BAPTISTWAY PRESS® Adult Online Bible Commentary

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Studies in Psalms: Songs of Faith

Lesson Eight

Praise for God’s Goodness

Focal Text
Psalms 100; 103

Background
Psalms 100; 103; 105

Main Idea
Praise God for God’s goodness to us, shown in so many ways.

Question to Explore
In what ways has God shown his goodness to you?

Quick Read
We are to worship an Audience of One in gratitude for his grace gifts to us.

Commentary

It’s been said that the problem with the typical morning worship service is that it starts at 11 o’clock sharp and ends at 12 o’clock dull. Many people seem to agree. According to surveys, the number one reason people drop out of church today is that its worship is boring.

A little boy sitting through an interminable morning worship service complained loudly to his big sister, “This is boring!” She elbowed him in the ribs and said, “Shut up—it’s supposed to be boring.” She then pointed to the men standing at the doors and warned him: “Do you see those men over there? They’re the hushers!”

Another small boy went to church with his family. That night in his prayers he said, “Dear God, we had a good time at church today, but I wish you had been there.”

Wouldn’t you like to come to worship each week expecting an exciting, life-changing experience? knowing that you would leave filled with the presence and power of God?
certain that Jesus would meet you where you hurt and give your life renewed purpose and significance? I want that for your church and for mine as well.

Would you like to begin each day that way? How can we experience that kind of exciting worship together on Sunday and personally through the week? That’s the critical question we’ll ask this week. We need to know how to worship God, and why. This week’s study provides us the opportunity to discuss the theology and practice of worship. Nothing is more vital to our souls.

**Worship an audience of One (100:1)**

We begin at the beginning: who is worship for?

Growing up, I assumed the worship service was for the congregation. The pastor preaches to you, and the choir sings to you. You act like any other audience. You come, pay money, laugh or clap if you want to, and come back if you like what you hear. When I was a member of the congregation, I certainly thought worship was for me.

So when I became a preacher, I continued in that mindset. I tried to preach sermons that would help people, entertain them, and keep them coming back. It’s the most popular way to preach today. I call it “therapy preaching.” The pastor is a counselor, a therapist, here to help you with your problems.

Is that how you see worship? This Sunday, will you say things such as, *The choir sounded good today,* or *I didn’t know those hymns,* or *I didn’t get much out of the sermon,* or *That really helped me?* Consciously or unconsciously, do you think the congregation is the audience?

It was a shock to me to learn that this is not how God sees worship at all. Psalm 100:1 is clear: “Shout for joy to the L**ORD**, all the earth.” **To the L**ord, for him alone. Worship is directed not at the one who worships but at the One we worship. “All the earth” is commanded to worship him continually. Even this moment.

Isaiah learned that God is the audience of worship, on that life-changing day when he “saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple” (Isaiah 6:1). His vision took the prophet into the holy of holies, the inner room of the Jewish temple. The room was thirty feet long by thirty feet wide by forty-five feet high (see 1 Kings 6:2; 2 Chronicles 3:8; a cubit is about 1 ½ feet). Too, this whole room was filled with the robe of the one seated on the throne at its center. Angels called “seraphs” were flying all around the room, crying “Holy, holy, holy” (Isa. 6:2-3). The doorposts were shaking, and the temple was filled with smoke. Who was the audience of this incredible worship service? Not Isaiah, but God.

This is the scene in heaven right now: “Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever
and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: ‘You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being’” (Revelation 4:9-11).

Here’s our future in glory: “Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: ‘Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!’ Then I heard every creature in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: ‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!’ The four living creatures said, ‘Amen,’ and the elders fell down and worshiped” (Rev. 5:11-14).

This is what God wants from each one of us: “Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks” (John 4:23).

Who is the audience of worship? Who is worship for?

Note that the true Audience of worship is very attentive. He is watching everything we are doing in worship:

- Consider this sobering verse: “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Hebrews 4:13).
- God knows when our worship is sincere and when it is habit: “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men” (Matthew 15:8-9, quoting Isa. 29:13).

God knows whether we prepare ourselves to be in God’s presence, or just walk in and sit down. He knows whether we really sing hymns of praise to him, for he hears our words and reads our thoughts. He knows whether we return his tithe to him financially. He knows whether you will apply his word to your life this week or not.

Centuries ago a choir presented Handel’s Messiah so beautifully that the applause was thunderous and everyone turned in appreciation to Handel (1685-1759) as he sat in the crowd. According to the story, Handel stood slowly and pointed his finger upward, silently indicating that the glory should be given to God, not to himself. Surely the true Audience was pleased.

Was God pleased with you and your class last week? Will God be pleased with you next Sunday?
**Practice the essentials of worship (100:2-5)**

It was the last night of the revival I was preaching in my brother’s church in Houston. The service was done, and we were in the fellowship hall when we heard the sirens. They came closer, until they stopped at our church! We rushed outside to find the sanctuary on fire. Smoke had set off the alarms, and firemen were running up, hoses in hand.

It turned out to be a small fire in the balcony of the sanctuary, more smoke than flames, and it was soon out. The interesting part was happening outside the building. People from all over the neighborhood were running out to watch—some in their pajamas. Three times as many came to watch the fire as had come to the church for its revival services. I thought of the statement attributed to the evangelist Charles Finney (1792-1875) more than a century ago: *If your church is on fire, people will come from miles around to watch it burn.*

Before we can have a fire, we’d better prepare the fireplace. If we don’t, nothing good will happen.

We’ve studied about the Audience of worship. Now let’s learn the simple steps essential to the life-changing worship he deserves.

**Decide you want a fire**

I have long appreciated the ACT method of worship: Adoration; Confession; Thanksgiving. Psalm 100 is perfect for the first step in worship. It is a “hymn of praise,” the most common type of psalm, with more than half the psalms fitting into this category. These psalms express gratitude to God for who he is, what he does, and/or how he has blessed his people. Psalm 100 is perhaps the best-known “song of praise” in the Bible.

Its call to praise is specific: we “enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise” (100:4). Praise is the key that unlocks the throne room of glory.

The verbs of this psalm provide the keys to adoration:

- “Shout” to the Lord (100:1)
- “Worship” him with gladness (100:2a)
- “Come before him” with joyful songs (100:2b) (Note the parallelism in 100:2a and 2b—a glad heart must produce a glad voice.)
- “Know” that he is God, our Creator and Shepherd (100:3)
- “Enter” his presence in praise (100:4a)
- “Give thanks” for his goodness (100:4b)

Do this constantly, in gratitude for God’s constant gifts to us (100:5).

When last did you praise God from your heart? In a moment we’ll turn to Psalm 103 to discover reasons to worship God. For now, know that true worship begins with such adoration.
The first step in having a fire is to decide we want one. We must want a fire before we’ll build it. We must want to meet God in worship before we will. We must believe that we can and that we will. We must believe that the fire can come, that it will fall, before it will.

Like everything else in life, we get what we expect in worship. If we just come for a meeting, such as for a Rotary or Kiwanis Club meeting, with a Bible study as the program, just another part of the week, that’s what we’ll find. If we expect a routine service, we’ll have one. But if we seek fire, we’ll feel it.

It’s a fact: we cannot see what we don’t expect to see. Joel Arthur Barker, author of *Future Edge,* makes the point clearly in a video I once watched. He flashed a deck of cards on the screen, asking the viewer to find the “wrong” card. I saw nothing wrong. Then he flashed the cards much more slowly, and I saw the problem: a red jack of spades, a black ten of hearts, a red three of clubs. I wasn’t watching for that, and so I didn’t see it. I couldn’t see it.

What do you expect in worship? A preaching and musical performance? That’s what you’ll see, and nothing more. Do you come to meet your needs? to have a good time with friends? to enhance your business? I’ve met several people in my various churches who were honest enough to tell me they joined for the business contacts. Do you come to be entertained? You’ll get what you seek.

Decide to begin your worship with the praise of God, and you’ll find yourself drawing close to the Audience you seek.

*Repair the fireplace*

Next we repair the fireplace, the hearth where the flame is to come. If there are cracks in the bricks, the fire won’t draft properly. If the damper is stuck shut, all we’ll make is smoke. If rain is leaking onto the fire, it won’t last. We must repair the fireplace before the fire can start.

In 1 Kings 18:30, the altar of the Lord was in ruins. For years the people had neglected it in their idolatrous worship of Baal, the Canaanite god of fertility. Its stones had fallen and crumbled, and weeds had grown up over it.

Today my heart is God’s fireplace, his altar. The Bible teaches that my body is “a temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 6:19). My life is his altar. If my life is choked with sinful weeds or cracked with spiritual neglect, I must repair it before God’s fire can fall in my worship.

I must get rid of anything I have made more important than God in my life: “If you are returning to the LORD with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the LORD and serve him only” (1 Samuel 7:3).
I must purify myself of everything unclean: “When they had assembled their brothers and
consecrated themselves, they went in to purify the temple of the Lord, as the king had
ordered, following the word of the LOR D. The priests went into the sanctuary of the LOR D
to purify it. They brought out to the courtyard of the LOR D’s temple everything unclean
they found in the temple of the LOR D” (2 Chron. 29:15-16). It took them sixteen days to
make the temple clean again. Such repentance is indispensable to prayer and worship: “If
I had cherished sin in my heart, the LOR D would not have listened” (Ps. 66:18).

Do you repair your altar before you use it to worship God? Do you repair the fireplace, so
God can send his fire?

Prepare the wood
First, we decide that we want a fire in our house. Second, we repair the fireplace. Third,
we prepare the wood. We tear up newspaper, split the kindling, and get the wood. We
arrange it properly. We get the matches. If we don’t prepare the wood, we can’t have a
fire.

This we do in private, meeting daily with God. It’s been said that we don’t know a person
well if we’ve met the person only in a crowd. Before we meet God in public, we first
must meet God in private. We must prepare the wood before we can have a fire.

A friend of mine states this truth: “Our problem is that we worship our work, work at our
play, and play at our worship.” That’s been true in my life. Is it true in yours?

In a remote mountain village, a wealthy man who had grown up in the community
wanted to leave a legacy to his hometown, and so he built a church building. When the
people gathered for its unveiling, they were amazed at its beauty. The steeple was tall and
beautiful, the woodwork intricate, the pulpit and furnishings ornate. But soon they
noticed a problem and asked, “Where are the lights?” There were no lights anywhere in
the sanctuary.

Their benefactor pointed to brackets on the walls. Then he gave to each family a lamp
they were to bring with them to worship: “Each time you bring your lighted lamp to
worship, your area will be lighted. If you come without lighting your lamp first, your
place will be dark. The light in the church is up to you.”

Indeed it is.

Know why you worship God (Ps. 103)
When we choose to adore God and confess our sins to him, we are ready to offer him the
thanksgiving he deserves. Psalm 103 can be our guide to specific, honest, joyful worship.

David begins: “Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name”
(103:1). Why? Because of “all his benefits” (103:2). What are they? Read over this list of
God’s blessings to his people, whereby he:
Psalms 100; 103. Praise for God’s Goodness

- Forgives all our sins (103:3a)
- Heals all our diseases (103:3b)
- Redeems our lives and afterlives (103:4a)
- Crowns us with love and compassion (103:4b)
- Satisfies our desires (103:5)
- Works righteousness and justice for the oppressed (103:6)
- Reveals his ways through his word (103:7)
- Is slow to anger and abounding in love (103:8-9)
- Offers grace rather than justice (103:10-11)
- Removes our transgressions from us (103:12)
- Has compassion as a Father for his child (103:13)
- Keeps us forever (103:14-18)
- Rules the universe (103:19)

Note the repetition of “all” (103:1b, 2b, 3a, 3b, 6b, 19b, 21a, 22a, 22b), showing the inclusive, inexpressible grace of our Lord. Which of these gifts of grace have you experienced from the hand of God? When did God last forgive your sin and heal your hurt? Has God given you salvation? Has God met your needs and given you his justice? Has God revealed himself in his word? Has God given you grace when you deserved judgment? When last did you thank God for such gifts of love?

In response to such goodness, the Lord calls his heavenly host into his worship (103:20-21). Too, the Lord calls “all his works” to join them (103:22), you and your class included. The Lord has a right to expect such gratitude from his people, doesn’t he?

All through his word, our Father calls his children to worship him:

- “Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD, rejoice” (1 Chron. 16:8-10).
- “You who fear the LORD, praise him!” (Ps. 22:23).
- “Ascribe to the LORD, O mighty ones, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness” (29:1-2).
- “Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!” (32:11).
- “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9).

We worship because our Lord deserves our praise. Too, we worship because such adoration connects our hearts with his, our lives with his power and peace. God empowers the praise of his people and uses it to transform our lives and souls.
For example, remember the time King Jehoshaphat and the nation of Israel were on the brink of annihilation. Mighty armies from Moab and Ammon had attacked and surrounded them. They had no chance of victory or even survival. So “Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the LORD and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying: ‘Give thanks to the LORD, for his love endures forever’” (2 Chron. 20:21).

What happened? “As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated. The men of Ammon and Moab rose up against the men from Mount Seir to destroy and annihilate them. After they finished slaughtering the men from Seir, they helped to destroy one another. When the men of Judah came to the place that overlooks the desert and looked toward the vast army, they saw only dead bodies lying on the ground; no one had escaped” (2 Chron. 20:22-24). God empowers our praise.

Jonah’s life was ending in the belly of a great fish when he prayed, “I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the Lord.” The result? “And the LORD commanded the fish, and it threw Jonah onto dry land” (Jonah 2:9-10).

The story is told of a wealthy Ohio farmer named Taylor who was once approached by a young man named Jamie, asking for a job. Taylor hired Jamie and allowed him to sleep in the barn. He proved to be a very valuable employee.

One day Jamie came to Taylor and announced that he and the wealthy man’s daughter had fallen in love. The farm worker asked Taylor for his daughter’s hand in marriage. Taylor was incensed and fired him. Jamie packed his things and left, and Taylor never heard from him again.

Years later Taylor was cleaning the barn and came to the area where Jamie used to sleep. When the straw was swept away he was startled to find that Jamie had carved his full name in the wood: James A. Garfield.

Taylor’s farmhand had gone on to become a general and then president of the United States (March—September 1881). The man could have been father-in-law to the president, but he never recognized Garfield for who he was.

Do you recognize Jesus for who he is? Do you give him the praise that is his due? Will your class join you this week?

**Conclusion**

Decide to make God your Audience of One. Choose to worship him. Confess the sins that keep you from his presence. Offer him your specific thanksgiving. And you will meet the Maker of the Universe this day and this Sunday.
John Gillespie Magee, Jr. was a young pilot in the Royal Canadian Air Force, killed in action during World War II. Among his effects was found this poem:

    Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of earth,
         and danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;
    Sunward I’ve climbed and joined the tumbled mirth
         of sunsplit clouds—and done a hundred things
    You have not dreamed of—wheeled and soared and
         swung—high in the sunlit silence.
    Hov’ring there, I’ve chased the shouting winds along,
         and flung my eager craft through footless halls of air,
    Up, up the long, delirious, burning blue, I’ve topped
         the windswept heights with easy grace,
    Where never lark or even eagle flew.

    And, while with silent, lifting mind I’ve trod the high
         untrespassed sanctity of space,
    Put out my hand, and touched the face of God.

So can we.²

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² [www.skygod.com/quotes/highflight.html](http://www.skygod.com/quotes/highflight.html)