



LESSON 2: THE INVITATION IS OPEN . . . PSALM 95 & 100

BACKGROUND

Psalm 95 and 100 are hymns of praise to the eternal, universal and invincible reign of God. This theme is shared with a cluster of Psalms (**47** and **93-100**). We speculate that these hymns were written for the high religious festival in which the kingship of God over the Israelites, as well as the whole world, was celebrated each year at the temple. These Psalms were probably also sung by worshippers as they approached the temple to worship.

Both Psalms are a call or invitation to worship God, so they are considered *Psalms of Thanksgiving and Praise*. After you do this lesson, you should have answers to the following questions: *What is thanksgiving, praise and worship? Who do we worship? How do we worship? Why do we worship?* As you read, watch for images and word pictures used to describe God.

DISCUSSION STARTER

- When (in what situations and for what acts) do you **extend** a thank you or an acknowledgment for a favor or kindness done for you? When do you **expect** a thank you or an acknowledgment for a favor or kindness you've done?

PREPARATION

1. Before you read **Psalm 95 and 100**, ask the Holy Spirit to teach you and guide you into all truth (John 16:13). You may want to use the prayer of the well-known 19th century missionary, Amy Carmichael, as your prayer throughout this course: *Holy Spirit, think through me until your ideas become my ideas*. Or, you could use King David's prayer from Psalm 119:18: *Open my eyes to see the wonderful truths in your law*.
2. Read **Psalm 95 and 100** slowly and thoughtfully in at least two translations. (The Scripture handout for this lesson provides four versions of this Psalm.) As you read and reread, mark any words or phrases that you like. **Write out** at least **one verse** from these Psalms that impresses you.
3. In the space below, note all the **similarities** you see between these two Psalms.

QUESTIONS

4. What inviting phrase (or variations of) does the poet use in **95:1, 2, 6** and **100:2**?

Consider this phrase. What do these words imply about the activities we are called to?

5. Fill in the chart below by listing the specific activities we are invited to perform.

| | |
|--------------|--|
| 95:1 | |
| 95:1 | |
| 95:2 | |
| 95:2 | |
| 95:6 | |
| 95:6 | |
| 100:1 | |
| 100:2 | |
| 100:2 | |
| 100:3 | |
| 100:4 | |
| 100:4 | |
| 100:4 | |
| 100:4 | |

6. Which of the activities that you listed above are easiest for you to do and which are more difficult for you? Why?

The activities in **Psalm 95 and 100** center around **thanksgiving, praise and worship**. Even though these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, it can be helpful to make some distinctions. Generally speaking, in **thanksgiving** we give glory to God *for what he has done for us*. In **praise**, we give glory to God *for who he is, all his attributes and characteristics*. **Worship** is more of an *encounter we have with God*, rather than an activity we do. Praise and thanksgiving lead us **into** worship, but true worship happens when God's Spirit touches our spirit and we experience the real Presence of God. Worship is our gift of adoration, given to God, but it also effects us because meeting God "heart to heart" changes us. Think of worship as having a **Love Affair** or a **Lover's Tryst** with God!

7. The Psalmist invites us to **sing** and **shout** to **music** and **song**. What do you think music adds to expressions of praise and worship and how important is it?

8. What emotions does the Psalmist specifically mention in **95:1 and 100:1,2**? Do you think it's possible to enter praise and thanksgiving without these emotions? Why or why not?

- ♥ The people of the Psalms used every available means to express their love and praise to God (see Psalm 150, for example). What available means do you have and what are some unique ways you can express your love and praise to God?
- ♥ What do the actions in **95:6** reveal about the act of worship?
- ♥ For the people of God, is thanksgiving, praise and worship an option or a necessity? Explain.

9. According to **Psalm 95 and 100**, why is God deserving of our praise and thanksgiving?

| | |
|--------|--|
| 95:3 | |
| 95:4,5 | |
| 95:6 | |
| 95:7 | |
| 100:3 | |
| 100:5 | |

- ♥ According to the above statements, who "owes" God thanks, praise and worship?
- ♥ What statement are we making if we personally don't take the time and effort to enter into thanksgiving, praise and worship?
- ♥ How do you think God feels and reacts when people refuse or forget to give him thanks and praise?

10. Write out **Psalm 100:3** from one of the Bible versions.

How does our contemporary culture deny and/or ignore these truths?

- ♥ What difference will it make in a person's life if they accept these truths?

11. What three word pictures or metaphors for God are we given in these Psalms? (**95:1, 3; and 100:3**)

12. What do these word pictures for God mean to us? Choose one of the metaphors and write down all the things you can expect from your relationship with God when he reveals himself to you in this way.

♥ **Psalm 95:4,5** twice mentions God's "hands." What are God's "hands" doing? What effect does the poet achieve by using this image?

13. **Psalm 95** and **100** are invitations to praise and worship. What is one possible reaction to this invitation that we are warned about in **95:7,8**?

What happened at Meribah and Massah? God delivered the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt and led them into the wilderness in order to take them to the Promised Land (the place of "rest" that God had promised them). Twice on this journey, water ran out and the people feared they would die. They challenged Moses, grumbling and complaining, accusing him of leading them to their deaths as they asked, "Where is God and why isn't he taking care of us?" The first time this happened (at Meribah) was only days after God miraculously took the people across the Red Sea, while wiping out Pharaoh and his army. The second time they complained, accusing Moses and refusing to trust God (at Massah), came after years of God's faithful care of them as he supplied daily food and water in the desert. God was angry with the people **not** because they needed and asked for his help. He was displeased because in spite of his constant and faithful provision and his acts of great power on their behalf, the people still refused to trust him and believe that he would take care of them. (Exodus 17:1-7; Numbers 20:1-13)

14. What is similar about 1) refusing to trust God even when he has amply provided for you in the past and 2) refusing to respond to an invitation to give thanks, praise and worship to God?

15. What is the result of such a choice? (**95:8, 10, 11**)

♥ What connotations does the word *rest* suggest? Is your relationship with God more like rest or work?

♥ How is the **experience of worship** and the **experience of rest** similar?

♥ **Psalm 95:10-11** and **100:5** give two very different descriptions of God. How can both be true?

RESPONSE

16. Considering your insights from this lesson, how you would complete this sentence: *What God really wants from me is . . .*

Take a **PRAISE WALK** this week. Take a walk outside, looking for "snapshots of beauty": scenes or items (man-made or natural) to which your heart says, "That is beautiful". Don't look for what others may think is beautiful, but look until you see something to which **your** heart responds. As you walk, thank God for the beauty he created and for the way it uplifted your heart. Praise God for his limitless creativity and beautiful design. Reflect on your "snapshot" as you continue to walk. What does this beauty reveal to you about God? **Ask God** what he wants to say **to you** through the beauty you observed. When you return home, write down what you want to remember.