

THE SONGS WE SING: Celebrating the Chorus of Christmas

"THE SONG OF THE SAINTS"

PSALM 96

This Week's Core Competency

Worship – I worship God for who he is and what he has done for me. Psalm 95:1-7

- 1 *Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD;
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.*
- 2 *Let us come before him with thanksgiving
and extol him with music and song.*
- 3 *For the LORD is the great God,
the great King above all gods.*
- 4 *In his hand are the depths of the earth,
and the mountain peaks belong to him.*
- 5 *The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands formed the dry land.*
- 6 *Come, let us bow down in worship,
let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;*
- 7 *for he is our God
and we are the people of his pasture,
the flock under his care.*

Describing contemporary Americans, someone has said, "They work at their play, worship their work, and play at their worship." By this he did not mean that we enjoy our worship that it refreshes and revitalizes us. Instead he meant that we don't take it very seriously even though it is an essential spiritual discipline.

When we worship, we exalt, honor, adore, and

***Sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth.***
-Psalm 96:19

glorify God in response to his holiness and his grace in our lives. In our thoughts and in the words, rituals, and symbols that we employ in worship we ascribe to God infinite worth that belongs to him alone. Either alone or in unison with other believers, we experience God's presence and deepen our relationship with him through sincere worship and are thereby inspired to live righteous lives. In this way worship truly is a transforming experience.

Dallas Willard writes, "If in worship we are met by God himself, our thoughts and words turn to perception and experience of God, who is then really present to us in some degree of his greatness, beauty, and goodness. This will make for an immediate, dramatic change in our lives" (*The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 178).

While all of this is true and constructive in what it asserts, it is, at the same time, misleading and destructive in what it implies. And here's why. It implies that we worship God for selfish reasons, that we worship him for our personal benefit. It leaves the impression that worship is about *our* experience, *our* inspiration, and ultimately *our* spiritual transformation, and while Willard is certainly right when he says worship "will make for an immediate, dramatic change in our lives," *our* personal improvement, no matter how laudable, is hardly worship's *raison d'etre*. To which we would all say, "Of course not." But how we talk after attending worship service belies our

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words. Do we not talk about whether we enjoyed the service or not, whether we got anything out of it, or didn't? Do we not comment on whether the music suited our ear, the vocalists suited our taste, and whether the temperature in the sanctuary was to our liking? And do we not, preoccupied with our experience, evaluate worship accordingly?

Somehow we overlook talking about whether we truly worshiped or not. After all, we worship because the LORD God is worthy of our worship. True worship is in and of itself worthwhile because the Creator deserves it, and what's more, he demands it. Worship doesn't have to be beneficial to us to be worthwhile, which means time spent in worship is never time wasted. With this Psalm 96 concurs. It tells us we are to sing praises to the LORD and ascribe to him the glory he due him. And it tells us we are to do this 1) because the LORD is great and worthy of praise, 2) because he made the heavens, and 3) because he is surrounded by splendor, majesty, strength, and glory—not because we will somehow benefit from doing it. Worship is not a means to an end; it is an end in itself.

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Psalm 96

- 1 Sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth.
- 2 Sing to the LORD, praise his name;
proclaim his salvation day after day.
- 3 Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous deeds among all peoples.
- 4 For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;
he is to be feared above all gods.
- 5 For all the gods of the nations are idols,
but the LORD made the heavens.
- 6 Splendor and majesty are before him;
strength and glory are in his sanctuary.
- 7 Ascribe to the LORD, O families of nations,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

- 8 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
bring an offering and come into his courts.
- 9 Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness;
tremble before him, all the earth.
- 10 Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns."
The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved;
he will judge the peoples with equity.
- 11 Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad;
let the sea resound, and all that is in it;
- 12 let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them.
Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy;
- 13 they will sing before the LORD, for he comes,
he comes to judge the earth.
He will judge the world in righteousness
and the peoples in his truth.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Number "sing" in vv. 1, 2.
- * Circle "new song" in 1.
- * Circle "salvation" in v. 2.
- * Circle "glory" in v. 3.
- * Box "for" indicating reason in vv. 4, 5.
- * Circle "gods" in vv. 4, 5.
- * Box "but" indicating contrast in v. 5.
- * Underline "splendor and majesty" and "strength and glory" in v. 6.
- * Number "ascribe" in vv. 7, 8.
- * Highlight v. 10a.
- * Circle "judge" in vv. 10, 13 (2x).
- * Number "let" in vv. 11, 12.
- * Box the temporal connective "then" in v. 12.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. If verses 7-9 are addressed to "families of nations," to whom are verses 1-3 addressed?
2. The psalmist begins, "Sing to the LORD a new song." What does he mean?
3. Explain from verse 3 what "declare his glory" means.
4. List the reasons found in verses 4-6 for praising the LORD.
5. Explain the *contrast* in verse 5.
6. Verse 8 says, "Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name." How exactly is this done?
7. Explain the sense in which "The LORD reigns."
8. The psalmist uses figurative language in verses 11-12. Describe its effect on you.
9. **Discussion:** Talk about why the LORD's coming to judge the earth is a reason to rejoice.

The summary of Psalm 96 given by one author can easily be used to unpack the psalmist's message (see Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms*, NIBC, 375). "The liturgy of this psalm celebrating Yahweh's kingship opens with calls to praise stated in general terms (vv. 1-3)." The three-fold repetition of the verb "sing" is striking. Not only does it emphasize that singing the LORD's praise is a must, but it at the same time also inclines the human heart toward that very necessity.

"Reasons for the praise are then stated in terms of Yahweh's incomparability among those claiming divine status, his past act of making the heavens, and his royal attributes (vv. 4-6)." These reasons are hard to miss since they are introduced by "for." According to the psalmist, other so-called gods are "nothings" in reality, but the LORD created the universe. On the recurring use of the Hebrew word translated "for" one author writes, "The use of [ki] in vv 4 and 5 provides a double emphasis on the high status of Yahweh, who is greater than all other gods and more worthy of reverence (fear) than any other deity. The second [ki] statement in v 5 extends and intensifies the declarations in v 4: all the gods of the peoples are 'mere idols' . . . [but] Yahweh 'made the heavens' (cf. Ps 8:4)" (Marvin E. Tate, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 20, *Psalms 51-100*, 514). What's more, unlike the "nothings" to which the psalmist refers, to Yahweh belong "splendor" and "majesty", "strength" and "glory." These attributes, *personified* in the psalm, stand before him in his sanctuary as his royal attendants.

"The liturgy then moves to another section calling for praise but this time specifying how and where (vv. 7-9)." As the only true God, all people

are to praise the LORD by ascribing to him the glory he deserves. Doing this entails bringing him an offering that is not only a religious sacrifice but also a political tribute and bowing down to worship him as divine king in his temple courts.

"The final section specifies the content of this praise, which looks especially to his future act of judging. In response, the whole cosmos is to reverberate with praise (vv. 10-13)." The praise of Yahweh to be declared among the nations (cf. v. 3) is simply this, "The LORD reigns." "This confession of Yahweh's rule leads to a look backward at his 'establishing' the world and to a look forward to his 'judging' the peoples with equity (cf. 93:1-2, 5) (Broyles, 377). This future judgement is a cause for rejoicing because it implies he will make all things right. When the LORD comes he will restore order and harmony in his sin scarred creation. And so everything in heaven and on earth is to rejoice and be glad in anticipation of that day. The sea, the fields, the forest, and everything in them are to jump for joy! The writer, divinely inspired, sees beyond the horizons of his own age, and beyond the limits of his own nation. He sees a day when the sovereignty of the LORD will be finally manifested and universally acknowledged. There is nothing here of Jewish exclusivism, but a vision of world-wide blessing under the Kingship of Jehovah" (W. Graham Scroggie, *The Psalms*, 279).

Until then, we are to continually sing new songs to the praise of his glory. We are to worship for his benefit rather than our pleasure. But what greater pleasure can a child of God find than in the worship of his King and Savior.

The Message of the Passage

Sing the LORD's praises for he is the only true God; affirm that he who reigns also comes to judge the earth.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you through his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James suggests in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

- **Give Yourself Some Good Advice Based on the Message of this Passage.**

- **Pick a verse or verses from the passage to memorize or think about this week.**

- **Relate the message of this passage to any of the following:**
 - **Belonging**
 - **Becoming**
 - **going Beyond**

- **Journal your thoughts on the passage.**

- **Home Group Discussion** (for those involved in the deeper connections of a home group)

Read Psalm 96 together. Assign different verses or stanzas to different readers or have the leader read one verse or stanza and the rest of the group read alternately the next verse or stanza. Then worship the Lord together by simply "ascribing" or "affirming" verbally his unique attributes and his marvelous deeds alluded to by the psalmist. For example, one person might begin something like this, "I want to affirm that the LORD is the Creator of the heavens. The universe he created cannot be moved." And so on.

“The Song of the Saints”
(Use the space below for Sunday’s message notes)

notes **N** STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

- v. 1 **new song** This simple expression can be taken in a number of ways. One commentator claims it refers to this song, Psalm 96 (Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms II*, AB, 357); one to a yet-to-be-written one that expresses "the thought and hopes and triumphs of the new and glorious age which is about to dawn" (J. J. Stewart Perowne, *The Book of Psalms*, 196). Another author suggests that it's not the lyrics of the song that's new but the singers of the song. "The song is clearly new to the singers of the psalm, that is, 'all the earth' (so in 98:1, 4). They are to take up Yahweh's song-not those of 'the gods of the nations' (96:5)-and sing of his salvation, his glory, and his marvelous deeds" (Broyles, 375). It may, however, roughly mean "sing again" for "fresh mercies call for fresh melodies" (Scroggie, 280). "The thought of a 'new song' does not involve the idea of a new poetic or musical composition, but as we believe Briggs rightly claims, 'a new outburst of song because of a new event that evokes it'" (H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms*, 682). "Just as God's care is never ceasing and new every morning (cf. Lam. 3:22f.), so also the song of his praise must be ever new" (A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, NCBC, 2:682).
- v. 1 **sing, sing, sing** Cf., ascribe, ascribe, ascribe in vv. 7, 8. When the verb 'sing' is used three times, this serves to make plain the compulsion to utter vocal musical praise when the thought of the Lord's greatness are entertained. This thought kindles the fires of devotion to the point where praise cannot be restrained" (2:682).
- v. 2 **salvation** Cf. "Announce every day how he delivers" (the NET Bible). "'Salvation' which is the object of praise is again so broad a term and so general in its scope that it allows for including any form of God's help and deliverance that anyone may have experienced at any time in soul or body" (Leupold, 683). Some commentators see in the term an allusion to the Lord's past restoration of Jerusalem following the exile (Broyles, 375); others see an allusion to his future coming to judge the earth (v. 13).
- v. 3 **glory** "What lies at the base of the term is the idea of 'weight,' or 'standing' (*gravitas*), and of 'honour.' The possessions of Jacob are his [Heb. *kbwd*, glory] (Gen. xxxi. 1)-that is, they are what give him standing. And a people's [*kbwd*] is its nobility, its leaders (Is. v. 13), or its might in general (Is. xvi. 14, xviii. 3, xxi. 16). [*kbwd*] is by and large that asset which makes peoples or individuals, and even objects, impressive, and usually this is understood as something that can be perceived or expressed. Thus Jahweh's [*kbwd*] also, that is, his power and standing, his honour, were perceptible in the world in the most varied of ways—in actual fact it fills the whole creation (Is. vi. 3), and *there is a duty laid upon men and angels to praise God and acknowledge this honour given him by his strength* (Ps. xxix. 9), an honour which Jahweh claims for himself alone (Is. xlii 8)" (Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker, 1:239 italics added). Clearly in this verse, the LORD's "marvelous deeds" are his glory, i.e., what makes him uniquely impressive.
- v. 4 **gods** How can the psalmist, on the one hand, admit the existence of other gods in verse 4 and then, on the other, call them "idols," lit., "nothings" or "non-entities" in verse 5? Note the play on Hebrew words. "They are not [*elohim*] ('gods') but [*elilim*] ('nobodies'); cf. Isa. 2:8, 18, 20, 10:10, 11' etc." (Anderson, 2:683). "It is possible that verse 4 means to say that Yahweh is to be revered above all would-be 'gods' or whatever humans trust in, strive for, and worship. But it is also possible 'the gods of the nations' are those fabricated by the nations, and the 'gods' of verse 4 are the divine beings of Yahweh's heavenly council (89:5-8 also refers to them to express Yahweh's incomparability; cf. 29:1; 148:1-2; 1 Kgs. 22:19)" (Broyles, 376).
- v. 5 **the heavens** This is likely a figure of speech called *synecdoche* in which a part refers to the whole. Here "heavens" is put for the whole of creation. The LORD made the universe.
- v. 6 **splendor and . . .** "Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary" (ESV). "Splendor" and "majesty" are terms used to refer to Israelite kings in the royal psalms and to Yahweh in Ps 104:1. "Strength" and "glory" ["beauty" in many translations] are used to refer to the ark of the covenant. Many commentators suggest that these divine attributes are personified in verse 6.
- v. 7 **Ascribe** "Acknowledge and proclaim the wonderful deeds of God" (Anderson, 2:684). Cf., "O nations of the world, recognize the LORD; recognize that the LORD is glorious and strong. 8Give to the LORD the glory he deserves!" (NLT).
- v. 7 **families of nations** I.e., all nations on earth; cf., "all people on earth" (TEV). "All the 'families' of the world are urged to ascribe to Yahweh glory and mighty power (which means, of course, that they would not attribute these qualities to their gods) and to come with gifts of tribute to join in a great 'bowing down' before Yahweh, who reigns as king over all creation (vv 7-10)" (Tate, 514).
- v. 11 **heavens . . . earth** This is likely a figure of speech called *merism* (a form of *synecdoche*), in which two contrasting parts or extremes are used to refer to the whole, e.g., "I've been working day and night" or "all the time." Here the heavens and the earth are to rejoice, and more specifically on earth, the sea, the fields, and the forest and everything in them are to rejoice.
- v. 13 **judge** "In the context of the Psalms, Yahweh's 'judging the world in righteousness' means 'putting things right' and restoring order and harmony. Judgment thus calls for joy" (377).
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Connect the **FAMILY**. During this series, Bible stories appropriate for children will be used that complement the adult teaching.

Experience it!

Experience scripture through the activity-based learning exercise. Dinner is a perfect time to engage the family.

This week, as you are celebrating the birth of the Christ, focus on our Core Competency of Worship. Each night take time to describe who God is and the things He has done for you. Be sure to thank Him for these things!



Pray it!

Pray God's will for your child by praying scriptures. Insert your child's name in the blanks as you pray.

Father, help _____ to declare the glory of the Lord among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. Ps 96:3

Post it!

Post the kid-friendly Core Competency and the memory verse throughout the house. Lead your children to interact with them as they memorize.

Core Competency – I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Memory verse – "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given . . . And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Isa 9:6

Discuss it!

Discover biblical truth by discussing the scripture. Reflective questions are great with older kids.

Read Matthew 2:1-12

- * Who did the Magi tell of their desire to worship the Christ child?
- * Why did Herod called the Magi secretly?
- * Who really wanted to worship the child? How do you know?

* What was the response of the true worshipers when they saw the Christ child?

Live it!

Live out the Core Competency and build deeper relationships by doing this activity.

As a family invite a friend or neighbor to the Family Friendly Christmas Eve Program. It is from 3:00-4:00 pm on Thursday, December 24. We will have Christmas carols, the Christmas story, laughter, and it may even snow indoors!



Challenge

Kids preschool through sixth grade receive Kid Pix Tokens for each discipleship activity completed.

Family completes **Experience It** _____ Child memorizes kid-friendly **Core Competency** _____

Family participates in **Live It** _____ Child memorizes **Memory Verse** _____

Kids can earn extra tokens on Sunday morning by:

Bringing a friend to **The Kid Connection** _____ Completing **KIDZ Bulletin** _____

Child's name _____ Parent's signature _____

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.