

Psalm 111-115 • Chapter Study

Psalm 111

This is a New England Primer.

It was used to teach children the alphabet & rudiments of reading.

It uses a simple acrostic of each letter as the first in a sentence.

And nearly all the sentences are drawn from scripture.

That's what both Psalms 111 & 112 are – acrostic songs.

There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet so there are 22 lines in the original Hebrew, although the English translation has condensed that to only 10 verses.

Just as the New England Primer was used to teach children, these Psalms were the way one generation of God's people passed along to the next their faith.

111 celebrates the power, goodness, and righteousness of God.

112 describes the blessing of the faithful.

Both draw from previous psalms & proverbs.

¹ Praise the Lord!

Literally = **Hallelujah!** Praise to Yahweh!

Haw-lal / Yah

Halal - primary meaning = to shine; to flash forth light.

In speech = to praise; to boast.

Can say "Hallelujah!" as praise, but it's also a call to praise God specifically, mentioning things He's done that are laudable.

That's what so many of the Psalms are – specific examples of praising God for Who He is and what He's done.

I will praise the Lord with *my* whole heart,

He's going to put all he has into it.

In the assembly of the upright and *in* the congregation.

These aren't 2 different places. It's Hebrew poetry to repeat something using different words.

The Psalmist simply means he's going to gather with others to praise God. Because . . .

² The works [artwork; something crafted to perfection] of the Lord *are* great, Studied [investigated] by all who have pleasure in them.

Often in the psalms we find this invitation to **ponder** the acts of God.

Those acts might be His creation, or His redemptive acts on behalf of His people.

Either way, the point is the call to **investigate**, to stop & consider what God has done.

Believing in the God of the Bible isn't a call to leave your brain at the door.

It's no blind leap into the dark.

The God who created us and gave us these marvelous organs called the brain wants us to use it.

³ His work *is* honorable and glorious, And His righteousness endures forever.

⁴ He has made His wonderful works to be remembered;

One of the ways we remember God's works is by repeating them out loud, recounting them to one another.

Teaching them to children; passing them on to the next generation of believers.

The Lord *is* gracious and full of compassion.

When God gives grace, when He pours out mercy, how much is left?

All of it! God's grace & mercy are supplies that are not diminished in their going out.

Just as there was always more fish & bread as long as the crowds were in need, so, there is no lack in God's grace.

⁵ He has given food to those who fear Him;

God takes care of His own.

He will ever be mindful of His covenant.

When you see that word 'covenant' in the Bible, think of **marriage**, because that's the illustration God uses.

God is every mindful that He's our beloved & we are His.

My wife is in Texas. She left Tuesday & will be gone for almost 2 weeks.

I have here on my hand, a ring that represents our covenant, entered into on May 17, 1980.

Lynn is my beloved wife, & I am her beloved husband.

We are in covenant – & even though we're physically separated by 1,491 miles the strength of our covenant isn't diminished in the least by the distance.

Jesus bears in His hand, in the print of the nail, the *mark* of His covenant with us.

Neither time nor space in any way diminish the power of His love or the purpose of His commitment to us.

He is *ever* mindful of you as His bride.

⁶ He has declared to His people the power of His works, In giving them the heritage [inheritance] of the nations.

This looks back to Israel's conquest of Canaan.

⁷ The works of His hands *are* verity [truth] and justice; All His precepts [ways] *are* sure.

⁸ They stand fast forever and ever, *And are* done in truth and uprightness.

⁹ He has sent redemption to His people; He has commanded His covenant forever: Holy and awesome *is* His name.

God worked a dramatic redemption for Israel *twice*.

The first was their deliverance from slavery in Egypt.

The second was their *return from exile* under the Persians.

Now we get one of the most famous of the proverbs of Solomon.

¹⁰ The fear [a sober, cautious respect] of the Lord *is* the beginning of wisdom;

This word for fear speaks of the kind of *seriousness* that recognizes the power of something.

A careless disregard for that power could lead to great harm.

I have a grinder; it's a power tool that spins at a very high speed.

You can cut metal with it like it's soft wood. / It's a potentially dangerous tool.

I once held it in the wrong place & my knuckle got nicked by a cutting wheel.

Another time, sparks burned through my glove & tattooed me with blisters.

I'm not terrorized by that grinder, but I do have a cautious approach to it.

I treat it with the respect it deserves for the power & potential it possesses.

That's a hazy illustration of what it means to fear God.

You don't want to get sideways with Him.

He is the Almighty – & either our relationship with Him is . . .

One of faith & surrender so that all His power works to bless us as our Savior.

Or, we reject Him & will face Him as a Righteous Judge.

A good understanding have all those who do *His commandments*.

This is an important insight into knowing God.

Obedience opens our understanding.

In John 7:17 Jesus said -

“If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or *whether* I speak on My own *authority*.”

In other words, revelation comes from submitting to God.

In John 8:31–32 we read –

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. ³² And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

When studying the Word, we'll encounter something we ought to do.

But often a question rises, “Why?”

We don't see how obeying something will work-out in terms of God's blessing.

But we do it anyway because that's what it means to trust God, and sure enough, things work out just as God promised.

Then, looking back, we say, “Sell, sure!” Because we now understand.

A classic example of this that so many have given testimony to is tithing.

They see the *principle* of tithing in the Word but don't understand how giving 10% is going to make them more financially secure.

But, in simply obedience, they give, and God responds with favor.

Now – most people will say, “I don’t know **HOW** God has done it, but He’s blessed us & now I can’t imagine **not** tithing.”

I can say from personal experience, as I know many of you can as well, that the most difficult areas of obedience yield some of the biggest breakthroughs in revelation.

His praise endures forever.

Because He is infinite!

Psalm 112

¹ Praise the Lord! Blessed *is* the man *who* fears the Lord, *Who* delights greatly in His commandments.

How can the one who fears be blessed? It’s the same idea as before.

This isn’t a cringing terror that makes us run from God.

It’s a serious & reasonable caution that realizes the safest place is as close to Him as possible.

That’s why this person delights in God’s commandments; he/she wants to know everything they can about God to be as close as possible.

Back to my grinder; when I first got it, I poured over the instructions so that I knew how to operate it.

The Bible is the Operators Manual for Life.

² His descendants will be mighty on earth; The generation of the upright will be blessed.

While there are notable exceptions, it’s a **general principle** that living a consistent godly life will impact our children & encourage them to walk with God as well.

³ Wealth and riches *will be* in his house, And his righteousness endures forever.

As a proverb, this is again meant to be understood as a **general principle**, not an ironclad promise to individuals.

It’s generally true that when people consistently trust in God and live by His Word, blessing follows.

But God’s blessing can’t always been measured in earthly terms like monetary wealth.

Many wealthy people give loud testimony to the fact that money doesn’t equal happiness.

They are the first to say that what makes a person rich isn’t counted in dollars or possessions.

Whose better off – the billionaire whose kids are in drug rehab & hate him, or the poor man playing a catch with his adoring family at the park?

⁴ Unto the upright there arises light in the darkness;

When others are struggling in tough times, the godly will find guidance from the Lord.

He is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous.

The ‘he’ here is the godly person.

He’s gracious, compassionate & righteous because God is & he walks with a God Who is.

⁵ A good man deals graciously and lends; He will guide his affairs with discretion.

Faith in God will have an impact on how one lives.

The Bible never conceives of religion in purely private terms where what one believes about God has no bearing or influence in how they treat those around them.

Jesus made it clear when He said the greatest command was to love God with all your body, soul & spirit, & to love your neighbor as yourself.

⁶ Surely he will never be shaken;

Because he trusts in God.

The righteous will be in everlasting remembrance.

⁷ He will not be afraid of evil tidings; His heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord.

⁸ His heart *is* established; He will not be afraid, Until he sees *his desire* upon his enemies.

If attacked he’s confident his cause will triumph because his desire is God’s will.

⁹ He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor;

He’s generous, specially to the poor.

His righteousness endures forever; His horn [strength] will be exalted with honor.

¹⁰ The wicked will see *it* and be grieved; He will gnash his teeth [frustration] and melt away; The desire of the wicked shall perish.

What the wicked desire comes to nothing.

Psalm 113

- 1 Praise the Lord! Praise, O servants of the Lord, Praise the name of the Lord!
- 2 Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth and forevermore!
- 3 From the rising of the sun to its going down the Lord's name *is* to be praised.
- 4 The Lord *is* high above all nations, His glory above the heavens.
- 5 Who *is* like the Lord our God, Who dwells on high,
- 6 Who humbles Himself to behold [consider, concern Himself withHimself withHimself withHimself with] *the things that are* in the heavens and in the earth?

Even though God is a majestic, infinite Creator, He condescends to pay attention to us.

A little boy lies on his stomach in fascination watching an ant hill for a few minutes.

But he's never going to **develop a concern** for them.

What he'll probably do is get bored after a short time & as he runs off to something else, he steps on the ants.

The distance between God & us is **at least** as great as the distance between us & ants.

Yet God does much more than just watch from a distance as we go about our pathetic little lives.

He becomes one of us & lives our life.

He takes all that God is and wraps it in humanity & shows us the way back to God & what we were created for.

- 7 He raises the poor out of the dust, *And* lifts the needy out of the ash heap,

- 8 That He may seat *him* with princes— With the princes of His people.

These lines are lifted from the song of Hannah, the mother of Samuel.

Sitting on an ash heap was the sign of supreme degradation.

You just couldn't get any lower than this.

Reading this makes me think of the people in Mexico, Egypt, & India who are so poor, their food & clothing supply is the city dump.

They pick through the cast offs of others for survival.

This world is filled with grotesque inequity.

But heaven will see people who ruled over nations sitting side by side with those who lived & died in garbage dumps.

- 9 He grants the barren woman a home, Like a joyful mother of children. Praise the Lord!

One of the greatest shames & pains a woman in the ancient world could endure was to be childless.

It wasn't just that they wanted someone to pass the family name & estate to.

In that culture, because of war, the women usually outlived the men by many years.

Once her husband was gone, her adult children would bring her into their homes & take care of her as she helped in the raising of her grandchildren.

But without children, there was no one to take care of her in her old age and that meant a life on the streets as a desperate beggar.

But there's no shame, pain, or want in heaven!

Psalm 114

This psalm is a marvelous example of Hebrew poetry.

Which is conveyed by the repetition, not of sound, but of thought.

It's 4 stanzas of 2 vs. each. // Watch for the poetry now . . .

- 1 When Israel went out of Egypt, The house of Jacob from a people of strange language,

- 2 Judah became His sanctuary, *And* Israel His dominion.

The Jews went from slavery in Egypt to become a mighty kingdom in Canaan.

This reference to the land divided into **Judah & Israel** marks this psalms as being written during the time of the Kings or later.

- 3 The sea saw *it* and fled; Jordan turned back.

In the Exodus, 6th tribes of Israel made 2 dramatic crossings of water; one at the Red Sea, the other at the Jordan.

4 The mountains skipped like rams, The little hills like lambs.

When God descended on Mt. Sinai to give His people the Law, an earthquake shook the ground.

In light of these dramatic effects on the Earth of God's redemption of His people – the Psalmist asks nature a question

5 What ails you, O sea, that you fled? O Jordan, *that* you turned back?

6 O mountains, *that* you skipped like rams? O little hills, like lambs?

What was **caused** these things?

7 Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, At the presence of the God of Jacob,

8 Who turned the rock *into* a pool of water, The flint into a fountain of waters.

It was the presence of God that divided the waters, shook the Earth and opened springs of water for His people at **Rephidim & Kadesh**.

The translation to English loses a crucial insight conveyed in Hebrew here.

Though the psalm speaks of the past, it does so in the present tense, meaning that the same God who did what's described here is present among His people now to do for them whatever they need.

Psalm 115

Like the other psalms in this section, we know neither who nor when this was composed.

But it looks like it was written during Israel's Exile in Babylon.

The psalm is a response to idolaters who mock Israel's faithfulness to God.

1 Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, But to Your name give glory, Because of Your mercy, Because of Your truth.

Prior to the conquest by Babylon, one of the great concerns of the prophets was that if God's people were defeated & carried away into captivity, it would bring dishonor to God's name.

Because the ancient world believed victory in battle meant the winners' gods were greater than the vanquished's gods, If Judah was conquered, Jerusalem destroyed and the Jews carried off captive, it would degrade God's fame among the nations.

And every day Israel remained in captivity would be another occasion for Israel's enemies to mock.

So the psalmist cries out for God's name to be honored once again!

2 Why should the Gentiles say, "So where *is* their God?"

That's exactly what they were saying, and every time he heard it, the psalmist grimaced.

3 But our God *is* in heaven; He does whatever He pleases.

Truth be told – Judah had not been defeated because her God was weak.

Judah was beaten precisely because her God is real & powerful, and used the Babylonians **AS** the instrument of His judgment on His own wayward people.

It isn't that Yahweh was defeated by Marduk.

It's that Marduk is naught but a word & Yahweh reigns.

4 Their idols *are* silver and gold, The work of men's hands.

5 They have mouths, but they do not speak; Eyes they have, but they do not see;

6 They have ears, but they do not hear; Noses they have, but they do not smell;

7 They have hands, but they do not handle; Feet they have, but they do not walk; Nor do they mutter through their throat.

The idols made to represent their gods looked like creatures – but in fact they were just metal covered hunks of wood.

8 Those who make them are like them; *So is* everyone who trusts in them.

It's a spiritual principle that we become like that which we worship.

If you worship an idol which can't see, hear, think or feel – you will slowly become like it.

Conversely, if you love, serve & worship Jesus, you'll become more like Him.

The grace & truth He's full of will fill you!

A simple test to determine what our god is, is to ask what is the absolute last thing we'd give up.

Or better – what is the last thing we'd refuse to give up?

Whatever that is, is our god.

Now the psalm turns to call God's people back to whole-hearted devotion to Him.

9 O Israel, trust in the Lord; He *is* their help and their shield.

10 O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord; He *is* their help and their shield.

11 You who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord; He *is* their help and their shield.

12 The Lord has been mindful of *us*; He will bless us; He will bless the house of Israel; He will bless the house of Aaron.

13 He will bless those who fear the Lord, *Both* small and great.

14 May the Lord give you increase more and more, You and your children.

15 *May* you *be* blessed by the Lord, Who made heaven and earth.

16 The heaven, *even* the heavens, *are* the Lord's;

Heaven is not the abode of idols.

God alone inhabits eternity; not Marduk, Bel, Ishtar, Ra, Set, or any of the other dozens of gods ancient people worshiped.

And while heaven belongs to God alone -

But the earth He has given to the children of men.

God has given the stewardship of creation to humanity.

Idols possess ***no power*** on Earth either.

As Paul tells the Corinthians, demons use idols as their fronts, but the only power they have is to tempt & deceive, which has ever been their mode of operation.

17 The dead do not praise the Lord, Nor any who go down into silence.

18 But we will bless the Lord From this time forth and forevermore. Praise the Lord!

Many Bible students get tripped up by v. 17.

Please understand that the psalmist isn't giving a theology of the afterlife here.

That's not his intent at all.

Having spoken of the earth as the realm of humanity, what he means is that it's during this life that we have the chance to love, serve & worship God.

Once we die, our time on Earth is done & the opportunities this life affords are past.