



A Psalm of Praise



“May I Tell You a Story?”

BY DICK DUERKSEN

But after several days and dozens of great ideas, our trash cans were filled with crumpled solutions. Nothing was working.

“We need a word from the Lord,” one said.

“When David couldn’t find an answer, he just wrote a psalm. Right?”

We spent Friday evening on the porch, watching a mountain sunset and reading the King’s psalms.

“You’ve lived in the mountains,” one of the men said to me. “So take us on a Sabbath journey to somewhere we can hear God’s voice.”

“I know just the place,” I replied with a hopeful smile.

Sabbath was a day of rest. A time to put aside the work and celebrate God’s gift of grace. A perfect time to listen for His voice.

We packed a picnic of apples and peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches, tossed in a dozen bottles of water, and drove deeper into the Rockies.

“Mount Evans is one of 58 Colorado peaks that are more than 14,000 feet [4,267 meters] tall,” I told the guys. “This one’s 14,264 feet [4,347 meters], and it’s got a road that curls almost to the top.”

We drove up, beyond the crowds at Echo Lake, above a forest of stunted trees, around scores of “too-tight” corners, and past granite boulders arranged like the bones of resting dinosaurs. Mountain beasts—pika

It was impossible, like putting a jigsaw puzzle together with pieces from a dozen different boxes. We were about to give up, abandon the goals, pack our suitcases, and go home.

We had borrowed a cabin high in the Rocky Mountains and settled in with certainty. We knew that the four of us could find a way to design a marketing plan 12 universities could use to recruit secondary school students “fairly.” We had been chosen by our peers, wise leaders who believed we could make a small miracle happen.

and marmots—whistled warnings as we passed. Everywhere, the mountain offered thousand-mile views. We stopped often, speaking quietly, with reverence. Between stops, Serge read Psalm 98 aloud.

“Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy; let them sing before the Lord” (NIV).

Just below 13,000 feet (3,962 meters), Summit Lake nourishes families of wildflowers in a large area of Arctic tundra. We pulled into the parking lot, put on heavy jackets, hats, and gloves, and began walking the stony trail past the lake to a place where I have often found wild white mountain goats. It’s a dangerous spot on the mountain, with giant granite boulders and patches of green grass beside a 2,000-foot (609-meter) drop into a dark canyon.

As we settled beside a couple large boulders, there was much wheezing and breath-catching from men who were unaccustomed to the elevation and exercise.

“Remind me why we’re way up here,” one of the men said, looking my way accusingly.

“You wanted to be in a place where we could hear God’s voice, and receive a word from the Lord,” I answered.

Our breathing slowly returned to something near normal, and we began to enjoy the view. That’s when a large mountain



goat chose to make a grand entrance with her two bouncy kids. She knew we were there, yet walked fearlessly around us, guiding the two young ones to join her on a grassy plot beside our boulders. The kids noticed us, but followed Mom's example of ignoring us as they turned bright-red flowers into dessert.

Serge spoke first. "I've never been this close to a wild animal!"

"Me neither," the others chimed in.

"Are we safe?" "Can we talk?" "Will they bite?" Then the hillside went silent, except for the sounds of mountain goats chewing.

"Praise God from whom all blessings flow."

I don't remember who started the singing, but I do remember the song. It was the doxology, straight out of the hymnal. Maybe even on key. A solo quickly became a quartet as the rest of us joined in, doing a mountaintop imitation of the King's Heralds.

The goats stopped chewing and stared; their heads tilted a bit to the side, as if trying to make out the words.

"Amazing Grace" was next, then "A Little Talk With Jesus," "In the Garden," followed by every hymn and chorus we could remember from Sabbath School, church, and family worship. We sang tenor, bass, baritone, melody, and other notes that sort of fit. Though I'm sure

it sounded terrible, the goats loved it. Mom tossed her head and told her kids to listen carefully. The kids ignored her and played tag around the boulders. Until we ran out of music.

"I can't remember any more songs." I think it was Serge who gave up first.

When we stopped singing, the kids bounded back to Mom's side, lay down, and watched us. Carefully. As if wondering what our next awesome trick might be. Mom ignored them and just looked at us. Finally she spoke.

"Thank you for coming to our hillside cathedral and singing such lovely music for us."

No, she didn't use words, but the look in her eyes, the way her ears flickered, and the tones she chose as she "Baaa-ed" to us made her voice almost human. She had enjoyed the music, she said, and was thankful we had come. She was pleased that we had been kind to her kids. She was rejoicing that the Creator had brought us together for this time of worship.

We thanked her for her kindness, for listening, and for accepting—even though we had sung some wrong notes.

She laughed, at least that's what it felt like, as she stood, called to the kids, and began to walk down the cliff into the canyon.

Then she stopped, two kids standing silently beside her, and spoke to us clearly. "Baaa,aaa,iet, baa,ump, ump, baaaw."

In a moment they were gone.

We sat silently for a long while.

"Remember Psalm 98," one of us whispered. "The mountains sing, the rivers clap their hands, and (maybe) even the mountain goats sing His praises! If the Shepherd King had been here today, the psalm would have included a line about mountain goats singing praises."

When we got back to the cabin, it took about 30 minutes to write the perfect plan. ©

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