*“How Much Do You Want?”*

Psalm 81

Do you love the Lord this morning? Do you enjoy Him—His presence, His promises, His provision—to the degree that He intends?

* I’ve met many people who love the Lord and seek him faithfully—they read their Bibles like they’re eating a delicious meal; they pray; they seek to live in a way that honors the Lord. They are a blessing and an encouragement to many.
* I’ve also met some who appear to want the bare minimum to ensure that they make it to heaven when they die and experience minimal suffering on earth. It’s almost as if their motto is, “I’m a Christian, but I do what I want.” They often attend church, they might sing, might even give, but their hearts look for security and satisfaction in any number of things besides the Lord?
* Which one sounds more like you this morning? When it comes to the Lord, how much of Him do you want? There is a way to tell not only how we might honestly answer this question, but also to help us discern where we stand with the Lord. That’s where this Psalm comes in.

This Psalm (and worship in general) is not designed merely to make us feel better, but to call for “commitment (that affects) life” both inside and outside the church building.[[1]](#footnote-1)

* Context: God’s people had national holidays—they would gather and celebrate, often with feasts, as they reflected upon God’s great deeds on their behalf.[[2]](#footnote-2)
* Call to review our past, consider our future, and evaluate our present circumstances and responses. This gives a word of hope to anyone who will listen to the words and respond accordingly.

**READ PSALM // PRAY**

1. **Record of God’s Providence (vv. 1–7)**

Look at what God has done!

* The people had called out and God had answered them (7)
* The people praise Him because He has given freedom, rest, DELIVERANCE (6, 10, 14–15)
* He had provided food and water, nourishment (7). Meribah—Exodus 17 and Numbers 20. The two mentions of Meribah, which occurred at the beginning and end of Israel’s time in the wilderness, seems to summarize that entire forty-year period.[[3]](#footnote-3)
* He has revealed Himself to them, He has spoken
* He has promised victory over enemies. Logic: God’s enemies are supposed to be our enemies
  + He never promised freedom from challenges, but He has promised His presence.

Asaph (following David’s example in numerous Psalms) reviews God’s mighty works to remind Israel just how well God has cared for them in the past—this is a healthy practice for us as well.

* How has the Lord been good to you?
* Think on all the circumstances around your birth, upbringing, life, etc.—how has the Lord proven Himself to be faithful?
* You may find it easy to list many ways God has been good to you.
* Others—“It’s been a hard life!” Then how has the Lord sustained you?
  + This exercise isn’t meant to minimize our many challenges, but to remember God’s perfect care for us.
* This sets us up to consider what He might do in our future, which begins right now.

1. **Reminders of God’s Promises (vv. 8–16)**

God’s people have received great advantages from the Lord, but they have drifted. Their error: they wouldn’t listen to God, take Him at His Word. Their admonishment (8)—"LISTEN. Hear me out!”

* They’ve turned from God. Their instruction came from the culture around them, they followed after other gods. Do you know what their objective was—they wanted to be like the people around them. That was their goal, that was the motive that shaped their decisions. It’s the root of their disobedience and it turned into full-blown idolatry.
* How could this happen among God’s people?
* They were stubborn. Maybe they thought they knew better, or that they could handle the pressure of being pulled in different directions. Or maybe they thought the Lord was making an empty threat. Regardless, they remained stuck in their ways. They didn’t listen. They wouldn’t make the adjustments necessary to actually believe and follow the Lord. They were fine claiming him with their lips so long as they didn’t have to drop their idols—gods invented by men, who couldn’t save, sustain.
* See the paradox: an active, exuberant people and a neglected God!
* God allowed it! He will not violate our ability to obey or disobey, or choose for ourselves. He simply “turned them over” (vv. 11–12). He let them have their way.
  + Sometimes our harshest judgments come when God gives us what we want rather than what He has promised (11).

How did God respond?

* He reminded them of his faithfulness
* He reminded them of his desire (v. 16)
* He made a promise (v. 10): “Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.”
  + Appeals to the ability—“Open”
  + Appeals to their appetite—“mouth”
  + Appeals to their capacity—“wide”
    - He won’t fill a closed, full, false, or half-heart.

**He said to them, “I will give you as much as you want.” And His promise remains for us today as well.**

* **Takeaway Truth: You can have as much of the Lord as you want.**
  + ***How much do you want?***

1. **Response for God’s People**

This Psalm is a call to reflection, repentance, and renewal. The Lord is ready to rescue those who recognize their wrongdoing and rely upon him for help.

This is all that He wants: a people who will simply listen to him and walk in his ways. That’s really all. A people that believe that he knows what he’s talking about. That he’s looking out for their best interests. That he cares about them, that he loves them. That he is always working for their good. That he is not holding out on them. That he—unlike the harsh taskmasters of Egypt who sought to enslave and redefine them according to their own customs and desires—intends only freedom and flourishing for all his people.

1. **He wants us to Choose what is Better**

God’s intentions toward us now remain the same as those he had with Israel. The feasts called for God’s people to remembers his faithfulness, all while pointing toward a greater fulfillment at a future time. And that greater fulfillment came to us in the person of Jesus, who is the True and Greater Passover lamb slain for the sins of his people. He has begun a new Exodus, leading his people from slavery into a kingdom that will never end. He is the Better Manna and Living Water that satisfies us not for one day, but for eternity. And he dwells among his people not in a tent made by human hands, but by His Spirit who takes up residence within us.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Jesus is God’s way of saying to us, “Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.” John 6:35,56, “Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst… Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.”

1. **He wants us to Receive what is Promised**

In light of all that God wants to offer us… why would we *not* open wide our hearts to Him?!

* Does your life declare that you are wide-open to the Lord? What about your priorities? Prayers? Pursuits?
* Your greatest needs do not exceed the capacities of our God to fill them.
* The Lord won’t fill a closed or full mouth. He fills those hungry for him. Those who listen to him. Those who want him more than anything else and live to prove it.
* Philippians 4:19, “And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”

1. **He wants us to Enjoy what is Given (16)**

Our God is no miser—He is extravagant in the quality and quantity of His blessings toward us!

* Psalm 107:9, “For He satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul He fills with good things.”
* Psalm 34:8, “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!”

**Takeaway Truth: You can have as much of the Lord as you want.**

* ***How much do you want?***

**Closing illustration – Barry and Alyssa, blank check, “I’m good for it.”**

* **Limited by two things: Vision (size of their request) and Trust (whether or not account holder would come through)**
* **We are limited in the same two ways (as individuals and as a church)**
  + **Vision: How much of God do we want?**
  + **Trust: Do we trust Him to come through?**

**Takeaway Truth: You can have as much of the Lord as you want.**

* Are you receiving as much of the Lord as He desires to give to you?
* How much of the Lord do you want? Because however much that is, He still has more to offer.

1. John Goldingay, *Psalms, Volume Two: Psalms 42–89*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 557. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See James M. Hamilton, *Psalms, Volume Two: Psalms 73–150*, Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2021), 81. Hamilton writes that Leviticus 25:9–10 “calls for the shofar to be blown “on the new moon” of the seventh month on the tenth day, the day of atonement, in the forty-ninth year at the commencement of the year of Jubilee. The Jubilee commemorated the exodus from Egypt through the proclamation of liberty for the captives along with the conquest of the land through the return to ancestral property. . . The shofar was also heard at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:16, 19; 20:18). . . [This] call for the blowing of the shofar seems to connect Psalm 81 to what happened at Sinai and the year of Jubilee.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Hamilton, *Psalms, Volume Two*, 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Hamilton, *Psalms, Volume Two*, 85–86. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)