

Bible Studies for Life Series for January 6: Breakthrough in focus

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Breakthrough in focus

- Psalm 145

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With this psalm, we begin the new year in the manner that we closed the last—in praise of God. Psalm 145 is purely a psalm of praise to God for who he is and all he has done. There is no hidden agenda in this psalm, David is enamored with God and cannot contain himself.

This Christmas, I took the kids to shop for their mother's Christmas present. My daughter hasn't quite figured out presents are supposed to be kept secret until Christmas. She was so excited about the gift, she couldn't contain herself. She ran into the house and joyfully declared, "Mama, we got you a watch!"

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David's excitement mirrors my daughter's. He cannot contain himself, and he cannot remain silent; he bursts out in song proclaiming the greatness and goodness of God.

The first line of the psalm reveals the basis of David's praise, "I will exalt you my God" David does not work from an abstract understanding of God but from personal knowledge of God. God is not a distant and impersonal God for David but one who is "near to all who call on him in truth." David stands firmly in the Old Testament tradition of a God who reveals himself to his people and is present with his people.

Feelings are by no means the best barometer for our worship. Our feelings easily can betray us. We may or may not feel any guilt over sin, but we stand before God guilty of sin whether we feel that way or not. Feelings and experience often are difficult to interpret and can hamper our worship if they are not grounded in something beyond themselves.

David begins his worship and praise from his experience of God, but he does not end there. His worship includes much more and ultimately is based in the nature and character of God. David bases his worship of God on God's graciousness, compassion, faithfulness and righteousness.

It is important that David noted goodness and compassion together, one helps to define the other. It is the same with grace and truth. John's Gospel says Jesus came full of "grace and truth." Truth not tempered with grace can become a tool of manipulation and revenge. On the other hand, grace that is not tempered with the truth can quickly become a spineless

sentimentality that does not beckon us to be transformed but the mercy of God.

In the same way, goodness without compassion is sorely lacking and falls short of who God is and the manner in which God desires us to live. Goodness without compassion can let us do what is right but still have all the wrong motivation. But God's compassionate goodness is seen in that he is slow to anger and rich in love. These are characteristics of God. They are based in his very nature and form the foundation of David's praise.

David further lays the foundation for his praise in God's faithfulness. God's faithfulness is not only the basis of David's praise, it is the foundation of our hope. As I write this, we are in the peak of the Christmas season. Hope seems abundant this time of year. Hope has been called the "Spirit of the Season," but real hope is not to be found in visions of sugar plum fairies, but in the bedrock faithfulness of the God who acts in history. It is the hope that comes because the God who is faithful is the same God who sent his son to die for us. It is the hope that the Christ who overcame death will do the same for his people.

David testifies of God's faithfulness in the way he cares for people. God upholds those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down. David says in this psalm that God is faithful to his promises but those promises are made to people. We see in this section God's great faithfulness to his people.

These promises again speak to the personal nature of God, that God will not abandon his people. What great reason to celebrate! God's goodness and faithfulness are not dependent on the circumstances of life, but God is faithfully with us through every circumstance of life. It is no wonder David could readily sing the praises of God.

David concludes his foundation of praise by singing of God's righteousness. Notice in this section and in the previous section, faithfulness and

righteousness are coupled with God's love. All of the attributes of God are tempered by his love.

It is no different with righteousness. God's righteous love in no way makes room for those who would take advantage of his goodness. Because God is righteous there are consequences to disobedience whereas those who love him will obey. In every line following the statement of God's righteousness, David speaks of God's obedient people and his loving response to him. It is not the story of those who act out of fear toward God but respond to the great and loving God with lives that desire to please him.

David's foundation of praise holds firm for us as well. January is for many the most difficult month of the year. It follows a time of great excitement with days that are short and often dreary.

In keeping with the theme of this week's lesson, breaking through that involves a focus on the nature and character of God. These are the bases of all of our praise and adoration of God.

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