

A Song of Thanksgiving

Devotional Reading: [Ephesians 5:1–2, 15–20](#)

Background Scripture: [Psalm 100](#)

Psalm 100

A psalm. For giving grateful praise.

¹ Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.

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

³ Know that the LORD is God.

**It is he who made us, and we are his;
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 praise his name.**

**⁵ For the LORD is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations.**



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Key Text

Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.—Psalm 100:4

Worship in the Covenant Community

Unit 3: Psalms of Thanksgiving and Praise

Lessons 10–13

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify the psalmist's reasons for grateful praise.

2. Articulate why giving thanks is appropriate for all creation.
3. Make a plan to better recognize and seize opportunities for thanksgiving.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. An Invitation to Joy
- B. Lesson Context

I. An Invitation to Worship (Psalm 100:1–2)

- A. Open to All (v. 1)
Praise the Lord
- B. With Gladness (v. 2)

II. An Invitation to Know (Psalm 100:3–5)

- A. Who God Is (v. 3a–b)
- B. Who We Are (v. 3c)
Why the Servant Smiled
- C. Why We Should Praise (vv. 4–5)

Conclusion

- A. Looking to the Future
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

How to Say It

Bezalel	Bih-zal-el.
Gentiles	Jen-tiles.
Jerusalem	Juh-roo-suh-lem.
Mishnah	Mish-nuh.
Oholiab	Uh-ho-lih-ab.
pantheons	pan-thee-ahnz.
tabernacles	tah -burr-nah-kulz.
Torah (<i>Hebrew</i>)	Tor-uh.
Wycliffe	Wye-clif.
Yom Kippur	Yohm Ki-poor or Yahm Ki-poor.

Introduction

A. An Invitation to Joy

The confession that God constantly cares for humans points us to the reality of mystery. Why should God care? Would it be appropriate for an eternal being to care about such short-lived creatures as human beings? Given the apparently unnecessary suffering in the world, and in Israel's history specifically, how can we know that God cares? Most of the Bible concerns these questions. Its answers should provoke a profound sense of wonder in all of us.

[Psalm 100](#) makes a simpler point, however. It confesses that God shows profound care for a whole people, the Israelites, preserving them during times of political and social turmoil, teaching them how to live better lives through the Torah, and listening to their prayers whether the people were praising or lamenting. That view of God's work lies at the very heart of the faith of both the synagogue and the church. We are part of a great flock tended by the shepherd who drives away the wolves and leads us to good pastures, as [Psalm 23](#) says (see [lesson 10](#)).

B. Lesson Context

[Psalm 100](#) is familiar to many Christians through the hymn "All People That on Earth Do Dwell," whose tune is called "Old Hundredth." The superscription to [Psalm 100](#) states the obvious. The psalm concerns praise, or better, thanksgiving. Anyone singing this psalm should come to God with deep gratitude.

The book of Psalms is actually a collection of five books or sections. Most Bibles note these book divisions (often with Roman numerals) at the beginnings of [Psalms 1](#); [42](#); [73](#); [90](#), and [107](#). Altogether these five books feature 150 poems.

[Psalm 100](#), today's text, is found in the fourth of these five books. Many scholars consider this section of Psalms (that is, [Psalms 90–106](#)) to be the answer to the problem presented in the first three books: the Davidic dynasty established ([Psalm 2](#)); the flourishing of that dynasty ([Psalm 72](#)); and the failure of that dynasty ([Psalm 89](#)). The emphasis in Book IV of Psalms is simply that God reigns!

The verbs throughout the psalm that are plural invite all who hear the psalm to join in praising God. The original singers were to express their appreciation for God's work among them in the central location, the temple in Jerusalem (compare [2 Chronicles 5:2, 12–13](#)). The reason for the gratitude appears in [Psalms 93–99](#), which should be read along with [Psalm 100](#). Since it is so short, it seems unlikely that it should stand by itself. Rather, it concludes a sequence of psalms that concern Israel's joyous celebration of God's benevolent kingship. Much of the psalm has precise parallels in [Psalms 95](#); [96](#), and [98](#).

I. An Invitation to Worship

([Psalm 100:1–2](#))

A. Open to All (v. 1)

1. Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.

The single Hebrew word here translated with the phrase *shout for joy* occurs 28 times in the book of Psalms. Four of those instances involve making such noise *to the Lord* (see [Psalms 95:1](#); [98:4, 6](#)). The

oldest English translation, that of the Wycliffe Bible of AD 1395, challenged the reader to “sing ye heartily to God.” The same verb is used for the shout at the siege of Jericho ([Joshua 6:5, 10, 16, 20](#)). The call to shout with joy in worship speaks to the high enthusiasm and excitement that should surround the praises of the faithful community (compare [Ezra 3:11](#)).

All the earth translates a Hebrew phrase that appears 17 times in the psalter. In 15 of those instances, the translation is “all the earth” or “the whole earth,” and that is the sense here (examples: [Psalms 33:8; 96:9](#)). Even so, some students think that the text calls the faithful of Israel, wherever they may be, to prayer and praise. This interpretation is supported by many texts that call Israel to faithful worship of the Lord (example: [95:6–10](#)). And the focus might be on Israelites who were forced to migrate to many lands, and about whom the prophets were concerned (example: [Hosea 11:10–11](#)). This cannot be proven, however, as no date or author is given for the psalm.

Another interpretation is that the challenge to prayer and praise is for Jew and Gentile alike, anywhere in the world. Like [Psalms 148–150](#), this understanding of the text expects that not just Israelites will join in praising God, but all human beings (compare [Psalms 22:27; 96:7](#)). How will this occur? The psalm does not spell out how Gentiles should know about God’s mercy and kindness (although the gospel message will clarify this later).

The idea that Gentiles will come to know about Israel’s God is a repeated theme of the Old Testament. For example, Abraham’s family was to be a blessing to “all peoples on earth” ([Genesis 12:3](#); compare [Galatians 3:8](#)). The prophet Isaiah drew on this idea ([Isaiah 2:1–4; 49:6; 60:3](#)), as did other prophets (examples: [Micah 4:1–4; Zechariah 9:10](#)). A third possibility is that the writer might have embraced intentionally the ambiguity of whether he was speaking to Israel as dispersed in the world or to both Israelites and Gentiles everywhere. Certainly, the psalm eventually came to have the bigger vision. All human beings may join in the worship of God in the full knowledge that God welcomes all into a deep relationship ([Acts 3:24–26](#)).

What Do You Think?

When do you find yourself desiring to shout for joy to the Lord?

Digging Deeper

Do you ever stifle this urge? Might your answer change if you sensed “all the earth” joining in that celebration?

Praise the Lord

Every Sunday morning, believers from diverse backgrounds and walks of life gather as a congregation to worship and praise God. Despite their differences, they come together in love and devotion to God. They start their worship by singing hymns and offering prayers of thanksgiving, expressing their joy and gratitude for all the blessings in their lives. Their collective voices create a beautiful harmony that fills the sanctuary, and the spirit of unity and peace permeates throughout the congregation.

As they worship and praise, this congregation embodies the message of [Psalm 100:1](#). They enter

God's presence with joy and thanksgiving, recognizing and celebrating the goodness and faithfulness of God. Their worship is not merely ritualistic but is a genuine expression of their heartfelt devotion and gratitude toward him. Their faith and hope in God's love and provision shines through their worship, and it serves as a powerful reminder that no matter how difficult the circumstances might be, the Maker's presence and goodness remain constant. Can the same be said of your own prayer, praise, and worship practices?

—O. P.

B. With Gladness (v. 2)

2a. Worship the LORD with gladness;

The invitation comes with certain expectations. The first is that worshipping *the Lord* can't be separated from serving him ([Matthew 4:10](#)). The deity served is the deity worshipped, and vice versa ([1 Kings 9:6, 9; 16:31](#)). Another expectation concerns the attitude or motivation that people bring to that privilege. We do not serve God primarily out of fear of violating his rules, nor do we serve as those who merely tick off boxes as a matter of ritual or for personal gain. Either approach assumes that our good works will justify us in God's eyes. Rather, we serve *with gladness*, a word translated "joy" elsewhere. This approach dispels worry and allows for simple trust in God's mercy. The word translated "gladness" occurs 14 times in the book of Psalms, where it is also translated "joy" ([Psalms 16:11; 43:4; 137:6](#)). This sense of joy occurs in individuals and in the community.

The life of worship and service should be filled with joy whenever possible and deeply honest when it is not (compare [2 Corinthians 1:3–11; Philippians 1:12–18](#)). While not under consideration in this psalm, it is important to recognize that Israel used laments to help them express the disorientation and pain they experienced (see the book of Lamentations). Asserting that we are to serve and worship the Lord with gladness is not an exclusive call to speak *only* happily to God. He has made room for all our experiences, as we see most clearly in the incarnation of Jesus.

2b. come before him with joyful songs.

The invitation to *come*, here and in [Psalm 100:4](#) (below), is similar to [Psalm 95:2, 6](#). Singing is mentioned more than 130 times in the psalter, and joy takes concrete form as the community assembles in doing so. The psalm invites those hearing it to take delight in both God's merciful work and their fellow human beings' celebration of that work.

Ancient singing normally was accompanied by musical instruments, including stringed lyres or harps, wind instruments such as pipes, flutes, or ocarinas, and percussion instruments such as drums or shakers (compare last week's lesson on [Psalm 150](#)). The talents of the people come together to express their pleasure in God's goodness. We see a similar embrace of creativity in service to God in his calling of Bezalel and Oholiab "to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze" ([Exodus 31:4](#)). We do well to consider how we, too, are allowing our skilled artisans to lead us into the worship of our creative God.

What Do You Think?

What role does music in general play in your life?

Digging Deeper

What are some “glad” songs that incline your heart to serve the Lord?

II. An Invitation to Know

(**Psalm 100:3–5**)

A. Who God Is (v. 3a–b)

3a. Know that the LORD is God.

We now come to the beating heart of **Psalm 100**. Here is the first key idea of the verse: *the Lord*—the God of Israel who rescued the people from Egyptian bondage, gave them the promised land, and sustained them repeatedly in times of crisis—is the one and only true *God*. Other “gods” do not merit the name.

Since the psalm probably addresses the whole world, and not just Israel alone, the confession that “the Lord is God” is to be offered by all human beings. Or in other words, the evidence of God’s deity, as revealed in the exodus and other miraculous events of Israel’s history, also extends to non-Israelites (Gentiles). This idea also appears in, for example, **Psalms 46:10** and **83:18**.

The main idea of the psalm is the call to *know* God. Human knowledge of God is always limited and entirely dependent on God’s self-revelation. We can know only what God has equipped us to know. And the main thing we know is God’s mercy to human beings. By calling Abraham and his descendants to be a people, God was forming a people who could be an example of the possibilities of righteousness and mercy for all human beings. The psalm invites its Jewish singers and all who overhear them to experience confidence in God’s willingness to be with the reader in a deep relationship. Peoplehood is worth celebrating.

Knowing God is an important way the New Testament talks about the experience of being a Christian. The Gospel of John in particular speaks of evidence as it relates to coming to the knowledge of the deity of Christ (**John 4:39–42; 6:69; 8:28; 20:30–31**). What we can know, we know through the revelation of the Son (**1:18; compare 1 John 1:1; 2:13–14; 4:2**). This idea does not appear in this form in the Old Testament, of course. Yet its core ingredients do.

3b. It is he who made us,

The second idea, or rather confession, is that the Lord’s status as the unique God means that he is the Creator. Ancient religions sometimes thought of the creator as a retired deity, the ancestor of the current leader of the gods of their pantheons. For the Bible, there is only one God, and so God must be the Creator.

What Do You Think?

What reassurance can you take from God’s forming his people, not our forming ourselves into his people?

Digging Deeper

How do you experience freedom in light of God’s work forming us?

B. Who We Are (v. 3c)

3c. and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

The phrase “not we ourselves” (found in the *KJV*) is one possible reading, but there is uncertainty in the Hebrew text. The word “no” in Hebrew is identical in sound to the word “for him.” This second possibility yields the truth that *we* did not make ourselves, having no godly power to do so. Saying so implies God’s continued power over us and our relative powerlessness in the face of the Lord who formed us. The phrase *we are his people* implies a shared history and hope for the future, a deep relationship marked by prayer and service.

The last part of the verse restates and deepens that idea (compare [Psalm 95:6–7](#)). “Shepherd” was a royal title (example: [2 Samuel 24:17](#)), with God being the heavenly king who cares for human beings (compare [Psalm 23](#); [John 10:11–18](#)). While the image of Israel as flock can have negative connotations—the sheep for the slaughter, etc. ([Psalms 44:11, 22](#); [49:14](#))—it more ordinarily has a positive meaning. The image may be one of mutual love and desire for relationship (examples: [77:20](#); [78:52](#); [79:13](#); [107:41](#)). Even the negative uses are such because they hope for a positive relationship that does not seem available at the moment (examples: [74:1](#); [80:1–7](#)).

Why the Servant Smiled

At the funeral of Kevin, a dear friend who dedicated his life to serving others, the officiant fittingly referred to him as a “smiling servant.” Kevin recognized that God’s people are in his safekeeping, just like sheep in a meadow under the care of a good shepherd. By embracing God’s authority, Kevin knew he would be protected and find joy. He believed in God’s protection and care, so he gave back to others with a warm, comforting smile that brought joy to those around him.



Visual for [Lessons 8 & 12](#)

Ask learners to consider who they are inviting to the Lord's feast and how they are doing so.

The faith and trust behind his smiles were not just a knowledge of facts but also an understanding of the relationship between the Creator and the created. Until his last breath, Kevin completely understood this, so he smiled.

Kevin's life exemplified the peace and joy found, even in life's troubles, when we recognize God's love and care. Who reminds you to trust in God's care? And who are you reminding, by word and deed, to do the same?

—O. P.

C. Why We Should Praise (vv. 4–5)

4a. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise;

This psalm was to be sung in the temple as part of congregational worship (see [Psalm 100:2b](#), above). *Gates* and *courts* together form the part of the temple precinct to which the congregation had access. The temple centered on the holy of holies, which only the high priest could enter once a year in order to offer a sacrifice for atonement ([Hebrews 9:7](#)). A court outside of this was open to priests, another outside that to men of Israel, and the courts on the outside perimeter were available to women and Gentiles.

Because a large group was being called to praise, this psalm probably was sung at a major holiday when Israelites made a pilgrimage from the countryside and gathered at the temple in Jerusalem. Some scholars have connected this song to the Festival of Tabernacles (see [Leviticus 23:33–43](#)), but without great certainty. In the third century AD, the collection of Jewish law called the Mishnah reported the tradition that the priests in the temple sang [Psalm 94](#) on Wednesdays and [Psalm 93](#) on Fridays. So it is possible that [Psalm 100](#) also figured in daily rituals, but this is also very uncertain. There are not enough specific clues in [Psalms 93–100](#) to answer the question confidently.

What is more certain is that the psalm envisions a congregation singing it inside the temple courtyards, as do [Psalms 24:7–10](#); [120–134](#); [149–150](#). These speak of processions, dancing, and crowds preparing themselves for worship together. [Psalm 100](#) also excludes usage during a day of fasting or remorse (like Yom Kippur—the Day of Atonement; see [Leviticus 16](#); [23:26–32](#)). Such an observance would require a different sort of psalm.

What Do You Think?

What physical places remind you of entering God's temple?

Digging Deeper

How does praise shift if you are doing it all the time, no matter where you are, since you are part of the temple of the Lord ([1 Corinthians 3:16](#))?

4b. give thanks to him and praise his name.

To thank God means to give him all proper due (compare [Psalm 96:2](#)). The congregation should *praise* God and elevate his *name* above all others. The congregation should revere God and treasure the opportunity to be in his presence. Worship, then, is not primarily a moment for inspiring people,

but a time for connecting people to God as it brings to memory our deep dependence on God's love.

5. For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

The psalm ends with closely connected reasons for human praise. The statement that *the Lord is good* is no mere cliché, for many ancient deities were far from good. The notice of God's goodness appears frequently in the book of Psalms, often as a reason for praise and confidence in the possibilities of a good life (examples: [Psalms 25:8](#); [34:8](#); [86:5](#); [119:68](#); [145:9](#)).

But how can God's goodness be proven? *His love* is seen in example after example of repeated acts of healing, forgiving, and rescuing Israel from oppressors. That merciful goodness has appeared again and again in Israel's history, as psalms reciting God's deeds show (examples: [Psalms 105–106](#)). God's goodness appears in the permanent nature of his trustworthiness (compare [98:3](#)). God's promises and actions are reliable because of his *faithfulness*, providing an unfailing guide to human happiness (examples: [36:5](#); [89:8](#); [119:90](#)).

Because God's faithfulness endures *through all generations*, [Psalm 100](#) points to the future. The countless experiences of the people with God illustrate divine faithfulness. The people's worship should recall those experiences. It should also express their confidence that such faithfulness awaits their descendants. Hope is "baked into" the worshiping congregations, understanding of reality and its behaviors.

What Do You Think?

How can you see God's faithfulness in your family's history?

Digging Deeper

What stories should you pass on to younger generations so that God's faithfulness to your family will be known?

Conclusion

A. Looking to the Future

The center of [Psalm 100](#) invites those singing it to know God's goodness. That goodness shows up in God's unfailing loyalty to Israel and repeated acts to help and heal them and other human beings.

[Psalm 100](#) concludes a group of psalms by inviting all human beings, and especially the people of Israel, to worship God in the joyful knowledge that he loves them and will care for them. By ending a group of psalms this way, [Psalm 100](#) creates a sort of infinite loop. It invites us to begin with [Psalm 93](#) and sing the rest of the hymns of praise, and when we reach [Psalm 100](#), we can start over again.

Throughout these hymns, God the king brings salvation and joy to a needy and expectant people. They acknowledge that blessing with the only resource they can: their collective singing.

[Psalm 100](#) ends with a look toward the future. Far from regarding the fate of the succeeding generations as bleak or hopeless, this psalm assumes that an eternal God will always care for those who come after. The invitation to praise extends to all people. It is not a distraction from the nitty-gritty

details of life but a way of helping us understand what those details can mean when we submit them to our Creator.

This perspective is worth recovering today because it frees us to find ways to bless our descendants rather than leaving them with problems and burdens. The hopefulness and joy of the psalm invites us to live in ways that future generations will remember us with approval. In reading or singing this psalm today, we can be confident that the God whom Israel trusted is still trustworthy. The hope to which they aspired, we also can embrace.

B. Prayer

Our God and King, you are enthroned in the highest heaven and in the heart of the humblest person. You alone are God, and you have made us in wonderful ways. Help us to celebrate what you have done, are doing, and will do for all your creation as you sustain and bless all the things you have made. Help us to recall who we are, your treasured people, so that we may invite others into that same sense of belonging. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Know that the Lord is God and praise accordingly!

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible Student](#) (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the [NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition](#)).

Into the Lesson

Group the class into pairs or triads and distribute or post these questions: 1—What is the last thank-you card or expression you received? 2—What is the last thank-you card or expression you sent? 3—How did you feel when you received thanks? when you did not?

Give the groups five minutes and ask each individual to choose one of the questions and answer it in their group. Tell the class, “Today’s psalm gives us words to express our thanks to the One who deserves it most. As we study, you can evaluate how well and how often you tell him thanks.”

Into the Word

Combine each group of two or three with another for Bible study. Assign all of your groups *one* of the following activities. Or use *two* or all *three* of these activities among the groups.

Option 1. Ask learners to brainstorm or research hymns and worship songs based on [Psalm 100](#).

Compare the lyrics of the songs with the Bible text to find those you feel most faithfully share its meaning. Consider singing together or listening to a public domain version of one of these songs, either now or toward the end of class.

Option 2. Distribute a handout (you create) with the following prompts for group members to answer as they consider [Psalm 100](#):

Verses [1–2](#): Describe the emotions here. Write one sentence to summarize the main idea of these verses.

Verse [3](#): What does praise affirm about our relationship with God?

Verse [4](#): Where are we supposed to praise and thank God? What does this say about the kind of relationship he wants to have with us?

Verse [5](#): How do these statements about God qualify him for praise like no one else?

Option 3. Distribute the “Why Worship?” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Groups should complete the activity as indicated before coming together as a whole group to discuss answers based on [Psalm 100](#). Record answers on the board as learners speak.

Give your groups at least 10 minutes to work on any of these activities, and then allow several minutes for them to report and discuss as a class.

Into Life

Divide the class into their prior groups. Choose one or two of the following activities, asking groups to complete them simultaneously.

Option 1. Distribute blank paper and pencils. In three subgroups, learners should jot down reasons to be thankful according to the category assigned to them: **The Personal Group**, **The Home and Family Group**, and **The Church Group**. Encourage them to be specific, even if trivial. After the minute has passed, ask volunteers to share one item from their list with their entire group. Ask volunteers, “How do you feel about thanking God for blessings like those you’ve listed?”

Option 2. Distribute card stock, markers, stickers, and other art supplies. Ask members in groups to make place cards for a family dinner, maybe even Thanksgiving dinner. Each card should contain a quote or paraphrase from a verse or section of [Psalm 100](#), along with the name of one person at the table. As they’re working, volunteers should tell each other about the people who are coming to dinner. *Note.* Be sensitive that class members may be mourning the absence of family or friends from holiday gatherings this year.

Option 3. Distribute the “Responsive Reading” exercise from the activity page to be completed as indicated.

After calling time on the chosen activities, ask learners how they can better recognize and seize opportunities for thanksgiving in the coming week. Encourage them to write these plans down and act on them. Close class with prayer.

To print the reproducible activity page, simply click the highlighted text below to create a pdf file on

your hard drive. Then open the pdf file in Acrobat Reader and print.

Activity Page (November 17—A Song of Thanksgiving)
