

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *On Boxing Day, you may feel that there is no time for exercising yourself in some discipleship programme. So be it, but I do suggest reading through this psalm a few times and letting the Lord speak to you as He will. After reading the study, it may say more and more to you.*
- *Pray for those who find it hard to praise God or give Him thanks, and ask the Holy Spirit to help those you know who have such difficulties.*

Final Prayer

Stay with us, Lord Jesus, we pray, and at those moments when we are most vulnerable, help us to remain firm in faith. With Your help, may we take our stand against all that is wrong and evil in our world, and testify to Your saving and redeeming love. We praise You, Lord Jesus Christ: AMEN

Psalm 100

No: 20 Week: 171 Friday 27/12/08

Prayer

What a privilege it is, dear Father, to rejoice in the birth of Your Son! What a joy it is to be able to celebrate it with joy and thanksgiving in our churches and homes! What an honour to be touched by Your gracious hand and lifted into heavenly places to rejoice with the angels! Dear Father; may the wonder of Christmas never leave us; old or young: Alleluia!

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Christmas

Pray for people who are separated from other loved family members by thousands of miles, and thank God for the wonders of communication available to us today.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for all those whose work is to maintain essential services*
- *Give thanks for this special day and all that it means*
- *Pray for elderly people who have no one left to help or love them*

Meditation

I heard a voice say; 'Go to Bethlehem and see the child.'
And I hesitated. What if I was hearing things?
But my spirit was led to the child in the stall,
And I was captivated; Christ was born in my heart.

I heard a voice say; 'Glory to God in highest heaven!'
And I said 'what?' I didn't have a clue what it meant!
But my spirit was consumed by heavenly praise,
And I was transported into realms of amazing joy.

I heard a voice say; 'Come follow me ...'
And I didn't know what to do. Was the choice really mine?
But Jesus took hold of my faint hearted hand
And I was blessed beyond measure by His care.

I heard a voice say; 'Give me Your all!'
And I said 'why?' Why give back what you have been given?
But the Christ within me was speaking from the Cross
And He had given His all for me. So I knew what to do.

Bible Study - Psalm 100

¹ A psalm. For giving thanks.

Raise a shout for the LORD, all the earth!

² *Worship the LORD with gladness, and come before him with joyful songs.*

³ *Know that the LORD is God.*

It is He who made us, not us; and we are His people, the sheep of His pasture.

⁴ *Enter His gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to Him and bless His name.*

⁵ For the LORD is good;
His love endures forever,

His faithfulness stands for all
generations.

Review

This wonderful psalm of praise is one of the most famous songs of the Old Testament, and on this 'Boxing Day' or 'St. Stephen's Day' (and other names in other countries!), its straightforward and uncompromising call to praise God is welcome after all our festivities! It is so easy to sit back and forget everything after the fun and excitement of a great festival day. However, a Christian is one whose heart is naturally filled with praise and thanksgiving at Christmas time, and although we love our church services, no special act of worship is necessary for us to praise God. It is enough for us to know that in truth, Christ has come into the world. The praises of our God well up within us as a response to His gift of love and salvation in Jesus Christ, and a simple reading of psalm 100 will help us focus and express this praise. Although the predominant theme of the psalm is worship and praise, it connects with some of the great words used by the Old Testament to describe our relationship with our living God; and these words have fresh meaning for us as Jesus comes into the world at Christmas time.

After the superscription at the beginning ('A psalm. For giving thanks.' – 100:1), the psalm begins. If we then take our eyes off the structure of the printed verses, we can easily see that the Hebrew rhythm of the psalm is a different from others. Hebrew poetry is typically made up of pairs of lines which parallel each other in meaning; but here, the lines are clearly grouped in triplets! The psalm consists of four, three line Hebrew 'verses', and the first is contained within verses 1 and 2, and the others are in verses 3,4 and 5 respectively. The first calls for all the earth to praise God (100:1,2), the next verse gives the reason for that praise (100:3), the third verse invites people to come to 'His courts' to praise (100:4) and the last gives a reason for this more intimate praise (100:5).

Worship (100:1,2) The first call to worship; 'raise a shout ...' (100:1) is astonishing! The word used means 'to give a blast on a horn' like a signal for an army to march or attack, or 'to shout in applause' rather like the roar of a football crowd when its team advances. This is no meek summons, it is a raucous, loud noise created by people who know that something is about to happen that is good! The call of course is made to all the world (we have seen how important this is in recent studies), and although the psalmist knew that not everyone would respond, he was unashamed to present God universally as the Creator of all things. The psalm asks that those who have been made by God acknowledge Him by serving and worshipping Him in word and deed (this is what the word 'worship' means - v2), and especially with songs (100:2).

The first three lines of psalm 100 are seemingly made for Christmas time! We could place them at the front of a service of readings and carols and they would fit perfectly. In addition, they remind us that our praises are never solitary, for at Christmas time we join with millions of others across the world in a massive shout of praise that goes around the whole world. It is a privilege to be a part of this praise, whether in a church service or at home, worshipping through our private devotions or in other ways at home.

He has made us (100:3) Following on directly from the first part of the psalm, the second three line 'verse' says that we should praise God because he is our maker. It seems obvious when put like this, but if God has truly made us, then we are surely duty bound to give Him thanks, for without Him, we would not exist. Not every translation presents the second line of this verse very well, but when paraphrased, it says 'indeed, it is God who has made us, and not us by ourselves.' The last line adds by way of illustration; we are not our own masters, we are like sheep that have a shepherd, the 'sheep of His pasture.'

At Christmas time, we focus our praises on Jesus, born as a baby. However, if we read more widely around the scriptures that accompany this story especially in the four Gospels, we will discover that all of them refer to Jesus as coming from God, who made the Universe. John calls Jesus the eternal, pre-existent 'Word' (John 1:1f.), Matthew describes Him as 'Immanuel' (Matt 1:17f.) God 'with us', and Luke traces Jesus back to Adam (Luke 3:38). The story of salvation is eternal and Jesus' coming is at its centre.

Thanksgiving, praise and blessing (100:4) Next, our psalm invites us to come closer and worship the Lord not just anywhere, but in 'His courts' (100:4). This is the worship of those who have responded to the call in the first half of the psalm; the worship of God's people Israel in Old Testament times and the worship of God's people the Church in our own day. The worship is described as 'thanksgiving', 'praise' and 'blessing'. Praise has already been defined by the first half of the psalm, and to this is added the idea of thanksgiving, which is always about specific things; we thank God for saving us, or for helping us in some way, for example. Lastly, to 'bless' God is to give Him the best of our support, our goodwill, and our total commitment.

On the day after Christmas, we continue to give thanks to God, and praise Him for all the special things of the season. In a great birthday party for His Son, we have enjoyed happiness, feasting and the giving and receiving of presents; how can we not give Him thanks! Indeed how ungrateful if we do not bless our God and Father for the give of His Son! He is the inspiration for our joy and happiness this Christmas.

Love and faithfulness (100:5) Lastly, in the final verse, the reason for our celebration and praise is given. The praise of God by those who have responded to His call is due to the fact the God is good (100:5). His character though just, is essentially loving; and for that reason He is willing to do everything necessary to deal with our problems of sin in this world by sending His Son. It is hard for us to appreciate all that Jesus does for us as we give thanks for His birth, and it is particularly difficult to imagine that this child will die on a cross for us and our salvation; however, this is the truth of the matter. God's love is measured not just in terms of being 'nice', but in terms of His ability to do what is necessary to save us; and this is why Jesus came into the world as a baby. When we think about the scene in Bethlehem when Jesus was born, we should know that God's 'love endures forever' because of what that baby lived to become and to do.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Which words from this psalm catch your heart and your imagination? Share your responses in the group.
2. How does this psalm reflect the praises of God that are part of your church life? How can it help us grow in worship?
3. What does this psalm say to you about the God who sent Jesus into the world?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

I have ended up saying more about this psalm than I intended! This is because it is such a magnificent psalm, and I could say an great deal more, in fact, the psalm we have studied recently make me want to do further psalm studies in this series of devotions. The psalms straddle the Old and New Testaments in a unique way, but they do need interpretation, because some of them seem very obscure unless we have some general understanding of where they come from. Praise is a great theme for our reflection and study, and the psalms are never shy to say more and more about what it means to praise God.