



## GROWING TOWARD GOD IN WORSHIP: THE CALL TO WORSHIP AND CONFESSION

Psalm 100  
March 8, 2020  
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Our worship begins the moment we walk through those Narthex doors. Psalm 100 tell us to enter those proverbial gates with thanksgiving, because entering into God's house is a profound moment in our week. It is focused time, with our brothers and sisters in Christ, to offer ourselves in praise to our Maker.

But I imagine such focused hearts eludes most of us. We come rushing in from Sunday School, trying to find our pew and our friends. We come having wrestled with our little ones trying to get their Sunday best on or having to roust our teenagers out of bed. Perhaps our Saturday night bled into the early hours of Sunday morning and we simply feel lucky to be here.

Whatever the circumstances, there are many reasons we are not so focused the moment we enter. I am certainly as bad as anyone. I am thinking about my sermon, wondering if the acolyte's fire will go out, whether the guest speakers have been properly instructed, the sound system, the flow of worship, and on and on and on; wanting each part to fuse into a unified whole – for us all to properly honor our Lord.

Thus, the secret to a better beginning in worship is to prepare before you even arrive, when you wake up in fact. As you wake on this day, you should begin by remembering this first day of the week has special significance for Christians. Scripture tells us Jesus rose on Sunday and early Christians referred to Sunday as the "Lord's Day" (Revelation 1:10). The significance was so deep for Christ's followers that they moved their worship day from Saturday to Sunday.

As you approach the Sanctuary, your heart and mind should be experiencing what some have called a "little Easter" each and every week; a deep sense of thanksgiving and joy for God's resurrecting

and reconciling power made possible through our Lord Jesus Christ.

In fact, in the early church, Sunday – as the day of resurrection – came to be regarded as the "eighth day of creation"! Every week as we celebrate Christ's resurrection, we should enter this place with the expectation God will create something new and powerful in our hearts, minds and lives.

Whatever distractions we entered with are meant to be purged during the prelude. The contemplative music, with its beauty and structure, is meant to lead our soul into the presence of God. It should be a time of prayer and asking for God's Spirit to make you fully present this hour. A sense of expectation and energy should build as we approach the Call to Worship. It is our first overt act together and, as such, should serve to create and express our collective praise.

It should be drawn from scripture as it extols the central aspects of our Lord. God's glory, love, honor, might, steadfastness, and mercy. It should be about God and not us, taking us out of our self-concern, enabling us to focus on a praise worthy of Lord. It should remind us worship is about what we offer to God in thanksgiving, not about our personal wants and desires from this hour.

*Psalm 100* is the prototype for the Call to Worship, with each piece building our praise...

### ***Make a Joyful noise!***

prompts us to exude energy and delight.

### ***All the earth***

reminds us that we are joining all creation in this act of praise. As Isaiah declares, even the trees of the fields will clap their hands! It joins into a powerful sense of an earth-wide praise, growing our connection to all the people, especially all our brothers and sisters in Christ.

In challenging us to

***know that the Lord is God,***

we realize worship is fundamentally an act of acknowledging the “Godness” of God – that it only belongs to the Lord. Meaning only God deserves our eternal praise.

The Psalm expands on this theme by reminding us,

***It is he that made us, and we are his.***

In this moment, we realize our longing for autonomy and freedom is actually a distortion of our idolatrous ways. In acknowledging, “It is he that made us,” We joyfully admit that we are not even lord of our own lives.

At first this might be troubling, but the next phrase reassures us,

***We are...the sheep of his pasture.***

Yes, our lives don’t belong to us but thankfully they belong to a nurturing, shepherd God who watches over us and disciplines us with love.

Having called ourselves together and then praised the Lord in song, we are ready.

We are to confess and to truly mean it.

We are ready for God to do something to us;

We need God to do something for us;

for our praise is imperfect,

and our hearts have divided loyalties.

So even this moment of confession is not about us;

but about making our praise of God pure and more authentic.

But the refining fire is no picnic;

it burns...

but it is a burn that eliminates

the deadwood in the forest,

for if we let too much accumulate in our hearts

it can be a fire that burns us up,

if we don’t clean out our soul detritus each week.

*Psalm 51* serves as our prototype for Confession and when it declares that,

***my sin is ever before me,***

it reminds us that each week there are many things that have created a barrier between us and God. And just as you might move to the other side of the street when you see someone you owe money to, we avoid God when we are in debt.

Think about those people you have wronged. It creates an awkwardness when you see them, doesn’t it? That tightness in your chest is joined by a fear in your mind that somehow you will be called out, shamed, and shunned. As long as the offense is not resolved, there will always be a barrier between your heart and theirs. Like that relative you have avoided for so long. I imagine just bringing that person to mind right now, makes your heart beat faster and your breath get shallower.

That relationship will never be fixed unless you have the courage to reconcile.

The next phrase from the Psalm,

***Against you, you alone, have I sinned,***

reminds us that every act against a stranger, neighbor, or family member is in fact, first of all, an act against God. That phrase enables us to see the truth of our sin.

It means there is a part of us,

that as we go to God in confession,

should be filled with a Holy terror,

for we know there are many, many times

we have sinned through our thoughts,

words, and deeds,

by what we have done

or what we left undone.

We remember that God is a Holy God

who abhors sins,

who will not tolerate its presence.

Dozens of times the Old Testament asks

in one form or another,

“Who can stand when you appear?

Who can abide the day of his coming?”

We remember that God’s divine wrath burns hot,

when we do not use our power

to help those in deepest needs,

when we covet our neighbors’ blessings,

and when we seek our own justice for minor  
needs  
but neglect to work it for others  
who have been profoundly wronged.

For this time in worship we must fully realize the shocking, dangerous nature of our sins for it to be effective. For only the fullness of our sorrow can lead to an authentic, soul-felt desire for what comes next,

***Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love.***

We ask God for this mercy, not presuming it will come again even though we have already received 70 times 7 – and more. We know God is not obligated to forgive. It comes to us as an unmerited gift. We do not presume. We are almost as tired of our sins as God is. So along with the psalmist we pray,

***Create in me a clean heart,***

***O God,***

***and put a new and right spirit within me.***

We realize in this confession time that our ability to be free from sins depends upon God's power, not our own will. Sin is a power of which no mortal has control, so we ask God to fix it for us;

*create in me,  
put a spirit in me.  
PLEASE!!!*

As Luther so powerfully penned in a Mighty Fortress is Our God, "on earth is not his equal." We cannot stand against the power of sin except by His power.

This means surrendering our will to the Lord's and welcoming the Spirit's power in our lives. But if we don't truly recognize our sin, we won't truly invite God in. But if we truly confess our sins, as Paul admonishes us, God will cleanse us of all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

Imagine the promise in that! We are tired of making the same mistakes and living with the same fears but, in surrendering to God, we can truly become something new.

If we have truly felt the depth of our sin in that confession and experienced the sheer Holy wrath of our God and been in mortal terror – if only for the briefest of moments – only then are we ready to hear, understand, and believe the Truth of this Incredible God.

Our God is a God of infinite mercy and love.

For as much fear we knew  
for the briefest of moments,  
we shall know an infinitely greater,  
sublime,  
rapturous,  
resplendent,  
and refulgent,

**JOY!!!!**

In the Assurance of Pardon, we can see, hear, and feel those cleansing waters of Christ's supreme grace. We truly are ready to accept that God forgives and forgets. God wants us to confess – in order for us to know his mercy and to believe.

To believe,

that as Psalm 51 tells us

***wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.***

Our sin is not like that ketchup stain on your white polo shirt. Yes, you washed it and it mostly came out. But you can still see it and you know, no matter how much you scrub it, there is always a reminder of your clumsy eating habits (a lot like all my ties!).

But God scrubs us so thoroughly from sin that we are whiter than snow. We have been cleansed with such power that there is no microscopic residue left. It is GONE!

The Call to Worship... The Confession and Assurance... so much has already happened in worship... and it's only getting started! Thanks be to our Awesome God. Amen.