



# PSALMS

SCRIPTURE  SHARED

## Week 2

### Week 2, Day 1

#### Psalm 100

*A Psalm of thanksgiving.*

*1 Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.*

*2 Serve the Lord with gladness;  
come into his presence with singing.*

*3 Know that the Lord is God.*

*It is he who made us, and we are his;  
we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.*

*4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving  
and his courts with praise.  
Give thanks to him; bless his name.*

*5 For the Lord is good;  
his steadfast love endures forever  
and his faithfulness to all generations.*

#### Understanding the Passage:

Psalm 100 is a “psalm of praise.” There are many of this same genre found throughout the psalter, but this one models the genre and form of these types of hymns. One of the main features of a psalm of praise is a back-and-forth rhythm of calling the hearer and reader of the psalm to praise and then following that with listed reasons *for* praise. You see that same rhythm represented in the structure of this psalm: verses 1-3a call for praise, 3b enumerates the reason, verse 4 returns to praise, and verse 5 returns to the reasons why.

Psalm 100 also caps off a series of “enthronement psalms” that verbally enthrone God with praise and thanksgiving. Psalm 100 caps off these songs (starting in Psalm 95) because it universalizes the praise for God. That is, those psalms begin locally and specifically, and Psalm 100 ends with all of the world praising God.

In more liturgical traditions this psalm is sung or recited on Christ the King Sunday. As you read it, you may understand why – Jesus, for Christians, is the one who has made us, he is our shepherd, his name is blessed, he is maximally good and faithful. All of these things we sing of God the Father in Psalm 100 are true of Jesus.

The use of this psalm, and others like it, in the Christian tradition highlights a core belief that Christians carry: Jesus is worthy of our praise because Jesus has done something universal and all-encompassing. That is the posture throughout the psalms and it is one that we ascribe to Jesus in our worship of him with the language and vocabulary of the psalms.

### **Questions for Discussion and Reflection:**

1. Psalm 100 calls us to lift our voices in praise. What might it look like for you to make gratitude and praise a regular rhythm in your daily life?
2. This psalm begins locally and ends with the whole world praising God. Where in your life do you see God moving you from a smaller perspective to a bigger, more universal one?
3. Verse 5 says God’s goodness and faithfulness endure for all generations. How have you personally experienced that truth in your own story or family?

## **Week 2, Day 2**

### **Psalm 34:1-10**

*Of David, when he feigned madness before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away.*

- 1 *I will bless the Lord at all times;  
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.*
- 2 *My soul makes its boast in the Lord;  
let the humble hear and be glad.*
- 3 *O magnify the Lord with me,  
and let us exalt his name together.*
- 4 *I sought the Lord, and he answered me  
and delivered me from all my fears.*
- 5 *Look to him, and be radiant,  
so your faces shall never be ashamed.*
- 6 *This poor soul cried and was heard by the Lord  
and was saved from every trouble.*
- 7 *The angel of the Lord encamps  
around those who fear him and delivers them.*
- 8 *O taste and see that the Lord is good;  
happy are those who take refuge in him.*
- 9 *O fear the Lord, you his holy ones,  
for those who fear him have no want.*
- 10 *The young lions suffer want and hunger,  
but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.*

### Understanding the Passage:

Like many psalms, Psalm 34 begins with what's called a "superscript." These descriptive title lines are not assigned a verse number (some translations or citations, however, will use the number *zero*) but the words are present in the original manuscripts. This one begins with a description of a scene not found in scripture where David "feigned madness before Abimelech." These headings were likely used to help readers find appropriate application in their own lives.

That said, it's hard to find any "madness" in the beautiful words of this song of thanksgiving, unless you count the worshipful abandon the author expresses for the goodness of God.

This psalm is an invitation to praise and experience the God of Israel. The voice and mood of the psalm is imperative. The author gives direct order and instruction to the hearer to bless, praise, magnify, exalt, taste, and fear. One could read this psalm as a relatively exhaustive account of all the ways one might encounter and interact with such a God. It's multi-sensory and experiential. James Limburg condenses the message of this psalm this way: "Give it a try! [...] Look at it. Taste it. Try living it for thirty days. Try prayer and try praise. Let me teach you something about our faith See for yourself that this religion that we practice is good!"

We often think of our religion and the religion of others as laundry lists of doctrines and ideas to intellectually assent to. And sure, there's some of that. But Psalm 34 invites us to praise as an entrance to and experience of a religion and spiritual life. Don't wait to praise, the Psalm says, but try praise and encounter *first* and let your religious life flow from that.

A note on the word *fear*: Often when commentators or preachers come across the word "fear" when it relates to God in the Hebrew Bible we are quick to replace it with "reverence." There isn't anything wrong with that in the big picture, but Psalm 34 and others that encourage readers to "fear God" may also want to capture a sort of fear that is humbling, awe-inspiring, and God-sized. Of course, we don't want to be afraid of God as we would be a monster in a horror movie, but the Psalmist does ask us to experience God with a sort of fear that isn't mere respect for status or position but recognizes the magnitude of difference between creature and Creator.

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. This psalm invites us to taste and see that the Lord is good. What are some ways you have experienced God with your whole self — not just in your thoughts, but through your senses, emotions, or body?
2. Psalm 34 speaks of "fearing the Lord" in a way that's awe-filled and humbling. When was the last time you felt small in the best way — confronted with God's greatness?
3. The superscript ties this psalm to a story of David in disguise. Have you ever felt like you were "putting on a face" in life, but still found yourself able to encounter God authentically?

### Week 2, Day 3

#### Psalm 19:1-6

*To the leader. A Psalm of David.*

*1 The heavens are telling the glory of God,  
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.*

*2 Day to day pours forth speech,  
and night to night declares knowledge.*

*3 There is no speech, nor are there words;*

*their voice is not heard;  
4 yet their voice goes out through all the earth  
and their words to the end of the world.*

*In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,  
5 which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy,  
and like a strong man runs its course with joy.  
6 Its rising is from the end of the heavens  
and its circuit to the end of them,  
and nothing is hid from its heat.*

### **Understanding the Passage:**

James Luther Mays calls Psalm 19 one of the “problem children” of the psalms. If you read the whole composition you might feel whiplash every 4-6 verses as it seems to change genre or aim as you go. However, the scope and message of the psalm can be summed up in and centered on the idea of “word” and “speech.” In these first 6 verses we’re talking about the “words” of nature praising God.

Nature says something about who God is. Many have experienced the beauty and awe in nature – its variety, scope, size, beauty, mystery. Psalm 19 invites us to wonder and reflect on what this says about the God who created it. This God is one, but expresses himself in variety and difference. This God makes big things, but is even bigger and beyond our capacities. This God values beauty and aesthetic gifts in the world. This God is mysterious and creates things that draw us into this mystery.

We don’t just passively receive this message, Psalm 19 says. Rather, nature itself *speaks* these things to God. Nature praises God.

Tyler Staton, pastor of Bridgetown Church in Portland OR, tells the story of accompanying a friend to AA. This friend was not religious and had no interest in God or Christianity. However, as you may know, the second step of the 12 steps is coming to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us. Tyler’s friend wanted to walk a road of recovery, but he was hung up on this second step. He just couldn’t get past it. Despite all of the healing conversations in his meetings. Despite his deep desire to change. He just had no use for this nameless faceless power. One weekend Tyler took his friend on a drive and they found themselves on the Oregon coast. Tyler’s friend couldn’t stop gushing about the beauty of this beach. He couldn’t stop expressing awe for the water, the birds, the rocks, and the sand. Tyler, knowing his friends struggle with step 2 asked him, “do you think there might be a Power greater than you?”

Psalm 19 asks us the same question from the mouth of nature itself. The same is echoed by Jesus in Luke 19:40 – if we don’t praise God for the great things he’s done for us, the rocks will.

### **Questions for Discussion and Reflection:**

1. Think about a time you were struck by the beauty of nature. What did that moment reveal to you about God’s character?
2. Psalm 19 says creation itself speaks and praises God. How might you listen differently to the “voice” of creation in your daily rhythms?
3. Tyler’s friend encountered awe at the Oregon coast. Where in your own life do you find it easiest to recognize that there is a Power greater than yourself?
4. If even the rocks will cry out in praise, what might keep you from joining in? And what would it look like for you to add your voice?

## Week 2, Day 4

### Psalm 103:1-5

*Of David.*

- 1 Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
and all that is within me,  
bless his holy name.*
- 2 Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
and do not forget all his benefits—*
- 3 who forgives all your iniquity,  
who heals all your diseases,*
- 4 who redeems your life from the Pit,  
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,*
- 5 who satisfies you with good as long as you live  
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

### Understanding the Passage:

Psalm 103 as a whole seems to move in concentric circles outward. It begins with the blessing of God by an individual's soul and moves outward to the whole of creation (v. 22). For verses 1-5 we focus on the human posture of praise and blessing of God.

First, you might already be wondering, "Isn't God the one who blesses me? And not the other way around?" Blessing flows two ways. When God blesses us it's giving things to us out of his great love and attention to us. For us to bless God, the intention is largely the same – we want to love and attend to God by speaking well of him and acknowledging who God is. We don't give God anything he lacks, rather we give something to God he desires in this "soul blessing."

For psalm 103 this blessing toward God is total. Our entire being is wrapped up in its orientation toward God. This rules out any possibility of compartmentalizing or half-hearted devotion toward God. One could imagine a weaker version of this psalm: "Bless the Lord O my soul. But just my soul. That's the part that's pointed toward God." God, and the psalmist, asks for all of us to bless God.

This blessing is rooted in the "benefits" God provides. These aren't monetary or material benefits at the core, but are forgiveness, healing, and redemption. John Wesley described a human's salvation as a "dual moment." In a singular moment God does two things – one thing he does *in* us and one thing he does *for* us. The benefits Psalm 103 lists are those things God does *for* us. Our relational status before God changes when he forgives us, heals us, and redeems us. In doing those things for us, something in us begins to change.

Verse 5 reflects the outcome of these mutually assured blessings. Our strength is renewed and our lives are lifted in the light of what God has done and is doing. These, beyond any material or monetary thing we might ask for, enliven us to live the lives God calls us to.

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. Psalm 103 invites us to "bless the Lord with all that is within us." What parts of your life feel easy to turn toward God — and what parts feel harder to bring under that same devotion?
2. We often think of God blessing us, but this psalm calls us to bless God. What does it look like for you to "speak well of God" in your daily rhythms?
3. The psalm lists forgiveness, healing, and redemption as God's benefits. Which of these do you most need to receive and remember right now?

4. Verse 5 says God renews our strength. Where in your life are you feeling weary, and how might God be inviting you to find renewal in him?

## **Week 2, Day 5**

### **Psalm 133**

*A Song of Ascents.*

*1 How very good and pleasant it is  
when kindred live together in unity!  
2 It is like the precious oil on the head,  
running down upon the beard,  
on the beard of Aaron,  
running down over the collar of his robes.  
3 It is like the dew of Hermon,  
which falls on the mountains of Zion.  
For there the Lord ordained his blessing,  
life forevermore.*

### **Understanding the Passage:**

Life is God's good gift. The life we live individually and the life we share with others (family, neighbors, church, work, friends) crowns the blessings of God. Because God is a relational being in God's self, it's no wonder that Psalm 133 celebrates human relational life as the apex of God's goodness worthy to be praised. The psalm begins with what many commentators and scholars believe was a common folk proverb in ancient Israel. Paraphrased it says, what a blessing when our family gets along. Amen to that! The only other place the phrase "when kindred live together" is used in the Hebrew Bible is Deuteronomy 25:5 and in that context there is no unity, but discord. A blessing to live in unity, indeed!

The psalm doesn't stop there, though. This blessed unified life is extended to Zion by way of a strangely beautiful simile of anointing oil running down a priest's beard. There's a lot of Israel's history packed into these few verses. First, anointing oil connotes the ritual marking of a priest or religious figure. Being in family unity is like that – marked and set aside for a specific holy purpose. Second, it goes down the beard of Aaron, the first priest. This anointed blessing of unity is just like the marking of the first and most emblematic priest of the Old Testament. You can see the religious significance used as an emphatic marker for the psalmist. This unity is *that* good. Third, we move to another simile that takes us 100 miles north of Jerusalem to Mt. Hermon where the dew of that mountain flows into God's holy city. This likely is referring to the fact that many from outside the "inner circle" of Jerusalem flow into the city and now also take part in this great unity the psalm blesses. The alienated and afar are now embraced and close.

Finally we center on the epicenter of God's blessing, Zion. The city of Jerusalem. That holy city that bridges the gap between our world and God's. The city where the priests pull back the curtain between heaven and earth. We experience the collision of those worlds and the outpouring of God when we find kindred living in unity. James L. Mays sums it up this way: Psalm 133 is "a witness that God was at work building a family that transcends all the given and instituted barriers that separate and diminish life." Jesus echoes this same desire of God's heart in Mark 3:34-35: "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." And blessed are we when unified under that will to love the world.

**Questions for Discussion and Reflection:**

1. The psalm begins with the joy of family unity. Where in your life have you recently experienced the blessing of being “in unity” with others?
2. The psalmist compares unity to sacred anointing — something holy and set apart. How might God be calling you to treat your relationships as sacred?
3. The image of dew flowing from Mt. Hermon into Zion suggests that even those far off are drawn into God’s family. Who in your life or community might God be inviting you to draw closer into unity?
4. Jesus says his true family are those who do the will of God. How might that widen your sense of kinship and reshape the way you live in relationship with others?

**Video Discussion Questions:**

1. What, if any, was your first exposure to the psalms? How would you answer that first question, “what are the psalms?”
2. When you hear the word “worship” what comes to mind? How would you define it?
3. What are some reasons to praise God? What’s a big thing you want to praise God for? And what’s a small thing?
4. What makes you “tremble” before God? What about God’s power might evoke something like “fear?”
5. How have you experienced praise of God in nature?
6. If we’re to worship God with our whole person, what part of us is harder to submit to a posture of worship? How do we compartmentalize worship of God in our lives?
7. How has someone supported you or joined with you in worship and praise of God? How was your worship “enhanced” by your connection with someone else?
8. How can you plan to “stop” in your day-to-day life to worship? How can you implement a consistent pause starting today?

**Prayer requests and other notes:**