

January 1
Lesson 5

PRAISE GOD

FOR CREATION

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 146

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Psalm 33:1-9

PSALM 33:1-9

- ¹ Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous;
it is fitting for the upright to praise him.
- ² Praise the LORD with the harp;
make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre.
- ³ Sing to him a new song;
play skillfully, and shout for joy.
- ⁴ For the word of the LORD is right and true;
he is faithful in all he does.
- ⁵ The LORD loves righteousness and justice;
the earth is full of his unfailing love.
- ⁶ By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,
their starry host by the breath of his mouth.
- ⁷ He gathers the waters of the sea into jars;
he puts the deep into storehouses.
- ⁸ Let all the earth fear the LORD;
let all the people of the world revere him.
- ⁹ For he spoke, and it came to be;
he commanded, and it stood firm.



Photo: Stocktrek Images / Thinkstock

KEY VERSE

*By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth.—
Psalm 33:6*

LESSON AIMS

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

1. List some reasons to praise the Lord and rejoice in him.
2. Describe worship as a function of God's creation.

3. Suggest one way that his or her church can improve the worship experience.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Call to Worship
- B. Lesson Background

I. Praise by the Upright (Psalm 33:1-5)

- A. Use Every Means (vv. 1-3)
What About Unskillful Praise?

- B. Acknowledge His Attributes (vv. 4, 5)

II. Praise for His Works (Psalm 33:6, 7)

- A. Heavens and Their Host (v. 6)
- B. Waters of the Sea (v. 7)

God's Unseen Creativity

III. Duties of the Created (Psalm 33:8, 9)

- A. Who (v. 8)
- B. Why (v. 9)

Conclusion

- A. Worship Time
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Call to Worship

Traditional worship services begin with a “call to worship.” This may simply be a Scripture (often from the book of Psalms) read from the pulpit. Or it may take the form of a short responsive reading. Typical of the latter is this:

Leader: *Our soul waiteth for the LORD: he is our help and our shield.*

People: *For our heart shall rejoice in him, because we have trusted in his holy name.*

All: *Let thy mercy, O LORD, be upon us, according as we hope in thee.*

These lines, which are [Psalm 33:20-22](#), include the elements of waiting on the Lord, acknowledging his protection, rejoicing and trusting in him, and anticipating his love and mercy. All such elements can play an important part in unifying the congregation to the purpose of worship. We must not forget that we have come to worship, and skilled worship leaders issue this call clearly.

Our lesson today is from the first nine verses of this same psalm. Although the words were penned over 2,000 years ago, the purposes of and necessity for worship have not changed. If we let it, [Psalm 33](#) can enliven and focus both our corporate and personal worship.

B. Lesson Background

The psalmists composed their works for specific purposes, and sometimes the purpose and identity of the author is revealed in a psalm's superscription. For example, the superscription of [Psalm 51](#) refers to that psalm as “of David ... after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.” What follows is David's repentance for that sinful episode.

If you have a Bible in an electronic format, you may find it interesting to discover these superscriptions to be tagged as “verse zero” of the psalm that follows. Many psalms, however, lack a superscription, and [Psalm 33](#) is one of those. In these cases, we must look within the psalm itself to get an idea of how the Israelites originally used it.

[Psalm 33](#) bears no statement of authorship, but a reasonable guess is that David wrote it. One piece of evidence to support this theory is that the last verse of [Psalm 32](#) and the first verse of [Psalm 33](#) are worded very similarly, with the superscription of [Psalm 32](#) attributing that composition to David.

Regarding purpose, one theory is that [Psalm 33](#) was used in public assemblies to thank God for a good harvest. In an era when 98 percent of the people made their living by agrarian means in rural settings, the effects of good and bad harvests were felt immediately by nearly everyone. While a national celebration of a good harvest may seem odd to those of the modern Western world, where only 2 percent of people live on farms, such a celebration was quite fitting for the ancients (compare [Psalm 65:9](#); [67:6](#); [85:12](#); contrast [Jeremiah 8:13](#)).

Giving thanks to God is the essence of worship. When we are aware of and grateful for the blessings of adequate provisions for life, it should be natural to direct our gratitude to God.

I. Praise by the Upright

(PSALM 33:1-5)

A. Use Every Means (vv. 1-3)

1. Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him.

The original wording behind the exhortation *sing joyfully* is translated similarly in [Psalm 81:1](#) as “sing for joy” and in [Psalm 98:4](#) as “burst into jubilant song.” The former includes a reference to loudness, so that is likely implied here as well. We cannot know how the worship of the ancient Israelites sounded, but loud congregational singing seems to be in view.

Such rejoicing must be done *to the Lord*, for he and nothing else is to be the focus in worship. Appropriate worship celebrates God, but that will happen only as we recognize our proper position in the order of creation, our relationship with God, and our dependence on him.

HOW TO SAY IT

Ecclesiastes Ik-leez-ee-as-teez.

The rest of the verse before us reveals the feature of *parallelism* for which ancient Hebrew poetry is noted. One form of parallelism involves two lines saying the same thing (or nearly so) with different words. We see this here in that those who are *righteous* and those who are *upright* are actually the same people. Their rejoicing is *praise*.

People are not made righteous by their praise of God, but praising him is the right and proper thing to do. We cannot consider ourselves to be upright if we refuse or neglect worship.

What Do You Think?

What steps can we take to ensure that our joy is in the Lord rather than in “things”?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Steps to recognize the problem
- Steps toward a solution that also witnesses to others
- Distinguishing between joy and happiness

2. Praise the LORD with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre.

The psalmist (possibly a worship leader) turns his attention to include instrumentalists. As we are on the alert for more parallelism, in light of what we just saw in [verse 1](#), we may be tempted to conclude that only one musical instrument is in view here, with *harp* and *lyre* being merely different words for the same thing (synonyms). But the fact that harp and lyre are listed together in several nonpoetic passages requires that they be seen as distinct instruments (example: [1 Chronicles 15:16](#)).

But the fact that the two instruments are different does not mean that parallelism is absent. There is more than one kind of parallelism, and the one we see here is a parallel of category: *harp* and *lyre* are both stringed musical instruments, mentioned dozens of times in the Old Testament. David played at least one of these instruments, perhaps both, with skill (see [1 Samuel 16:23](#)).

Harpes can vary widely in size. Some are small enough to be portable (compare [Psalm 137:2](#)). On the other hand, harps used for worship may be very large, thus capable of producing great volume at the cost of portability. Perhaps the larger harps are played while standing.

Archaeologists have found inscriptions depicting ancient harps, as well as a few actual harps. These reveal configurations of two posts extending from a sound box, with a connecting bar at the top. The strings that connect the sound box with the bar are tuned to specific musical notes. The strings, made from prepared goat or sheep intestines, can be plucked or perhaps played with a bow.

Evidence from ancient drawings indicates curved yokes and jar-shaped sounding boxes to be features of lyres. An instrument featuring 10 strings, whether to be plucked or played with a bow, can be enormous if designed for use in large worship gatherings ([Psalm 144:9](#)).

3. Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy.

The fact that singers are to *sing ... a new song* doesn't necessarily mean a newly composed tune, but a song that is fresh and renewing rather than stale and tired (compare [Psalm 98:1](#); [Revelation 5:9](#)). And as they sing such a song, the instrumentalists are to hold nothing back in terms of skill, volume, or joyous exuberance.

There is a place for contemplation, stillness, and silence, but not in the worship service envisioned by this psalmist. How wonderful it would be if we discovered a 3,000-year-old video that showed us such a worship service in progress! Our notions of stately, dignified worship in ancient Israel might be turned on their head if we could witness the exuberance of the joyful, loud praise that seems to be sketched here. This

psalm offers no words of caution on restraint for worship.

Over-the-top exuberance is not the same as uncontrolled chaos, however. For the musical expressions of singers and notes to blend harmoniously implies the skill that comes from rehearsal. But the motive behind rehearsal is important. Wrong motives put the professionalism of the musicians first. Right motives put the meaningfulness of the worship experience first. And we do well to remember that what is meaningful to us may not be meaningful to God (see [Isaiah 1:13](#); [Amos 5:21](#)).

What Do You Think?

How do we keep musical expressions of praise from becoming mere performance?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Considering personal spiritual disciplines

Considering leadership example

Other

WHAT ABOUT UNSKILLFUL PRAISE?

One Sunday before worship began, our youngest daughter asked to sit with members of our small group in the row behind us. We agreed, and during the service I kept hearing her little-girl voice singing above all others. I don't know whether that was because she sang loudly or I was tuned in to her because she was my child.

Either way, her sweet soprano voice stood out to me as her innocence shone through. Her voice wasn't perfect, and she missed some words. But I imagined that God must have smiled at that little voice praising him.

It's all too easy to get caught up in personal preferences and showmanship in musical expressions of worship. Is the volume according to my taste? Is the worship team properly attired for being on stage? Is each song timed perfectly with no dead space?

That Sunday when I saw my daughter's sweet expression as she sang her heart out to God, I did not notice anything about the quality of the music. Skillful praise is the ideal to aim for, but heartfelt praise also counts (in [Isaiah 29:13](#) we see what God thinks of the opposite). What a blessing it must be to God to hear the sincere praise of his children!—L. M. W.

B. Acknowledge His Attributes (vv. 4, 5)

4a. For the word of the LORD is right and true;

Having primed the singers and the musicians for worship, the psalmist now begins to give content to their praise. What we say in worship is important, and it should not be approached carelessly. It is not profitable for the church to sing words that contain unbiblical sentiments or misleading doctrinal statements.

We guard against such errors by careful study of Scripture in order to derive song lyrics from the Bible itself. No matter how catchy or popular a worship song might be, it should have no place in a church service if it detracts from biblical truth. Music makes words memorable, and church leaders must insist that the worship words in their services glorify and praise the Lord appropriately.

In the half verse before us and in the next three, the psalmist celebrates four attributes of the Lord. First, the Lord's word *is right*, meaning what God has communicated to mankind is *true* and without error. We can depend on the reliability and authenticity of God's Word. God's Word is truth, always and forever ([John 17:17](#)).

4b. he is faithful in all he does.

For *all he does* to be *faithful* means that just as God's words are always trustworthy, his actions are as well. God is consistent in the ways he deals with humanity. He has sent his messengers to proclaim his ways and call people to repent. But in spite of human sin and an all-too-often unwillingness to repent, God loves us deeply. His works are consistent with and speak of both his love for us and his holy insistence that we abandon sinful ways.

This combination of trustworthy words and faithful works means that God always keeps his promises, whether of judgment or of blessing. This is a great lesson of the Old Testament. What God promises Israel, God delivers—even when (or especially when) it is not to their liking. This is true for us also; we can always depend on God's promises.

5a. The LORD loves righteousness and justice;

[Psalm 97:2](#) tells us that "*righteousness and justice* are the foundation of [God's] throne." Since this is so, it is no wonder that God expects and loves to see righteousness and justice exhibited by his people. *Righteousness* refers to "doing the right thing," while *justice* refers to treating others fairly, as in "being just."

The two ideas are so close in meaning that they are practically synonyms. This indicates one rather than two attributes of God (notice how they are parallel in [Psalm 9:8](#)). It's virtually impossible to think of God or anyone else who does the right thing yet is unjust!

God is unrelenting in his calls for the people of Israel to do the right thing in maintaining justice in their society. As righteousness and justice undergird the throne of God, so are they to be the foundation of human society as well.

5^b. the earth is full of his unfailing love.

The psalmist looks to creation to find a fourth attribute of God: his provision of good things within our world. God pronounced the goodness of his creation at the beginning ([Genesis 1:31](#)), and we should celebrate the one who has provided such bounty for us.

The word translated *unfailing love* is very common in the Old Testament (see [Psalms 33:18, 22; 36:7; 119:76](#); etc.). The psalmist is saying that creation itself is a testimony of God's favor toward us. The goodness evidenced in his world should stimulate ongoing praise and worship.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways to ensure that worship addresses the attributes of God?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding corporate worship

Regarding times of personal worship

II. Praise for His Works

([PSALM 33:6, 7](#))

A. Heavens and Their Host ([v. 6](#))

**6. By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,
their starry host by the breath of his mouth.**

The psalmist now steps backward in time to consider the initial creative acts of God. The emphasis is the method of creation found in [Genesis 1](#): God spoke the universe into being.

The psalmist's angle is to consider first the realm beyond the earth: *the heavens* and that which inhabit them. *Starry host* may refer to stars of the night sky or to the angels who reside in Heaven as God's servants. In ancient Israelite thinking, the two may be one and the same (compare [Judges 5:20; Job 38:7; Isaiah 40:26](#)).

Modern science has expanded our knowledge of the physical aspects of the universe far beyond that of the psalmist. The number of stars by one estimate is between 10^{22} and 10^{24} —almost incomprehensible numbers. The ever-growing list of scientific discoveries tests the faith of some. But how much better it is to allow those awe-inspiring discoveries to drive us to our knees in worship of their Creator!

What Do You Think?

What best helps you appreciate God's creative power? Why?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Considering the witness of Scripture

Considering the witness of creation itself

Considering your own life experiences

Other

For creation to come about by the *breath* of God's *mouth* is not to imply that he has physical body parts. Rather, the psalmist is emphasizing creation by means of God's words. This is difficult for us to understand, but we might say it this way: God imagines it, speaks it, and it is created. Interesting to consider at this point is [2 Timothy 3:16](#): "All Scripture is God-breathed."

B. Waters of the Sea ([v. 7](#))

**7. He gathers the waters of the sea into jars;
he puts the deep into storehouses.**

The psalmist turns his attention to another realm of great wonder and mystery: the oceans. The fact that God is able to gather *the waters of the sea into jars* is demonstrated in the facts of history noted in [Exodus 14:21, 22; 15:8; Joshua 3:13-16](#); and [Psalm 78:13](#).

The imagery of the forces of nature being kept in *storehouses* is also reflected in [Job 38:22; Psalm 135:7](#); and [Jeremiah 10:13; 51:16](#). The Creator is the master of the mighty oceans and all other forces of nature.

We manage water supplies, with varying degrees of success, by building colossal dams, levees, and waterways. As we do, we should not allow hubris to cause us to forget that it was God who created the self-renewing water system of the earth in the first place.

GOD'S UNSEEN CREATIVITY

As a result of its extreme depth and pressure, the Mariana Trench in the Pacific Ocean features some unusual life-forms. Food is scarce in the

deepest levels, and some organisms there survive on chemicals that emerge from the sea floor. Some such organisms are in the form of giant, single-celled amoebas.

At levels in the trench where no light filters down from the surface, certain creatures have tiny luminescent lures for attracting prey. The fish and other sea creatures found at these levels look very different from those in other parts of the ocean. It is almost as if they don't need to worry about their appearance since no one can see them in the dark that far underwater anyway!

Relatively few people ever think about such forms of life or even know they exist. But keep in mind that the more we learn about creation, the more we learn about the Creator.—L. M. W.

III. Duties of the Created

(PSALM 33:8, 9)

A. Who (v. 8)

**8. Let all the earth fear the LORD;
let all the people of the world revere him.**

The two lines of this verse are saying the same thing (again, parallelism). The contemplation of God's great creative acts prompts the psalmist to call for a proper response: jaw-dropping fear and reverence. There are many aspects to worship, including remembering God's grace, celebrating his love, and expressing our gratitude to him. But what about fear and reverence? Have we lost these elements of worship?

A proper fear will strip us of high-minded pride ([Romans 11:20](#)) as it humbles our hearts. Any pretense or delusion of our own greatness or worthiness is swallowed up in recognition of the vast superiority of God's eternal power.

B. Why (v. 9)

**9. For he spoke, and it came to be;
he commanded, and it stood firm.**

The psalmist finishes this section with a return to the most baffling and amazing consideration in all of this: God's ability to speak creation into existence. Nothing thwarts God's creative intentions. God speaks, it happens, and it happens in a permanent way. It stands *firm*. This is not digital creation, but hard and fast reality. We are not independent players in this cosmic drama, but part of God's plans and purposes. Our role is to recognize, marvel, and submit.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways to use [verses 8](#) and [9](#) in worship?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

In various elements of corporate worship

In personal worship daily for a week

Other

Conclusion

A. Worship Time

Churches today carefully plan and rehearse their worship times. This is designed to bring believers before the throne of God in a spirit of praise. Such elements undergird today's text as well. The psalmist's desire for skill as various elements of musical expression interact implies planning for a large community's time of worship.

Underlying this focus, however, is a broader picture of what worship is. God is not to be awe-inspiring only for an hour or two on Sunday morning; he is eternally and always so. A weekend gathering of believers might be a high point in our worship, but it should not be the only worship experience.

We can worship when we see God's activity in a gentle rain or a thundering storm. We can worship him when we view a glorious sunset or a clear, starry night. We can worship when we gaze into the eyes of a newborn baby. We can worship when we calm our hearts for sleep or when we awaken fresh for a new day. We can worship when we remember the many blessings God has laid in the pathways of our lives, or when we consider the many things he has in store for us in the future (see [Ecclesiastes 3:11](#)).



Visual for Lessons 5 & 6. Start an activity by pointing to this visual and challenging learners to write a prayer using all the words.

One implication of all these possibilities is that our worship should not be confined to a sanctuary or worship center in a building. By lifting our “worship awareness” to a higher level, we find endless things that point our hearts to the Lord, the maker of the heavens and the earth and the provider of our daily needs.

Look for small worship opportunities as they present themselves to you in the week ahead. When you recognize one, give a smile as an act of joy directed to the Lord, for he alone is worthy of worship. Mouth this simple prayer: “Thank you, Lord, for letting this remind me of you.” When you fill your heart with worship, you will not be disappointed.

B. Prayer

O God, as your great power causes us to stand in proper fear of you, may we also remember your great love for us. We pray this in the name of Jesus, who in that love went to the cross. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

As you praise God, don’t forget why.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Into the Lesson

Begin by asking students to form small groups of four or five people each. You then will go to the first person in each group and say either *land*, *air*, or *water*. That person has 10 seconds to name either a land animal, a type of bird or flying insect, or a type of fish or other creature that lives in the water. If the person is able to supply an appropriate name, he or she then turns to the next person in the group and says either *land*, *air*, or *water*. If the person is unable to supply a name, then he or she is eliminated. Make sure to mention that no creature can be named twice. Allow play to continue for five minutes or so or until a winner emerges.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “In the Watery Deep” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have students work individually or in pairs.

After either activity, lead into the Bible study saying, “It is hard to look at the created world without acknowledging the Creator. Today we will talk about praising God for his marvelous creation.”

Into the Word

Before getting into a study of today’s text, write these words from [Luke 19:40](#) on the board (near the top) in this fashion:

“I tell you,” he replied, “if they [disciples] keep quiet,

[move down to the middle of the board and write]

the stones will cry out.”

Have the class paraphrase this rather strange statement made by Jesus during his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. They may respond with something like, “If God’s followers do not praise him, then praise will come from the rest of his creation.”

Divide the class into two groups. *Group 1* should read [Psalm 33:1-5](#), looking at the responsibility the righteous followers of God have to praise him. Ask the group to write as many relevant phrases from those verses under the first phrase from [Luke 19:40](#) on the board.

Group 2 should read [Psalm 33:6-9](#), looking for the interaction between God and the rest of his creation. Ask the group to write relevant phrases from those verses under the second phrase from [Luke 19:40](#) on the board.

Reassemble the class and have a spokesperson from each group share what they discovered from the text. Refer to relevant portions of the commentary to support discussion as necessary.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Reporter’s Notebook” activity from the reproducible page. Have students work in pairs or small groups to complete this exercise.

Into Life

If you did not use the “In the Watery Deep” activity for the first part of the lesson, distribute it now. Allow students to work in small groups to complete it.

If you used the activity earlier, have your class turn to it once more. Close the lesson by having students cite content from that exercise to substantiate these statements about God’s nature and power:

- *Even the most powerful earth-moving equipment can’t accomplish what God constructed in creation.*
- *Even the most compassionate urban planners can’t construct a living environment as hospitable as that which God has created for humankind.*
- *Even the most just of all rulers can’t show fairness to the greatest and smallest in his domain as God has.*
- *Even the largest food bank in the world cannot hold a fraction of the provisions God has stored for those he created.*

Read [Romans 1:20](#), Paul’s affirmation that God’s power and nature are obvious in the world he created. Close with a prayer thanking God for revealing his power and nature in that way.