

Psalm 147 Inner Health Made Audible

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Preacher: Chris Oswald

[0 : 00] We're in the book of Psalms yet again this week. Psalm 147, and we'll be spending the majority of our time in verse 1. This week I asked ChatGPT the following.

If you could only choose one single marker, whether a lab value, physical capability, or clinical measurement, as the sole indicator of a person's health, what metric would you choose?

It's like you could only pick one. Which metric would you choose? The number one answer is the VO2 max. The gold standard for cardiorespiratory fitness appears to be the best single test for determining or measuring someone's health.

There are other things that may, you know, runner-up status. Grip strength, heart rate variability, gait speed. Surprisingly accurate predictor of aging is how quickly you can walk or how slowly you walk.

Now, I ask that question because we're thinking about praise today, and C.S. Lewis, who had a whole journey of discovery related to this concept of praising the Lord, C.S. Lewis said that praise is probably best understood to be inner health made audible.

[1 : 23] Inner health made audible. He says it this way, I had not noticed how the humblest and at the same time most balanced, capacious minds praised most, while the cranks, misfits, and malcontents praised least.

The good critics found something to praise in many imperfect works. The bad ones continually narrowed the list of books we might be allowed to read. The healthy and unaffected man, even if luxuriously brought up and widely experienced in good cookery, could praise a very modest meal. The dyspeptic and the snob found fault with all. Except where intolerably adverse circumstances interfere, praise almost seems to be inner health made audible.

Now, this is something that Lewis came to see, but did not begin to see early in his Christian faith. He was a reluctant worshiper.

He found it to be tedious. And so one of the things I'll do, in addition to talking about Psalm 147 one today, I'll walk you through some of the discoveries that Lewis made that turned him into someone who was happy to praise the Lord.

[2 : 36] Of course, praise is central to the Christian life. Jesus sang with his disciples. Paul and Silas sang in prison. Paul tells the Ephesian church to address one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.

He tells the Colossian church to let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

The biggest book in the Bible, the book of Psalms, is a book dedicated to praising the Lord. The last book in the Bible contains more than a dozen references to the saints singing to the Lord.

And our text today in Psalm 147 one gives us three reasons that we ought to be eager worshipers of our Lord Jesus. But before I get into that, I think it's worth mentioning that there are really just three reasons that people do things.

The first one is, is they do, they do such and such a thing because it's profitable. Doing this activity provides a good return. Or sometimes people do things because it's pleasurable.

[3 : 43] It feels good to do this activity. It might not be profitable, but it's fun. And the third one is that it's appropriate or proper. The third reason that people do things, not so much that they enjoy it, or even that it necessarily produces anything clearly, but that it is proper.

It's the appropriate thing to do. And if you think about the reasons you do all the things you do, they probably all have some connection to those three reasons. And maybe some of the healthiest things you do have all three motivations simultaneously.

It's good for you. It's pleasant. And it's the appropriate thing to do. I can think of one activity that I can't talk about because of our commitment to PG content.

But I think that that one checks all three of those boxes. So sometimes, yeah. So sometimes you do these things only for one reason. Sometimes you do these things for multiple reasons.

Well, our text today, Psalm 147.1, actually just says that praising God checks all three of those boxes. Look at verse 1, Psalm 147.

[4 : 51] Praise the Lord. The Hebrew there is hallelujah the Lord. Hallelujah the Lord, for it is good to sing praises to our God. It is pleasant, and a song of praise is fitting.

The phrase there, or the word there, it is good to sing praises to our God, is the word that we would translate into profitable. It is profitable to sing praises to God.

Well, there's all sorts of ways we could talk about why it's good for you to praise the Lord. But let's just really quickly discuss three. First of all, one of the reasons why it's absolutely good for you to praise the Lord is it gets you in touch with the origins of all things.

Do you know how disconnected you become and how foolish your mind becomes when you become disconnected from the foundation of all things? Romans says that this is actually the beginning of the end.

Romans 1 says this. When you lose touch with foundational reality, the origin of all things, it just sets in a sequence, an avalanche of folly.

[5 : 58] And so what worship does, amongst other things, is it keeps you in touch with this very fundamental thing. You need to be a human and not a stupid human, not a foolish human. And that is, I remember where all of this came from.

Praise roots you into the origins of all things. Praise roots you into the world. When I was in Boise this week, I got to talk to the team of church planting, the church planting team. And one of the younger men told me that moving up there to plant a church made him realize how much he had taken for granted in his church back in Phoenix.

He mentioned a particular man that I know well, a man who's probably 15 years older than me, who's given his life to ministry and helped start that church. And he said, this man did all of this. He brought this church out of nothing into this thing that has child care and a worship team and a parking lot.

And, you know, he was completely mindless toward the people who made it possible and toward the process that made it possible. And the reality is, is that we are just specializing these days in taking the founder level of things for granted.

We take the foundations for granted. We're almost taught to do that. And so one of the things that worship does is it reminds you of who started all of this and where we would be without him.

[7 : 16] It also orientates us. You know, your ability to make value judgments is essential in life. You've got to be able to figure out, is this good? Is this bad? Is this good, better, and best? Again, a modern problem appears to be that people really do struggle to prioritize good, better, and best.

They really struggle to do that. They don't really necessarily know how to choose one thing over another. They really struggle with that. Well, that's because when you disconnect from the ultimate, the biggest and the bestest, you have no scale to compare the rest of your life to.

And so the question that we're always asking is, is this good? Is this not good? Is this best? Is it not best? Well, the answer to that question always starts with, well, compared to what? And worship reconnects you to the best and the biggest, and it reconnects you to the top of the scale.

And then you're able to sort of have this intuitive relationship as you perceive the world to say, well, that's good. But is it closer to God or less close? And so on and so forth.

You're able to evaluate things better. And the third thing I would say about why this is good, why it's good to worship, why it's profitable to worship, has to do with this old theological word named omnity.

[8 : 30] The theological word, omnity. This is a word that just means whole, complete. Worship is one of the few activities that God gives us that allows us to bridge the brain-heart barrier and the brain-heart and body barrier.

Worship is, singing praise to God, is an opportunity to get your whole person involved. We know that one of the great problems, I think you probably know this, I certainly feel it all the time.

One of the great problems with Christianity is, is that the ideas can settle up here and never make it down to your heart. And you can become a kind of intellectually, a solely intellectual Christian.

John Owen would be one guy who would be in danger of that. He was a brilliant man. He talks about this difficulty, this disconnect between, I know the truth, but is it really in my heart? He says, the truth of it is, here lies a great difference between sincere believers and mere hypocrites. Hypocrites assent unto the doctrine of the gospel, things touching Christ as true, but they don't embrace them as good.

[9 : 51] Their hearts and affections do not cleave unto them as finding a real sweetness, excellency, and suitableness. It's actually really easy to get in a head-only space in worship, or in your Christian life.

Singing praises to the Lord is God's gift to you as an incorporeal being, a being with a body. It's God's gift to you to allow the truth of God's word to penetrate all the way from your head to your heart and even out into your body.

Worship, singing praises to the Lord is a uniquely total body event. And of course, we're called to love the Lord with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength.

And the question is always, how do I do that? How do I move from just knowing truth to actually engaging my whole being? And the answer, one answer anyway, is worship. Jonathan Edwards had every single sort of advantage that C.S. Lewis lacked when it came to worship.

He was a natural worshiper. He was a brilliant man. He could have been a genius in literally any field, pretty much. Absolute polymath. And he loved worship.

[11 : 01] He said that worship is profitable and advantageous. It is health to the mind. The soul is greatly bettered and advantaged by it. It is an exercise that naturally tends to the spiritual life, to strengthen, confirm, and increase it, and is that which has a great reward of God.

We're not to look upon that time lost that is spent in worshiping God and magnifying Him. Tis not a vain thing to praise Him. We cannot spend time better for our souls.

It doth the good to the heart in that manner to be lifted up unto God. It gives vigor and new life to the soul. And praise, as well as prayer, has a tendency to drive down blessings from heaven.

And so the first point is why we should praise the Lord is it's good for us. It's profitable. And that's what the psalm says. But as we continue in the psalm, it says, not only is it good to sing praises to our God, but it is pleasant.

Edwards says it is pleasant as well as profitable. It's a sweet and joyful exercise. Likewise, the pleasures of this approach the nearest to any joys in heaven.

[12 : 10] Now, I'm going to pause and assume that some of you don't enjoy singing praises to God. This is a safe assumption because this is just something you see throughout history.

Lewis would be one of those people. And I want to tell you a couple of things. I'm going to clear the way for a couple of things. First of all, it is the folly of modernity to make singing a feminine activity and not a masculine activity.

So one thing that could be checking some of you guys is you just don't think that singing praises to God is a very masculine activity. But I would just tell you that David is a better man than anybody in this room.

He is more manly than anybody in this room. Sorry, Jesse. Number two. But, but, yeah, okay. He's, David's manlier than anybody in this room.

And he was known as the psalmist of Israel. We need to disconnect something that's really from the world and not from God's word. So if you're thinking, well, this isn't a very manly activity.

[13 : 09] It's like, well, no, you've just been around men who didn't know that it actually is a manly activity. But, you know, a lot of it is a little bit more complicated than that. Some of you just don't like to do it.

And you're not sure why. And you perhaps are tempted to think that your preferences in this area are a good enough rule to follow and obey.

So I want to walk you through C.S. Lewis's journey to how he discovered praise to be not just profitable, but also pleasant. He doesn't ever mention all of this in one place.

But as you read his writings, you see that this was one of those areas that he was just behind on as he was figuring it out. And you can kind of piece together how he got right in this particular area.

The first place I think you'd look in understanding how Lewis became happy to praise God when he really wasn't to begin with as a Christian is he had discovered and resolved to understand that beauty is objective.

[14:10] And so failing to find pleasure in something that is objectively pleasurable is a character flaw. So he moved his preference to not sing into the proper category, which was to see it as a defect.

He wasn't willing to see his personality as perfect or his preferences as perfect. He learned to see certain personality features as just defects.

For instance, in *The Abolition of Man*, Lewis says he doesn't like kids. And he's really tried to like kids, but he just doesn't like kids. But then he says this.

My not liking kids is an evidence of my poor character because kids are objectively likable. You see what he did there? It's the exact opposite of what a humanist does.

A humanist brings their personality and their preferences and sets that as the rule with which the environment must engage. But C.S. Lewis's first step in enjoying praise was to say, certain things are objectively good to do and should be objectively pleasurable.

[15:18] And if I don't find that thing pleasurable, it's on me. It's a character flaw. I need to work on that. The second phase was he just would go to church. And he would go to church and he eventually got his heart kind of steered right by looking at saints who were more mature than him and understanding, OK, they enjoy this.

So what's going on? Listen to this. This is from a letter that he wrote. Someone asking, hey, I just became a Christian. Do I really have to go to church and sing songs? He says, when I first became a Christian about 14 years ago, I thought that I could do it on my own by retiring to my rooms and reading theology.

And I wouldn't go to churches or the gospel halls. I disliked very much their hymns, which I considered to be fifth rate poems set to sixth rate music. But as I went on, I saw the great merit of it. I came against different people of quite different outlooks and different education. And then gradually my conceit just began peeling off. I realized that the hymns, which were just sixth rate music, were nevertheless being sung with devotion and benefit by an old saint in elastic side boots in the opposite pew.

And then you realize that you aren't fit to clean those boots. And it gets you out of your solitary conceit. So step one, this thing is objectively good. If I don't like it, it's me, not the thing.

[16:42] Number two, lots of other people who are more mature than me are finding this beneficial. And number three, he began to understand why it was that God prescribed praise in the first place.

Obviously, we believe that nothing adds to God. God's not in a codependent relationship with creation. He needs nothing from anybody in this room. So when he calls us to praise him, it's not to turn his, to get his glory meter up as if he is lacking in praise or worship.

So Lewis understood this and he began to wrestle with, well, why is it then that God calls us to praise? And it took him a while to catch on. He writes this in *Reflections on the Psalms*.

But the most obvious fact about praise, whether of God or anything, strangely escaped me. I thought of it in terms of compliment, approval, or the giving of honor.

I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise. The world rings with praise. Lovers praising their mistresses.

[17:47] Readers their favorite poet. Walkers praising the countryside. Players praising their favorite game. I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses, but completes the enjoyment.

It is the appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep telling one another how beautiful they are. The delight is incomplete until it is expressed.

It is frustrating to have discovered a new author and not to be able to tell anyone how good he is.

To come suddenly at the turn of the road upon some mountain valley of unexpected grandeur and then have to keep silent because the people with you care for it no more than a tin can in the ditch.

To hear a good joke and find no one to share it with. The Scotch Catechism says that man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. But we shall then know that these things are the same thing.

Fully to enjoy is to glorify. And commanding us to glorify him, God is inviting us to enjoy him. That was a lot, so let me just break it down. He's saying that actually the end of everything you enjoy is to tell someone else how much you enjoyed it.

[19 : 03] It's to worship it, to celebrate it, to praise it, and so on and so forth. And so what God is doing when he's calling us to praise him is just to finish the act of enjoying him by proclaiming that he is good, by telling others that he is good, by celebrating the fact that he is good.

And so with these three steps, Lewis became someone who at first was ardently disinterested in singing praises to God, to someone who became interested. Number one, he recognized that the lack of desire to do this was a character flaw.

Number two, he recognized that so many other people get so much benefit from it, and they're people that he respects, and he should listen and pay attention to them, follow their example. And number three, he began to realize that what God is really doing when he calls us to praise him is he's calling us to enjoy him.

And that when we enjoy other things in life, we almost certainly praise them as the final act of that enjoyment. And so praise makes actual logical sense in that respect as well.

So for those of you who would say, I agree that it's profitable, I understand that, but I don't find it pleasant, I would say, well, you don't find it pleasant today. But here's the reality.

[20 : 13] We want our personality to be like God's, and we want our preferences to be like God's. And if God is programming his eternity with singing, that means he likes it, and we need to learn to like it too.

Because we're not just dropping into Christianity with our own personality and preferences and saying, revolve around me. No, we have a God to whom we conform. His preferences become our preferences.

His personality becomes our personality. Okay, so number three, looking back at the text, Psalm 147.1, Praise the Lord for it is good, profitable, to sing praises for our God.

It is pleasant, and a song of praise is fitting. Remember we said there are three reasons people do stuff. First one is because it's profitable, it turns a good return to them. The second is because it's pleasurable.

And the third one is because it's proper. It's the right thing to do. And what you'll see in Psalm 147 is, is that this is where it all lands. We not only do things because we can see their benefit.

[21 : 14] We can only do things because we enjoy them. But we also do things because in case of praise, it is the absolute right thing to do. Worshiping God is the right thing to do.

We should praise God because we are convinced that God deserves to be praised. Look at verse two. The Lord builds up Jerusalem. He gathers the outcasts of Israel.

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. He determines the number of stars. He gives to all of them their names. Great is our Lord and abundant in power.

His understanding is beyond measure. The Lord lifts up the humble. He casts the wicked to the ground. So what the psalmist is doing here is giving us every reason to see that praising the Lord is absolutely proper.

I love in this passage how we actually saw this when Jared led us through Psalm 148. I love how the Bible keeps showing us the cosmic power of God and then immediately goes from some expression of his cosmic power to something about his care just for like little old me.

[22 : 25] Our passage here says that God spoke all the sons into existence and gave them their name. You know, just as a helpful reminder, something we take for granted, our son releases more energy in one second than humanity has ever used in the history of the earth.

Literally every second, our son releases more energy than the whole world has ever used throughout all of time. And there are hundreds of billions of sons in our galaxy alone.

And some of them are just absolutely massive. I remember reading about a son that we've detected and measured that if we were to replace our son with this son, the outer edges of this new son would touch Jupiter.

You know, he's just an incredibly large thing. And what's especially amazing to think about is that these sons that produce more energy, even our smallish medium-sized son, that produce more energy than we've ever used in our entire lifetime, they're like little cheap firecrackers to the Lord of the universe.

I'm not talking about the kind you get in Missouri. I'm talking the kind you get in Kansas, you know. They're like the snaps. Sons are like snaps to God.

[23 : 46] They're just nothing. I mean, he's just so incredibly massive. The text says that he is abundant in power and his understanding is beyond measure.

And after reminding us of this, he then says the same God who manages billions of sons lifts up the humble. The God who sees all the sons in the world as snaps looks to you with love and regard. And when you're low, he lifts you up. And when you're being attacked by the wicked, he casts the wicked to the ground.

This God of the universe who created all things has this inexplicable, miraculous regard for human beings. So much so that he sees us in rebellion against him and the God who has infinite power above all that we can ask or imagine rather than squash us and turn us into nothing or send us to hell eternally, sent his only begotten son into the world to live a righteous life so that he could give his righteousness to you and receive your sin unto himself and bear the wrath of the God who's in charge of the sons against your sin.

So yes, praise is profitable. Yes, it's pleasurable. But it's just proper. It's just the right thing to do.

[25 : 40] Singing praise to God is the right thing to do. I think it's important as we live in this modernity to remember some of the classical things. I make an effort to bring that to you.

I want you to think in terms of ideally centuries or thousands of years. And I want you to know that really throughout classical history, especially in the Western world, there was no worse flaw failing than ingratitude.

Ingratitude was simply seen as the chief sin in many respects. Now, I'm not making a theological assertion here. I'm just telling you that when philosophers thought through morality, they saw ingratitude way up there.

Have you ever thought about how offensive your ingratitude is to God? Have you ever thought of just like how much patience and long suffering and mercy he has to extend to you, not for the things you've done, but for this one thing you consistently fail to do?

And that is to be mindful of his many blessings and praise him because praise is proper. He's made it pleasurable. He's made it profitable.

[27 : 01] But have you ever stopped to think of just how much we sin, not so much in what we do, but in the failure to consistently thank the God of the universe for loving us and taking care of us and redeeming our life out of the pit?

Cicero said, gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but is the parent of all others. Seneca, ingratitude is the most common and at the same time, the most serious of all crimes.

This guy named Pastor Chris, who's right up there, decided a long time ago that if you call me ungrateful, you might as well call me every other name in the book.

There's really nothing worse than being an ungrateful person. It's a moral evil, my friends. It's a moral evil to be ungrateful to a holy God who sustains your life day in and day out and had so much regard for you that he shed the blood of his own son for your sake.

A failure to praise is simply inappropriate. Jonathan Edwards says, if we very often receive kindness and bounties from him and many that are unspeakably great and of which we are very undeserving, it is most reasonable that we should praise and bless him and give thanks to him.

[28 : 21] It is a most becoming thing that those that thus benefit, receive benefit from so glorious a being should praise him with an exalted heart.

Before we wrap up, we're really close to being done. I want to call out something quite interesting that you'll see consistently in the scriptures. Ideally, I made a joke previously, but ideally most of what we would, most of what we do would be done for all three reasons.

In an ideal world, in an ideal life, you'd be able to see the profit, the pleasure, and the appropriateness of everything you do. There are times, though, because we're broken people, that we don't see some of that.

What does the Bible do to get us back in the game, to get us up off our butts and back into the game, to get us to engage in the activity?

Does it tell us how often, does it tell us how profitable it is to do it? Well, sure, certainly it does.

Does it tell us how pleasurable it is to do it? Well, you know, it sometimes does.

[29 : 30] But by and large, not because God is only focused on duty, but because it is the simplest way to communicate, by and large, you'll see God say, do this because I told you to.

And don't do this because I told you not to. And this is why the Bible says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Because many times an activity that God's called us to, or called us away from, won't necessarily be clearly profitable, won't necessarily be clearly pleasurable.

Sometimes all you got is because God said so. And rather than try to program a whole new kind of Christianity and a whole new kind of sermon to orient toward people who demand that everything be, everything they're called to be exhibited as profitable, sometimes the right thing to do is just say, guys, we've got to do this because the God of the universe told us to.

The psalmist gives us three reasons, but in the end lands on this final one. It is simply appropriate to worship the God of the universe. And so he continues, sing to the Lord with thanksgiving, make melody to our God on the lyre.

He covers the heavens with clouds. He prepares rain for the earth. He makes grass grow on the hills. He gives to the beasts their food and to the young ravens that cry.

[30 : 54] His delight is not in the strength of the horse nor his pleasure in the legs of a man, but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him and those who hope in his steadfast love.

Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem. Praise your God, O Zion, for he strengthens the bars of your gates. He blesses your children within you. He makes peace in your borders.

He fills you with the finest of the wheat. He sends out his command to the earth. His word runs swiftly. He gives snow like wool. He scatters frost like ashes.

He hurls down his crystals of ice like crumbs. Who can stand before his cold? He sends out his word and belts them. He makes his wind blow and waters flow.

He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes to the rule and rules to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any other nation. They do not know his rules. Praise the Lord.

[31 : 49] Praise the Lord for his rules, including the rule that we should praise him with singing.

Praise the Lord for his rules. He has not given them haphazardly. He's not even given them to everybody, but he's given them to us.

And we should be glad for the light shed upon our path and walk in that light. For communion today, I think the idea simply lands in first Peter. He has called us out of the darkness and into his light that we might proclaim his excellencies.

He has called us and saved us to give us the pleasure of praising him, to help us to do the thing that we should have always been doing, to praise him, to help us to do the thing that benefits us for you because Jesus Christ was given up for your sake.

Come and take the bread and the wine, sit down and understand the God of the universe, the God of all the sons, sent his son so that for your sake, you might become the righteousness of God.

Let me pray. Father God, we praise your holy name for how good you've been to us. We ask God that this sermon be an encouragement and a correction and help us, Lord, to engage week after week as a community of saints in the activity of worshiping you well.

[33 : 05] We love you, Lord. You are worthy of it. Please pardon our many, many failings, our many flaws. Please pardon our serious gaps in gratitude. We praise your name in particular, God, for how kind and faithful you have been, even as we have routinely neglected to thank you for so much.

You are such a good God to us. We praise your holy name. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.