

Psalm 138

“Praise for Answered Prayer”

God is a God who answers our prayers. In the New Testament, Jesus assured His followers that God will answer our prayers offered in His name (John 14:13-14). God will also answer our prayers according to His will (1 John 5:14). Therefore, Christians can pray with confidence because God is a God who answers prayer. King David recognized this great truth about God. In Psalm 138 he wrote about a situation in which God answered his prayer. Although we don't know the exact situation David had in mind—and David certainly experienced God's answers to prayer on many occasions—we see from this psalm that no matter the circumstances God answers prayer. We can pray with confidence because God is a God who answers our prayers. Psalm 138 can be divided into four sections, each revealing a response to God based on His answers to our prayers.

Because God answers our prayers He deserves our praise (138:1-3).

Praise is the most obvious response to answered prayer. We should be careful to praise and thank God when He answers our prayers.

Yahweh God deserves our wholehearted praise even in the presence of all the mighty ones (138:1).

The psalm title attributes this psalm to David, who begins by declaring, “I will praise you!” The name Yahweh doesn't appear in the original text until verse 4 and is then repeated five more times (twice in verse 5, once in verse 6, and twice in verse 8). However, it's obvious that David is directing His praise to Yahweh God, the covenant keeping God of the people of Israel. The verb “praise,” used here and in verses 2 and 4, comes from the idea of stretching out the hand as an expression of gratitude. This praise, David writes, encompassed his whole heart. Furthermore, David said that he would “sing praise” to God, a different verb emphasizing the musical expression of praise. He would do so in the presence of “the mighty ones.” This term could refer to the false “gods” of the surrounding nations, emphasizing the reality of the true God. It could refer to mighty men, rulers of the nations surrounding Israel, pointing out their inferiority to the true God. However, like its use in Psalm 8:5, it likely refers to angelic beings since the context refers to the Temple which was adorned with the likeness of cherubim. David launches into this psalm with expressions of praise and worship. God deserves our wholehearted praise.

Yahweh God deserves our wholehearted praise for His loving grace and truth (138:2a).

Praise is directed to God and can focus on His attributes, including His grace and truth. David used yet another verb to express his worship, saying, “I will bow down.” This act of reverence reveals David’s humility. We must come into God’s presence with humble hearts. The presence of God in ancient times was associated with the Temple in Jerusalem, and David bowed down toward the Temple in recognition of God’s presence. He gave “praise” (again, extending the hand in worship) for God’s name, His name serving as the summary of His attributes, His holy character. Specifically David mentions God’s loving grace (a single, potent term in Hebrew) as well as God’s truth (faithfulness to His reality and reliability). God deserves our wholehearted praise because of who He is, the God of grace and truth.

Yahweh God deserves our wholehearted praise because His name and word are exalted above all (138:2b).

David could praise God because God is exalted above all else. God has exalted His name, His holy character. He’s also exalted His word, His declaration of truth. God has exalted His name and His word by demonstrating over and over again His trustworthiness as seen in answering the prayers of His people.

Yahweh God deserves our wholehearted praise because He answers our prayers (138:3).

In verse 3 David narrows his focus to the main point of the psalm, the fact that God had answered his prayers. In a situation of desperation David had called on God and God had responded. God answered David’s prayer by making him bold and strengthening his soul. In our moments of desperation and despair we can cry out to God and He will give us strength. Because God answers our prayers He deserves our praise.

**Because God answers our prayers
others will recognize His greatness (138:4-5).**

Answered prayers can become a source of witness to unbelievers. When we report on the ways in which God is at work in our lives, others can see the Lord and turn to Him.

Yahweh God’s words incite even the kings of the earth to praise Him (138:4).

David expressed his anticipation of the impact that the Lord would make on the kings of the earth. “May all the kings of the earth praise you, O Lord.” They would do so when they hear

the words that flow from the mouth of God, His revealed truth. God's Word is powerful, penetrating the human heart (Hebrews 4:12).

Yahweh God's glory incites even the kings of the earth to sing about His ways (138:5).

David also anticipated that the kings of the earth would sing praise to Yahweh God in response to His ways. One of God's "ways" is to answer the prayers of His people. In addition, God's ways reveal His great glory. The splendor of His majesty, His power, and His works prompt praise. Because God answers prayer, others may come to see His greatness and glory.

**Because God answers our prayers
we can trust Him discern our hearts (138:6-7).**

God answers prayer, but to answer our prayers appropriately He wouldn't grant every request we make. Our prayers are often misdirected. Therefore, it's reassuring to know that God discerns human hearts.

Yahweh God distinguishes the lowly from the lofty (138:6).

The Lord God is exalted above all. He doesn't need to care about our situation or to answer our prayers. However, God does care and He does answer prayer. He looks on those who are lowly, who are humble before Him, casting His caring eyes on our needs. By contrast, God knows (relationally) the proud "from afar," that is, He holds at a distance those who put their confidence in themselves rather than in Him. He distinguishes between the lowly and the lofty, favoring those who are humble and resisting the proud (Proverbs 3:34; James 4:6).

Yahweh God distinguishes the friend from the foe (138:7).

Likewise God distinguishes between those who stand for Him and those who stand against Him. He preserves the lives of His people (literally "you give life to me") even in the midst of their distress. God stretches out His hand against the anger of His people's enemies, using His mighty right hand to deliver us. God protects His people and punishes His enemies. Because God answers prayer He must discern human hearts.

**Because God answers our prayers we can
count on Him to see us through to the end (138:8).**

David concludes this psalm with a declaration of God's enduring, eternal blessing on His people. The Lord God sees us through to the end. We can count on Him to answer our prayers.

God's plan for me is personal (138:8a).

David states that Yahweh God will "perfect" or "complete" or bring to their perfect "end" His people. He will fulfill His purpose in our lives and in His plan for this universe. This He will do "for me," David says. David affirms that God takes personal interest in each of us.

God's loving grace for me is eternal (138:8b).

David next addresses Yahweh God, declaring, "O Lord, your mercy forever!" The verb "endures" is implied. God's mercy endures forever. The word "mercy," as in verse 2, refers to God's loving grace, His covenant love for His people. His loving grace endures forever.

God's work in my life is dependable (138:8c).

Finally David prays, "Do not forsake the works of your hands." Since God is a God who answers prayer, David is confident that God will answer this prayer. David, like all of God's people, is a work of God's hands. We belong to Him by right of creation and, through Jesus Christ, by right of redemption. We are the work of the Savior's nail pierced hands. Since God created us and Jesus died for us, we can be sure that Yahweh God will never abandon us. He is always at our side. He will see us through to the end. We can pray with confidence because God is a God who answers our prayers.