

# Praise God in His Sanctuary

## All the Way Up to Heaven

*God gifted three people in the Lampel family with singing voices. Mom was a soprano in the choir, and, in her young-adult years, a favorite soloist in the congregation.*

My brother was in every choir while growing up, and went early into the adult choir. Later, in college, he studied voice. And I passed through all those same choirs in the church, and remember fondly the elderly ladies who would choose a spot in their pew so as to hear my voice during the singing of the hymns. Yes, God was generous to three members of our singing family.

Then there was Dad.

One of my strongest, most vivid recollections of childhood worship services in the old Baptist Temple on Second Street is of my dad singing hymns. This memory springs immediately to mind whenever I am around people who will not participate in the singing of hymns, claiming they haven't a voice for singing.

Dad had no voice for singing. He may have been singing the same words, but the 16-tone discordant melodies that sprang from his lips bore no relationship whatsoever with what others around him were

singing. If we were all reading the notes from off the printed page, surely Dad was speaking in tongues.

In addition, Dad had a peculiar, *physical* way of singing. He could not keep his right hand still. From the opening measure, his hand (with palm flat and fingers aligned) would wave in rhythm at his side, keeping a steady—if not wholly accurate—beat until the final “Amen.”

I confess that back then—back when I was young and pews were made of hard wood—I was more than a little embarrassed by my dad's singing. At the time, I wished he would respect the difficulty we were all having staying on the correct note while his more alien notes blared in our ears. I desperately wished he would tone it down a little so that God wouldn't be distracted from hearing our more pleasing, melodious sounds.

But then, that was back when I was an idiot.

Now I realize that of the two of us, Dad's song was probably the one making it all the way up to heaven and the ears of our God. You see, Dad sang from his heart—full-throated, with abandon, from his very soul. And that's the sound that is pleasing to God. Just as God's *vision* is unique, seeing people differently than man, so He also *hears* people in a way all His own. When God looks upon an individual, His gaze is not distracted by surface trappings, by artifice and appearance, but it burrows deep, all the way to the heart. Just so, when God listens for the uplifted song, He listens not for pristine tonality, for melodic purity, but for the stirrings of a truthful and sincere heart.

Maybe Dad realized that there are no excuses for not lifting our voice in praise. Maybe he realized that no trying circumstance, no disappointment, no peculiar arrangement of vocal chords is reason to deny God His adoration. Maybe Dad understood that God honors honesty over beauty, discordant clarity over magnificent ambiguity.

Or maybe Dad just loved his God.



Sing to the Lord a  
new song



# The Object of Our Praise

O Lord God Almighty, not the God of philosophers and the wise but the God of the prophets and the apostles; and better than all, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, may I express Thee unblamed? They that know Thee not may call upon Thee as other

than Thou art, and so worship not Thee but a creature of their own fancy; therefore enlighten our minds that we may know Thee as Thou art, so that we may perfectly love Thee and worthily praise Thee. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (A. W. Tozer)

The essential beginning of praise is for the individual to know the *object* of that praise. It is not enough to know that God is; to properly praise Him, we must know *who* He is. And after we know who He is, we can do little else but praise Him.

Praise need not be put to a tune. Song is, indeed, a comfortable and fitting vehicle for praise—especially since our guidebook for praise, the Psalms, is essentially a hymnal. But heart-felt praise provides its own tune, and does not require a man-made melody.

So David blessed the Lord in the sight of all the assembly; and David said, "Blessed are You, O Lord God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O Lord, and You exalt Yourself as head over all." 1 Chronicles 29:10-11

Knowing who God is does not necessarily mean one can paint His portrait. God the Father—even with His gracious accessibility to those who call upon His name—remains absolute, unimaginable holiness. When Isaiah found himself in the very throne room of God, he just crumpled into a heap and cried out, "I am about to die!" He was unable to describe God Himself; like John in the Revelation, Isaiah could only describe the *glory* of God's presence—not His actual appearance.

In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he

covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said,

"Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory."

And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Isaiah 6:1-4

But isn't that precisely who God is: holiness. He didn't one day say, "Okay. Even with the sin of humankind, I think I'll change my mind and permit you to come into my presence." No, He said, "I permit you to come into my presence—but only through Christ. On your own, you could not possibly bear my presence; but bathed in the blood of My Son, you can."

True words of praise, whether spoken or sung, do not talk *about* praise; they do not tell others to praise; neither do they speak of how profitable praise is. True words of praise do nothing more or less than speak words of adoration to God. For example, the following line from a popular chorus addresses God directly, but only speaks *about* praise:

*We are here to praise You,  
Lift our hearts and sing.*

There's nothing wrong with that, but it's not yet real praise. Another chorus encourages others to bow down in worship:

*O, what a mystery, meekness and  
majesty;  
Bow down and worship for this is your  
God.*

Again, profitable instruction, but not real, direct adoration, as is the following:

*You are almighty God, Savior and Lord;  
Wonderful Counselor, You are the Lord.  
And I praise Your name.  
And I praise Your name.*

None of this is meant to restrict our words of praise—only to develop in us a more informed sense of what we are saying when we address our God. Sloppy, haphazard worship is worth little; it bespeaks an inattentive heart and mind. It betrays how little we actually think about what we say to Him.

Our hymns and choruses are a valuable, useful, sometimes edifying component to our worship—be it corporate or private. But sometimes they are billed as something they are not. Begin paying more attention to the nature of the hymns and choruses sung in the worship services of which you are a part. What are they saying? Beyond the text itself, what is the purpose of each hymn? Is it really appropriate for that moment in the worship? In other words, if the congregation is supposed to be praising God, does the text actually do that? Put another way, what is the direction of the hymn? Is it vertical (up to God), or horizontal (across to believers or the unsaved)? A true song of praise and adoration will always have a vertical direction.

*Exalted, O Lord, in  
Your strength*

*Holy God, we praise Thy name; Lord of all, we bow before Thee;  
All on earth Thy scepter claim, all in heav'n above adore Thee.  
Infinite Thy vast domain, everlasting is Thy reign.*

*Hark, the loud celestial hymn angel choirs above are raising;  
Cherubim and Seraphim, in unceasing chorus praising,  
Fill the heav'ns with sweet accord: Holy, holy, holy Lord.*

*Lo! the apostolic train joins the sacred name to hallow;  
Prophets swell the glad refrain, and the white-robed martyrs follow;  
And, from morn to set of sun, through the Church the song goes on.*

*Holy Father, Holy Son, Holy Spirit, Three we name Thee;  
While in essence only One, undivided God we claim Thee,  
And adoring bend the knee, while we sing our praise to Thee. Amen.*

*(Te Deum, ca. 4<sup>th</sup> Century)*

That our idea of God correspond as nearly as possible to the true being of God is of immense importance to us. Compared with our actual thoughts about Him, our creedal statements are of little consequence. Our real idea of God may lie buried under the rubbish of conventional religious notions and may require an intelligent and vigorous search before it is finally unearthed and exposed for what it is. Only after an ordeal of painful self-probing are we likely to discover what we actually believe about God. (Tozer)

## The Restoration of Praise

No matter how experienced in the Christian faith we might be, no matter how “spiritual,” no matter how eager we are to do and think right—no matter the quality of our relationship with God, there will always be those times when we have set so many bricks into the wall that stands between ourselves and God that we imagine nothing will ever break through.

Even the apostle Paul wrote of his frustration over times when, try as he might, there was a disconnect between his actions and God’s will for his life.

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man,

but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Romans 7:18-24

Even in the believer, evil will always be present in the flesh; only on the day when we are given a new body will that inconvenient tenant vacate the premises. And no matter how Spiritually mature we may be, there will always come those moments when we feel that in our life darkness has overwhelmed light—times when, even though we know better, the presence of God feels more distant, and unresponsive.

Sometimes we know He is near, but we have no words for the Father. Sometimes the anger and brutality and callousness of this world have become so fiercely imbedded in our lives that we are left numb from the neck up. We want to reach up and caress the grace of a loving God—but even that seems impossible; the scar tissue is too thick, too desensitized.

In those times of apparent alienation all we can do is worship. There are no tricks, no magical formulas, no incantations to miraculously brighten our step and our outlook. There are times in our life when there is no earthly remedy for our condition. All we can do is worship. All we can do is fall to our knees, press our face to the ground, and declare the goodness and holiness of our God.



Then the healing begins. Then the bricks and stones and carefully troweled mortar of that wall begin to disintegrate and tumble to the earth. Then the piercing light of God’s forgiving grace once again can pour through to restore the relationship that has fallen into such bad repair. Flesh will never have the answer to its distance from God. Our efforts to dismantle the wall have been in vain. But, on our knees, declaring His sovereignty in our praise, we have given God the opportunity to break through the wall from *His* side.

The next time the only words you have for your heavenly Father are “I’m sorry,” the next time your head feels so numb that you can barely call upon His name, just worship Him. Approach the Father in the blood of His Son and call out His greatness. And when even *that* seems impossible, open the Psalms and read some of God’s words back to Him. Praise Him with the words He Himself set down for His glory.

And be restored.

I call to the Lord, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies.

*Sing praise to God who reigns above,  
the God of all creation,  
The God of power, the God of love,  
the God of our salvation;  
With healing balm my soul He fills,  
and every faithless murmur stills:  
To God all praise and glory.*

*What God’s almighty pow’r hath made,  
His gracious mercy keepeth;  
By morning glow or evening shade  
His watchful eye ne’er sleepeth;  
Within the kingdom of His might,  
lo! all is just and all is right:  
To God all praise and glory.*

*The Lord is never far away,  
but, through all grief distressing,  
An ever-present help and stay,  
our peace, and joy, and blessing;  
As with a mother’s tender hand,  
He leads His own, His chosen band:  
To God all praise and glory.*

*Thus, all my toilsome way along,  
I sing aloud Thy praises,  
That men may hear the grateful song  
my voice unwearied raises,  
Be joyful in the Lord, my heart,  
both soul and body bear your part:  
To God all praise and glory. (Johann J. Schütz)*

Being able to praise God when that is the last thing one feels like doing has a lot to do with grace. It is *grace* that permits us to draw near to God when we are at our lowest—at those times when we are feeling the least spiritual.

# The Loveliness of Praise

**L**ittle in our experience comes without practice. God gifts us with skills and talents for various pursuits, but without regular practice they soon wither and fade. With practice, we are better today than we were yesterday; without practice, today is but a fading memory of what we once were.



There are many reasons why we should worship and praise our God. Topping the list, of course, is that He has commanded us to. But maybe the second reason, before any others, would be that we praise

God because we find Him there. And the more time we spend with God, the more practiced we become in His ways. His vocabulary begins to replace and overshadow the vocabulary of this darkened age; His bright and shining Spirit becomes our beacon, replacing the tarnished headlamps of earthbound society; His pervasive love becomes the glue that bonds us not only to Him, but to others belonging to Him.

One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all

the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple. Psalm 27:4 kjv

Practice—in this case—*almost* makes perfect. For those who love the Lord, heaven is brought nearer by practicing here and now that which will be our eternal occupation. Times of struggle and times stained by the occasional ugliness of the earth’s system are relieved by practicing what we will be doing once we have risen into God’s very presence. Or did you think you would be lounging lazily in a golden

I have loved the habitation of your house, O Lord, and the place where you dwell.

palace, sipping iced tea for eternity? Then you haven't read the job description:

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice,

"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing."

And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all

things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever."

And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshiped.

Revelation 5:11-14



There is a pristine rightness about dwelling in His praise. As with so many things of God, it is reciprocal: The words of our praise emanate from His Spirit; as we praise, His glory fills our sight and pushes aside encumbrances; as our focus

dwells on Him, our own spirit is quickened into more creative praise; with this, He showers us with even more of His blessings—including more words of praise. It is in praise that we see the lovely attributes of God: His wisdom, His righteousness, His mercy. It is in praise that we see God as He truly is—not as the world paints Him, but as He paints Himself.

How blessed is the one whom You choose and bring near to You To dwell in Your courts.

We will be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, Your holy temple. Psalm 65:4

God of all grace, whose thoughts toward us are ever thoughts of peace and not of evil, give us hearts to believe that we are accepted in the Beloved; and give us minds to admire that perfection of moral wisdom which found a way to preserve the integrity of heaven and yet receive us there. We are astonished and marvel that one so holy and dread should invite us into Thy banqueting house and cause love to be the banner over us. We cannot express the gratitude we feel, but look Thou on our hearts and read it there. Amen. (Tozer)

*Light of the world, we hail Thee, flushing the eastern skies;  
Never shall darkness veil Thee again from human eyes;  
Too long, alas, with-holden, now spread from shore to shore;  
Thy light, so glad and golden, shall set on earth no more.*

*Light of the world, Thy beauty steals into every heart,  
And glorifies with duty life's poorest, humblest part;  
Thou robest in Thy splendor the simple ways of men,  
And helpst them to render light back to Thee again.*

*Light of the world, illumine this darkened earth of Thine,  
Till everything that's human be filled with what's divine;  
Till every tongue and nation, from sin's dominion free,  
Rise in the new creation which springs from love for Thee.  
(John S. B. Monsell)*

I will bless the Lord at all times;

His praise shall continually be in my mouth.

# The Release of Praise

Music is both an expression and a source of pleasure, and the pleasure that is purest and nearest to God is the pleasure of love. Hell is a place of no pleasure because there is no love there. Heaven is full of music because it is the place where pleasures of holy love abound... It is the nature of love that it cannot lie quiescent. It is active, creative, and benign.

The love of God is one of the great realities of the universe, a pillar upon which the hope of the world rests. But it is a personal, intimate thing, too. God does not love populations, He loves people.

He loves not masses, but men. He loves us all with a mighty love that has no beginning and can have no end.

In Christian experience there is a highly satisfying love content that distinguishes it from all other religions and elevates it to heights far beyond even the purest and noblest philosophy. This love content is more than a thing; it is God Himself in the midst of His Church singing over His people. True Christian joy is the heart's harmonious response to the Lord's song of love. (Tozer)

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.

There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.

Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. Psalm 19:1-4a niv

**D**f winter, the season in which we still dwell, is the time for quiet introspection, then surely spring is the time for abandoned praise. If winter is when the earth sleeps in its annual Sabbath, then spring is when all joy bursts forth as a result.

Come spring the wrens have returned, the males staking their claims on the houses placed around the property and making their preparations for coaxing a female to make a home with them. Between trips shuttling twigs from the ground to the interior of the house, the tiny wren will pause upon a nearby branch to lift his vibrant song to the sky.

Now the lilting melodies of the meadowlark join with the ratcheting calls of the pheasant and wild turkey. The mockingbird and brown thrasher fill the air with their glorious, variegated songs so energetically pronounced.

The robins, too, add their simple voice to the chorus, while they pull up worms from the soil and build their mud-lined nests for the family that will soon be bursting its seams.

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples." But Jesus answered, "I

tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!" Luke 19:39-40

The hard truth may be that, if their songs were translated, those birds would simply be giving voice to the more mundane necessities of life. The small wren in his full-voiced melody may only be saying, "Where *are* you? I'm lonely!" The mockingbird may really be saying, "Oh yeah! Well, take *this!*" And the robin may simply be muttering to himself, "Now where is that worm? He was here just a minute ago."

But if the true worth of an utterance is the emotion it stirs in the breast, then this winged chorus is indeed lifting praises to their creator. One cannot stand in the midst of this choir without feeling himself in God's cathedral. As the air is filled with their rejoicing, the human heart is overwhelmed with praise and adoration of the One who filled the earth with so many good things.



In June of 1997 Jacques Cousteau, the French explorer, filmmaker and environmentalist, died. Eighty-seven years old at the time of his death in Paris, he had been in failing health for some time. Most people—especially Americans—probably know Cousteau best from his television specials about life in the seas.

One news article contained a striking quotation from the statement about his death that came from the Cousteau Foundation: "Jacques-Yves Cousteau has rejoined the World of Silence." The reference to the "world of silence" is from one of Cousteau's most noted documentaries, "The Silent World."

Now, I know very little about M. Cousteau beyond his public persona. I know he helped invent the aqua lung (scuba gear) shortly after World War Two—a war in which he spied for the French Resistance, and consequently received the Legion of Honor, France's highest honor. But more than that I know little more than what I've seen on television—and I certainly haven't a clue as to where he is spending eternity.

The announcement from his foundation, poetic and well-meaning as it may be, was a sharp reminder that, at least in the eyes of those who knew him, Cousteau will not be enjoying the same eternity as I.

As much as I may enjoy the peace and quietude of life in the country, I had better get used to some loud, foot stompin', window shattering, joyous worship and praise—because that is precisely how I will be spending eternity. Eternity with God will not be a sterile, hushed existence akin to that suffered by monks in their isolated cells. Frankly, I believe it will be more like a rock concert held in Yankee Stadium. At the center of it all will be the Lord God sitting upon His throne, and surrounding that throne will be thousands and millions and billions of saints and angels lifting up their voices in loud adoration and praise:

"Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created." Revelation 4:11

Hallelujah! Amen.



Those Sunday morning and evening memories from oh, so long ago, still color my life. I can still smell the old church sanctuary on a Sunday morning, the air bright with daylight and aftershave. I can still smell the humid closeness of the evening service in the thick of a Midwestern summer, the air heavy with old wood, old carpet, and fading cologne mixed with perspiration. No matter the temperature, Dad would always wear his suit coat in the morning, but might remove it for the more

informal evening service (the tie would remain).

The joy of praise, in a conservative Baptist church in the '50s and '60s, was more quietly visceral than explosive; our worship was subdued, but no less real than that of some more dynamic sects today. There were fewer "choruses," and more "old" hymns sung from dog-eared hymnals. On Sunday mornings God would be serenaded by the old standards of corporate worship—"Come, Thou Almighty King," "Holy, Holy, Holy," "All Hail the Power"—but on Sunday evenings, with their warm

informality, He probably just leaned back and listened as a spectator while we sang more to each other: "Love Lifted Me," "The Solid Rock," "There Shall be Showers of Blessing," and "Tell Me the Story of Jesus."

But no matter the textual direction of the songs we would sing, I will always associate Dad's energetic, discordant hymn-singing with true praise, for it was delivered honestly, vigorously, and was always energized by a deep love for the Lord.

And that is the true essence of praise—praise that reaches all the way up to heaven.

# Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!

*Almighty One! I bend in dust before Thee;  
Even so veiled cherubs bend;  
In calm and still devotion I adore Thee,  
All-wise, all-present Friend!*

*Thou to the earth its emerald robes hast given,  
Or curtained it in snow;  
And the bright sun, and the soft moon in heaven,  
Before Thy presence bow.*

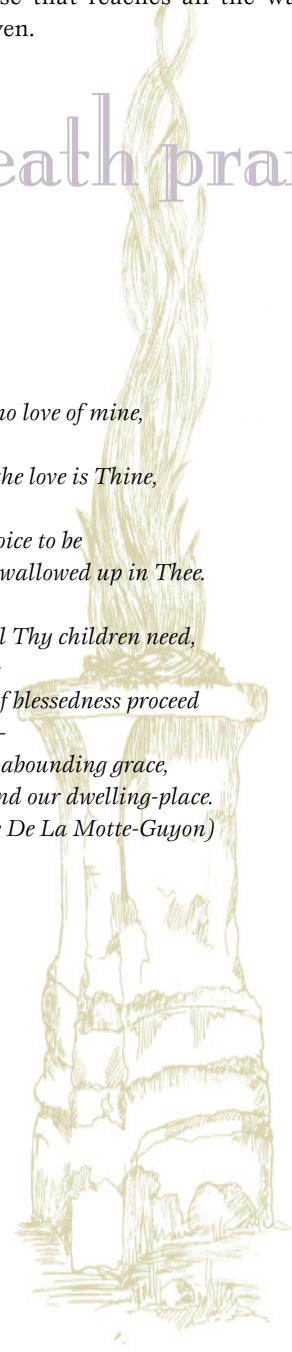
*Thou Power sublime! whose throne is firmly seated  
On stars and glowing suns;  
O, could I praise Thee,—could my soul, elated,  
Waft Thee seraphic tones,—  
Had I the lyres of angels,—could I bring Thee  
An offering worthy Thee,—  
In what bright notes of glory would I sing Thee,  
Blest notes of ecstasy!*

*Eternity! Eternity! how solemn,  
How terrible the sound!  
Here, leaning on thy promises,—a column  
Of strength,—may I be found,  
O, let my heart be ever Thine, while beating,  
As when 'twill cease to beat!  
Be Thou my portion, till that awful meeting  
When I my God shall greet!*

*(Sir John Bowring)*

*I love my God, but with no love of mine,  
For I have none to give;  
I love thee, Lord; but all the love is Thine,  
For by Thy life I live.  
I am as nothing, and rejoice to be  
Emptied, and lost, and swallowed up in Thee.*

*Thou, Lord, alone, art all Thy children need,  
And there is none beside;  
From Thee the streams of blessedness proceed  
In Thee the blest abide,—  
Fountain of life, and all-abounding grace,  
Our source, our center, and our dwelling-place.*  
*(Jeanne Marie De La Motte-Guyon)*





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