

OUR GOD IS IN THE HEAVENS

Psalm 115

I. WHY DO A SERIES ON HOW TO PRAY?

A. TO SERVE GOD MORE EFFECTIVELY

1. FIVE GOALS

- Outreach/evangelize
- Disciple young persons
- City-wide ministry
- Training lab for ministry
- Global church

2. EFFECTIVENESS

- **Ph 4:13**—*I can accomplish all things through Him who strengthens me.*
- **Jas 5:16**—*The effectively powerful praying of a righteous person can accomplish much*

B. FOR OUR BENEFIT

1. To know God better
2. To meet our own needs
3. To help others

C. BEING CHRIST-FOLLOWERS

1. Obeying His command—**Lk 18:1**—we should **always pray**—and never lose heart
2. Becoming like their Master—Christ-like
3. Following His example—He prayed continually

III. HOW TO PRAY

- ❖ **DRAW CLOSE TO GOD—SPECIAL ACCESS—TO “OUR FATHER”**
- ❖ **INTERCEDE URGENTLY FOR AND WITH EVERYONE WE KNOW**
- ❖ **PRAY FOR GOD’S PEACE UPON OUR COMMUNITY AND NEIGHBORS**
- ❖ **THAT WE WILL BE INSTRUMENTS OF PEACE AMIDST TURMOIL**
- ❖ **THAT OUR WITNESS WILL BE GODLY AND DIGNIFIED**
- ❖ **THAT WE WILL FAITHFULLY PROCLAIM CHRIST AS THE TRUTH**
- ❖ **THAT WE WILL EFFECTIVELY RECLAIM THE LOST**
- ❖ **THAT THE FATHER WILL SHOW HIMSELF IN A MIGHTY WAY**

IV. CONTEXT AND RELEVANCE OF PSALM 115

A. ANCIENT PAGAN VIEWS OF GODS

- Most people believed in ‘gods’
- Invented gods with human myths
- Made gods in man’s image—divine human-type beings
- Made idols to represent gods—then worshiped idols as gods
- Tried to manipulate gods—in worship—to do human bidding
- Ultimately—gods not transcendent—but anthropomorphic and ‘natural’ beings

B. ANCIENT PHILOSOPHIC VIEWS

1. MATERIALISM—everything is made of ‘stuff’
 - **Heraclitus—fire**
 - **Thales—water**
 - **Anaximenes—air**
 - **Anaximander—undefined universal substance**
 - **Anaxoagoras—atoms**
 - **Democritus—atomic theory—everything governed by natural laws**
2. PANTHEISM—god is in everything—**Stoics**
3. DEISM—god is removed—and uncaring—**Epicureans**
4. RELATIVISM—there is no absolute truth—**Skeptics**
5. NATURALISM—live simple life in line with nature—**Cynics**
6. REALISM—ultimate reality is impersonal force—**Aristotle**

C. COMMON DENOMINATORS

1. None believed in **transcendent—single—supreme—personal—caring—Creator**
2. Virtually all viewed man and nature as the measure of things
 - **Protagoras (5th century Sophist) → “Man is the measure of all things”**

V. TEXT

1 Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to Your name give glory because of Your loving kindness, because of Your truth. **2** Why should the nations say, “Where, now, is their God?” **3** But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases. **4** Their idols are silver and gold, the work of man’s hands. **5** They have mouths, but they cannot speak; they have eyes, but they cannot see; **6** They have ears, but they cannot hear; they have noses, but they cannot smell; **7** they have hands, but they cannot feel; they have feet, but they cannot walk; they cannot make a sound with their throat. **8** Those who make them will become like them, everyone who trusts in them.

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, the small together with the great. **14** May the LORD give you increase, you and your children. **15** May you be blessed of the LORD, Maker of heaven and earth. **16** The heavens are the heavens of the LORD, but the earth He has given to the sons of men. **17** The dead do not praise the LORD, nor do any who go down into silence; **18** But as for us, we will bless the LORD from this time forth and forever. Praise the LORD!

V. SERVICE OF WORSHIP—OUTLINE

A. WORSHIP LEADER'S OPENING PRAYER—vv1-8

Our God is Supreme—vv1-3

Their gods are mere idols—vv4-8

B. ANTIPHONAL CHORAL EXHORTATION—vv9-11

9a Israel trust in the Lord—9b He helps and protects

10a Priestly leaders trust in the Lord—10b He helps and protects

11a All worshipers trust in the Lord—11b He helps and protects

C. CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE—v12a

The Lord has remembered us—He will bless us

D. JOINT CHOIR AFFIRMATION—vv12b-13

He will bless Israel and the priestly leaders

He will bless all who worship Him—great and small

E. WORSHIP LEADER'S BLESSING—vv14-15

May the Lord cause you to increase

May you be blessed by the Lord—the Creator

F. CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE—vv16-17

The heavens are the Lord's

He gave the earth to humankind

The dead cannot praise the Lord

But we who are alive bless the Lord and praise Him

VI. CONTENT

A. THE PRAYER—vv1-8

1. APPROACHING GOD—v1

2. ACCUSATION—v2

3. ANSWER—v3

4. COUNTER-ACCUSATION—vv4-8

B. APPLICATION—vv9-18

1. EXHORTATION—vv9-12a

2. ENCOURAGEMENT—vv12b-16

3. RESPONSES—vv17-18

A. THE PRAYER—vv1-8

1. APPROACHING GOD—v1

- a. Don't glorify ourselves
- b. Give glory—to God's name
- c. Reason—His loving-kindness and truth

2. ACCUSATION—v 2

- Pagans charge—"Where is your God?"

3. ANSWER—v 3

- a. Response—"Our God is in the heavens"
- b. Significance—He does whatever He pleases

4. COUNTER-ACCUSATION—vv4-8

- a. Their gods—are man-made idols—v4
- b. Their gods—are lifeless and powerless—vv5-7
- c. Idolators will become like their gods—lifeless and powerless—v8

B. RESPONSE

1. EXHORTATION—vv9-11

- a. **Command: Trust the Lord—vv9a . . . 10a . . . 11a**
 1. All Israel—v9a
 2. Religious leaders [house of Aaron]—v10a
 3. All [nations] who fear the Lord—God-fearing Gentiles—v11a
- b. **Basis of Trust—9b . . . 10b . . . 11b**
 1. He helps us
 2. He protects us—He is our 'shield'

2. ENCOURAGEMENT—vv12-16

- a. **The Lord is mindful of us—He has remembered us!—v12a**
- b. **Promise of blessing—vv12b-15a**
 1. Promise
 - The Lord *will* bless us—vv12b-13
 2. Blessing

- May the Lord make you increase—**v14**
- May the Lord bless you—**15a**

c. Reassurance of Sovereignty—vv15b-16

- o He is the Creator of everything—**v15b**
- o The heavens are His—**v16**
- o He is the one who has given men the earth—**v16**

3. WORSHIP—vv17-18

a. Context—v17

- o The dead cannot praise God
- o Assumption: the dead have no hope
- o Implied: the living still have hope
- o Implied: we—the living should respond—in two ways

b. We Living Ones Worship—v18

1. We will bless the Lord—forever
2. Praise the Lord!

VII. APPLICATION

A. AN APOLOGETIC PRAYER

1. Opposes humanistic core of pagan religion and philosophy

v1—Not to us, O Lord, not to us . . . give glory

2. The challenge—v2—“Where now is their God?”

- a. Pagan religions—said Jews/Christians were **atheists**—worshiping unseen god
- b. Pagan philosophers—ridiculed Jews/Christians—there is no god—only nature

3. Answers challenge

- a. Magnifies Jehovah—as supremely transcendent—and omnipotent
- b. Ridicules fallacy of worshipping powerless gods
- c. Paul addressed this to pagans and philosophers in Athens

Acts 17:24-29—The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He himself gives to all people life an breath and all things; and He made from one man every nation of humankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek god, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His children,’ Being then the children of God, we

ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man.

B. TODAY'S CHALLENGE

1. Today's criticisms come from—**New Atheists**

a. **Richard Dawkins—*The God Delusion***

An atheist in this sense of philosophical naturalist is somebody who believes there is nothing beyond the natural, physical world, no supernatural creative intelligence lurking behind the observable universe, no soul that outlasts the body and no miracles—except in the sense of natural phenomena that we don't yet understand.

b. **Daniel Dennett—*Breaking the Spell and Darwin's Dangerous Idea***

Let your *self* go. If you can approach the world's complexities, both its glories and its horrors, with an attitude of humble curiosity, acknowledging that however deeply you have seen, you have only scratched the surface . . . Keeping that awestruck vision of the world ready to hand . . . you will be a better person. That, I propose, is the secret to spirituality, and it has nothing at all to do with believing in an immortal soul, or in anything supernatural.

c. **Christopher Hitchens—*God Is Not Great***

Atheism by itself is of course not a moral position or a political one of any kind; it simply is the refusal to believe in a supernatural dimension.

2. Presuppositions

- **Humanism**—man is the measure of all things
- **Naturalism**—there is no supernatural—no transcendent—no creation—only evolution
- **Materialism**—all that matters is what we experience
- **Positivism**—no belief without positive proof from empirical (scientific) evidence
- **Relativism**—truth is how humans define it—no objective outside authority

3. Key question—**where is your god?**

- Positivist logicians and philosophers—supernatural God defies reason
- Naturalistic scientist—supernatural God cannot be proven
- Skeptical ethicists—there would be no evil if supernatural God exists

4. Their ultimate challenge—there is **no** 'supernatural'

C. OUR RESPONSE

1. Yes—God *cannot* be proven **absolutely** through reason, science, philosophy or ethics

- Though there is much supportive rational and scientific evidence
- Though He has demonstrated His existence throughout history

2. Dawkins' demands are illogical—and inadequate—when it comes to Supernatural

- Dawkins—"Extraordinary claims demand extraordinary evidence!"
- Illogical—Supernatural claims cannot be fully demonstrated by natural evidence

- Inadequate—He does not allow for historical evidence of God’s supernatural acts!
3. God is *not* confined to test tubes or human reason—He is above them!
 4. God **is** supernatural—in the heavens above all
 - Not invented by humans
 - Cannot be fully understood or explained—His ways are not our ways!
 - Cannot be proven by human means
 - Cannot be controlled—confined—manipulated by humans
 5. If we depend on *natural* evidences—we will fail!
 6. Ultimately—a matter of faith—**because** He is *supernatural* God

D. OUR RESPONSIBILITY—WHAT WE MUST DO

1. **Acknowledge**—our own **impotence**—reject self-centered approach
 - *Not to us, O Lord, not to us*—we should not receive glory
 - *Not to us, O Lord, not to us*—we are not even worthy to worship—apart from His mercy
 - *Not to us, O Lord, not to us*—humans are not the measure of all things
2. **Recognize**—**root problem** of disbelief
 - Intellectual doubt and moral sin—are just indicators of disbelief
 - Ultimate cause—is the **idol of self-love** that displaces God
 - Remedy = **self-denial**—and affirmation of His Lordship
3. **Assert**—God’s true nature
 - He is **supernatural**—He is in the heavens
 - He is **omnipotent**—He does as He pleases
 - He **cares**—He is merciful [loving-kindness]
 - He is Absolute **Truth**—truthful—and to be trusted
4. **Challenge**—impotence of modern ‘gods’
 - a. Modern ‘gods’—philosophy—science—ethics—logic
 - b. What have they done to:
 - o Eradicate all disease?
 - o Prevent death?
 - o Stop natural disasters?
 - o Bring ‘world peace’?
 - o Rid the world of evil?
 - c. When did any of them:

- o Part the Red Sea
 - o Stop the River Jordan
 - o Halt the sun in its course—twice
 - o Turn water to wine
 - o Walk on water
 - o Still the storm and calm the waves
 - o Feed 5000 with 5 loaves and two fish
 - o Cast out 2000 demons from one man
 - o Wither a tree with one command
 - o Raise the dead
- d. They are powerless—impotent—and hopeless
- o They speak—but their words are empty
 - o They see—but they do not perceive reality
 - o They hear—but they do not understand truth
 - o They will become like their empty philosophies—empty—still—dead voices of the past
5. **Trust** in Him—radical faith in God—as supernatural
- a. Based on **objective** proof
1. What His **Word** tells us
 2. What He has done in **history**—with Israel and subsequently
- b. Based on **subjective**—*personal*—experience
1. His **mercy** and revelation of **truth**
 2. His **help** and **protection** (shield)
- c. Based on His **encouragement**
1. He ‘has **remembered**’ us—**v12**
 - a. He does not forget His covenant promise—**Dt 31:6** and **Josh 1:5**
 - I will be with you
 - I will not fail you or forsake you
 - b. He ‘has been **mindful** of us’
 1. Notices our plight—our situation
 2. The basis of Isaiah’s prayer—**Is 63:15-19**

Is 63:15—*Look down from heaven and see from Your holy and glorious habitation*

Is 63:16—*You, O Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is Your name.*
2. He has **blessed** us

- o Fulfilled in **Salvation**
- o Fulfilled in Presence of **Holy Spirit**
- o Fulfilled in **Beatitudes**—so we can bless others

3. He **reassures** us

- o As supernatural **Maker** and Sustainer—He takes care of us
- o So—we pray confidently—“**Show yourself, Lord**”—as in **Isaiah 64**

6. **Worship** Him

a. Contrary to the dead

- To those who are perishing—the preaching of the cross is foolishness

b. **We are alive**

- But to us who are being saved—it is the power of God

c. Our response

- We **bless** the Lord—forever
- We call others to—**Praise** the Lord!

VII. INVITATION

GLORIOUS THINGS OF THEE ARE SPOKEN

**Glorious things of thee are spoken, Zion, city of our God
He whose word cannot be broken formed thee for His own abode
On the Rock of ages founded, what can shake thy sure repose?
With salvation's wall surrounded, thou mayest smile at all thy foes.**

**See the streams of living waters, springing from eternal love
Well supply thy sons and daughters, and all fear of want remove
Who can faint while such a river ever does their thirst assuage?
Grace which, like the Lord, the giver, never fails from age to age**

**Round each habitation hovering, see the cloud and fire appear
For a glory and a covering, showing that the Lord is near
Thus deriving from their banner light by night and shade by day
Safe they feed upon the manna which God gives them on their way.**