

A Call to Worship...Even When it's Hard

Psalm 95

Sunday, August 10th, 2025

By Ryan Perry

Scripture

Psalm 95

[1] Oh come, let us sing to the LORD;

let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!

[2] Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;

let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

[3] For the LORD is a great God,

and a great King above all gods.

[4] In his hand are the depths of the earth;

the heights of the mountains are his also.

[5] The sea is his, for he made it,

and his hands formed the dry land.

[6] Oh come, let us worship and bow down;

let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!

[7] For he is our God,

and we are the people of his pasture,

and the sheep of his hand.

Today, if you hear his voice,

[8] do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,

as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,

[9] when your fathers put me to the test

and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.

[10] For forty years I loathed that generation

and said, "They are a people who go astray in their heart,

and they have not known my ways."

[11] Therefore I swore in my wrath,

"They shall not enter my rest."

Let's Pray

Introduction

Story of the Israelites

So the year is roughly 1446 BC, and God has just delivered the Israelites from Pharoah and the Egyptians by parting the Red Sea. They were able to cross over safely, Pharoah and his army were destroyed, and all of the Israelites, along with Moses rejoice because of God's great deliverance.

But then they set out on a journey into the wilderness of Shur, and within three days, they started grumbling against Moses because they were thirsty and the only water they could find was bitter. So God, in his kindness, had Moses throw a log into the water so it would become sweet and his people could drink.

Then, about a month or so later, they come to the wilderness of Sin, and once again, they grumble against Moses and Aaron because they are hungry and have no food. In fact, they are so hungry and upset that they tell Moses that it would have been better to stay as slaves, because at least they had as much meat and bread as they could eat.

And yet, despite their grumbling, God, once again, provides for them and gives them flaky manna from heaven to bake into bread and eat. So God has now provided both water and food for his people, surely they will now trust God, along with Moses and Aaron, to lead them, right?

Wrong!

Once God has them leave the wilderness of Sin they walk roughly 50 miles to a place called Rephidim. Now, I don't know if you have ever walked a large distance in hot weather or just tried to do yard work in the peak of the summer, but when you are outside, doing physical activity in the heat, you are more than likely going to sweat, you might face dehydration, and you are going to be very thirsty.

So when the Israelites get to Rephidim they want water! But there isn't any, not a single drop. And instead of trusting that God will provide for them like he did in the wilderness of Shur and Sin, they once again grumble against God and against Moses.

In fact, let me read for you how the people respond to Moses in Exodus 17:2-4, 7:

[2] Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" [3] But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" [4] So Moses cried to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me."

[7] And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

God had delivered the Israelites from harsh slavery and had provided water and food for them on this journey. And yet, when the physical effects of dire thirst hit them and water was nowhere to be found, they doubted and grumbled against Moses, and put God to the test.

How this story applies to us

Now, I have to admit that it's really easy for me to rag on the Israelites for their faithlessness. I mean, geez, they had God going before them in a cloud and a pillar of fire, and he destroyed an army before their very eyes. How can they not trust God?!

But we need to remember that they're now struggling with real physical realities. Real thirst, real hunger, and the uncertainty of where they were even going.

And maybe what we need to do is put ourselves in their shoes and ask ourselves, "how do we think we would have done if we were there?"

Or better yet, "How do we respond to God when things don't go the way we want?" When we find ourselves in need physically, when we lose a loved one, or when we hear of multiple college-age women disappearing and turning up dead in Wisconsin, do we turn to God in worship and trust, or are we given to worry and grumbling like the Israelites?

The truth is, this side of eternity, we all experience hard situations that tempt us to grumble against God and put our trust in him to the test. **Which means that every one of us experiences times when we struggle to worship God.**

The writer of Psalm 95 understood this, which is why he references the example of the Israelites in Exodus 17 in verses 7-11. He understands that we, at times, will have a worship problem like they did.

But instead of just identifying the problem in this psalm, he gives us a practical call to worship so that we are able to trust God, even when it's hard. So today, we are going to look at three ways that the Psalmist is telling us to worship God.

- 1. Worship God with thanksgiving and submission**
- 2. Worship God for who he is.**
- 3. Worship God by turning to Christ.**

One of the things you will notice is how intertwined these points are. That real Thanksgiving and submission can only come from a genuine apprehension of who God is, which only comes through faith in Christ.

I say that so it will help you to understand where this message is going and how it will all fit together in the end. So let's begin by looking at the Psalmist's call to worship God with thanksgiving and submission.

Worship God with thanksgiving and submission

Psalm 95:1–2, 6

[1] Oh come, let us sing to the LORD;

let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!

[2] Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;

let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

***[6] Oh come, let us worship and bow down;
let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!***

The first thing that we need to notice in verses 1 and 6 is this call to come. This is important because it's a reminder that worship isn't merely a passive activity, but instead it is active and it requires us to do something.

Secondly, this psalm, like all of the psalms, isn't written to individual Israelites or believers. It is written for the gathered people of Israel to use for their worship gatherings at the temple.

This is why the psalmist uses words like **"us and our."**

Because the kind of worship that he is talking about here isn't merely for individuals to do on their own, but it's also meant to be lived out within the gathering of God's people in the church.

With this in mind, what are the actions of worship that the psalm writer is calling us to do?

The first thing he tells us in verses 1-2 is that we are supposed to come to God with singing, joyful noises, thanksgiving, and songs of praise.

We are supposed to be a people who genuinely praise and thank God for who he is and what he has done for us. Which means that we are supposed to cultivate an attitude that is the exact opposite of the grumbling and faithlessness of the Israelites.

Application

But that isn't always easy, is it?

For instance, just think about your morning as you got ready to come to church. How many of us have already had moments of frustration today?

Your kids were disobedient, you and your spouse got in an argument right before you got in the car, you got a mean-spirited email or message from a friend, or you read an article about Israel building forces for a ground invasion of Gaza.

And now you have to come into this place to give genuine and joy-filled thanksgiving and praise to God.

That's really hard.

But we need to remember that praise and thanksgiving are not just meant for the times when our hearts are perfectly happy with God and everything's going well. Rather, we are called to give God praise and thanksgiving at all times and in every circumstance.

As Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18:

[16] Rejoice always, [17] pray without ceasing, [18] give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

The reality of worship is that when we praise and thank God, we are making a conscious effort to make God and his purposes for our life the source of our joy and not our circumstances.

Which means that even when we experience frustrating and hard circumstances, like the Israelites did, we can choose to view them through the lens of gratitude versus frustration.

But there's more. Because the genuine worship of God involves more than coming to God with praise and thanksgiving. According to verse 6, it also includes bowing down and kneeling before the Lord our Maker.

Now, the words worship, bow down, and kneel are all communicating the same idea, which is reverence and submission. That we would take our wills, desires, hopes, and dreams, and we give them over to God to do with as he sees fit.

Illustration

But as easy as that is to say, we have to admit that it doesn't always feel good, does it? Because there are times when God is bringing us through hard trials or is calling us to do things that don't feel great in the moment.

I may have shared this story, but in December of 2016, I was on the phone with my dad, and we were talking about life, ministry, and our family. Now, I can't remember exactly what set him off, but at some point in our conversation, he got mad, and the whole call devolved into a fight where he said some really horrible and hate-filled things to me.

As you can imagine, I didn't take it well, and I chose to fight back with some fairly horrible and hurtful words of my own.

And for the next two months, we didn't talk as I tried to convince myself that it was okay that I hurt him, because he hurt me first.

But God wouldn't let me stay there. Because in February of 2017, the conviction of his Spirit was so heavy upon me that even though every bone in my body didn't want to call him, I knew that I had to.

So I picked up the phone, called my dad, asked for his forgiveness, and told him I loved him. **That was the last conversation that I had with my dad before he died the next month.**

I can only imagine the shame and regret that I would be working through today if I had never made that phone call.

Application

The point is this: Submitting to God's will for your life isn't always easy, and sometimes it doesn't even make sense.

The Israelites didn't understand why God had brought them to a dry land with no water, and they were about to stone Moses and turn back to Egypt.

But when we choose to worship God with thanksgiving and praise, and to submit our lives to him despite our circumstances, we are making a conscious choice to believe two things:

One, that God is working good things in our lives even when we can't always see it...That's Rom. 8:28.

Two, like the Israelites in the desert, that God is working to prepare us for his eternal promise land. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:4-5:

[4] For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life (eternal life). [5] He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

So let's be a body of believers that trusts God even when it's hard, so that we can worship him with thanksgiving and can submit our lives to him because he is working for our good, even when we feel like we're in the wilderness.

But we can't stop there. Because genuine thanksgiving and submission also require us to believe that God is who he says he is. **This brings us to our second point.**

Worship God for who he is

Psalm 95:3-7a

***[3] For the LORD is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.
[4] In his hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are his also.
[5] The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands formed the dry land.
[6] Oh come, let us worship and bow down;
let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!
[7a] For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand.***

Now, even though I have put this point into the form of a command, these verses really get to the heart of "why we worship God." The psalmist sums up this "why" with two main ideas:

- God is the mighty creator and king of all things.
- He is our God, and we are his people.

God is the mighty creator and King of all things.

Now, we know that there really is only one God, but there were so many other gods that people tried to worship in that day. Gods like Baal, Molech, Asherah, and Chemosh. Likewise, there were gods associated with the mountains, seas, wilderness, and fields.

These gods were usually associated with other nations, but we know that the Israelites were often tempted to worship them as real gods.

So the psalmist wants them and us to see and believe that Yahweh is the One True God and King who is greater than all of those fake gods.

He is the one who controls the depths of the earth, he is the one who owns the mountains, he is the one who formed the dry land and sustains it, and he is the one who even controls the raging sea. **In short, God is the powerful creator and sustainer of all things.**

In fact, in Colossians 1:15-17, while giving evidence for the deity of Christ, Paul points us to the same reality when he says:

[15] He (Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. [16] For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. [17] And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

We are created by an eternal God who formed every spec of the universe that we know and don't know. And at this very moment, he is holding all of it, including us, together.

Which means that we can praise him, thank him, and submit to him regardless of the real struggles and pain we may be experiencing because we know that he is in control of it, and he is powerful enough to get us through it.

This is why we continually preach and teach a big and sovereign God here at LEFC. Because it gives us the confidence to trust God with our circumstances which naturally leads us to an attitude of awe and praise.

But our confidence in God and our worship of him aren't just based on the fact that he created and controls everything. It's also built upon the reality that...

He is our God, and we are his people.

As the psalmist writes in Psalm 95:7a:

***[7a] For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand.***

Here's what this means: **The LORD is our God because he has chosen to make us his people and his sheep whom he loves, protects, and cares for.**

In fact, this is the same promise he made to us in Ephesians 1:3-4 when Paul writes:

[3] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, [4] even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

Each one of us are chosen by God to be his treasured people. We didn't earn it, and we didn't deserve it, but he sent his son Jesus Christ to die for us so that we could be freed from the penalty and power of sin and could be his children whom he loves and cherishes.

Application:

This truth is so important as we seek to worship God with thanksgiving and submission. Because it helps us to see all of our struggles, not simply through the lens of his power and sovereignty, but through the lens of his gracious love for us.

That the Sovereign and powerful God who loved us by sending his son to die on our behalf is the same God who is working out his good and gracious plans in our lives because we are his children whom he chose, whom he redeemed, and whom he cares for.

So if you are struggling to praise God or if you are finding it hard to submit to his plans for your life, come back to these glorious and yet foundational truths of who God is and who he is for you:

- That he is the Mighty creator and King over all things in the world and in your life.
- Through Christ, He has become your God, and he has made you his beloved child.

Now, does this mean that all of your struggles to worship God will go away if you simply remember these truths about God? No.

Think about this, the Israelites had a front row seat to the power, love, care, provision, and deliverance of God, and yet, they came into Rephidim, and instead of turning to God in faith, they charged God and Moses with failure and got angry.

So if that's how the Israelites responded after seeing the mighty power at work in their lives, how can we have any hope of praising God and submitting to him when our lives, at times, can feel so difficult?

Worship God by turning to Christ in Faith

Psalm 95: 7b-11

Today, if you hear his voice,

**[8] do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,**

**[9] when your fathers put me to the test
and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.**

**[10] For forty years I loathed that generation
and said, “They are a people who go astray in their heart,
and they have not known my ways.”**

**[11] Therefore I swore in my wrath,
“They shall not enter my rest.”**

One of the things that the elders and I were talking about on Tuesday was the fact at times in my sermons I can give a lot of attention to the first points and then shortchange the last point. So what I did today was I gave you a good portion of my last point in the introduction.

Because we know what ‘s going on here. The Israelites hardened their hearts against God and against Moses at Rephidim because they didn’t trust God to provide water for them.

So Moses told us in Exodus 17:7 that he named that place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites put God to the test, even though they had seen him work mighty miracles.

Now, though that happens to be the particular event that the psalmist picks up on during the Israelites' time in the desert, it is part of a pattern of disobedience and unfaithfulness that comes to a head when they ultimately refuse to go into the promise land in Numbers 14.

As a result, God loathed that generation and he swore in his wrath that they would not only miss out on the promise land, **but they would not enter his eternal rest.**

So the question is, if that was true of Israel, how can we expect anything different in our own lives?

But here’s the beautiful thing about these verses in Psalm 95. They are brought up again in Hebrews chapters 3-4. Here’s what the author says about them in Hebrews 3:5-6:

[5] Now Moses was faithful in all God’s house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, [6] but Christ is faithful over God’s house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

If we are going to truly worship God in the ways that Psalm 95 talks about, and if we want to enter the eternal rest that the Israelites missed in their desert wanderings, the author of Hebrews is telling us that we need to turn to Christ in faith.

We need to believe that he is the one who made us right with God and has freed us from the power of sin.

Romans 8:2

[2] For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

We need to believe that he is the one who perfectly obeyed God on our behalf when we couldn't.

Romans 5:19

[19] For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

Finally, we need to believe that he is still working in us so that we can faithfully walk in the newness of life that he has given us.

Philippians 2:13

[13] for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

In your struggles and hard circumstances, you are not left to worship God on your own. You don't have to muster up a right heart, a right attitude, or the right kinds of thoughts toward God so we will be happy with you. **In fact, you can't.**

Instead, you need to hear and believe the voice of Christ, which says, *"Come to me and trust in all that I have perfectly done for you. Trust that I have given you a new heart, trust I have made you pleasing and right in God's sight, and believe that I will help you to live out this new life of faith and worship that I have purchased for you."*

So yes, worship God with thanksgiving and seek to submit to his will. Worship him as the mighty creator God who has chosen us to be his people. But in all of it, we must continually put our hope and trust in the work that Christ has done and is doing in us.

For he has brought you to God, he has made you right with God, and he will be with you and will work in you, by the power of his Spirit, until the day he calls you to God's eternal rest.

Let's Pray