

Come with Thanksgiving to Worship (Psalm 95)

Pastors hear many reasons why people stop going to church, but I read this and adapted this list:¹ [Why I As A Pastor Stopped Going to Sporting Events](#)

1. There's lots of hypocrites who go to sporting events who aren't true fans
2. The seats were too hard and uncomfortable and I don't really like crowds
3. The people sitting in my row didn't seem very friendly, some ignored me
4. Sometimes it's slow and boring, I leave thinking it didn't do much for me
5. Sometimes it's too intense, into overtime so I'm late getting home, hungry
6. The band played some songs I had never heard before
7. The referees made a decision I didn't agree with and they didn't change it when I told 'em and gave my reasons! I'll find referees elsewhere who agree
8. You don't have to go to a sporting event to be a sports fan, I can just watch from home or listen. I can record and fast forward what I don't like
9. The games are scheduled on my only day to sleep in and run errands or do stuff around the house, and that day's really our family time, for just us
10. I've done my own reading on sports so I know more than the coaches

As we compare life to God's Word, it exposes how lame our excuses are. I used be a lame 18 and 19 year old who by God's mercy is now a lover of the church. Many have a low view of church but a high view of sports and other things their hearts love, commit to, sacrifice for, and are passionate about. People will join teams and clubs and associations but never join a church.

Some give hours to golf but little to God. Down in SoCal we had a neighbor that attended our church and Bible study for awhile, and he would often invite me to go fishing on the weekend. He'd leave at 4 a.m. on a Saturday to get good spots. Fishing was a priority to him. This same friend I began to notice hadn't been at church awhile. I remember when I tried to encourage him about attending church, he said 'I know Phil, but dude, it's just so early and I'm so tired on Sundays, when 10 a.m. rolls around it's hard to get out.' Same guy who earlier tried to get me to get up before 4 a.m. to fish. Why? Fishing was what he praised and prized. His heart and passion was in it and he lit up about it, spoke with joy about it and called others to come with him

Please come with me in God's Word to Psalm 95 this morning and in light of Thanksgiving being this week, I think it's good for us to be reminded of a greater privilege we have in church. Giving thanks is to be a greater priority as we praise and prize Christ. We'll be back in John 16 next week but like I've done the last 2 Thanksgiving seasons, I want to devote a whole message to thanksgiving, to preparing for it and practically applying it. We can't hear too much about giving thanks (I need it every day). In a far greater way than my friend talking about his sport, listen to Ps 95 as to a friend talking of his Savior. Picture a man standing as a greeter outside church (or in OT times, outside a synagogue or temple). The greeter's face lights up as he speaks of worship, there's joy he has in it, and he's calling others to join him inside. If you're able please stand in honor of our privilege: worship in God's Word

Responsive reading: 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, do not harden your hearts*

...

Let's bow in prayer. Our great God, we bow before You our Maker, Creator of heaven and earth. You are the great King above all, You are the rock of our salvation, You are the Shepherd of Your people, and You are our God. All things are in your sovereign hand, even our hearts so we ask You keep us from hardening as we hear Your voice today in Your Word. Help hearts to be sensitive to the Spirit and responsive to the Shepherd's voice as the people of Your pasture and sheep of Your hand. May we see Your hand at work in hearts being made soft, pliable, humble, thankful and joyful. Amen.

This text helps us grow a heart and passion for coming to church, in fact the NT quotes Ps 95 three times to apply it to the church. It's inspired for us to come thankfully to church, to be thankful for its worship. For thanksgiving it wasn't hard to pick a text as I saw a new banner with the 1st part of Ps 95. I'm thankful for this church. We all should thank God for the freedom and ability to come to church today, and never take these blessings for granted. We should remember not everyone has what we enjoy each Lord's Day and we need to recognize even some among us may not enjoy these blessings.

Some see gathering as a church an experience to endure rather than enjoy. Maybe you come to church in a sense of duty or drudgery instead of delight. Others in a worship service may come because of family or a feeling they have to, not because they want to. Probably many are affected in how they come based on what happened in their life that week, high, low, in-between. There's at least some who I know had a rough week but who come with joy on their face. Ps 95 recognizes not all come to worship in the same frame so it begins calling all to worship in thanksgiving, showing us how and why. There's 4 ways we can grow in our thanksgiving for church and as a church

Main point: A Call to Worship with Thanksgiving

1st way: Come Gratefully (v. 1)

The word '*come*' rings out in v. 1 and 2 like a church bell sounding twice to call the community to worship, or in OT times like a shofar horn blown for an assembly. v. 1 calls God's people to come with joy as they sing, and v. 2 adds *Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving*. It's a call to worship by giving thanks and a call to come with joyfulness and gratefulness to God in His presence with a congregation in public, not in isolation or in private. Notice the phrase '*Let us*' in v. 1 twice and v. 2 twice and in v. 6 twice, then in v. 7 God's people say '*we are the people/sheep of His pasture*.' This song isn't for solo sheep, it's for worship by a gathered flock to hear the Shepherd speak, to be led and fed by His Word, coming with joyful noises like sheep.

[think of a ranch triangle rung to call people to supper fellowship]

Since at least 300s AD, Ps 95 has been used as a call to worship in churches. In v. 1-2 we hear the word *Come* 2x and *Let us* 4x. An old preacher called it '4 heads of lettuce.' At the head of this psalm is *let us come gratefully, let us sing joyfully, let us come thankfully, and let us worship passionately*. As we enter this psalm through its first 2 verses it's as if a doorkeeper is standing at the entrance of 2 doors to God's house calling you to enter, *come into God's presence with thanksgiving in your heart and enter His courts with praise, we'll say this is the day that the Lord has made, we will rejoice for He has made us glad*. Ps 84 says it's better to be a doorkeeper in the house of God, better is one day here than thousands elsewhere. If that resonates with your heart, if you want to be a doorkeeper or greeter of the house of the Lord, let me know as we're working to build a team of men and women whose heart is to encourage people at the outside doors like Ps 84, 95 to come gratefully.

Not everyone naturally comes that way, but we're called to, and we're called to encourage others to. Heb 10 says as churches assemble '*let us consider how to stir one another to love ... let us encourage one another*' (v. 24-25).

What if you don't feel like coming to worship that day? It starts with '*Come.*' v. 1 starts where we must start, coming to worship by faith, not by feelings. What if circumstances aren't on a joyful note? v. 1 says *make a joyful noise.* What if you don't feel like there's much in your life to be singing about? v. 1 calls you to sing *to the Lord*, sing about the Lord, not your life. What if your life is rough, rocky, or hard that day? What if you feel stuck between a rock and a hard place? End of v. 1 calls you to praise the '*rock of your salvation.*'

Not everyone *feels* thankful as they come to church but v. 2 calls us to *give* thanks, it's a choice to give thanks, praise. And hearts can change as they do

Which takes us from #1 Come Gratefully, to #2. Worship Joyfully

² *Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!*

We're not to come somber and silent to worship. And if you hear the joyful noise of babies or toddlers in church don't be upset. It's out of the mouths of infants that God ordains praise (Ps 8). I've heard people complain that little kids in SS were singing too noisily and joyfully, not being all serious like in the old days, but I think of Jesus when the Pharisees wanted Him to shush little kids singing hosanna in the temple. Jesus instead rebuked the legalistic adults who needed to learn about true worship (Mt 21:15-16). We as adults can learn from little ones the kingdom of heaven is like: the joy, enthusiasm and emotion doesn't need to be restrained as we grow up. We don't come to a funeral, we come to church to celebrate Jesus is alive! It's why we gather the day He rose. Again, to go back to a sports analogy, compare how most guys listen to God's Word and how they listen to a game with joyful noises.

We're capable of expressing what v. 2 calls for because we do that in other areas of life, but many leave emotions or expressions of joy at the door of a church. It's not what the Bible tells us. Listen friends, far greater than a team we love winning, is the victory of the Savior we love! All of us praise what we prize, whether sports, shows, hobbies, games, food, oils, products, etc.

If we're with others who share our passion, it multiplies praise. It's a similar dynamic in v. 2 for those who prize God and praise God together with other people sharing that passion. Others who want to talk about whatever it is we love most, multiplies our joy. It's possible to have a Thanksgiving dinner by yourself but isn't it better to be with others you love to give thanks together? It's possible to worship thankfully by yourself but v. 2 is far better together! *let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise...*

There is a reverence to be sure in v. 6 but v. 1-2 calls us to start by rejoicing as Spurgeon wrote: ‘We should shout as exultingly as those do who triumph in war, and as solemnly...The perfection of singing is that which unites joy with gravity, exultation with humility, fervency with sobriety...this is too much overlooked in ordinary services, people are so impressed with the idea that they ought to be serious that they put on...misery, and quite forget that joy is as much a characteristic of true worship as solemnity itself.’²

[we're called to be sober-minded thinkers but not sour-faced singers!]

In OT time in the open tabernacle courtyard or in open courts of the temple, the ‘worshippers may be there under an open sky, but in our terms they are being invited to raise the roof! The Hebrew words translated “make a joyful noise” in verses 1 and 2 indicates an unrestrained shout.¹³ Is this a noise or a shout? If you're perceptive you noticed the banner doesn't say '*joyful noise to Him with songs of praise,*' it has '*shout joyfully to Him with psalms*' (from NKJV). I hope that hasn't bothered you so it's hard for you to be joyful till I explain which is it (or that it says v. 1-2 instead of 2)! Here's what one says:

"The phrase *joyful noise* is an encouragement for those of us who cannot sing tunefully but make a noise [even if we can't hit the note]. Yet if *joyful* as unto the Lord, He who loves the crows, as well as the nightingales, is pleased. The original means to make a loud sound of any sort, either with the voice or with instruments. "There is no one English expression for the full burst of instrumental and vocal music which is meant by the Hebrew"⁴

The NASB has joyful shouts with psalms in v. 2 and the footnote for psalms says ‘or songs (with instrumental accompaniment).’ In 98:6 just across the page, this joyful noise or shout is with the sound of a horn. Ps 33 commands ‘*shout for joy*’ and ‘*play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts*’ (33:1, 3). Turn forward to Ps 150 where it highlights some of the musical instruments in biblical worship. Several psalms give instructions to the choir director to use stringed instruments (Ps 54 heading), others an ‘instrument of Gath’ or ‘instrument of ten strings’ (Ps 84 heading, 33:3 NKJV). Scriptures call for lyres or small harps scholars think were more like banjos, wind instruments, melodious instruments, soothing instruments, other instruments for banging or clanging, some psalms are called to be sung loudly, some with shouting.

Ps 150 commands in worship *Praise the LORD! Praise God in his sanctuary* ... [what are ways to praise in the sanctuary? v. 3] *Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp!* ⁴ *Praise him with tambourine* [or ‘timbrel’] *and dance; praise him with strings and pipe!* [some say ‘flutes’] ⁵ *Praise him with sounding cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals!*

The tambourine or timbrel of v. 4 was what Miriam took in hand after the red sea where she led in worship, sang a solo, and the women danced with her in praise. The New English Translation of Ex 15:20 says Miriam ‘*took a hand-drum in her hand, and all the women went out after her with hand-drums and with dances.*’ These had a percussion hand beat used with Jewish dancing, not like modern sensual dancing, but worshipful dancing, probably twirling to the beat of the timbrel. Ps 81:2 commands ‘*Raise a song, strike the timbrel.*’ Ps 68 describes a procession to the sanctuary with singers and musicians beating the timbrels (v. 25-26). Bible dictionaries define timbrels as ‘percussion instrument held and struck by the hand...ancient instrument possibly had metallic disks that also make noise when the drum is struck.’⁵

In v. 5 the sounding cymbals and loud clashing cymbals make clear worship in Bible times could be quite noisy and lively; NASB ‘resounding cymbals’ or KJV ‘loud’ and ‘high sounding cymbals.’ Young’s Literal Translation is ‘cymbals of shouting.’ But the psalms weren’t just for Hebrew worship. Ps 47:1 commands ‘*Clap your hands, all peoples!*[that’s a word for all nations] *Shout to God with loud songs of joy!*’ 134:3 commands those who stand in the house of God: ‘*Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the LORD!*’

There’s nothing wrong with lifting hands in the holy place to bless the Lord, as long as it's not to draw attention to yourself. It's ok to clap to some songs. We don't clap *at or for musicians* here because it's not *performance for you*, and in our church culture it might distract if you start dancing or shouting, but I’ve seen both in Africa where they worship more like in the OT psalms with a lot of joyful noise, drums, banging, clanging, dancing, and clapping.

We can learn from other cultures and shouldn’t judge others by how we do it, as our tradition isn't the only one or how saints of old did it. I’d probably feel out of place in Bible times worship but we can use more of it. OT saints didn’t have pianos, and many of our American forefathers once considered a piano to be too worldly and too wild; couple hundred years later some see instruments like in the psalms that way! So we stick to the text not tradition. People have cultural preferences, but Scripture calls for a variety of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, and diverse instruments and gifts in worship that minister to different people (if you have gifts, see music director Jerry).

As we go back to Ps 95 it’s worth mentioning that not all psalms are upbeat, some are laments (think Ps 22 *my God why have you forsaken me?*). Not all are all joyful, but there’s a place in worship for joyful songs and loud praise

Some psalms are slow, to be meditated, some list 1 instrument, others none. Some are very personal (much ‘*I/me/my*’) others theological, there’s variety. Whatever noise you make or prefer, at least make an effort to make it joyful (smile). If this steps on toes, tap your toes instead, lighten up, look up what psalms say, don’t look down on others. Be thankful, keep thinking biblical. If the Bible calls for raising and clapping hands, at least we can say it’s ok if hands don’t stay in pockets. If psalms command dance with beating timbrel, at least we can say not all beat or music that moves us is wrong. If Scripture tells us to shout loudly, at least we can say *Amen* in worship. In NT worship we teach by psalms (Col 3:16), they admonish us to worship more vibrantly

We Come Gratefully, Worship Joyfully, and #3. Focus on God’s Majesty

95:3 *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!*

More than any style, what fuels worship is its substance: a high view of God is the fuel for high worship. It's not about which instruments, reverence has to be there with our rejoicing. In v. 3 the Lord is a great God, greatly to be praised. It says He's a great King, that speaks of His majesty and supremacy over all. Nations have earthly kings who think they're sovereign and in OT times had so-called gods over earth or sea, but even idols like Dagon bow to the one true God over all, the only true sovereign, the great King of kings. How do you grow in thanksgiving? v. 3 calls us to focus on God's majesty.

Derek Kidner: ‘it is not a forced cheerfulness: [in v. 3] the...*For* introduces a reason bigger than the world itself, seen and unseen...[as later] spelt out in Paul’s catalogues of ‘*things...in heaven and on earth,*’ ‘*principalities... powers...height...depth,*’ which were created through and for the Son of God; which in the end must bow to Him; which, meanwhile can do nothing to separate us from His love (cf. Col. 1:16; Phil 2:10; Rom 8:38f).’⁶

This is the message of psalms and many hymns and spiritual songs. Hymns like this psalm say things like ‘Praise ye the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!...Praise yet the Lord, who o'er all things so wondrously reigneth!’ Spiritual songs say ‘shout to the Lord, all the earth let us sing [to] power and majesty, praise to the King, mountains bow down and the seas will roar...’ v.2-3 takes us from ‘shout to the Lord all the earth let us sing [to] power and majesty, praise to the King, mountains bow down and the seas will roar...’

v. 4 is like the song 'how majestic is your name in all the earth.' Or 'from the highest of heights to the depth of the sea, creation's revealing your majesty.' For the highest of heights we can think of Mt. Everest, 29,000+ feet above sea level. For the depths of the sea we can think of the Mariana trench in the Pacific, the deepest location of earth on earth, 7 miles deep, 36,000+ feet. It says in v. 4 both are in God's hand, the idea is both extremes and ends of the spectrum and everything in-between in creation is in a sovereign God's hand

He's got the rivers and the mountains in His hands [like v. 4],
 He's got the oceans and the seas in His hands [like v. 5],
 He's got everybody here in His hands [like v. 7, we're the sheep of His hand],
 He's got the whole world in His hands.

We sang earlier: With voice as full and strong as ocean's surging praise
 Send for the hymns our fathers loved, the psalms of ancient days
 Rejoice! Rejoice! Rejoice give thanks and sing!

v. 6-7 Come let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker, for He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand

This takes us from highest praise to the lowest posture. The proper response to majesty is humility, bowing, kneeling. To *bow* in biblical culture showed honor, to *kneel* showed you were lower and under Him, and the Hebrew for *worship* includes the idea of lying all the way down prostrate before a king. Our worship has to do with God's worth-ship, His worthiness to be praised. It is He who has made us, not we ourselves, we are His people and sheep of His pasture. He is our Shepherd, He is our Maker, He is our God and King. There's plenty reasons in the OT to give thanks but there's more in the NT.

Jesus said in Lk 24:44 He fulfills *everything written about me in the psalms*
 The Lord inspired Ps 95 and He also embodied Ps 95 for our greater thanks:
 - In v. 1 'the rock of our salvation' made OT readers think of Meribah (the context of v. 8). There Israel felt they would die without water and they complained, but God graciously told Moses to strike a rock to give water. The rock became a symbol of God saving lives of ungrateful undeserving Israelites in Ex 17 by pouring out water to give them life despite their sin.
 - 1 Cor 10 says Christ was the spiritual rock that sustained OT Israel even though many grumbled, and it says those OT events were recorded for our example so we wouldn't grumble (1 Cor 10:4-6, 10-11). In the NT Jesus is the rock of our salvation struck by God for our sin on the cross, including sins of grumbling, pouring out Himself to give life to all who trust Christ.

- He's the rock of our salvation, in Christ the solid rock we can come with thanks giving. It's easy for grumbling to come out of our lips like Israel, but if we focus on the rock of our salvation gratitude can pour out our lips
- When v. 2 calls us to come into His presence with thanksgiving, the only way we can come into God's presence at all is by what Christ did for us. On this rock of who Christ is, He promised to build His church. Salvation in knowing Christ is the ground on which we come and ground for thanks
- In v. 2 the Lord calls Israel to loud singing with joy to Him but amazingly Zeph 3:17 says this to future Israel: *'The LORD...will rejoice over you with gladness...he will exult over you with loud singing'* [NAS 'shouts of joy']. God's people sing to the Lord like that till the day He sings back to them!
- In v. 3 that very phrase '*great God*' is used of Jesus in the NT (Titus 2:13)
- Jesus is the King over all in the NT using same phrase *over all* (Eph 1:21)
- In v. 4 the Creator of the earth is Jesus in the NT, by His hand (Heb 1:10)
- In v. 5 the God who owns the sea walked on it in Jesus and they said *even the wind and sea obeys Him!* Will we obey His command to give thanks?
- When v. 6 calls us to our knees to bow before Him, remember Jesus is the One before whom every knee will bow and every tongue confess Jesus is Lord. Jesus is the Lord of Ps 95. Come let us worship and bow to Jesus!

When v. 7 moves from lying down to sheep in a pasture, think of Ps 23: *He makes me lie down in green pasture.* Think of Jesus' words, Jn 10 *'If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture...I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.'* If you don't naturally fall down in thanks, think of Jesus laying down His life.

[if He's not yet your Lord, bow in faith for grace then thank Jesus]

When v. 7 calls us His sheep of His hand, think of Jesus saying also in Jn 10 *'my sheep ... will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand'* (10:28). Believers are the sheep of His hands, hands with nail prints through them. If you don't kneel in humble thanks, think of Jesus 3 chapters later kneeling to wash the feet of ungrateful disciples, then they sang psalms and He went from the upper room to the cross to bow His head in death for sins. 3 days after that He told them He fulfilled what psalms wrote of Him. *Let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord Jesus* in thanksgiving.

Come gratefully, worship joyfully, focus on His majesty, listen responsively
 End of Ps 95:7 warns the sheep in His pasture who hear his voice but don't follow (the very language Jesus used of His words in Jn 10). The sheep who resist the shepherds call go astray, and so do people who resist God's Word.
 v. 7's last application: *Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart*

v. 8-11 poetically paraphrased: ‘they saw His wonders...and then His praise they sung;
 But soon His works of power forgot, and murmured with their tongue’
 Come, let us hear his voice today, The counsels of his love obey;
 Nor let our hardened hearts renew The sins and plagues that Isr’el knew.

Kidner points out that hearing God’s Word preached is how we hear God’s voice today and ‘is presented here as one of the prime acts of worship. And “hear,” or *hearken to*, has often the added dimension in Hebrew of “obey”...the worshipper singing this psalm is reminded to ask himself *how* he hears – will it be obediently – and for whose *voice* he listens.’⁷

Worship includes songs sung (v. 1-2) and sermons heard (like end of v. 7). Ps 95 starts with a call to worship and ends with a caution to worshippers not to harden their hearts in worship when God's Word is preached. It gives the illustration of the Israelites complaining but we should be praising God instead. It warns hearts can harden if they're not grateful, they will grumble. The rest of the psalm talks about that OT illustration but turn to Heb 3 as we close with a NT application from Christ’s voice directly to Christ’s church. Today we hear His voice in His Word, don't be thick-hearted, be thankful in heart. Don't murmur, meditate on your blessings, make a joyful noise today.

Heb 3:7 *Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you hear his voice,* ⁸ *do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion* [Ps 95 is what the Holy Spirit says to NT believers, it quotes the whole text, then v. 12 applies] *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.* ¹³ *But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.* ¹⁴ *For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.* ¹⁵ *As it is said, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”* [also in 4:7]

Let's encourage one another today.

¹ Adapted from several online sources with variation, original source unknown.

² Charles Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, Hendrickson, 2:165.

³ *Vitality of Worship??* SOURCE?

⁴ Herbert Lockyer, *A Devotional Commentary on the Psalms*, p. 341.

⁵ Swanson's Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains. Also Hebrew Aramaic Lexicon of OT says it means 'hand drum' or 'tambourine' and Gesenius Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon of the OT defines 'hand drum, timbrel.' See also Smith's Bible Dictionary, International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, 1915 edition.

⁶ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, p. 344.

⁷ Kidner, p. 345.