



Lesson 3: Your Hallelujahs Don't Have to be Hollow Anymore

Dear Fellow Travelers,

An editorial piece in the Outlook section of *The Washington Post* several months ago caught my eye. Written by pastor Henry Brinton, it discussed the explosive popularity of Rick Warren's *The Purpose-Driven Life* among churches and the general public. This book, which sold more than 11 million copies last year, focuses upon personal change as the key to stress reduction, satisfaction, and simplified living. Brinton wonders whether or not the church needs to challenge us to "move beyond the personal to the public." Spiritual growth, he argues, is not only about the personal; it also has a social component that demands our prophetic response.

The praise in psalm hymns also has a social component. Psalm 146, for example, declares that God executes justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry, sets the prisoners free, upholds the orphan and the widow, and brings the way of the wicked to ruin. But when we read the newspapers and look at the television news, we see clear evidence that denies the psalmist's praise, and we wonder whether this praise is naive or phony. It is neither. The praise of Psalm 146 is prophetic praise. The psalmist knows full well how broken the world is, but insists on holding out a picture of the future, a vision of the world that God intends for us. This God-centered world of justice lures us into the future at the same time that it critiques our present, our government, our experts, ourselves.

Our God is praiseworthy because our God is the Creator, "who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them" (Ps. 146.6). God is the One upon whom we all depend for our very lives. Many of the things upon which we once depended, in which we placed our trust, have betrayed us—our fast food, our health plans, our 401Ks, our government. But not God, the Creator of us all. Retreating into our individual spiritual bubbles and focusing upon personal change might just keep us from this life-giving, world-transforming recognition.

I recommend to you a book that addresses the social component of our praise: David Pleins: *The Psalms: Songs of Tragedy, Hope, and Justice* (Orbis, 1993). Pleins investigates the psalms as "poetry of justice" that helps us see the world through God's eyes so that politics and praise can never be separated.

May you find ways this week to bring your politics and praise together.

In our Creator's name,

Denise