

What should be your ultimate priority, most important to do? Not raise a family, save souls, or fix society. Above all else, worship God! Remember the slogan *soli Deo gloria*, WCF #1 (“man’s chief end”), 1 Cor 10.31, Rom 11.36; 1 Pet 4.11. “God’s supreme end in planning, purchasing, and applying salvation is His own glory; therefore the chief end and intention of those who have received God’s grace in Christ is to bring glory to Him” (Cairns, DTT, “SDG”). “To glorify God is to acknowledge Him, praise Him, and to make Him known unto others with love, joy, and reverence, in response to beholding His perfections” (à Brakel, TCRS 3.245).

The whole psalter, esp. in its climax (Psa 147 in particular), help us do this. Psalm 147 is like a basket made of bands of 3 colors. First, it has 3 themes (the ministry of praise, God as Creator, God as Caretaker). Second, it has 3 movements (these depend on Him: stars, then atmospheric and earthly creatures, then His chosen people). We note these tricolored bands, both ways, in this exposition, using all 20 verses, but in a topical arrangement.

Praise God for His powerful word that creates and sustains all things, especially His chosen people.

I. Calls to Worship God Alone (the reasons apply to no other)

- The first and last word of true religion. “Praise ye the LORD,” or, “Hallelujah” (Heb.).—the prologue (1a) and the epilogue (20c). “We need to praise God with our lips, not indeed for His sake, but for our own sake; since by praising Him our devotion is aroused towards Him. [It] is also profitable to others by inciting their affections towards God” (Aquinas, ST, II-II q. 91). Each of Psa 147’s three sections begin by arguing for this (1, 7, 12).
- Worshiping Him is good (1bc)—“good,” “pleasant,” and “comely” (right, fitting, becoming, lovely, alts.). Praising God is praiseworthy, delightful. It is your eternal ministry begun now.
- Worshipping Him is gratitude (7). “Thanksgiving” or “grateful praise” (alt.). Ingrates, in truth, are infidels. Cf. Psa 107.1, 8. This is the 3rd thing we must know “to live and die happily: how to be thankful to God for such redemption” as we have in Christ (HC #2).
- Worshipping Him is gracious (12). “Jerusalem/Zion” is mentioned because He chose to be gracious to them. “Such redemption” (HC #2) is the basis and inspiration for our grateful praise.

II. Worship Him Who Is the Creator and Sustainer of All Creation. The Creator of all things is necessarily God worthy of all praise. Scripture makes this point many, many times. It is the point of Gen 1.1. The ultimate sin is to serve the creature more than the Creator (Rom 1.25), transgressing the First Commandment (Exod 20.3).

- He makes and organizes the starry heavens (4, 5). “He determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names” (ESV). The countless number stars help convey God’s “understanding” as “infinite.” Why do you think you can behold the stars, except as inspiration to praise their Creator (Psa 19.1)?
- He manages the atmospheric and earthly creatures (8, 9, 15-18). Clouds, rain, earth, grass, mountains, cattle, ravens, snow, frost, ice, wind, waters—all these are creatures constantly fulfilling God’s commands to them (i.e., His effectual will; cf. 148.8). Deism (creation as a wound clock, without God) is horrid!

III. Worship Him Who Is the Caretaker of His Chosen People. As impressive as creation is, God’s loving, faithful care for us inspires greater praise. There would be no Church in the first place, nor could she continue one moment, except for God’s sovereign, omnipotent grace.

- He gathers and preserves His people (2, 3, 6). He “builds up Jerusalem” by “gathering” chosen spiritual “exiles” (2). He consoles those thus gathered (3). He exalts them and “casts down” their “wicked” enemies (6) to protect and preserve His church.
- He renews His people spiritually (10, 11). It is not physical strength (whether of horse or human), but spiritual: fearing (worshiping) Him and hoping in His mercy, that are His choicest blessings to us.
- He prospers His people, especially by entrusting them with His Word (13, 14, 19-20b). Four blessings in vv. 13, 14: protection, progeny, peace (law and love), and provision. This OT description has more profound spiritual parallels (victory in spiritual warfare, conversions to Christ, unity in the church, and Christ as our wheat/bread, the staff of spiritual life). Stewardship of His Word in vv. 19-20b: we have more than natural revelation in creation; we have special revelation through the prophets, esp. Christ. How this enriches and ennobles us above all others without God’s Word! And now, the church is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim 3.15).

The reason why the Church is called the “pillar of truth” is, that she defends and spreads it by her agency. God does not Himself come down from heaven to us, nor does He daily send angels to make known His truth; but He employs pastors, whom He has appointed for that purpose. To express it in a more homely manner, is not the Church the mother of all believers? Does she not regenerate them by the Word of God, educate and nourish them through their whole life, strengthen, and bring them at length to absolute perfection? For the same reason, also, she is called “the pillar of truth;” because the office of administering doctrine, which God hath placed in her hands, is the only instrument of preserving the truth, that it may not perish from the remembrance of men (Calvin on 1 Tim 3.15).

How great the reasons, then, that we have for praising God from now on as our ultimate priority! O how great He is! How magnificent His works! How stupendous His grace to His chosen people! Hallelujah! Praise ye the LORD!

I conclude with a prayer by the lesser-known Italian Reformer, Peter Martyr Vermigli, composed while meditating upon this Psalm, the 147th:

Exceptional praise is owed to Your magnificent glory, O almighty God, for we see You restoring the broken, lifting up the meek, and casting the wicked right down into the abyss. There is no force that can be compared to Your power. You rule the stars, and they are like your sheep or like servants whom You call by name to do Your tasks. You produce the clouds, rainfalls, and hay; You give nourishment to cattle and the young ravens, and You provide a refuge without infantry or cavalry for those who fear You. Look with favor, we pray, upon Your Church; fortify her against her enemies and increase the peace of her children. Do not allow her to waste away by a shortage of Your Word. With your Word send her snow, ice, and sleet, and when it shall seem right, instantly calm the blustering winds. Cause the temporary misfortunes, which You use to try her, to vanish suddenly before the favor of Your grace. To other mortals You have not acted in this fashion by revealing to them the secrets of Your Scriptures, but grant it to us so that we may use them for our salvation. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Ω