

Singing for Joy

Psalm 95:1-11

I grew up in a home surrounded by music. In High school, my mom played the baritone in the band and learned the piano on an old upright. She describes it as having more keys that didn't work than did. When we were 5 or 6 she tried teaching my twin brother and me piano. For me it lasted about as long as the song "Here we go up a row to a birthday party." Those of you who took piano will recognize the tune from Thompson's beginner piano book.

In Jr. High she tried teaching my younger brother and me the trombone. I made it a bit farther than the piano, but it was not an instrument I could slide into very easily. My twin brother played the trumpet and had a teacher and actually did quite well playing some duets.

When my sister came along and took up piano, it was mom's hope that she would play and I would sing in chapel. If you have watched some of the music videos I have reposted of her, you see that she does both the playing and singing. My favorite instrument now is the record player or radio.

The running joke in the family is that Dad kept having boys until he got one that was a good mechanic. I think the same could be said with a musician. It took five kids for a good mechanic and four to get a gifted musician.

Before radios became a standard feature rather than a luxury in cars, my dad learned to sing as a boy in the backseat of their sedan. Grandma would get sheet music so that she and grandpa along with dad and his brother would sing when they traveled somewhere. At family reunions my Dad and his brother would be asked to sing duets.

Both mom and dad sang in the church choir and dad sang in a community church choir. At home you could always hear mom going around the house humming or singing a hymn whether she was doing dishes, folding laundry, or fixing dinner. Maybe she got the idea from those 7 Disney dwarves who liked to whistle while they worked. Whenever she had a

minute while the potatoes were boiling, she would sit down at the piano to play and sing. When she was up in the camp kitchen, you could expect to hear her humming a hymn.

One year, the community churches decided to do a combined Easter cantata, choosing John W. Peterson's "No Greater Love". Dad got my twin and me to join him in the base section. We were in 9th grade, and I was still trying to find my voice without squawking. He told us just to listen and follow him. So I learned music by ear. Some of you sopranos will remember our choir practices where I would join you just for fun, albeit in falsetto range.

They have not said so, but I'm not sure if it bothers Randy and Elaine when we are singing hymns that I will sing base on one stanza, then sing the tenor part, then maybe sing the melody or just pick a part at random. I don't read music. I couldn't tell you an A from an F just by looking at the note. I do know sharps and flats and I can listen to the piano and match the note.

You may be interested to know that I was in a rock band at one time. It was either 4th or 5th grade. Four of us made paper instruments and we went to a couple of the younger grades and sang some songs by the Monkey's. We never got any record deals and it didn't last long as the boy band broke up. I'm not sure if that changes your opinion of me.

What I can tell you is that much of my life I have enjoyed singing and my parents instilled that in me. Someone else who enjoyed singing was the psalmist. A simple definition of psalm is any sacred hymn or song, in particular any that are contained in the Biblical book of Psalms and used in worship. The Greek word for psalm means to pluck, which gave rise to a word that means a song sung to harp music. The English word generally refers to a sacred song regardless of what instrument is used.

Today we usually just read the Psalms instead of sing them, although some have been put to music. Many of them were written out of times of deep, personal and painful experiences and later put into a collection of songs for public worship.

Psalms is sometimes referred to as “Israel’s National Hymnbook.” The Hebrew title for Psalms means praises. It contains songs written out of times of despair and doubts as well as times of praises and thanksgiving. Our attention today is on the latter.

Psalm 95:1-11

This Psalm is broken into two major sections. In **verses 1-7b** there is a call to adoration. In **verses 7c-11** there is a cry of admonition.

I. A CALL TO ADORATION – vv. 1-7b

In this opening section, we have both the how and why of worship, why we offer thanksgiving, why we should sing praise and the psalmist shows us first the passion in our thanksgiving.

A. The Passion In Our Thanksgiving – v. 1

Originally, the word passion meant suffering or agony, as of a martyr. We often refer to the events around the crucifixion of Christ as The Passion.

We tend to think of passion as an emotion of intense love, but it can also refer to emotions such as hate, or rage, or fear, or joy. But as I read the psalms and particularly the one we are considering today, I think of passion as a strong love, affection, or desire that the psalmist had for God.

There is first the request.

1. The request – “come”

It’s a public invitation by the psalmist for everyone to join him as they approach God. The dictionary defines it as moving from a place thought of as ‘there’ to or into a place thought of as ‘here’; to move toward. It’s a word that means to come and meet God face-to-face, to be in His presence. This movement can be physical as I move from where I am standing to another spot somewhere else.

This movement can be emotional, where my heart moves to contemplate all that God has done and my attitude changes to reflect my thanksgiving.

This movement can be spiritual where I come into His presence for the purpose of worship, praise, confession, thanksgiving.

In **Matthew 11:28**, Jesus bids those who are burdened with a heavy load to come and find rest. In this place, I have burdens and He invites me to move toward Him to experience rest and peace.

Jesus bids disciples to come and follow Him.

After Philip met the Savior, he went to Nathanael and invited him to meet Jesus of Nazareth. Nathanael was put out and wondered how anything good could come from that town. Philip’s invitation was simple **“come and see”**. In essence, come and check it out for yourself. (**John 1:46**)

Revelation 22:17 “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.”

The psalmist invites others to come and sing. It’s an open invitation extended to all who passionately adore the Lord. This request has been extended to us to join in a celebration of thanksgiving. It’s the same invitation we see in **Psalm 100:2 “Come into His presence with joyful singing.”**

Will you accept the request?

Next, the psalmist explains the reason for the request.

2. The reason

You may want to underline them in your Bible.

v. 1 – “let us sing”

v. 1 – “let us shout”

v. 2 – “let us come”

v. 2 – “let us extol”

The same Hebrew word can be translated as sing, shout, our cry aloud and carries the idea of chanting or singing. This word occurs some 50 times in the Old Testament, with nearly half of them occurring in the book of Psalms. The emphasis in those verses is on singing and shouting praises to God.

Often it’s used to express joy or celebration which implies loud singing especially in relation to lifting up praise to God.

Isaiah 12:4-6 (v. 6)

Another word that is translated sing and used some 90 times in Psalms is a word that brings with it a command. The text indicates a compelling urgency to sing. **Psalm 96:1-2** is such an example.

In our passage, the psalmist chose the Hebrew word that expresses joy and celebration as we sing.

Over the past number of decades various research has been conducted by universities and psychologists looking at the benefits of singing.

1. Singing relieves stress

In other words, it relaxes you. Researchers found that singing lowers the cortisol levels in your brain. Cortisol is the chemical that controls your mood, your motivation, your fears. It also increases your metabolism. On the other hand, high levels of cortisol are connected with stress and only decreases when you're singing in a place that doesn't already make you anxious.

2. Singing stimulates your immune system

One study showed that those who sang had higher levels of immunoglobulin A than those who only listened to music. This chemical is the antibody that plays a role in the immune function of mucous membranes.

3. Singing may improve your snoring and lung function

Singing changes the way you breathe. One study interviewed the spouses of choir members and found that fewer choir members snored.

4. Singing in a group or choir develops a sense of belonging and connection

It gives the person a greater sense of well-being more than if the person only sang solos.

5. Singing was found to enhance memory in those with dementia

People with dementia not only remembered the lyrics, but also remembered some life events.

When I worked for Hospice, there was one couple I well remember. The husband had played in back up bands for some big names back in the day. His wife had dementia. One day as he and I were talking he

said, I want you to see something. He went over to the record player and put on an album and a minute later, his wife came out of the bedroom dancing and singing all the words to the song.

6. Singing has been shown to improve speaking abilities

Research done decades ago among those who had a hard time speaking, showed that singing helped improve the speaking ability of those with autism, Parkinson's, aphasia following a stroke and stuttering. Singing stimulates multiple areas of the brain simultaneously.

I was scrolling through Facebook a few weeks ago and watched a clip from America's Got Talent. It featured a young man who was blind and autistic. But when he sat down to play and sing you would have never known he was a special needs person. It was incredible.

Those are just some of the neurological and physical benefits from singing. But singing also has spiritual benefits. Singing can give you joy and peace as you face trials. **Mom always sang, but she found a special joy, strength, and comfort in the years she battled cancer. She always had a hymnal with her so she could sing.**

We are told to sing, to shout, and to lift up God as we come into His presence. Paul and Silas sang in prison while sitting with their hands and feet in stocks.

When the armies of Ammon and Moab threatened Israel, we read in **II Chronicles 20:21** **"After consulting the people, 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.'"**

The passage says that as they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushes and defeated their enemies.

Whatever enemies you are facing today, try singing praise. Whether it is the enemy of fear or doubt or temptation or whatever it is, come into God's presence with singing.

The request has been given by the psalmist to come into God's presence. The reason for the invitation is to sing, shout and lift up His name. He then also gives us the response.

3. The response

v. 1 – “sing joyfully”

v. 1 – “shout aloud”

v. 2 – “come before Him with thanksgiving”

v. 2 – “extol Him with music and song”

Extol means to lift high. Your Bible might also read “joyful noise.” Of all people around the world, Christians have the most to be joyful. **But are we?**

The word joy means a very glad feeling, pleasure, or delight. Let me add words like exuberance, enthusiasm, uninhibited. We may sing in a group, but we sing to an audience of one – joyfully, aloud, lifting Him up with music and song.

One night sitting in chapel with my group of campers the song leader was not very pleased with the lack of enthusiasm in our singing. I well remember something he said while we sang: “come on, sing to me.” I've got news for him, there is only One person we sing to and that's to the Lord. Let's do it joyfully, with thanksgiving and lots of enthusiasm. That is the passion of our thanksgiving. **How about the person of our thanksgiving?**

B. The Person Of Our Thanksgiving

In this Psalm, the psalmist gives us several names for the One who is worthy of our thanksgiving.

v. 1 – “the Lord”

v. 1 – “the Rock of our salvation

v. 3 – “the great God”

v. 3 – “the great King”

v. 6 – “the Lord our Maker”

v. 7 – implies that He is our Shepherd

Let me focus for a moment on just one of those names – the Rock of our salvation. It's a name that occurs several times in the Old Testament and suggests security, stability, something that is trustworthy and unmovable. Jesus pictured the Rock by building our house on a solid foundation.

This may remind you of the song we sing:
The Lord's our Rock; in Him we hide,
A Shelter in the time of storm;
Secure whatever ill betide,
A Shelter in the time of storm.

A Shade by day, Defense by night,
A Shelter in the time of storm;
No fears alarm, no foes affright,
A Shelter in the time of storm.

The raging storms may round us beat,
A Shelter in the time of storm;
We'll never leave our safe retreat,
A Shelter in the time of storm.

O Rock divine, O Refuge dear,
A Shelter in the time of storm;
Be Thou our Helper ever near,
A Shelter in the time of storm.

O Jesus is a Rock in a weary land,
A weary land, A weary land;
O Jesus is a Rock in a weary land –
A Shelter in the time of storm.

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Israel had many high cliffs to hide from their enemies. They were also locations for strong, protective city fortresses. This imagery of God being their rock would resonate with Israelites as they sang this Psalm. They understood this term to refer to God's physical protection and deliverance from her enemies rather.

I Samuel 2:1-2 “There is no rock like our God.”

As we move into the New Testament the understanding becomes clearer that Jesus is the Rock of our salvation. He is a sure foundation on whom our eternal destiny rests and in Him that foundation is secure. For that we give our thanks.

The Lord our Rock is the one to whom we sing our thanksgiving and praise.

Included in the names of the One we sing praise to is the psalmist's description of why He is Lord, why He is our Rock, why He is the great God, why He is our great King. **vv. 3-5**

The psalmist says that our God is above all gods. Now, to be clear, this isn't an admission on the part of the psalmist that there are other gods out in the universe, there aren't lesser gods who are vying for supremacy in the cosmos over our God. In the ancient world, as the case is today, other religions had many gods for different aspects of their lives. They had a god of war, a god of fertility, a god of prosperity. You name it, they had a god for it.

The psalmist is saying in these verses that there is no corner of the universe that God isn't in control of. Now matter how deep into the earth you go, God controls that. He controls the very tops of the highest mountains. The sea and everything in the sea belong to Him. Everything on land is His. And why is that? Because He created it. It is His and He controls it because it belongs to Him. He is the Maker. It makes sense that the maker should also be the owner. He not only created it, He sustains it, He keeps it going. Our God, our Lord, our Rock, our great God, our great King, our Maker is the person to whom we bring our thanksgiving.

But how do we approach Him? Verse 6 reminds us of the posture of our thanksgiving.

C. The Posture Of Our Thanksgiving – v. 5

The psalmist says that we should come before the Lord bowing down and kneeling. While this can refer to the physical posture of bowing low or of kneeling on the ground before Him, it certainly implies much more than just the physical posture.

These positions imply an attitude of the heart, one that involves humility and willful submission to the One who is our Creator and Savior. Submission speaks of being obedient to His commandments, a willingness to serve Him in whatever He asks, a recognition that He is our Master and we are subordinate to Him. It is more than just a bent knee, it is a submissive heart. A bent knee means nothing if first, we have not bent the heart.

I Samuel 15:22 “To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.”

Warren Wiersbe writes: “Some people who enjoy

lifting their hands and shouting do not enjoy bowing their knees and submitting. True worship, involves realizing the awesomeness of God and experiencing the fear of the Lord and a deeper love for Him. Too often Christian ‘praise’ is nothing more than religious entertainment and it never moves into spiritual enrichment in the presence of the Lord...Jubilation has its place only if it becomes adoration and we are prostrate before the Lord in total submission, ‘lost in wonder, love and praise.’”

The posture of thanksgiving begins with a heart of humility and obedience.

To close out our call to adoration, the psalmist points to the purpose of our thanksgiving in **verse 7**.

D. The Purpose Of Our Thanksgiving – v. 7a-b

Why do we sing for joy to the Lord?

Why do we shout to the Rock of our salvation?

Why do we come before Him with thanksgiving?

Why do we lift Him up with music and song?

Why do we come and bow down in worship?

Why do we kneel before the Lord our Maker?

Because He is our God.

Because we are His people, His flock.

Psalm 23:1-6

This Psalm is special because it reminds us how very special we are as His flock and how God shepherds us.

In **verses 1-3** we see how the Shephard cares for His sheep.

In **verse 1**, the shepherd gives repeatedly.

In **verse 2**, the Shepherd gives rest.

In **verse 3**, the Shepherd gives restoration.

In **verses 4-6** we see how the Shepherd comforts His sheep.

In **verse 4**, the Shepherd gives reassurance.

In **verse 5**, the Shepherd gives refreshment.

In **verse 6**, the Shepherd gives residence.

We are given a similar picture by Jesus in **John 10**. He describes the care that He as the Good Shepherd gives to those who are part of His flock.

John 10:11-16

A reason we are to offer thanksgiving is because of the care He provides to those in His flock. The Lord is our Shepherd, He gives us what we need. This is certainly a call to adoration and so we sing:

We worship and adore You,
Bowing down before You,
Songs of praises singing,
Hallelujahs ringing.
Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah! Amen.

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As we bring the message to a close, I want to briefly speak about a cry of admonition from **verses 7c-11**.

II. A CRY OF ADMONITION – vv. 7c-11

These verses call us to acknowledge the sovereign rule God has over us in both a submissive attitude and with a humble heart. Notice that there is an admonition to heed the present call.

A. An Admonition To Heed The Present Call – v. 7c

The word “**today**” speaks of immediacy and urgency. The psalmist is admonishing the people not to delay in hearing the Lord’s voice. Don’t resist the Lord’s voice to trust and obey.

Since this is a call to worship the Lord with our thanksgiving, it stands to reason that our thanksgiving and praise is of no value if we first don’t listen to and then obey what is being read and taught. We cannot offer thanksgiving today if we put off until tomorrow our willingness to submit and obey Him. Our words of thanksgiving have no audience with the ear of God if our heart is first not bent in humility and submission to Him.

Let’s be ever ready today, to heed His voice. It is a present call. The psalmist closes his thoughts with an admonition to heed the past rebellion.

B. An Admonition To Heed The Past Rebellion – vv. 8-11

These verses tell us why we should fall in surrender to the Lord. The psalmist takes us back in time to two historical events in the life of Israel. It’s a way

of reminding them to give serious thought to what happened in the past to their ancestors and not repeat the same mistake of hardening their hearts and rebelling against God. To put it candidly, they were unthankful. Their ingratitude led to rebellion.

The word “**heart**” refers to the will.

The word “**harden**” means to refuse to obey.

He takes them back to an event after their exodus from Egypt. It’s found in **Exodus 20:7**. It had been one complaint after another.

I’m thirsty. Where can I get water?

I’m tired. Can we stop and rest?

Are we almost there?

It’s so hot.

It was nonstop complaining. God told Moses to strike a rock so water would flow out. Afterwards he called the place Massah and Meribah.

Massah means testing. They tested God.

Meribah means rebellion. They disobeyed God.

The same thing happened in **Numbers 20** when they rebelled against the Lord and hardened their heart. Consequently, God refused to let those older than 20 the opportunity to enter the Promised Land, all because of their hard or stubborn hearts. That was His place of rest for them. “**Rest**” speaks of enjoying God’s presence forever. The writer of Hebrews uses it to describe the eternal rest that will belong to those who heed the call of salvation.

The psalmist draws their attention to what happened in the past so they wouldn’t rebel by ignoring God’s voice, but instead respond in willful obedience, reminding them to give Him the thanksgiving He deserves for how He provided and cared for them.

It is a call for us not to be slow in giving Him thanks and praise for all His blessings.

It is an invitation to come into God’s presence and sing for joy.

I sing praises to Your Name, O Lord,

Praises to Your name, O Lord;

For Your name is great and greatly to be praised.

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Do you like singing to the Lord? He is our Maker.
Let’s sing for joy.