

# The Majesty of God's Name

---

## THE POINT

*God is majestic and exalted by everything He does.*

## THE PASSAGE

Psalms 138:1-8

## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

We all have at least one song—perhaps several—that moves us. Songs that have a way of touching our emotions. Stir something within us. Maybe they put a smile on our face or make us want to dance. Even if the song is in a language we don't know, the music itself can often move us. (Just ask somebody who loves opera.) Music is such a universal language.

- The right patriotic song stirs in us everything we love about our country.
- The right Christmas song can quickly put us in a festive mood, longing for home, snow, or pumpkin pie.
- A certain love song takes us back to a special moment in our lives.
- Some songs just make us feel good.

Songs that stir our emotions are nothing new. The Bible is full of just such songs. While many of the psalms in the Bible express human emotions, one type of song was predominant for David, the most well-known writer of psalms. David was most moved by the majesty and glory of God. With all the soul-stirring themes in our music, nothing compares to the glory of God's name.





5 MINUTES

NOTES

## GET INTO THE STUDY

**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** Play a video clip with some songs that get stuck in your head. Then ask **Question #1**.

**NOTE:** A video option can be found at [BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra](https://BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra).

**DISCUSS:** **Question #1** on page 21 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): “**What song often gets stuck playing over and over in your head?**”

**GUIDE:** Direct the group to “**The Bible Meets Life**” on page 21 of the PSG. Introduce the importance of exalting God’s name by reading or summarizing the text or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

**RECAP:** Songs that stir our emotions are nothing new. The Bible is full of just such songs. While many of the psalms in the Bible express human emotions, one type of song was predominant for David, the most well-known writer of psalms. David was most moved by the majesty and glory of God. With all the soul-stirring themes in our music, nothing compares to the glory of God’s name.

**GUIDE:** Call attention to “**The Point**” on page 21 of the PSG: “**God is majestic and exalted by everything He does.**”

**PRAY:** Transition into the study by asking God to help the group understand the majesty of His name. Thank Him for being the God who continually blesses us.

# STUDY THE BIBLE



10 MINUTES

NOTES

## PSALM 138:1-3

**<sup>1</sup> I will give you thanks with all my heart; I will sing your praise before the heavenly beings. <sup>2</sup> I will bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your constant love and truth. You have exalted your name and your promise above everything else. <sup>3</sup> On the day I called, you answered me; you increased strength within me.**

**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** Use the “Objects and Symbols” option on page 35 of this Leader Guide to help the group consider how we appropriately and inappropriately worship.

**READ:** Ask someone to read aloud Psalm 138:1-3 on page 22 of the PSG.

**SUMMARIZE:** Highlight the main points from page 22 of the PSG. David used three phrases to describe worship: “I will give thanks; I will sing your praise; I will bow down.”

**1. Giving thanks is important.** David mentioned it twice in the opening verses of this psalm. Thanksgiving and worship are not associated primarily with feelings, but with actions.

**2. Praise is essential.** Music isn’t the only means of worship, but it’s a good one. David used music to settle his father’s flocks. His melodies mellowed the raging heart of Saul. Throughout his life, David’s praise flowed through voice, lyre, harp, and timbrel.

**3. Our posture means something.** True understanding of God’s majesty causes the worshiper to “bow down.” Experiencing God’s holiness moves us to fall prostrate before Him.

**LEADER PACK:** In advance, make copies of **Pack Item 3, “The Book of Psalms”** handout, and distribute them to group members to provide context for this passage. Invite volunteers to read the relevant points aloud.

**RECAP:** We can exalt the name of the Lord for who He is and what He does in our lives. His love and mercy are sure. His truth endures to all generations. Who God was to David, God will be to us. Our natural reaction should be to exalt God’s name in praise and worship.

**DISCUSS:** **Question #2** on page 23 of the PSG: **“What are some ways you like to express praise to God?”**

**TRANSITION:** God’s name is exalted because of His love and truth. In the next verses, we also see that God’s name is exalted because of His promises.



**ALTERNATE QUESTION:**  
*What might hinder us from praising God?*

## PSALM 138:1-3 *Commentary*

**Connection to The Point:** God’s name is exalted because of His love and truth.

**I will give you thanks (v. 1).** This introductory verse is a declaration by the psalmist that he will praise God. The singing or speaking of this psalm in public worship would have been a declaration of will by the worshipers that they would praise the Lord. Even when trials threaten the believer, expressing thanksgiving to God—for who God is, what He has done, and what He will do—is still a good way to display faith and hope in Him.

**Sing your praise (v. 1).** The Hebrew word for *sing your praise* (*zamar*) is usually associated with praising the Lord. It can refer both to vocal singing and the playing of instruments (Ps. 33:2; 98:5). Singing and musical instruments often go together in providing opportunities for people to remember and praise the Lord and express their thanks to Him. Singing is mentioned hundreds of times in the Scripture, so it is a vital expression of public worship for the people of God.

**The heavenly beings (v. 1).** Various interpretations have been suggested as to the identity of the heavenly beings. Some have taken them to be angels, false gods, or even human rulers, such as judges or kings. All these terms are possible translations of the Hebrew term *elohim*. However, the better translation is “before the gods.” This does not imply that these gods are real but serves as a polemic against those who worship false gods.

**Bow down (v. 2).** The Hebrew word for *bow down* (*shachah*) describes someone who has prostrated himself or laid flat on the ground. It is an expression of worship with humility. Those in the presence of royalty would never exceed the elevation of the king. Perhaps as David looked toward the future construction of the temple in Jerusalem, he laid himself flat on the ground in submission and surrender to the Lord, his King.

**Holy temple (v. 2).** Solomon built the temple after David’s death (1 Kings 6), but David planned for the temple by purchasing the land (1 Chron. 21:22-30). David may have been looking toward the place where the temple would one day reside. Another possibility is that David was speaking of God’s heavenly temple (2 Sam. 22:7).

**Your name (v. 2).** The *name* of the Lord represents His character and attributes. It emphasizes His power, authority, and holiness. The personal, covenant name of the Lord, *Yahweh* (usually indicated by the term “LORD”), emphasizes that He is both Creator and Sustainer. We know God and His name only because He has chosen to reveal Himself to humanity. *Yahweh* is the name by which He chose to reveal Himself to Moses and the Israelites, as well as to future generations (Ex. 3:14-15; 6:3).

**Constant love (v. 2).** The psalmist thanked God for His *constant love* (*chesed*), a rich word in Hebrew that has led to many different translations of this term. It describes God’s covenantal love, which could be expressed as “faithful love” (Ex. 34:6), “love” (Isa. 54:8), “constant love” (Ps. 40:10), “kindness” (Gen. 19:19), “loyalty” (Job 6:14), “goodness” (Isa. 40:6), and “faithfulness” (Mic. 6:8). God is faithful to His people not because they are faithful to Him, but because He is faithful to Himself and the covenant that He has made with them.

**Exalted (v. 2).** To *exalt* (*gadal*) is to magnify, to make great. God has exalted His name “above everything else.” When we exalt the Lord, we proclaim His greatness above all other beings; He alone is worthy of our praise and worship.

**Promise (v. 2).** God declared the promise of His covenant in His Word. He revealed Himself through His Word, giving His people reason to continue thanking Him and bowing in submission to Him. Again, because God is true, His promises are true and certain.

**On the day I called (v. 3).** No specific occasion is mentioned as the time of David’s prayer, but he certainly faced his share of dangerous and troublesome times that could have occasioned this call.

**Answered . . . increased strength within me (v. 3).** As David needed the Lord and called upon Him, God in His love and faithfulness answered David, providing the strength he needed to get through whatever storm of life he was facing.

# STUDY THE BIBLE



10 MINUTES

NOTES

## PSALM 138:4-5

<sup>4</sup> All the kings on earth will give you thanks, LORD, when they hear what you have promised. <sup>5</sup> They will sing of the LORD's ways, for the LORD's glory is great.

**READ:** Ask someone to read aloud Psalm 138:4-5 on page 23 of the PSG.

**RECAP:** God's name is above all names and His throne surpasses all others. Although David was the king of Israel, he bowed before the King of kings. David wasn't the only one to recognize God's exalted majesty. He called on all the "kings on earth" to offer thanks to the Lord. Throughout the Old Testament record, various kings recognized the power of the God of Israel.

**GUIDE:** Use the commentary for the verses on the next page of the Leader Guide to remind the group of the future implications of the kings of the earth bowing to God.

**SUMMARIZE:** Highlight the main points from page 24 of the PSG: This kingly praise is motivated by at least three majestic aspects of God: His promises, His ways, and His glory.

**1. God's promises are exceeding great and precious (2 Pet. 1:4).** They are kept through His power for His purposes.

**2. Like the rulers of the nations, we "sing of the LORD's ways."** His ways exceed our ways, and His thoughts are superior to our thoughts, as the heavens are above the earth (Isa. 55:8-9).

**3. We praise God because His glory is great.** David's word for "glory" conveyed weightiness or serious honor.

**DISCUSS: Question #3** on page 24 of the PSG: **"What are some promises of God that are meaningful to you?"**

**DO:** Direct group members to **Engage** with **"Seeing God's Majesty"** on page 25 of the PSG (page 35 of this Leader Guide) to give the group another opportunity to praise God.

**TRANSITION:** In the next verses, we see that God's name is exalted because of His care for the humble.

### ALTERNATE QUESTION:

*How have you seen God's promises fulfilled in your life?*

## PSALM 138:4-5 *Commentary*

**Connection to The Point:** God's name is exalted because of His promises.

**All the kings on earth (v. 4).** At the time of David, he was probably the only king who gave proper thanks to the Lord for His covenant and His faithfulness. However, this passage and other places in Scripture proclaim that one day *all the kings on earth* will give glory to God (Ps. 22:27-28; Isa. 2:1-4; Rev. 21:24).

**Give you thanks (v. 4).** David had expressed his own individual desire to give thanks to the Lord, but what had started personally would spread to a communal celebration, even beyond the boundaries of Jewish territory (vv. 4-5).

**LORD (v. 4).** At the start of the psalm, David did not address God by name, but he did refer to His "name" (v. 2). Here David used the name *Yahweh* (indicated with "LORD") which God had revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:14-16). *Yahweh* is God's covenant name. When describing the faithful love and truth of God (Ps. 138:2), *Yahweh* is the most appropriate name to use (Ex. 34:6-7).

**What you have promised (v. 4).** Literally, the Hebrew says that the kings of the earth will give thanks when they hear "the words of your mouth." This is a reference to the promises of God's Word. In making His covenant with Abraham, God had promised "all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:3). This promise was ultimately fulfilled through God's Messiah, Jesus Christ, who accomplished salvation for those who repent and believe in Him (John 3:16-18).

**Sing (v. 5).** Those who have heard and embraced the good news of the Word of God find themselves singing. The kings of the earth will one day sing of the Lord's actions.

**Ways (v. 5).** The term (*derek*) comes from a root word meaning "to tread, to walk." *Derek* is used figuratively for "a course of life" or "a mode of action." Many of God's mighty activities are described in the Great Hallel (Ps. 136). God has displayed His wonders both in creation (136:1-9) and in saving Israel through the exodus (vv. 10-26).

**Glory (v. 5).** The Hebrew word (*kabod*) literally means "to be heavy or weighty." In relation to God, it describes the "weighty importance and shining majesty that accompany God's presence."<sup>1</sup> To praise the Lord's glory is to honor Him for who He is, as well as for His gracious actions on behalf of His covenantal people.

**Great (v. 5).** The Hebrew word (*gadol*) means something massive or large. It can describe something great in size (like a whale [Gen. 1:21] or a river [15:18]), someone or something of great importance (Gen 12:2), great power (Ex. 14:31; 15:16), great riches (1 Sam. 17:25), or loud noises (Ex. 11:6). By describing the Lord's glory as great, David was expressing the Lord's preeminence. God is infinitely more important than anyone or anything in His created order in the sense that He alone is to be worshiped. One day all the kings of the earth will understand and acknowledge the Lord's greatness (Isa. 45:23; Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:10-11).

# STUDY THE BIBLE



15 MINUTES

NOTES

## PSALM 138:6-8

**<sup>6</sup> Though the LORD is exalted, he takes note of the humble; but he knows the haughty from a distance. <sup>7</sup> If I walk into the thick of danger, you will preserve my life from the anger of my enemies. You will extend your hand; your right hand will save me. <sup>8</sup> The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me. LORD, your faithful love endures forever; do not abandon the work of your hands.**

**READ:** Ask someone to read aloud Psalm 138:6-8 on page 26 of the PSG.

**RECAP:** God will not share His glory with another, which is why He “resists the proud but gives grace to the humble” (Jas. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5). When we humble ourselves before God, we acknowledge His rightful exaltation. God doesn’t ignore our respect for His glory but takes note of it. True humility recognizes His greatness.

**DISCUSS: Question #4** on page 26 of the PSG: **“How would you describe a humble person?”**

**SUMMARIZE:** Highlight the main points from page 26 of the PSG. If we are humble before God, He extends His hand to save us. Verse 8 conveys not simply a declaration, but a promise containing several truths:

- **The source of fulfillment is the Lord.** He accomplishes everything.
- **The certainty of fulfillment is the Lord.** David didn’t say God might, but He will fulfill.
- **The goal of fulfillment is the Lord’s purpose, not ours.** Our best end results from trusting His plans.
- **The beneficiaries of fulfillment are the Lord’s people.** God works not just for Israel, but for David; not just for humanity in general, but for you and me individually.

God is not only able but desires to complete what He began in us, for we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works. As a result of God’s faithfulness, we exalt His name.

**DISCUSS: Question #5** on page 26 of the PSG: **“Why is humility so important to God?”**

**GUIDE:** Refer back to **“The Point”** for this session: **“God is majestic and exalted by everything He does.”**

**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** Use the “Song” option on page 35 of this Leader Guide to offer the group an opportunity to praise God for His majesty.

### ALTERNATE QUESTION:

*Who has modeled humility in your life?*

## PSALM 138:6-8 *Commentary*

**Connection to The Point:** God's name is exalted because of His care for the humble.

**The humble (v. 6).** The term (*shaphal*) is used to describe those who are modest and/or considered to be of low estate (social status, economic status, and so forth). The kings of the earth may think that they are great, but God is the greatest of all, and yet He sees the plight of the humble. The same God who dwells in the heavens also chooses to live among the lowly (Isa. 57:15). To be of humble spirit "shows itself in several ways: a recognition of one's sinfulness before a holy God (Isa. 6:5), obedience to God (Deut. 8:2), and submission to God (2 Kings 22:19; 2 Chron. 34:37)."<sup>2</sup>

**The haughty (v. 6).** The Hebrew reader would have seen irony in the choice of words in this verse. David described God as "exalted," which means "high," and then he used a word for *haughty* that also means "high" or "exalted," except in a negative sense. The term for *haughty* (*gavoah*) has the general meaning of "to be tall" or "tower high." A form of the term is used in reference to an eagle that flies high in the sky (Job 39:27), of the heavens being high above the earth (Ps. 103:11; Isa. 55:9), and of an individual who is of great height (1 Sam. 10:23). Figuratively, it describes one who has an attitude of pride or arrogance. Such an attitude is the opposite of what God desires of a person. "Mankind, he has told each of you what is good and what it is the LORD requires of you: to act justly, to love faithfulness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Mic. 6:8; see Ps. 51:17). Pride occurs in the heart, where it festers (Ezek. 28:2,5,17; Ps. 131:1; Prov. 18:12; 2 Chron. 32:25). However, it also has a connection with the eyes (Ps. 101:5), and the lips (Ps. 10:3-7).

**The thick of danger (v. 7).** Being in *the thick of danger* is to be in dangerous situation which could lead to death, such as facing a wild animal or an invading army. David faced many such dangers in his own life.

**Preserve my life (v. 7).** The term (*chayah*) can mean "to keep alive" or "revive." David faced the enemies of Israel (Philistines), enemies within Israel (Saul), and enemies within his own family (Absalom). Knowing the truth of Psalm 138:6 assured David that God would *preserve* him from his enemies.

**Extend your hand; your right hand (v. 7).** The figurative use of both *hand* and *right hand* in relation to God represent the Lord's supreme, omnipotent power and authority. The *right hand* in particular symbolizes salvation and protection.

**Save (v. 7).** The Hebrew term (*yasa*) refers to being safe or being rescued/freed from something. When used in relation to God, it often has the meaning of the Lord rescuing someone from human enemies (Ex. 14:30; Num. 10:9) or disasters and calamities (1 Sam. 10:19). It is also sometimes used of God delivering someone from sin (Jer. 4:14; Ezek. 37:23), death (Ps. 72:13; Isa. 45:17), and punishment (Jer. 30:11). The God who had first reached out His hand to deliver Israel in the exodus (Ex. 3:20) would again reach out His hand and save David. His knowledge of God's past saving activities (Ps. 138:3) gave David assurance that God would continue to work on his behalf for his good.

**Faithful love (v. 8).** Returning to the powerful Hebrew word (*chesed*) for "constant love" (Ps. 138:2) or *faithful love*, David trusted that God's love would never fail him. David certainly failed God on several occasions, but God would not fail David. His covenantal love toward David would last forever, especially since God had established David's line forever (2 Sam. 7). God would be faithful to David because of the covenant they shared, and in the new covenant established through Jesus's blood (Luke 22:20), God continues to show His faithful love to believers in Christ.

**The work of your hands (v. 8).** David ended his psalm with a request that God would hold him in the same omnipotent hands that had made him. In other words, David prayed God would not release His grip upon him. God has promised the righteous He would uphold them by His right hand (Isa. 41:10; see also John 10:28-29). Even in times of trouble, David was trusting in the faithfulness, sovereignty, and goodness of God.



# LIVE IT OUT



5 MINUTES

NOTES

**GUIDE:** Direct the group to page 27 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the following applications:

- **Consider.** Think about how God displays His majesty around you. Write down items that are important to you. Look for opportunities to share about these blessings with others.
- **Hear.** Create a playlist of songs that lift up the majesty of God. Listen to this playlist throughout the week to draw your attention to God.
- **Worship.** Get alone and have a time of praise for God’s majestic name. Get with your family and share a devotional focused on God’s majesty. Get with your church and join in worship of our God.

## WRAP IT UP

**TRANSITION:** Read or restate “**The Point**” for this session: “**God is majestic and exalted by everything He does.**”

**PRAY:** Thank God for the way He exalts the humble. Ask Him to remove pride from our lives so that we can exalt His name through our lives.



SCAN ME



**Get insights on each week’s study.**

Listen to *Bible Studies for Life Adults* through your favorite podcast app.

© 2023 Lifeway Christian Resources

## ENGAGE

**Seeing God's Majesty.** Choose one of the following images that cause you to worship God in His majesty. Then offer a prayer of praise to Him.



**My Prayer:**

NOTES

## BONUS CONTENT

**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** Play a song of praise exalting God's majesty. Then close in prayer.

**NOTE:** A video option can be found at [BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra](https://BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra).

**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** Challenge group members to look around your meeting space and find "Objects and Symbols" that represent what the world encourages us to worship rather than God. (For example, a padded chair could represent comfort or idleness.) Encourage volunteers to present their object and symbols and explain what they mean.