



SUNDAY SCHOOL JULY 5, 2026

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Old Testament

Psalm 145:8-14

Context: Psalm 145 reminds us that God's greatness is not shown through domination, but through mercy, patience, faithfulness, and care for those who are falling.

The Lord is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
The Lord is good to all,
and his compassion is over all that he has made.

All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord,
and all your faithful shall bless you.
They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom
and tell of your power,
to make known to all people your mighty deeds
and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.
Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and your dominion endures throughout all generations.

The Lord is faithful in all his words
and gracious in all his deeds.
The Lord upholds all who are falling
and raises up all who are bowed down.

OVERVIEW

Psalm 145 is a hymn of praise traditionally attributed to David. It is an acrostic psalm, meaning each line follows the order of the Hebrew alphabet. In other words, it praises God "from A to Z." That matters: this is not random emotion. It is structured praise, disciplined praise, praise meant to shape memory and community.

Verses 8–14 focus on God's character:

- God is gracious.
- God is merciful.
- God is slow to anger.
- God is overflowing with steadfast love.
- God is good to all.
- God upholds those who fall.
- God raises those who are bowed down.

That is a very different picture of kingship than the ancient world often knew. Human kings could be violent, impulsive, and self-protective. Psalm 145 says God's reign is marked by compassion and restoration. Verse 8 directly echoes God's self-description in Exodus 34:6, one of the Old Testament's central descriptions of divine character.

See Addendum on Acrostic Alphabet of Praise



BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Immediately Before: Psalm 145:1–7

The psalm opens with personal praise: “I will extol you, my God and King.” The speaker begins individually, but quickly moves outward: one generation tells another generation about God’s works. Faith is not just private belief; it is handed down, spoken, sung, remembered, and lived.

The verses before our passage emphasize God’s greatness and mighty acts. Then verses 8–14 clarify what kind of greatness God has. Not brute force. Not intimidation. Not “my way or else.” God’s greatness is mercy.

Psalm 145:8–14

This section gives the heart of the psalm. God’s kingdom is everlasting, but the character of that kingdom is compassion. Verse 9 is especially important: “The Lord is good to all.” Not just Israel. Not just the faithful. Not just the deserving. All.

Immediately After: Psalm 145:15–21

The verses after our reading continue the theme of care. God gives food, satisfies desire, is near to those who call, and watches over those who love him. The movement is from God’s character to God’s action: because God is compassionate, God feeds, sustains, hears, and protects.

Broader Context of the Book of Psalms

The Psalms are Israel’s prayer book, hymnbook, grief book, protest book, and praise book all rolled into one. Many scholars describe the Psalms as “a school of prayer,” giving people language for their deepest feelings and hopes.

Psalm 145 appears near the end of the Psalter, where praise becomes increasingly dominant. After many psalms of fear, exile, enemies, guilt, and suffering, the book moves toward a final word: praise. Not because life is easy, but because God is faithful.

HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

In the ancient Near East, kingship was often associated with conquest, taxation, forced labor, military strength, and public displays of power. Kings were expected to protect their people, but they could also become oppressive.

Psalm 145 uses royal language — kingdom, dominion, mighty acts — but redefines kingship around mercy. God’s reign is not like Pharaoh’s domination or Babylon’s empire. God’s reign lifts up the fallen and supports the bowed down.

That is politically powerful language. It says the truest ruler is not the one who crushes enemies, but the one who sustains the weak.

Psalm 145 asks, “What kind of power looks most like God?”

The answer is not control.

The answer is compassion.



HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

The psalm is attributed to David, so the traditional setting would place it around the united monarchy, roughly 1000 B.C.

However, many scholars understand the Psalms as a collection gathered, edited, prayed, and sung over centuries. The final shaping of the Psalter likely continued into and after the Babylonian exile, especially from the 6th century B.C. onward. Psalm 145's emphasis on God's everlasting kingdom would have been especially meaningful for people who had seen human kingdoms rise, collapse, and disappoint.

Possible timeline:

- **Davidic monarchy: around 1000 B.C.**
- Divided kingdom: after 930 B.C.
- Fall of northern Israel: 722 B.C.
- Fall of Jerusalem / exile: 586 B.C.
- Return from exile: after 539 B.C.
- Final shaping of Psalms: likely over several centuries

So, whether we read it in David's voice or Israel's later worshiping voice, Psalm 145 proclaims: human kingdoms pass away, but God's compassionate reign endures.

BIBLE TRANSLATION UNDERSTANDING

Psalm 145 was written in Hebrew. It is poetic, structured, and theological. As noted before, it is also an acrostic. Interestingly, Psalm 145 is famous because one Hebrew letter — *nun* — appears to be missing in the traditional Masoretic Text. Some ancient witnesses, including the Septuagint and Dead Sea Scroll material, include a line after verse 13 that many modern translations footnote or include.

That does not change the central meaning of the psalm, but it gives a good reminder: Bible translation involves ancient manuscripts, comparison, judgment, humility, and footnotes. Footnotes are not threats to faith. Sometimes they are signs of careful scholarship.

Key Hebrew ideas:

Gracious — God gives favor that is not earned.

Merciful / compassionate — related to deep, tender care. It can carry a sense of womb-like compassion, the kind of care that protects vulnerable life.

Slow to anger — literally suggests "long of nostrils," an ancient idiom for patience. God does not have a short fuse.

Steadfast love — often translating Hebrew as covenant loyalty, durable love, committed mercy. It is not sentimental niceness. It is love that stays.

Kingdom / dominion — royal language, but the psalm fills it with compassion rather than coercion.

Major English translation stages:

- Early Hebrew oral and written tradition
- Greek Septuagint, beginning around the 3rd–2nd centuries B.C.
- Latin Vulgate, late 4th century A.D.



- Wycliffe Bible, late 1300s
- Tyndale, 1520s–1530s
- King James Version, 1611
- Revised Standard Version, 1952
- New Revised Standard Version, 1989
- New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition, 2021

A theologically important translation choice is “steadfast love.” Some translations say “lovingkindness,” “mercy,” or “abounding in love.” Each gets part of the meaning, but the Hebrew word “*hesed*” is bigger than affection. It is loyal, covenantal, active love.

SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY & GRANT COUNTY CONTEXT
Metaphorically, Psalm 145:8–14 is a portrait of what holy strength looks like.

In Grant County terms, this psalm is not about a God who stands at the courthouse steps demanding applause. It is about a God who shows up at the food pantry, the hospital room, the farm during a bad season, the recovery meeting, the nursing home, the classroom, the unemployment line, and the kitchen table where the bills are spread out.

“The Lord upholds all who are falling” is not abstract theology. That is the neighbor who just lost a spouse. The farmer watching markets and weather. The parent worried about a child. The veteran carrying quiet wounds. The pastor stretched between two churches. The person who looks fine in the pew but is depressed down inside.

This psalm tells us God’s kingdom is not measured by how many people it can overpower, but by how many people it can lift.

HOW SHOULD WE ACT AND REACT TO THIS SCRIPTURE TODAY?

We should first let the psalm correct our picture of God. If we imagine God primarily as angry, distant, punitive, or waiting to catch us, Psalm 145 says: start again.

God is gracious and merciful.

Then we should let it correct our picture of strength. If God’s power is shown through patience and compassion, then Christian strength cannot be cruelty, domination, or winning every argument.

We act by becoming more like the God we praise:

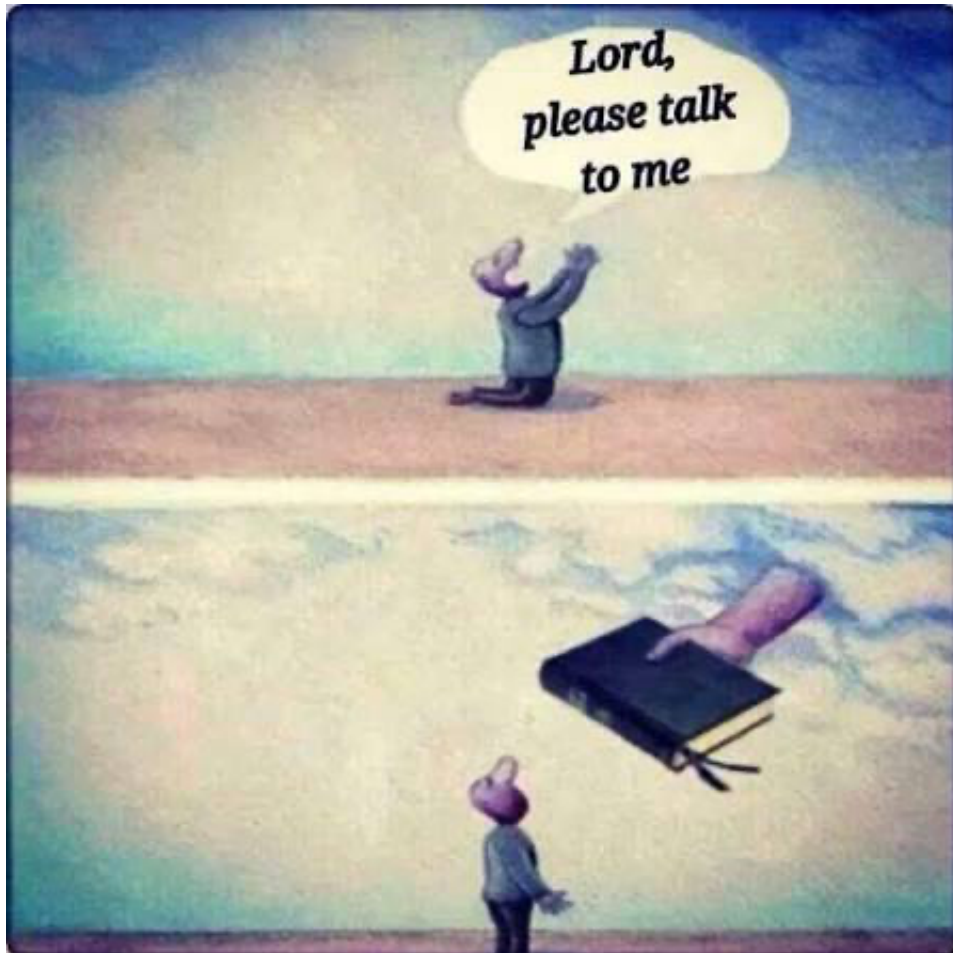
- Be slower to anger.
- Be quicker to mercy.
- Be loyal in love.
- Lift people who are falling.
- Notice those who are bowed down.
- Use whatever influence we have to restore, not crush.

If we praise a compassionate God on Sunday, we should not become hard-hearted people on Monday.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *What word or phrase in Psalm 145:8–14 stands out most to you?*
2. *Why do you think the psalm says God is “slow to anger” instead of saying God never gets angry?*
3. *What is the difference between God being “good to all” and God being good only to people who deserve it?*
4. *How does this psalm challenge common ideas about power, leadership, or kingship?*
5. *What would it look like for a church to reflect Psalm 145 in Grant County?*
6. *Is it harder for us to believe God is merciful toward others, or toward ourselves?*





Gospel

Matthew 11:16-19

Context: In Matthew 11:16–19, Jesus compares his generation to children who refuse to join either a funeral song or a wedding dance — rejecting both John the Baptist’s stern call to repentance and Jesus’ joyful table fellowship.

“But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,

*‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
we wailed, and you did not mourn.’*

“For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

OVERVIEW

This short passage is Jesus’ critique of spiritual stubbornness. John came fasting, warning, and living in the wilderness, and people said, “He has a demon.” Jesus came eating, drinking, healing, and sharing meals with sinners, and people called him “a glutton and a drunkard.”

The issue is not John’s style or Jesus’ style. The issue is that some people had already decided they would not listen. No messenger was acceptable. No tone was right. No evidence was enough.

Jesus ends with: “Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.” In other words, time will reveal the truth. The fruit of God’s wisdom will show itself in transformed lives.

BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Immediately Before

Matthew 11 begins with **John the Baptist in prison** asking whether Jesus is truly “the one who is to come.” Jesus responds by pointing to signs of healing, restoration, and good news to the poor. Then Jesus praises John as more than a prophet, but also says the kingdom of heaven is breaking in through Jesus in a new way.

So, just before our passage, Jesus is explaining John’s role and defending him from misunderstanding.

Immediately After

After this passage, **Jesus denounces cities where he performed miracles but where people still refused to repent.** Then he offers one of Matthew’s most comforting invitations: “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”

Broader Context of Matthew

Matthew presents Jesus as the Messiah, the fulfillment of Israel’s story, and the teacher of God’s kingdom. Throughout the Gospel, Jesus faces resistance from religious leaders and misunderstanding from crowds. Matthew often shows that people can be close to holy things and still miss what God is doing. This passage fits that theme: God’s truth may arrive in forms we do not expect — through John’s severity or Jesus’ mercy — and both can be rejected when hearts are closed.



HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

John the Baptist and Jesus both lived under Roman occupation, with Jewish religious life shaped by Roman power, local rulers like Herod Antipas, and competing expectations about what God's deliverance should look like.

John's wilderness ministry was politically dangerous because he called people to repentance outside the temple structure and criticized Herod's immoral marriage. That criticism helped land him in prison.

Jesus' ministry was also disruptive, but in a different way. He did not separate himself from sinners; he ate with them. Table fellowship in the first century was socially and religiously loaded. Sharing a meal implied acceptance, relationship, and honor. So, when Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners, critics saw scandal.

John looked too harsh. Jesus looked too loose. But both exposed the same problem: people wanted God's kingdom on their own terms.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

Approximate timeline:

Date	Event
c. 6–4 BC	Birth of Jesus
c. AD 26–27	John the Baptist begins public ministry
c. AD 27–30	Jesus' Galilean ministry
c. AD 28–29	John imprisoned by Herod Antipas
c. AD 30	Crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus
c. AD 70–90	Gospel of Matthew likely written in final form

Matthew 11 likely reflects a moment during Jesus' Galilean ministry while John is imprisoned but before John's execution.

BIBLE TRANSLATION UNDERSTANDING

Matthew was written in Greek, though Jesus himself likely taught mostly in Aramaic. The Gospel uses the Greek phrase often translated "this generation," meaning not simply an age group, but a spiritually resistant people who fail to recognize God's work.

Important translation notes:

- **"This generation"** does not mean "young people." It means the people of Jesus' time who are refusing God's message. This passage is not a complaint about "kids these days." Jesus is talking about spiritual resistance in any age.
- **"We played the flute... we wailed..."** refers to wedding and funeral imagery. Flutes suggest celebration; wailing suggests mourning. Jesus is saying people refused both joy and repentance.
- **"Son of Man"** is Jesus' favorite self-title. It can mean "human one," but it also echoes Daniel 7, where "one like a son of man" receives authority from God. So, the phrase carries both humility and divine authority.



- “**Glutton and drunkard**” echoes Old Testament language from Deuteronomy 21:20, where a rebellious son is accused of being a glutton and drunkard. Jesus’ critics are not merely insulting his diet; they are accusing him of moral failure.
- “**Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds**” means God’s wisdom is proven right by its fruit. Some translations say “children” instead of “deeds,” but the idea is similar: **wisdom is shown by what it produces.**

SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY & GRANT COUNTY CONTEXT

Metaphorically, this passage is about refusing to respond because the message does not arrive in our preferred package.

John comes with discipline, repentance, simplicity, and warning. Jesus comes with meals, mercy, healing, and joy. One is too serious. The other is not serious enough. One is too conservative. The other is too liberal. One is too gloomy. The other is too friendly with the wrong people.

That sounds painfully modern.

In Grant County terms, it is like saying:

- If the message comes from the courthouse, we distrust it.
- If it comes from the church, we say it is too preachy.
- If it comes from a young person, we say they lack wisdom.
- If it comes from an older person, we say they are out of touch.
- If it comes from the city, rural folks dismiss it.
- If it comes from the country, city folks dismiss it.
- If it challenges us, we call it judgment.
- If it welcomes others, we call it compromise.

Jesus’ point is sharp: sometimes our problem is not lack of evidence.

Sometimes our problem is that we have already decided not to dance, not to mourn, not to move, not to listen.

This passage asks: Are we rejecting God’s wisdom because it does not sound like our preferred messenger?

HOW SHOULD WE ACT AND REACT TO THIS SCRIPTURE TODAY?

We should become slower to dismiss people because of style, background, tone, age, politics, denomination, or personality.

We should ask: Is there truth here? Is there value here? Is God trying to reach me through a voice I did not expect?

We should also be careful about labeling people too quickly. John was called demon-possessed. Jesus was called a drunkard and friend of sinners. When we label people, we may avoid listening to them.

And perhaps most importantly, we should remember that Jesus was criticized for being a “friend of sinners.” That insult has become one of the most obvious truths of the Gospel.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *What are some ways we dismiss a message because we dislike the messenger?*
2. *What does it mean that Jesus was called “a friend of tax collectors and sinners”? Who are our “tax collectors”?*
3. *What might “wisdom is vindicated by her deeds” mean in everyday life?*
4. *Where might God be speaking today through someone we are tempted to ignore?*





Addendum

Did Sarah Know Abraham was taking Isaac to be sacrificed?

The short answer is: the Bible never tells us. That silence has led to several interpretations.

View 1: Abraham Did Not Tell Sarah (Most Common Scholarly View)

Many scholars think Abraham intentionally said nothing. Why? Imagine Sarah's perspective:

- She waited decades for Isaac.
- She laughed when told she would have a son.
- She finally gave birth in her old age.
- She had already insisted that Ishmael be sent away to protect Isaac.
- Now Abraham says, "I'm taking Isaac on a three-day trip."

If Abraham had explained God's command, it's hard to imagine Sarah allowing Isaac to leave. Some Jewish commentators even suggest Abraham kept the mission secret because Sarah would have stopped him.

View 2: Sarah Knew

Others suggest Sarah may have known and trusted Abraham completely. The text doesn't support or deny this; it simply doesn't say. Immediately after Genesis 22 comes Genesis 23: "Sarah lived one hundred twenty-seven years..." Then she dies. Some ancient Jewish traditions—not the biblical text itself—suggest that Sarah died from the shock of learning what had almost happened to Isaac. That idea appears in later rabbinic interpretation, but **Genesis itself never makes that connection**. The Bible simply moves from the near-sacrifice to Sarah's death.

Why does God say "your only son" when Abraham already has Ishmael?

This is one of those places where knowing the Hebrew and the story's context helps. Biologically, Isaac is **not** Abraham's only son. Ishmael was born years earlier. Everyone in the story knows that. So why say it?

The Hebrew phrase can mean something like:

- your unique son
- your precious son
- your beloved son

It's emphasizing Isaac's unique place in God's covenant and in Abraham's life at that moment—not making a biological statement. Notice the full phrase: "Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac..."

Each phrase narrows the focus.

- Your son...
- No, the special one...
- The one you love...
- Isaac.

It's almost as if the command keeps becoming more personal and targeted.



Acrostic Psalm 145 — An Alphabet of Praise

One of the fascinating features of Psalm 145 is that it is an **acrostic poem**. In Hebrew, each verse begins with the next letter of the **22-letter Hebrew alphabet**, from **Aleph (א)** to **Tav (ת)**. It is the Hebrew equivalent of writing a poem that begins each line with the next letter from A to Z.

This wasn't simply a literary exercise. The structure symbolized offering God **complete praise**—using every letter available, from beginning to end. We might say today that the psalmist praises God “from A to Z,” or in Hebrew, “from **Aleph to Tav**.”

Interestingly, Psalm 145 contains one of the Bible's most famous textual mysteries. In the oldest traditional Hebrew text (the Masoretic Text), the verse beginning with the Hebrew letter **Nun (נ)** is missing. For centuries, scholars wondered whether the omission was intentional or the result of a copying error.

Then came the discovery of the **Dead Sea Scrolls** in the mid-20th century. Among those ancient manuscripts was a copy of Psalm 145 that **includes the missing Nun verse**, as does the ancient Greek Septuagint. Most scholars now believe an early scribe accidentally skipped the line during copying, although the omission does not affect the overall meaning of the psalm.

One final detail is worth noting. The Hebrew word for **truth** (*'emet*, אֱמֶת) is spelled with **Aleph**, **Mem**, and **Tav**—the **first**, **middle**, and **last** letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Jewish teachers have long used this as a reminder that God's truth extends from beginning to end, encompassing everything in between.

Like so much of Scripture, Psalm 145 is not only inspired in its message—it is crafted in its design.

The Bible wasn't written to us, but it was written for us. The more we understand how it was written, the better we understand what God is trying to say through it.



James 4:13–17 — "Surrender Your Plans"

Overview

James reminds us that while planning for the future is wise, assuming we control the future is not. Human life is temporary and uncertain, so our plans should always be made with humility and openness to God's will. This passage is not against planning—it is against arrogance. James challenges the illusion that we are ultimately in charge of tomorrow.

Biblical Context

James 4 addresses pride, selfish ambition, conflict, and dependence on God. Just before this passage, James urges believers to **"submit yourselves therefore to God"** (4:7) and to humble themselves before the Lord (4:10). The problem isn't making plans. The problem is making plans **without acknowledging God**. The chapter concludes with a memorable statement: "Anyone, then, who knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, sins."

James reminds believers that faith is demonstrated through action, not merely belief.

Connecting James, Psalm 145, and Matthew 11

At first glance, these three readings may seem unrelated, but together they answer three important questions about living a faithful life.

- **Psalm 145** asks, *What kind of God do we trust?* - It answers by describing God as **gracious, merciful, slow to anger, faithful, and compassionate**—a God who lifts up those weighed down by life.
- **James 4:13–17** asks, *Who is really in control of tomorrow?* - James reminds us that life is like a mist—temporary and uncertain. We should make plans, but always with humility, recognizing that our future ultimately rests in God's hands.
- **Matthew 11:16–19** asks, *How will we respond to God's invitation?* - Jesus compares his generation to children who refuse to dance or mourn—people who reject God's message no matter how it comes. Yet Jesus concludes, **"Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."**

Together, the three readings present a progression:

- **Psalm 145** reveals **God's trustworthy character**.
- **James** calls us to **trust God more than our own plans**.
- **Matthew** challenges us to **live out that trust through faithful action**.

When we truly trust that God, our lives begin to reflect that trust in the choices we make each day.

How Should We Respond?

- Make thoughtful plans.
- Pray over those plans.
- Stay humble when circumstances change.
- Trust God when life doesn't follow your schedule.
- Remember that our greatest calling is not simply making plans—but faithfully doing today's good work.

Plan carefully. Hold those plans lightly. Trust God completely.