

THE
GOSPEL
PROJECT.

Longing
for the
KING

Beyond the Broken

Kendell Easley
Halim Suh

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ABOUT THE GOSPEL PROJECT

Some people see the Bible as a collection of stories with morals for life application. But it's so much more. Sure, the Bible has some stories in it, but it's also full of poetry, history, codes of law and civilization, songs, prophecy, letters—even a love letter. When you tie it all together, something remarkable happens. A story is revealed. One story. The story of redemption through Jesus. This is *The Gospel Project*.

When we begin to see the Bible as the story of redemption through Jesus Christ, God's plan to rescue the world from sin and death, our perspective changes. We no longer look primarily for what the Bible says about us but instead see what it tells us about God and what He has done. After all, it's the gospel that saves us, and when we encounter Jesus in the pages of Scripture, the gospel works on us, transforming us into His image. *We become God's gospel project.*

ABOUT THE WRITERS



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Barry Cram adapted this material for use with small groups.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Welcome to *The Gospel Project*, a gospel-centered small-group study that dives deep into the things of God, lifts up Jesus, focuses on the grand story of Scripture, and drives participants to be on mission. This small-group Bible study provides opportunities to study the Bible and to encounter the living Christ. *The Gospel Project* provides you with tools and resources to purposefully study God's Word and to grow in the faith and knowledge of God's Son. And what's more, you can do so in the company of others, encouraging and building up one another. Here are some things to remember that will help you maximize the usefulness of this resource:

GATHER A GROUP. We grow in the faith best in community with other believers, as we love, encourage, correct, and challenge one another. The life of a disciple of Christ was never meant to be lived alone, in isolation.

PRAY. Pray regularly for your group members.

PREPARE. This resource includes the Bible study content, three devotionals, and discussion questions for each session. Work through the session and devotionals in preparation for each group session. Take notes and record your own questions. Also consider the follow-up questions so you are ready to participate in and add to the discussion, bringing up your own notes and questions where appropriate.

RESOURCE YOURSELF. Make good use of the additional resources available on the Web at www.gospelproject.com/additionalresources and search for this specific title. Download a podcast. Read a blog post. Be intentional about learning from others in the faith. For tips on how to better lead groups or additional ideas for leading this Bible study, visit: www.ministrygrid.com/web/thegospelproject.

GROUP TIME. Gather together with your group to discuss the session and devotional content. Work through the follow-up questions and your own questions. Discuss the material and the implications for the lives of believers and the mission to which we have been called.

OVERFLOW. Remember ... *The Gospel Project* is not just a Bible study. *We* are the project. The gospel is working on us. Don't let your preparation time be simply about the content. Let the truths of God's Word soak in as you study. Let God work on your heart first, and then pray that He will change the hearts of the other people in your group.

THE
GOSPEL
PROJECT

Session 1

His Supremacy

Just as millions of angels participated in the dazzling show when the morning stars sang together at creation, so will the innumerable hosts of heaven help bring to pass God's prophetic declarations throughout time and into eternity.¹

BILLY GRAHAM

INDIVIDUAL STUDY

“And the Oscar goes to . . . ” The audience, filled with Hollywood’s royalty decked out in its finest attire, holds its collective breath. The speaker pauses dramatically. The winner pretends to be surprised, struts to the podium, and thanks everyone involved in this remarkable outcome. This scene plays out many times at the Academy Awards. And the next year, the cycle repeats itself. Last year’s praiseworthy actor begins to fade as the new kings and queens of Hollywood are crowned.

Something in all of us longs to give praise where praise is due. We love to receive praise as well. The trouble is this—praise for human success is so fleeting. Even the most celebrated films eventually make it to the \$2.99 bargain bin at the supermarket. It’s the same with sports. Who won the FIFA World Cup in 1982 or the World Series in 1992 or the Stanley Cup in 2002? Rarely do you find someone who remembers the winner of major sporting events in the past, much less the winning teams twenty or thirty years ago.

**When was the last time you praised someone who really deserved it?
What had they accomplished?**

**What emotions did you feel as you praised that person? What was their
reaction? Does this emotion fade over time? Why or why not?**

What should we learn from this desire to praise human success? What does this tendency tell us about our worship? Perhaps it’s a clue to remind us that Someone does deserve praise—not for temporary success that fades, but for beauty that’s everlasting. What if that Someone wants us to know Him? What if He invites us to join with others in offering praise forever?

Over the next few weeks, we’ll trace the story of God’s kingdom through the Scriptures. This is the story of a Creator worthy of praise, of an Enemy bent on destroying the world, of sinful humans redirecting their praise in all the wrong places, of a King stepping into the chaos to restore His fallen world, and of a people redeemed and set free to live with and for the King forever.

Throughout the week engage these daily study sections on your own. Each centers on a different aspect of God’s supremacy. There are three daily readings to prepare you before your group meets for this session. Interact with the Scriptures and be ready to interact with your small group.

1

God is to be Praised in the Heavens

Before the creation of the universe, many people imagine that God was lonely. But this can't be true. God has always lived in the perfect community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This family, existing beyond limits of time and space, had no loneliness. Everything was perfect.

Then, “in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). Theologians and philosophers have speculated on why He would do such a thing. Thoughtful people have often asked, “Why am I here?” In an attempt to discover an answer, go back to the awards show mentioned earlier. Why do we engage in elaborate efforts to applaud great work? Why do we insist on displaying awesome paintings in museums rather than hiding them in closets? Why do we develop special medals and awards for persons who have excelled at doing good? Quite simply, the answer is that beauty—all that is great and true—deserves widespread recognition. And because God is truly the greatest, He deserves the greatest praise.

You are matchless, O Lord. So our praise of You must rise above
our humanity ... You awaken in us a delight at praising You.²

AUGUSTINE (354-430)

It was a good thing for God's greatness, goodness, and love to be admired and praised—that's why He created the world! While some may think it was selfish of God to desire praise, we know that such a desire is no more selfish than a wonderful musician to bask in the applause after he concludes a concert. One goal of a performer is that his listeners will experience pleasure. And when the audience is pleased, he is pleased. As we praise God, we are filled with joy, and He is pleased. For we have an audience of One.

¹ Hallelujah!

Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise Him in the heights.

² Praise Him, all His angels; praise Him, all His hosts.

³ Praise Him, sun and moon; praise Him, all you shining stars.

⁴ Praise Him, highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens.

⁵ Let them praise the name of Yahweh,
for He commanded, and they were created.

⁶ He set them in position forever and ever;
He gave an order that will never pass away.

PSALM 148:1-6

The Word of God has always been powerful. When He created, He determined also to sustain His creation. He set the heavens in order in a way to preserve them, putting them in their position forever. What we often have called “the laws of nature” is actually God’s Word continuing to have force in every aspect of time and space.

In ancient days, people identified three “heavens.” The first heaven is the sky we experience—birds, clouds, wind, and rain. The second heaven very few have personally experienced—space and moon, planets and stars. The third heaven is the very dwelling place of God.

How does the creation of entities in the three heavens show God’s power?

In your experience, what elements in each of the three heavens especially display the majesty of their Creator?

This psalm gives attention to all three heavens, beginning with the highest heaven and moving downward. Verse 2 recalls that the “angels” and the “hosts” (heavenly armies) of the Lord were designed to praise their Maker. As they fulfilled their God-ordained responsibilities—communicating messages and engaging in spiritual warfare—they brought Him praise.

The second heaven—the “sun and moon” and “shining stars”—bring praise to the One who created them. Genesis accounts that these were made on the fourth day (Gen. 1:16-19). No less than the angels, the sun, moon, and stars were created to extol the One who made them.

Every line of Psalm 148:1-4 begins with the Hebrew *hallelu* (“praise”). In verse 4 the “waters” in the heavens are called on to praise Him. Clouds and rain and hail and snow call forth God’s praises. From a meteorological perspective, we understand that such atmospheric waters are above the heavens in the sense that they’re farther up than we can reach out and touch.

What can you draw from the truth that even creation itself worships God?

2

God is to be Praised on Earth

⁷ Praise the LORD from the earth, all sea monsters and ocean depths,
⁸ lightning and hail, snow and cloud,
powerful wind that executes His command,
⁹ mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars,
¹⁰ wild animals and all cattle, creatures that crawl and flying birds,
¹¹ kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all judges of the earth,
¹² young men as well as young women, old and young together.
¹³ Let them praise the name of Yahweh, for His name alone is exalted.
His majesty covers heaven and earth.
¹⁴ He has raised up a horn for His people,
resulting in praise to all His godly ones,
to the Israelites, the people close to Him.
Hallelujah!

PSALM 148:7-14

The second half of Psalm 148 opens with a call for the earthly portion of God’s creation to praise Him. Notice that the imperative verb *praise* extends throughout the rest of the psalm to include all earthly beings—animate or inanimate. There were sea monsters and creatures in the “ocean depths,” hidden from human eyes, whose purpose even in the abyss was to praise their Maker. He made the birds and winged creatures that would share the atmosphere with lightning, hail, snow, cloud, and winds—all of them praising the name of Yahweh.

What the psalmist knew (and we modern people easily forget) is that God designed weather phenomena to accomplish His purposes; therefore, even the weather gives Him glory. As each element does its thing, it “executes His command.” Weather isn’t random or impersonal after all.

The “mountains and all hills” and all vegetation were created on the third day (Gen. 1:11-13; Ps. 148:9). In verse 10, the psalmist noted groups within the animal kingdom were created to praise God. The psalmist concluded the animals by mentioning “flying birds,” which belong to the fifth day of creation. Perhaps they came last because birds singing can so easily be understood as voices lifted in praise to the Maker.

What elements of God’s majesty do you see displayed in the earthly part of creation?

How does observing these elements help us in witnessing to others about God's greatness and love?

Verses 11-12 describe a kaleidoscope of human diversity—humans made in the image of God—all of whom are called to praise Him. It includes those with power (“kings,” “princes,” and “judges”). It includes ordinary individuals (“all peoples”). It includes all age groups. It includes male and female. All are exhorted to praise Yahweh. Watch how the psalmist moved beyond the mere fact of creation to the reasons for worship:

- Earth is to praise “the name of Yahweh” because God has the most exalted name and reputation in the universe. Among other things, *name* stands for character and reputation.
- Earth is to praise Him because of “His majesty” in all the earth. The grandeur of earth, and therefore its Creator, can be seen in every crevice in the world. Like a blanket, His creative splendor covers everything.
- Earth is to praise Him because He has “raised up a horn” for His people. The horn, a biblical symbol of strength and power, probably stands for salvation, both from sin and from enemies.

The people especially called to praise God are those who have received His wonderful salvation! His people understand His love and power the best. They are to stand and praise. No wonder the psalmist concluded with a final “Hallelujah!” We, who have received His salvation, have as an integral part of our mission to display the glory of God's love and power.

What is the connection between our worship and our witness? How can observing the universe's praise encourage us to praise God?

Creation draws us to look at something beyond ourselves and marvel at it. All of creation has been given to us so that we behold the awesome God who has made it all and made it all good.³

MATT CHANDLER

3

God was Praised by Angels

In his series of children’s fiction books called *The Chronicles of Narnia*, C. S. Lewis imagined what another world was like. He accounted for its creation by telling what some children, including the boy Digory, saw at the beginning of Narnia. *The Magician’s Nephew* describes the heavens bursting into song as Aslan (the lion-like Christ figure) sings them into existence: “The voice [of Aslan] was suddenly joined by other voices; ... If you had seen and heard it as Digory did, you would have felt quite certain ... that it was the First Voice, the deep one, which had made them appear and made them sing.”⁴

Lewis was on target. At the beginning of creation, God first lavished creative energy on His heavenly home and its inhabitants. This is what we’ve called earlier in this study “the third heaven.” But why create the angelic beings before He created other intelligent life? At least in part, God was making it possible for an adoring audience to observe the rest of His creative acts and to praise Him for them. We find evidence for this in an astonishing passage in Job:

⁵ Who fixed its dimensions? Certainly you know!
Who stretched a measuring line across it?
⁶ What supports its foundations?
Or who laid its cornerstone
⁷ while the morning stars sang together
and all the sons of God shouted for joy?
JOB 38:5-7

These verses come near the beginning of God’s response to Job, a man who had greatly suffered and who had called out to God for answers. God began with a series of rhetorical questions designed to bring Job to an awareness of God the King. Yahweh is the Sovereign Lord.

God’s laying out of the earth didn’t occur in a vacuum. The observers were angelic beings—“the morning stars” and “the sons of God.” God’s heavenly court was watching Him as He created the earth with its kaleidoscope of staggering beauty. What was their response? They formed a colossal choir and “sang together” and “shouted for joy.” They praised the One who created them because this fulfilled God’s purpose in calling them forth.

Consider the following scriptural truths about angels:

- Angels are personal spirit beings created by God. *Personal* means they have intellect,

emotions, and will; they can have a relationship with God. *Spirit beings* means their primary mode of existence isn't bodily (2 Kings 6:16-17).

- Angels have both wisdom and strength. They don't know everything and aren't all-powerful. As God's messengers, they carry out His commands (Ps. 91:11).
- The number of angels is fixed but huge. Angels exist in many different orders, such as the cherubim and winged seraphim (Gen. 3:24; Isa. 6:2; Rev. 5:11).
- The "host of heaven" or "heavenly host" refers to angels who are God's warriors. One of His names is "the LORD of hosts," or "Yahweh Sabaoth" (1 Sam. 17:45; Luke 2:13; Jas. 5:4).
- Angels are presented as male (and when they are visible to humans, they look like human men). They're incapable of sexual intimacy or reproduction as humans are (Matt. 22:30).
- Some angels are assigned by God as "ministering spirits" to serve God's people (Heb. 1:14).
- Like the rest of God's creation, angels exist to bring glory and praise to God. Revelation 5-6 portrays angels as worshipping both God on His throne and the Lamb of God.

What images come to mind when you think of angels? How do these images correspond to the biblical teaching about angels?

How would your life be different (attitudes or actions) if you praised God on earth the way the angels praise God in heaven?

Think about the angels who shouted the angelic version of "hallelujah" as they watched God the King create the universe, the world, and everything in them. They've praised Him eternally since: "Day and night they never stop, saying: Holy, holy, holy, Lord God, the Almighty, who was, who is, and who is coming" (Rev. 4:8).

On a daily basis, in what ways do you see yourself joining in the praise that goes on in the highest heavens?

GROUP STUDY

Warm Up

Because of the ceremonial aspect of “proper church behavior,” it’s possible that many of us find it difficult to imagine the sounds, sights, and emotions connected to uninhibited, no-holds-barred praise toward God. But instead of looking to the 11 o’clock hour on Sunday to see this, we should be looking for the NFL hour on television. The roar of a sell-out-crowd stadium—and all the raw emotion from the loyal fans—deserves our full attention. Truly, it’s a small picture (and symbol) of what we will experience in the future as we gather around the Person of Jesus Christ. John records his revelation and wrote these passages:

¹ Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven. He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars, ² he was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand. He planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, ³ and he gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion. When he shouted, the voices of the seven thunders spoke.

REVELATION 10:1-3

After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting:
“Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God.”

REVELATION 19:1

And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder.

REVELATION 14:2

Eventually, we all will experience the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual fulfillment that comes from joining in on that holy roar.

Until then, what are some ways we can praise God as we’re out in the world—among neighbors, with coworkers, or surrounded by strangers?

Discussion

Before the world existed, God was always there—Father, Son, and Spirit united in love and glory forever. In love, God created everything in heaven and on earth for His glory. As Creator, He is worthy to receive praise from everything in heaven and on earth. The mission of God’s people today is driven by a vision of His power and love, both of which He displayed in the creation of the universe.

During this time you’ll have an opportunity to discuss what God revealed to you during the week. Listed below are some of the questions from your daily reading assignments. They will guide your small-group discussion.

1. What emotions did you feel as you praised someone who really deserved it? What was their reaction? Does this emotion fade over time? Why or why not?
2. In what ways has man missed the mark and worshiped God’s creation instead of the Creator?
3. How does the creation of entities in the three heavens show God’s power? In your experience, what elements in each of the three heavens especially display the majesty of their Creator?
4. What elements of God’s majesty do you see displayed in the earthly part of creation?
5. What is the connection between our worship and our witness? How can observing the universe’s praise encourage us to praise God?
6. How would your life be different (attitudes or actions) if you praised God on earth the way the angels praise God in heaven?
7. In what ways are you joining in the praise that goes on in the highest heavens?

Conclusion

“And the greatest is ...” No question about it, God the King of heaven and earth is the greatest. He’s the most beautiful, the most righteous, the most everything good and pure. He created the heavens in all their complexity, visible and invisible, so that they all would praise Him.

Because Jesus’ followers have been made alive to this reality, we’re driven by the vision of God’s power and love on display in the creation of the universe. What a privilege it is to praise the One who made us for His glory. Our mission is to spread the fame of His name.

Spend some time praying this for you and for your group:

“God, we want our lives to reflect the goodness and greatness of You and who You are! Show us how to do this in the big things and the little things of life. Help us see every opportunity as a way our lives can glorify You.”

1. Billy Graham, in *Billy Graham in Quotes*, ed. Franklin Graham (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 18.
2. Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine: Modern English Version* (New York: Revell, 2005), 15-16.
3. Matt Chandler and Jared Wilson, *The Explicit Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 104.
4. C.S. Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1970), 99.
5. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 475.

