

Pastor Steven J. Cole
Flagstaff Christian Fellowship
123 S. Beaver Street
Flagstaff, Arizona 86001
www.fcfonline.org

ALWAYS PRAISING, ALWAYS TRUSTING, ALWAYS BLESSED

Psalm 146

By

Steven J. Cole

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Always Praising, Always Trusting, Always Blessed
Psalm 146

A sermon that has impacted me as much or more than any other is one by the late Chinese church-planter, Watchman Nee, titled, "Expecting the Lord's Blessing" (in *Twelve Baskets Full* [Church Book Room, Hong Kong], 2:48-64). Nee was preaching on Jesus' miraculous feeding of the 5,000. His main point was (p. 48), "Everything in our service for the Lord is dependent on His blessing."

In the case of the feeding of the 5,000, the supply of five loaves and two fish was woefully inadequate to meet the demand. The disciples discussed trying to scrape together 200 denarii, which they did not have, but they admitted that even that would not adequately meet the need (John 6:7). But when the Lord blessed and broke the loaves and fish, there was enough to feed everyone to the full, with twelve baskets' full left over. Nee observes (p. 48), "The meeting of need is not dependent on the supply in hand, but on the blessing of the Lord resting on the supply."

Nee later explains what he means by "God's blessing" (pp. 58-59): "We mean divine activity that is not based on human activity. We mean a working of God that is not based on our work.... He cannot do the unexpected for us while we are expecting results in proportion to our own arduous efforts.... [His blessing] is expecting Him to work out of all correspondence to what we might reasonably expect." And so he asks the penetrating question (p. 49), "Do we really prize the Lord's blessing?"

When Marla and I were rearing our children, and even now that they're grown with children of their own, we pray often, "Lord, bless our children and grandchildren. Have Your hand upon them." We're asking Him to work far beyond our own imperfect skills as parents. To rear children who follow the Lord in this evil world is far more than using the right parenting techniques. You need God's blessing on your children.

The same is true in your marriage. There are some helpful techniques about how to communicate better as husbands and wives. But the key isn't using the best techniques or attending the latest seminar. The key thing is whether or not you are seeking God's blessing on your marriage. Are you asking Him to work far beyond all of your shortcomings and imperfections? I am not saying that we should ignore or excuse our weaknesses and sins. We should turn from all known sin and strive to grow in godliness. But, also, we must ask God to bless us beyond all human ability, so that He may be glorified in our earthen vessels (2 Cor. 4:7).

We don't know who wrote Psalm 146 or when it was written. Many think that it was after the Babylonian exile. It tells us how to experience God's blessing. It is the last of the Psalm beatitudes. It would be enlightening to study all of them (Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72* [IVP], 1:47, lists them: Psalms 1:1; 2:12; 32:1, 2; 33:12; 34:8; 40:4; 41:1; 65:4; 84:4, 5, 12; 89:15; 94:12; 106:3; 112:1; 119:1, 2; 127:5; 128:1, 2; 137:8, 9; 144:15, 16; 146:3). Psalm 146 tells us,

To experience God's blessing, always praise Him
and always trust Him.

This psalm (and each of Psalms 147-150), begins and ends with the exhortation, "Praise the Lord" ("Hallelujah"). We should not use *hallelujah* loosely, lest we be guilty of taking the Lord's name in vain. It should be a genuine expression of praise to the Lord. It is interesting that *hallelujah* first occurs in the Psalms in Psalm 104:35 and it only occurs 23 times in the Psalms (104:35; 105:45; 106:1, 48; 112:1; 113:1, 9; 115:18; 116:19; 117:2; 135:1, 3, 21; 146:1, 10; 147:1, 20; 148:1, 14; 149:1, 9; 150:1, 6). Also, no psalm that is labeled as a psalm of David contains *hallelujah*.

In Psalm 146:1-2, we see the psalmist always praising the Lord. In verses 3-4, he tells us in whom *not* to trust and thus, by implication, in whom always to trust. In verses 5-10, he shows that when we praise and trust in the almighty Lord, we will be blessed.

1. To receive God's blessing, always praise Him (146:1-2).

The opening "Praise the Lord" is plural, addressed to the entire congregation, but then the psalmist talks to himself, "Praise the Lord, O my soul!" Verse 2 adds a determined resolve, "I will praise the Lord while I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my

being." If the psalmist, filled with the Spirit, had to preach to himself in order to sing God's praises all of his days, then certainly we must do the same (John Calvin makes this point, *Calvin's Commentaries* [Baker], on Ps. 146:1-2, p. 285). Praising God every day as long as you live won't happen naturally or because you have a cheery disposition. It requires a God-ward focus, where you see every blessing and trial coming from His loving hand.

Also, the psalmist has to make this determined resolve to praise God as long as he is alive because, as he clearly shows (in verses 7-9), the Lord's people are not exempt from difficult trials. They are oppressed, hungry, imprisoned, blind, bowed down, strangers, fatherless, and widowed. There are wicked people in the world who persecute them (v. 9c). The apostle Paul gives a similar list (Rom. 8:35): tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and sword. Then he adds (Rom. 8:37), "But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us."

So we can't base our praise for the Lord on happy circumstances or on the mood of the moment. Praising the Lord always doesn't rest on having an upbeat, happy personality. Rather, it must be the determined choice of those who know God's love through Jesus Christ. In whatever trials or joys we may find ourselves, we must join the psalmist in preaching to ourselves, "Praise the Lord, O my soul!" We must join Paul, who from prison wrote (Phil. 4:4), "Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, rejoice!" Charles Spurgeon put it (*The Treasury of David* [Baker], 7:380), "We cannot be too firm in the holy resolve to praise God, for it is the chief end of our living and being that we should glorify God and enjoy Him forever." And, if we all will live that way each day during the week, when we gather to worship on the Lord's Day, God's praises will flood this place.

2. To receive God's blessing, always trust in Him, not in any human (146:3-4).

"Do not trust in princes, in mortal man, in whom there is no salvation. His spirit departs, he returns to the earth; in that very day his thoughts perish."

At first glance, verse 3 seems disjointed from verses 1 & 2. What is the connection between praising the Lord and not trusting

in princes (or, in modern terms, influential people)? The connection is, you will praise the one whom you trust if he helps you. If you trust a person in high places to help you and he comes through, you sing his praises. It's not wrong to give credit to the official who helped you, but you must not rob God of His rightful glory. If your trust is in the Lord, you see His hand behind what the official did, so He gets the glory. As Psalm 50:15 states, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me."

Some think that Psalm 146 was written after the Babylonian exile. The LXX adds to Psalms 146, 147, & 148 the title, "of Haggai and Zechariah," who were prophets in that era. Some of the Jews who had returned to the land were counting on the influence of the Persian King Cyrus to get the temple rebuilt. At first Cyrus granted permission, but then enemies of the Jews persuaded him to put a stop to the construction (Ezra 4:1-5).

We cannot know for certain whether or not that was the historical setting of this psalm. But the point applies to every time and place: If we trust in influential people for help, we are likely to be disappointed. Even if they come through as we hoped, we are then prone to praise them rather than the Lord. If we trust in the Lord, who can direct the hearts of kings whichever way He chooses (Prov. 21:1), then we will praise the Lord if those in high places show us favor.

In verse 3, the psalmist states his case: Trusting in influential people is misplaced, because they are mortal and any help that they may give is short-lived. Then in verse 4 he supports his case: The powerful man in whom you trust is one breath away from the grave, where he will be no help at all. There is a Hebrew word-play between *man* (Hebrew, *adam*) and *earth* (Hebrew, *adamah*). It comes from Genesis 3:19, where God pronounced the curse on Adam that he would return to the ground, "because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." It underscores the weakness of even the strongest of men. He may be a powerful prince today, but tomorrow he could be a corpse. You may have the king's favor today, but tomorrow, others could be in power that dislike you. So any trust in man is misplaced. Rather, trust in God and He will bless you.

Jeremiah 17 makes this point. First, the prophet says (17:5), "Thus says the Lord, 'Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind and makes flesh his strength, and whose heart turns away from the Lord.'" He goes on to compare this person to a bush in the desert. Then (17:7) he gives the contrast: "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord and whose trust is the Lord." He compares him to a tree planted by the water, which can endure a drought. Charles Simeon put it crisply (*Expository Outlines on the Whole Bible* [Zondervan], 6:499), "We cannot expect too little from man, or too much from God."

I read of a man who was having trouble trusting God to give ten percent regularly off the top of his paycheck to the Lord's work. (The New Testament standard, as I understand it, is not ten percent, but rather, as the Lord has prospered you, 1 Cor. 16:2.) But this man wanted to tithe, but he couldn't see how he could tithe and meet his bills. So he shared his fears with his pastor.

The pastor replied, "John, if I promise to make up the difference in your monthly bills if you should fall short, do you think you could try tithing for just one month?"

After thinking about it for a moment, John replied, "Sure, if you promise to make up any shortfall, I guess I could try tithing for one month."

The pastor mused, "Now, what do you think of that? You say you'd be willing to put your trust in a mere man like myself, who possesses so little materially, but you couldn't trust your Heavenly Father, who owns the whole universe!" John got the point and started giving faithfully off the top, trusting God to provide.

So, to receive God's blessing, always praise Him (146:1-2). To receive His blessing, do not trust in mortal man, but rather in God alone (146:3-4). Third,

3. When you trust in the all-powerful Lord, He will be your support in your weakness, and you will praise Him forever (146:5-10).

First the psalmist states his case (v. 5), that you will be blessed when you trust in the Lord. Then he supports his case (vv. 6-9), showing that the almighty, faithful Creator, comes to the aid of the weak who cast themselves upon Him. Finally (v. 10), he comes full

circle, showing that when you trust the Lord in your weakness, because He reigns forever, you will praise Him forever.

A. Statement of the case: When the almighty God is your help and your hope, you will be blessed (146:5).

“How blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God.” The title, “God of Jacob,” underscores God’s sovereign grace. Why would God choose Jacob over his brother Esau? Esau was the nicer man. Jacob was a conniving scoundrel. But God set His blessing on Jacob over Esau “so that God’s purpose according to His choice would stand” (Rom. 9:11).

You know the story: after Jacob stole his brother Esau’s birthright, he had to flee and live with Laban in Haran for 20 years. When he finally returned to the promised land, he got word that Esau was coming to meet him with 400 armed men. Weak and defenseless, Jacob panicked. He quickly divided his wives and possessions, each bearing gifts, in the hope that if the first bunch got slaughtered, the rest could somehow escape.

Then as he stayed back on the other side of the stream alone, the angel met him and wrestled with him until daybreak. When the angel told Jacob to let him go, Jacob gave that great answer (Gen. 32:26), “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” The angel blessed him, but he also touched the socket of his thigh, so that Jacob afterward walked with a limp. Jacob had seen God face to face, so that God was his only help and hope. As a result, he was weak in himself, but strong in the Lord, and thus truly blessed. Likewise, when you are weak in yourself, but the God of Jacob is your help and your hope, you will be truly blessed. Spurgeon put it (*An All Round Ministry* [Banner of Truth], p. 329), “The Lord pours most into those who are most empty of self. Those who have least of their own shall have the most of God’s.”

B. Support for the case: When you are weak and trust in the almighty, faithful God, you will be blessed because He delights to sustain the needy who trust in Him (146:6-9).

The psalmist makes four points here:

- (1) The Lord is able to bless you because He is the almighty Creator of heaven and earth (146:6a).

“Who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them” We have seen this theme repeatedly in the psalms. You can trust in God because, in contrast to the mortal “helpers” of verses 3-4, the Lord is the almighty Creator. The sea, for the Hebrews, often connotes that which is dark and threatening. But, God made it, too, and thus He controls it. He is Lord of heaven and earth.

- (2) The Lord is able to bless you because He is forever faithful (146:6b).

He “keeps faith forever.” He never goes back on His covenant promises. So, as the writer of Hebrews (10:23) exhorts, “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.”

- (3) The Lord is able to bless you because He delights to sustain the weak and needy (146:7-9).

The psalmist gives a quick list of people in dire straits whom the Lord sustains or delivers. Five times in rapid fire, he puts “the Lord” (“Yahweh”) in the emphatic position to apply in specific fashion the general truth that the almighty Creator is also the sustainer of the weak and needy (Willem VanGemeren, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. by Frank Gaebelin [Zondervan], 5:866). He mentions eight things:

First, the Lord “executes justice for the oppressed” (146:7a). Often, wicked, powerful men oppress God’s people. In His inscrutable purposes, God often delays judgment, as the Book of Revelation shows (see Rev. 6:10). But that same book shows that although judgment may be delayed, it is 100 percent certain. All wrongs will be righted. No oppressor will escape.

Second, the Lord “gives food to the hungry” (146:7b). We saw this in Psalm 145:15-16, that the Lord provides food for all of His creatures. Thus we can trust Him to provide for our needs.

Third, “the Lord sets the prisoners free” (146:7c). They may be imprisoned unjustly, such as Joseph or Peter, or due to their own rebellion (Ps. 107:10-16). It also could refer to those who are imprisoned by various sins or guilt or troubling situations beyond their ability to break free. The Lord is able to deliver the prisoners, no matter how securely the enemy guards them.

Fourth, “the Lord opens the eyes of the blind” (146:8a). Although there are no cases of the blind being healed in the Old Testament, the Lord told Moses (Exod. 4:11), “Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?” Isaiah 35:5 predicts of Messiah, “Then the eyes of the blind will be opened,” which Jesus referred to when He gave assurance to John the Baptist that He was the Messiah (Matt. 11:5). Interestingly, John was imprisoned, but not delivered! But he will see God’s justice on the wicked Herod who executed him.

Fifth, “the Lord raises up those who are bowed down” (146:8b). We saw this in Psalm 145:14. Whatever your burden, cast it upon the Lord and He will lift you up. Even if you are bowed down with sin and guilt, bring it to the cross and plead the blood of Jesus. He is the friend of sinners!

Sixth, “the Lord loves the righteous” (146:8c). Why is this in the midst of a list of people with overwhelming problems? Because the righteous are often oppressed and persecuted because they follow the Lord. But as Jesus said (Matt. 5:10), “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Seventh, “the Lord protects the strangers” (146:9a). Often, those who are foreigners are shunned or ridiculed or discriminated against. They feel lonely and as if no one cares for them. But the Lord cares for and protects them.

Eighth, “the Lord supports the fatherless and the widow” (146:9b). This is not asserting that orphans and widows are never oppressed or even killed (see Ps. 94:6; Isa. 10:2). But it is to say that such helpless victims never suffer apart from God’s permissive will, and that He cares especially for those whom the ruthless trample. As we saw at the head of the list, the Lord will execute justice for all the oppressed in His time.

So the psalmist’s point is that when we are weak and needy, we should trust in the Lord to bless us. Charles Simeon (*ibid.*, 6:501) wrote, “Let nothing, on the one hand, be deemed too great to carry to him; nor, on the other hand, account any thing so small that you may engage in it without his aid.”

So the psalmist in this section has said, (1), that the Lord is able to bless you because He is the almighty Creator; (2), He is forever faithful; (3), He delights to sustain the weak and needy.

(4) The Lord is able to bless you because He thwarts the way of the wicked (146:9c).

Spurgeon put it (*Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* [Pilgrim Publications], 40:70), "Where they looked for joy, they experienced disappointment; where they expected success, they met with defeat; and whereas they thought to heap to themselves pleasures according to their lusts, they find that they have only increased their misery." Or, as Isaiah (48:22) succinctly states, "'There is no peace for the wicked,' says the Lord."

The psalmist has stated his case, that you will be blessed when you trust the almighty God as your help and your hope. He has supported his case by showing that you will be blessed when you trust in the almighty, faithful God, because He delights to sustain the needy who cry out to Him. Then he wraps up his case by coming full circle:

C. The Lord will reign forever; therefore, praise Him (146:10).

"The Lord will reign forever, your God, O Zion, to all generations. Praise the Lord!" Wicked people may think that God does not reign, but the Lord scoffs at them (Ps. 2:1-4). This God who reigns is *our* God and we are His covenant people. Therefore, our praise should begin here on earth, as long as we have life and breath (146:2), and will continue forever.

Conclusion

To come back to the opening question, do you want God's blessing in your life? If so, always praise Him and always trust Him. We especially learn to praise and trust Him when He brings us into overwhelming situations that are beyond our ability. Five loaves and two fish to feed 5,000 hungry men, plus women and children? No way—unless you give your little to the Lord and ask Him to bless it. Then you'll praise Him and He even makes sure that you carry away a full basket of leftovers!

Application Questions

1. When the psalmist exhorts us to praise the Lord, does he mean that we should keep repeating that phrase over and over? If not, what does he mean?
2. How do we find the balance between “not trusting in princes” and properly using the means that God provides? Is it wrong to solicit the help of a government official?
3. “The Lord sets the prisoners free,” yet many of His saints (such as John the Baptist) have died in prison. How do we reconcile this seeming contradiction?
4. Some godly people seem to be blessed more than others. Is this due to human factors or to God’s sovereignty alone? What human factors hinder or open the way for God’s blessing?

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