statutes...

And we praise God, because this is a beautiful thing...

You see, those who **don't** know/love God, the thought of His rules and statutes – to them it feels like something that's designed to yank all of the fun out of their life...

Let me tell you, if you feel like that, you don't really know God.

Just like in this Psalm, to have God's ways revealed to us:- That's something to shout "Hallelujah" about...

Being different to the ungodly – to have a hope in the goodness and faithfulness of God – a hope that those who are perishing don't have: This is something to celebrate/that makes us overflow with praise...

Tucked away in V12, is a phrase I want to highlight: "**Praise your God**".

We're not just praising some kind of god that just happens to exist somewhere out there in the ether. The praise we bring, is to YHWH, **our** God – the God we have a relationship with...

If you do not know God – if He is **not** Your God, praise will be meaningless. And it will remain meaningless until He **is** your God; and until He **is** your hope; and your salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Hallelujah. Praise the Lord.

Sentence: Singing praise to God is good; pleasant; fitting.

Scripture: Psalm 147:1-20

Location: St George

Date: 04/01/2026

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And I can't think of any better way to finish up, than to move straight into singing praise to Him.