

We are starting a new series entitled 'High and Lifted Up,' and the goal of the series is to help us grow in our worship of God. Isaiah says, "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple." This should create in our minds an image of the greatness of God. As we work through this series, that is the image you should look to maintain in your mind as we are stretched to see the greatness of our God in even greater clarity. Now, when we talk about worship, we aren't just talking about the songs we sing during our services. Worship can be defined as "worthship." We should look to communicate God's worth to us with our lives.

We've recently spent a lot of time each week planning our services to make them a more worshipful experience that reflects the worthiness of our great God. Over the next several weeks, we will discuss the different elements of our services, including preparation, adoration, proclamation, and application. This would otherwise be called liturgy, a fancy way of saying the form/order of our worship services.

Scripture is clear that what we are doing here, at church, is critical to our spiritual growth and the endurance of our faith, such as we see in Hebrews 10:25: "Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." I know many believers who are not regularly in worship with other believers. This is a clear command in scripture and is more a reflection of an individual's disobedient heart than the condition of the overall church.

While regular worship services are critical to our walk, they should only represent part of our walk. We should not attend church on the weekend expecting to receive everything we need; instead, we should come prepared to join all the saints to worship our God. As we look at Psalm 95, we will discuss how we can come to church better prepared. This psalm is incredibly written, and we must pay careful attention to its structure to receive all of its wisdom about how it should inform our worship.

This psalm has a structure broken into two parts, verses 1-7 and 8-11. At first glance, it may seem that these two parts don't belong together, but as you will see, you can't have one without the other. Verses 1-7 command how we are to worship and prepare our hearts to hear the voice of God, found in verses 8-11. If we do not adequately worship God, we will not be able to listen to him when he speaks, nor will we be prepared to obey his voice. True worship is a sign of genuine belief, and a refusal to worship is a sign of an unbelieving heart. By the end of singing Psalm 95, you will know whether you have a heart that is worshipful towards God or if your heart is hardening toward him, and if you find that your heart is hard, do not fear; there is a remedy. Verse 1 opens with the first command about how we are to worship...

**"Oh come, let us sing to the Lord..."** (Genuine worship is Joyful)

I was recently listening to a podcast with my wife, and I was cracking up because they will often do a bit where they will force the other person to sing in their natural voice. Imagine if I made you come on stage and lead us in one of the worship songs that the worship team led us in today, entirely acapella. I am cringing just thinking about it.

This exuberant command, "Oh come, let us sing to the Lord," expresses the joyfulness we should have when we come into the presence of God. There are many ways to enter his presence, but what we see here by the psalmist is a response of rejoicing. Most importantly, this is a genuine response. It's not a religious show but rather an authentic overflow of praise from the heart. The psalmist continues by saying, "let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!"

Not only is genuine worship filled with rejoicing, but as we see in verse 2, it's also filled with thankfulness.

**"Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving..."** (Genuine worship is thankful)

We commonly come to church late and murmur through worship while maintaining an ungrateful attitude. Our services are a reflection of our worship life outside of Sunday. If this is the pinnacle of our worship, what the rest of our lives look like? We live in a day and age where we have more options available to us than ever before. You would think this would make us happier than any previous generation, but that is not the case. We are often ungrateful people. This is especially true when it comes to our worship. However, the psalmist urges us to "make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!"

When was the last time you vocalized appreciation towards God? Instead of coming into his presence to ask or receive from him, it's important to thank him for all he has done. My family was on vacation recently, and we took our kids to the candy store. We had a learning opportunity because we didn't allow our kids to get all the candy in the store, but they couldn't see that we were already there to get them candy. We can often treat God similarly; we can't see that our lives are filled with his blessings, and instead, we nurse our flesh ungratefulness even though we are in a candy store.

Genuine worship is thankful. Next, the psalmist turns our joyful and thankful worship towards a heart of humility and helps us see that real worship is reverent. Verse 3 begins by saying...

**"For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all God's." (Genuine worship is Reverent)**

This is where we can begin to see if our hearts are soft towards God or if there is any residual hardness of the heart. We started with joyful worship of God and appropriately thanking him, but now we see the real reason: because he is King. How does that land for you? How does it feel to know that God is King in a world about individuality and taking control of your life, future, and destiny? Not just any King, but he is King above all gods. Notice they are little "g" gods, which is to say they are created gods, and since God is the creator, it means that there is only one God.

The psalmist goes on to paint a picture of God's greatness. Just in his hand, it says are the "depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also." From the highest peak, Mt. Everest, to the lowest point on earth, the Mariana Trench, they are contained just within the hand of God. We are told that the sea is his, for he made it. The sea, representing chaos and unpredictability, belongs to God, who formed the dry land with his hand; creation is his sandbox!!!

Thinking of God in this way should cause one response, "Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!" True worship is offered in reverence and humility. If you feel your heart hardening because of God's kingship, the psalmist helps us in verse 7, saying, "For he is our God..." He's not just God, but he is ours. Then the psalmist does something very clever: he says, "And we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand." It would've made more sense to say we are the sheep of his pasture and the people of his hand, but he wanted us to stop and reflect on the goodness of our God. He's not just a king; he is a good king. We are his, and he is ours and provides for his people. You're not even as good to yourself as God is, so abdicate the throne of your heart and allow God to take his rightful place.

The next word found in verse 7 is perhaps the most crucial word of the entire psalm, "Today," you can respond even now. The psalmist says, "Today if you hear his voice." You can immediately start, you don't have to wait till the end or when you are home. You can respond even now in your heart toward God because, as we will see, true worship prepares us to hear God's voice.

**Fair warning:** This psalm takes a hard tone shift. As we are about to hear the very voice of God speak. We can tell God is talking because of the pronouns I and Me. As I said earlier, it can be

tempting to separate the first seven verses of this psalm from the remaining 4, but they must be sung together as...

**Genuine worship prepares us to hear God's Voice.**

We are warned, "Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work." We can read about this account in Exodus 17 and Numbers 20, where the people "disputed" with God and "Tested" him. They thought God brought them out into the desert to die of thirst and ultimately mocked God and said, "Is the Lord among us or not?" After being delivered miraculously through the Red Sea, seeing bitter water made sweet, God providing food from heaven, the people of God still did not view him as their God but hardened their hearts toward him. This would become a pattern for the Israelites, resulting in them being barred from the promised land and God's rest.

God said, "For forty years I loathed that generation..." which is better defined as disgust. God was disgusted with their unbelief and prevented them from entering his rest. A lack of true worship is always connected to unbelief. A lack of worship is connected to a hardened heart.

Interestingly, this psalm is often found in many churches' liturgy and calls to worship. It was also a Psalm that the writer of Hebrews referred to as it related to those individuals who converted from Judaism to Christianity. He appealed to them not to return to their easier life and forsake Christ.

This is equally applicable to us as well. We need to be willing to do the hard work of looking inwardly to determine whether or not our hearts become hardened, signaled by a lack of willingness to worship. One of the indicators of this can be what our services look like as we gather together. I don't want to overstate the point, but for many of us, the weekend worship services represent the bulk of our worship and walk with God. We are not making time for God daily, and we can barely be bothered to participate on Sunday. Preparation for Sunday begins on Monday. Examine your daily routines to determine if your heart remains sensitive to God.

If the psalmist had the motivation to do this, how much more do we who know Christ? Who knew God's wrath and disgust for sin as it was poured out on him. We should be even more willing to worship God genuinely because the rest the psalmist was talking about wasn't the promised land already gone; the rest the psalmist was talking about was eternal rest, which we now know is secured for us in Christ Jesus. God doesn't want lip service or church attendance.

He wants a people who will worship him in Spirit and in truth. Who genuinely worship him because he is their God and they are his people.

Genuine worship is joyful, authentic worship is thankful, real worship is reverent, and sincere worship prepares us to hear the voice of God so that we might obey his voice, not under compulsion, but with sincerity. So today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts. Let's respond to him in worship and come into his gates with thanksgiving. Amen!

**Benediction:** 2 Corinthians 13:14 "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."