

THE HARDEST HALLELUJAH
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I read once that the word “Hallelujah” is a shortened form of “Hallowed be Yahweh.” Another source defined it as praise from a position of adoration or “hallel” and God or “jah,” short for Yahweh. No matter how we try to break it down, it seems like it must be either a special word or a special praise to God. Yet, it is not found in that form in the Bible. It is spelled differently in three other places, including **Revelation 19:6**, where we read, “And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.” It is the song of the redeemed.

Praising the name of God is most certainly a high form of praise. David said in **Psalms 149:6** that the saints of God should have high praises in their mouth. He said this after exhorting Israel to praise the name of the Lord, known to them as Yahweh. Elsewhere we read the name of the Lord is to be praised, His name is to be exalted, and it is to be lifted up and glorified. So “Hallelujah” certainly seems like a high praise, especially if rendered in love. But sometimes, that worship is hard to offer. Though God may be worthy of the highest praise, too often we are not worthy to give it. Not when telling God we love Him requires us to bear our iniquity into the presence of our completely holy God. Shame is a debilitating disease. It separates us from those we need the most and it breeds loneliness.

The second most beautiful thing I have ever held dear is the pure love of my wife. It lifts me above the common and hallows my frail life. The gift of someone else’s life, given freely, cannot be purchased, be it the love of a parent, a friend, or a spouse. The last is perhaps the most magnificent and the most humbling, for that love entails the binding of souls. Perhaps I am not normal, but I have never been able to imagine how I could make love to my wife after being unfaithful to her. I cannot envision how I could partake of the holy while containing the profane within me, no matter how well I kept the secret. How could she fail to sense the corruption in what used to be pure love? I realize the Bible warns us to take heed lest we fall. Still, no temptation has ever yet been enough to make me willing to risk hurting her, breaking her trust and her heart, and risking the loss of what has given my life significance beyond myself.

David was called a friend of God, one of few to earn such distinction. His worship was truly adoration and love. It resonates through the book of Psalms. This king gloried in the presence of God – until he found himself in the wrong place and time. Some blame David’s fall on Bathsheba, but he belonged in battle, not at leisure on his roof. She belonged in private while bathing, not on her roof. It takes two to tango. Whatever the cause, the result was devastating. The price for stealing one sheep was replacing four. Four of David’s children eventually paid for his sin, but the worst still waited. David went from dancing before the Lord, with loving praises of “Alleluia,” to weeping before God for restoration. Read **Chapter 51 of Psalms** to get the feel of shame. Read it to understand how to repent with godly sorrow. David stood before the Lord and found the high praises had departed amid the shame. We cannot bring our love to a holy God; we cannot mingle our spirit with His, when we contain sin within us He so abhors. It closes our mouths.

The scriptures are full of others who walked with God in close communion, only to break His heart. Samson once exemplified the blessings and favor of God, till he counted them for naught. Across time, the hollow words echo from **Judges 16:20**, “And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him.” A rich young man came desiring to be Jesus disciple, and Jesus, seeing his desire and his purity, loved him. But the young man found his love of possessions greater than his love for God and went away sorrowful. Judas walked with, ate with, and lived with Jesus for three intense years. Until the very last moments of their relationship, knowing everything he had done, Jesus still embraced him and called him friend. Judas kissed the door to heaven, then turned away and went to Hell.

I know I am not supposed to judge, but some calls are easier than others. I have walked in the same shoes as Judas. I mentioned the second greatest thing in my life is the love of my wife. The most beautiful gift I have ever been given has been the love of God. He took all the risk and said “I love you” first. He too looked past my imperfections, saw what I could be and wanted to be, and made me significant with His love. I loved to come in His presence and call His name holy, because its power had sanctified me. He took me to heights I had never been, showed me things I had never before seen, and called me His friend. So I cheated

on Him. I broke my word, I turned away, and went back to the sin I once knew so well. The sin God likened to the vomit a dog returns to and eats. I know what it is like to want the love of a God who wants me, but be kept from Him by my shame. I have been in the shoes of Judas.

The hardest Hallelujah is the one we want to offer because He is worthy, but we know we are not. That praise should be given as an act of love, but we are too tainted. I understand David's plea to be washed with hyssop. Good thing someone finally made me understand it was not a plant, but His blood that could make me clean again. God promised in **1 John 1:9** that if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive. The amazing thing about grace is that when He forgives, He forgets what I cannot. I stand amazed by the promise of no condemnation in **Romans 8:1**. I do not know if I will ever feel completely clean again in the presence of my eternal lover. I cannot totally cleanse my mind of shame, though I feel no accusation in His love. I hope when enough time passes, perhaps a few thousands years, I can offer Him more than broken praises. Someday I will be in that multitude, in the presence of my friend. I too will be able to freely sing "Hallelujah," for I am beginning understanding one more thing about this One I love.

Yahweh has always been hallowed. My failure never made Him any less worthy of my praise.