

Praising Our Creator

We praise you, God, we praise you, for your Name is near; people tell of your wonderful deeds (Psalm 75:1).

Scripture: Psalm 75

Song: “Praise the Savior”

Over the past four decades, the *known* size of the universe has increased from 10 billion to nearly 100 billion light years. If all goes according to plan, the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) will reach much farther. Its stated mission is to search for the first galaxies that formed after creation. Of course, the Lord God spoke to create the heavens and earth. And He already knows every star in all the galaxies by name. What a mighty God we serve!

Yes, the Lord God is infinitely powerful (omnipotent), everything-knowing (omniscient), and everywhere-present (omnipresent). He is eternally sovereign over all. Nothing thwarts His plan, surprises Him, or escapes His notice. What’s more, while the Lord is infinitely and eternally righteous (holy and just), He is also compassionate (merciful and gracious). Therefore, He lavishes His goodness on us by forgiving our sins, adopting us into His forever family, and demonstrating His marvelous, unfathomable love.

How very good that we can join the vast numbers of other Christians in worshipping, revering, and praising our Maker and Creator. His name is above all names.

Father, I gladly join the angels and my brothers and sisters in Christ in praising You for Your greatness and goodness. We can never praise You too much! In Jesus’ name, amen.

June 13–19. **David Sanford** lives in Portland, Oregon, with his wife of 39 years. He loves to collect rocks and sea glass on the West Coast’s most picturesque beaches.

Enjoying God's Blessings

“I will look on you with favor and make you fruitful and increase your numbers, and I will keep my covenant with you” (Leviticus 26:9).

Scripture: Leviticus 26:3-13

Song: “Trust and Obey”

When I moved to Portland from Seattle as a single, 20-year-old transfer student, I thought I'd only be there three years. Little did I know that 40 years after graduation, I'd still be in Portland! Life is full of such surprises. Yet as I have followed the Lord through life's twists and turns, I have been blessed by His faithfulness.

In Leviticus, God's faithfulness was shown to His people through His covenant promises, which included causing them to prosper, granting them protection, and giving them peace. Did this mean every one of them enjoyed all these benefits, without exception, no matter what? No. God's covenant included conditions of carefully obeying His commands—including loving and serving God wholeheartedly, honoring parents, and loving neighbors well.

Human nature wants everything it wants on its own terms—for free, without strings attached, and *now*. Of course, that's not how life in God's kingdom works. In faithfulness God has established an upright path for His glory and our good. Only Jesus kept that path perfectly and provided salvation through His perfect sacrifice. Now in Christ, by His Spirit, we are able to truly worship and honor God by walking in His ways, enjoying His faithful presence and many blessings.

Father, I may not understand all Your ways, but I trust Your wisdom and want to honor You. Wash me, fill me, use me, and bless me today. In Jesus' name, amen.

God's Kingdom on Earth

Looking at his disciples, [Jesus] said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” (Luke 6:20).

Scripture: Luke 6:20-26

Song: “How Great Thou Art”

Africa's Sahara Desert is massive, almost as large as the entire United States. It's the world's largest traditional (hot) desert, with sand temperatures easily reaching 175 degrees. It's no wonder few have traveled across it without a veteran support team and secure supply chain. Typically such adventurers must receive travel clearances from at least half a dozen nations; wise travelers seek hospitality from various sheikhs, sultans, and other rulers to help ensure safe passage from one location to the next.

Travelers don't always know what religious beliefs to expect as they meet residents across the vast Sahara. Sheikhs, sultans, and other rulers and their people typically claim to be Muslims, and yet over time they've displayed mixtures of Islamic and traditional (animistic) beliefs and practices. While Africa's two dominant religions are Islam and Christianity, Christians make up less than two percent of the Sahara's population, with the exception of Egypt with more than five percent.

Some of these Christians face intense persecution. Yet what a wonderful experience to meet, enjoy hospitality, and worship with these fellow believers! They often help visitors see the kingdom of God through new, invigorating, and courageous lenses. They may be poor in earthly goods, but they are spiritually rich.

Father, Your kingdom exists even in the most desolate places on this planet. Please bless those who are poor and persecuted—with Your love, comfort, and strength. In Jesus' name, amen.

New, Eternal Life

You, Lord, brought me up from the realm of the dead; you spared me from going down to the pit (Psalm 30:3).

Scripture: Psalm 30

Song: “Leaning on the Everlasting Arms”

My wife typically does our grocery shopping, but I was filling in. After spending a couple minutes scanning every bag in the flour section, I turned to the woman on my left: “Do you have any idea where the almond flour is?” But just then I spotted it and felt foolish.

“Happens to me all the time at my age,” she laughed.

“You mean *our* age,” I joked.

“What? I’m 83!” she countered. “I’ve died twice.” After pausing, she added, “It was hard to resuscitate me both times.” Looking down, she continued, “All my friends have died, and now my husband is in the hospital.”

It was a candid glimpse into her fear and sadness around the realities of death and dying.

Yet for those of us who are in Christ, death is not an end. While on earth, Christians receive the beginning of a new, eternal life. Then after we die, the Lord gives us each a new, indestructible, eternal, glorious, heavenly body. Christians need never fear death!

Father, thank You for giving me such great hope now and for eternity! Help me as I reach out to others who do not yet have this hope. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Partners in the Orchard Harvest

The Father . . . chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created (James 1:17-18).

Scripture: James 1:13-18

Song: “Great Is Thy Faithfulness”

I grew up enjoying our family’s variety of fruit trees. Each summer we couldn’t wait to eat the first of the cherries, peaches, pears, and apples. The first fruits didn’t just taste delicious. They also offered the promise of many more mouth-watering experiences.

Spiritually, each of us is a kind of first fruit to God. In my case, I was my family’s first Christian in at least four generations. I grew up, graduated college, and married a wonderful Christian young woman. We have 5 children and—at last count—15 grandchildren! It’s a celebration each time another child is born into our family and then later is born again “into a living hope” (1 Peter 1:3).

More exciting still was when each of our children began to share “the word of truth” about Jesus Christ with their best friends, with other students, and with older neighbors as well. We literally cheer, high-five, or fist-bump and praise God together when the fruit of salvation manifests in another life.

One delicious peach is good, but not enough. Eventually, we want a tree full of peaches. And then we want an orchard full of scrumptious fruit. May each of our lives as a first fruit to God bring Him much glory.

Father, nothing is more exciting than inviting someone else to become a Christian. I want that experience again this summer and autumn, please! In Jesus’ name, amen.

The One True God

“Do not turn aside from any of the commands I give you today, to the right or to the left, following other gods and serving them” (Deuteronomy 28:14).

Scripture: Deuteronomy 28:9-14

Song: “I Know Whom I Have Believed”

I sometimes quip that I’m from a long line of atheists. In fact, when I committed my life to Jesus Christ at age 13, I was essentially kicked out of my father’s side of the family. My dad ridiculed me, and I didn’t see my paternal grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins for 37 years. But believe me, there was no lack of trying on my part to engage with them.

When I started college, I studied under a German existentialist philosopher who was also an atheist, but she was a person with whom I could openly explore ideas and beliefs. My challenge to her: Convert me back to atheism, or I’ll probably be a Christian the rest of my life. That professor and I studied the writings of the great atheists of the past four centuries. In the end, my biggest question was this: Why can these men write brilliantly about any subject under the sun except for God, Jesus Christ, the Bible, the church, and Christianity?

Except for one six-week stretch during my 30s, my faith in the Lord God, Creator and Maker of heaven and earth, has remained strong, growing, vital, and personal. I want to finish well. May you do the same!

Father, I never want to leave the God I know, love, and serve. Come what may, keep me close to You always. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Greatness of God

This is what the Sovereign LORD says . . . (Isaiah 49:22).

Scripture: Isaiah 49:18-23

Song: “Faith of Our Fathers”

The word *sovereign* appears hundreds of times in Scripture and is embedded 6,700-plus times in the sacred divine name YHWH (Hebrew). The latter typically appears as the word *LORD* capitalized in most modern Bible translations. When we think about who God is, we think of His eternality, holiness, wisdom, and power.

Heroes of the Bible rejoiced in each aspect of God’s sovereignty. King David said, “The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all” (Psalm 103:19). David also prayed, “Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all” (1 Chronicles 29:11).

The initial followers of Jesus Christ prayed, “Sovereign Lord, . . . you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them” (Acts 4:24). Later the apostle Paul described God as “the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen” (1 Timothy 6:15-16).

Does God’s sovereignty permeate every moment and millimeter of life? Absolutely! You’re never powerless, never alone, and never forgotten!

Father, how great You are! Your power, presence, and intimate knowledge of me are amazing blessings! I call on You right now for what I need. In Jesus’ name, amen.