

Getting Into The Mood To Worship: Understanding What Is Worship Really All About Psalm 95

Well, are you in the *mood* to worship this morning? Some of you might be seeing a red flag with that question. If you have been here for any length of time, one thing you have heard from this pulpit is that, contrary to what you hear in the popular culture, your *feelings or moods* are not always a reliable barometer of what is good vs. bad or right vs. wrong. That is because your moods have a tendency to fluctuate—sometimes moment to moment. Typically they are affected by what has been recently going on in your life. The Tigers lost yesterday for the fourth time in a row—so if you are a Tigers fan, you are *feeling pretty bummed*. But if you're a Sox fan, you're feeling *great*. If you received a negative report from the doctor this week—your mood is likely anxious and uncertain. But if the doctor told you that you that all traces of a cancer you have battling for the last two years have disappeared, you're elated. *It would almost seem as though moods are merely a reflection of your circumstances.* But actually they reflect something even deeper.

For example, what about the person who has gotten bad news—yet manages to find hope and peace in the midst of that? Is that person simply in denial? That's possible. But so is the possibility that they are focusing on something beyond the bad news that is even **bigger** than their problem. **[Slide 1]** Just listen to Psalm 112:1, 7-8a:

¹ *Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who finds great delight in his commands...* ⁷ *He will have no fear of bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD.* ⁸ *His heart is secure, he will have no fear....*

Biblically speaking, we are wise not to be *dominated* by our moods—especially when those moods give us excuses to say or do ungodly things. But the same Scriptures that warn us about our deceitful hearts and the negative moods that they can produce *also* call us to summon and direct our moods in response to **who** God is and **what** He has done. That is where *mood and worship need to come together*. And do you know which book of the Bible God has given you to help you figure all this out? The psalms.

The psalms were originally written and collected to direct God's people in the Old Testament regarding their worship. But they are equally valuable for believers in the 21st century. In fact, I would go so far as to say **they are God's inspired hymnbook**. One thing you see when you look at the psalms is that they display a variety of moods. Sometimes they can be **celebrative**—even upbeat. I mean what on earth do you do with those instruments and expressions of rejoicing in Psalm 150! **Read Psalm 150:**
[Slide 2]

³ *Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre,* ⁴ *praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute,* ⁵ *praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals.* ⁶ *Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD.*

It's almost like the psalmist is saying: "*Find everything under the sun you can get your hands on and make it resonate glory and praise to God—even to the point of using your own body and exhausting every muscle group in your body!!*" When you get around these verses, you get the distinct feeling that there is nothing more offensive to God than ***indifference and apathy***.

But there are other psalms where the worship is more ***contemplative and soul-searching***, resulting in sorrow and confession of sin—like Psalm 139: 23-24. Listen to David's words: [Slide 3]

²³ *Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.* ²⁴ *See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

And then there are times when worship is downright "***awe-full***." (PAUSE) I better explain that. When I say awe-full, I mean "***full of awe***" or wonder or what OT writers referred to as the fear of the Lord. That sense that He is infinitely holy and we are *so* deserving of His judgment. Again listen to David in Psalm 130:3-4: [Slide 4]

³ *If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?* ⁴ *But with **you** there is forgiveness; **therefore you are feared**.*

When you look at these different moods, there are some that we might naturally tend to gravitate to more than others—depending on your personality and natural disposition. But ***all of them*** are a necessary part of true worship. ***All of them*** are associated with different aspects of worship. These moods are not emotions to be aimed at or worked up for the sake of emotional experience or display—rather they are meant to be summoned by a heart that accurately understands and wants to respond to a particular truth that God is revealing about Himself.

The problem comes when people or churches almost exclusively favor one aspect of the character of God over another. Some love to celebrate His love and mercy which is good—but that can lead to an emphasis on rejoicing and celebration at the expense of worship that communicates God's holiness and displeasure with sin. Others see the need to affirm his holiness—especially in a day in which sin has nearly vanished from our vocabulary. This will produce a more solemn mood—and certainly that note is needed in much of Contemporary Christianity. Yet some take this so far that they find it very awkward to express heartfelt joy. Their worship seems to get stuck on a minor key.

What further complicates the issue is that over time, it is easy to focus almost entirely on a particular style of worship—and then we begin to confuse the ***style*** of worship with the ***essence*** of worship. When we get to this point, we feel that if we haven't experienced a particular style—then we haven't worshipped at all. And so there is tension among believers over styles—between style that emphasizes celebration and style that emphasizes contemplation and confession. Between style that sounds new and exciting to the younger generation and style that sounds older but familiar to the older generation. And the list of contrasts could go on and on.

Well on this point, I have some good news and some bad news. The Good News is that God does not favor *a* particular style. The bad news is that God doesn't favor *your* particular style. Because *what really matters to Him is your heart* (See John 4:23-24).

If your heart is really seeking after God, you can learn to make *style* yield to the priority of the truth about God that ought to be expressed in your worship. To that end, God has given us Psalm 95—a psalm that helps us pursue *all* the different moods of worship!

True worship is always going somewhere. But to where does it move the true worshipper? As we look closer at this psalm, we see that Biblical worship involves *three key moods*. First of all, Biblical worship calls us to...[Slide 5]

I. Come **rejoicing** (or Celebration)

In verses 1-2, there is a description of *what* rejoicing looks like. And then in verses 3-5, there is a *why*—the reason or cause for the *rejoicing*. Look again with me at verses 1-2.

A. The *what* of rejoicing [Read 1-2]

1. There is **singing**—“Let us sing for joy” literally summons us to *make a ringing cry*. Sometimes this verb is used if a cry of warning about an enemy attack. But more often it's used (as it is here) of a cry of joyous celebration. So this isn't *just* singing. This is ear-splitting praise from a heart that cannot help but express itself this way. You really get a feel for this word when you see how it is used in I Sam. 4:5 after the ark of the covenant was returned to Jerusalem. *What do o you suppose that was like? Like a bottom of the 9th game winning home run!*
2. There is **shouting**—A *shouting aloud for joy*. This word scares the daylights out of a lot of us Baptists. But should it?
3. There is also the **playing of music**—In verse 2, it says *let us extol him with music and song*. This word can be used of singing, but it also encourages the use of instruments.

Remember Psalm 150? There are *harps, lyres, tambourines, strings, flutes, and cymbals*. If they would have had keyboards, guitars, organs, and drums in that day—I am confident the psalmist would have included them as well! The sense here is we need to “pull out all the stops” to extol the greatness of God!

The psalmist just piles on phrase after phrase to make one simple point —**God is worthy of our heartfelt, passionate praise!!**

Now in making this point, the psalmist implicitly raises another. *We express intense joy at the things that really matter to us.*

Slide 6A: If you were sitting next to this woman this morning, would you be feeling a bit uncomfortable? Would you be saying to yourself: What is *her* problem? Doesn't she know that most Baptists just don't do that sort of thing? Why she is just out of control! If this keeps up, will have people hanging from the chandeliers! Wait before you judge her motives. She may just be doing exactly what this psalm calls for!

But if you are still struggling with this thought, maybe it would help if I told you that this picture wasn't taken at a church but at a [Slides 6B and 6C] baseball park—right *after* a home run!

You might say: “Oh—well that's different.” Is it really? Remember, *we express intense joy or displeasure at the things that really matter to us!*

Think about that for a moment. What is it that makes *you* “shout” or “give a ringing cry?” A sale? A great concert? Your sports team winning? Your teenaged daughter backing the car out of the garage—without first opening the garage door?! You get my point? All of us shout for *something*. And while you don't *have* to necessarily *shout* at church—how much *passion* do you have for the glory of God? Where does the worship of the living God register on your spiritual EKG? If we could hook up your spiritual heart to a heart monitor, what would your spiritual EKG look like? Would it be flat or spiked when it comes to your worship of the true and living God?

Transition: But what is it that produces this sort of joy? And so the psalmist brings up...[Slide 7]

B. The *why* of rejoicing.

What is it that should move us to a passionate expression of joy and celebration in our worship? Familiarity with the song? A beautiful melody? A rhythm that you can really get into? No doubt these things may help. But none of them is cause for *rejoicing* according to our text. Anybody can “get into” an upbeat song. We saw that on the concert here on Thursday night. Wow—were the King's Brass good or what?! There was something for everyone to enjoy. Sacred. Jazz. Big Band. Speaking of “big band”—I think I now know what gets some of our seniors moving! When they played that number by Benny Goodman, I saw some of you practically come out of your seats! I saw some people who move a bit slowly due to arthritis who suddenly started moving like they could have out-danced Fred Astaire! Music really can be powerful stuff—particularly when it is both upbeat and linked to happy memories. And frankly it was a lot of fun! But *by itself*, that sort of thing is shallow and short-lived. It is certainly not the reason for celebrative worship. *So what's the real*

reason? It's got to come from somewhere deeper than our preference for a certain style. It's something that comes from preparing our hearts before we ever open our lips. **Look at verses 3-5 (READ).** What is it that is beneath all the excitement? **An understanding of the greatness of God!** You already know that—right? But have you really *thought* about it?

What made this so exciting for the psalmist and the original readers? You have to put on their sandals and walk a mile or two with them to really appreciate what the psalmist is saying here. The common (and I might add, false) belief was that every nation had a national deity (sort of like a national mascot with considerable power). And every deity had a territorial sovereignty. There was a god of the *sea* and a god of the *mountains* and a god of the *plains*—and so forth. You get a snapshot of this sort of pagan thinking in I Kings 20:23-25 where King Ben-Hadad, whose army has just been routed by Israel is re-grouping and planning a counter-attack. Listen in on the narrative: **[Slide 8]**

23 Meanwhile, the officials of the king of Aram advised him, "Their gods are gods of the hills. That is why they were too strong for us. But if we fight them on the plains, surely we will be stronger than they. 24 Do this: Remove all the kings from their commands and replace them with other officers. 25 You must also raise an army like the one you lost—horse for horse and chariot for chariot—so we can fight Israel on the plains. Then surely we will be stronger than they." He agreed with them and acted accordingly.

But Ben-Hadad got some lousy advice. Look at I Kings 20:28: **[Slide 9]**

*"The man of God came up and told the king of Israel, "This is what the LORD says: 'Because the Arameans think the LORD is a god of the hills and not a god of the valleys, I will deliver this vast army into your hands, and you will know that **I am the LORD.**'"*

From our perspective, there is only one God—period. Any other so-called gods aren't true entities as much as they are projections of our own desires and false beliefs. End of discussion. But the Bible condescends to the language of man and talks about our imagined, self-contrived gods. And the point is—the God of the Bible is vastly superior to any *one* or any *thing* else.

You know people are really not much different today. They would rather put their trust in what they can see or what they have done or made rather than put their hope and trust in the Living God. But sooner or later they find their gods to be wanting. The vivid reminder of the Twin Towers crumbling and crashing still haunts our nation. And the dream of a stock market that just a few years ago was supposed to usher in a new millennium of unparalleled prosperity is a now dim memory. People are nervous.

The future isn't so certain. Wall Street worries that the bear god is going to devour the bull god....

The psalmist tells us that our God is beyond comparison with these puny, powerless deities. He is bigger than the stock market. He is greater than the department of defense. He controls every hurricane. No disease can thwart his unchanging purposes. No terrorist plot can override God's sovereign will. ***He is in control. He is over all! He's got it all covered for His people! And he doesn't even hike the annual premium for His coverage because that was paid once-for-all by the blood of His Son!***

Is that Good News for you? Is that something to celebrate? So what do you ***do*** when you have something to celebrate? ***You rejoice with all that you have.*** Worship is responding to all that God is with all that you are!

When you think about it—what else can you do but *rejoice* with your whole being? But worship doesn't stop there. Along with rejoicing, we must...[Slide 10]

II. Come revering (That involves Consecration) **Read (6-7)**

Notice again there is a ***what*** and a ***how***.

A. The what of revering —(6)

1. Worship—to prostrate oneself
2. Bow down—to stretch oneself out full length upon the ground
3. Kneel—Usual posture of prayer in Scriptures

The emphasis is not on posture itself but on *our whole being* reacting to the revelation of God. The English word for worship means "***worth-ship***" or ***ascribing worth to God***. The Hebrew words simply do it.

Question: What would you do if you could be in the presence of God right now?

Illustration: I heard about a pastor who claimed that every morning when he was shaving, Jesus would come in and chat with him, putting his arm around him.

Sort of hard to argue with someone's experience, isn't it. I have found it is wise to avoid that. Rather we need to test experience in light of the Scripture. What do you find when people knowingly were in the presence of *deity*?

Exodus 19:16—When Moses came down from meeting with God on Mt. Sinai, there was thunder and lightening and a cloud that covered the mountain. People trembled!

Isaiah 6:4—Remember Isaiah's response? "I am ruined."

Revelation. 1:17-- John fell down at His feet as if he were dead.

In our quest to make God relevant for people, we have watered down out the truth of His holiness.

Quotation: A.W. Tozer—“*There’s an awesomeness about God which is missing in our day altogether. There’s little admiring awe in the Church of Christ these days.*”

But what exactly is the reason for this awe? What is it that should cause us to lunge forward and bow down in reverent awe?

And so we come to the “why of reverence.” [Slide 11]

B. The why of revering (7a)

1. For He is *our* God—He is maker of the world in the sense of Genesis 1. But this may suggest even more. This may be an acknowledgement by the psalmist that Israel is not a *self*-made nation, but a *God*-made nation. Everything she *has* and *is* is by virtue of what God had graciously done for her. And the same could be said of the people of God today. We are not self-made. We could not even acknowledge His existence if He did not first open our blind eyes to see Him. We could not even offer our hearts to worship Him if He did not give us new hearts to know Him and believe on Him and love Him.

Not only has He made us in His image, but He has created us to be in the image of Christ. Without Him we cannot exist. Without Him life has no purpose. This is a God who doesn’t just pay the gas bill so we can get out of bed on a cold fall morning. He gives us an identity and a purpose and a *reason* for getting out of bed! But that is not all....

2. We are *His* sheep—If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, His providence watches and guides you. His mercy daily cares for you. His love disciplines you. One day some 2,000 years ago, that love caused Him to lay down His life for you. The Lord Jesus is no hireling just doing His job. He is your Shepherd. And He is constantly doing this—even when you are totally unaware that He is doing it. In fact, He is so faithful, that when His providence calls for trials and difficulties—Romans 8:28-30 says that He is at work in those situations to make you like His Son. He will make good on His promise to restore sinners like you who have placed their faith in Jesus and make them once again become all that He created them to be!

And for all this, what should we do? We *must* revere Him! To not revere him is the ultimate ingratitude—if not blasphemy. It shows how proud we are and how little we understand how

worthy we are of His wrath and how dependent we are on His sovereign grace. If we can rise when a judge or a senator or the President of the United States enters a room—how much more should we demonstrate our reverence to the King of Kings. How important that we train the next generation to revere Him as well.

The mood of reverence is not always as enjoyable as the mood of rejoicing—but it is a *necessary* part of our worship. Without it, ***the shouting of verses 1-5 can degenerate into self-indulgent entertainment.***

Worship is rejoicing. But it also must involve revering. But there is one more mood of worship. Worship means that we..[Slide 12]

III. Come resolving (Commitment) (8-11)

A. The what of resolving—(Read 7b) “Today if you will hear His voice....”

What is meant by this word, “resolving?” I mean what you do in response to the Word of God as it has been faithfully proclaimed. The key is the meaning of the word translated “hear.” The Hebrew word for hear does double-duty. It basically means “to listen” but it also means “to obey.” In the Hebrew way of thinking—if I tell you to do something and you hear me but ignore me—then you didn’t really *listen to me*.. The Greeks had a word for that you see occasionally in the NT. It’s—**parakoe**, which means to “hear alongside of.” The word picture suggested by that term is that of a boy who hears his mother calling, but manages to move to the side before the complete message contained in the sound waves can fully penetrate his inner hear. And it gives him a ready made excuse for being late for supper. “But I didn’t hear you.” *No—he didn’t want to hear you and made sure he avoided any instructions that sounded different than the music of an approaching ice cream truck.* The bottom line—no matter how we feel after a time of worship, genuine worship has not taken place unless we come with *open ears, open hearts, and a resolve to obey!*

You may be moved to ecstasy by the rejoicing. You may even have a sense of wonder and awe at the corporate revering of God. But the real proof of your worship is demonstrated **after** you leave the service—and how you respond the rest of the week. Anything less than that dishonors God and results in self-deception (James 1:22).

There is a **why** of resolving. Israel found that out the hard way. They did not hear and resolve to obey God’s commands and promises. And so they never made it to the Promise Land. Next week we will examine why that happened—and learn from Israel’s tragic example. We will look at two important questions. What happens when we do not resolve to follow God’s Word—when we treat the Word of God with unbelief or indifference? And then we will look at what causes that to happen and learn how to avoid it.

You say—well, Jerry. That was a tragedy. But after all this is Israel. And the covenant that God made with them regarding the Promise Land—well that really doesn't apply to us. That's true—yet we have in the NT an inspired commentary on this text and how it relates to the people of God today! It is found in Hebrews 3:7-4:13. In that passage, the author of Hebrews repeats this warning from the Book of Numbers 20 three times as he expounds on their application to us today. And the warning is simply this: If we who profess to be the people of God do not respond to the truth about Jesus—we run the danger not merely of failing to occupy the Promise Land—but of failing to occupy heaven.

Or to put it another way—Jesus said: *My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me.* No resolving to follow Jesus—no relationship. No relationship—then only judgment. “Depart from me—I never knew you!” There is no difference ultimately between worship and life.

Worship is far more than liturgies and orders of service. It transcends styles and preferences. As Doug Wilson wrote: “*When we gather together, we do not do so in our own name. We do not sing to please ourselves. We do not make any worship choices or exclusions because this is the way ‘we want to do it.’ He alone is worthy, and in the gathering of the saints, He alone must have His way. The worship of God must always be according to His Word.*” (Exhortations, p. 119).

Ultimately worship is a matter of life and death! It is about believing on Jesus alone to take care of the penalty of your sin. And it is about persevering in the faith and running hard after Jesus until you cross the Finish Line. It's about rejoicing, revering, **and** resolving. “Today if you will hear His voice....”

Invitation and Prayer