

January 22

Lesson 8

PRAISE GOD

THE CREATOR

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 8

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Psalm 104

PSALM 104:1-4, 24-30

¹ Praise the LORD, my soul.

LORD my God, you are very great;

you are clothed with splendor and majesty.

² The LORD wraps himself in light as with a garment; he stretches out the heavens like a tent

³ and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters.

He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind.

⁴ He makes winds his messengers, flames of fire his servants.

²⁴ How many are your works, LORD!

In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.

²⁵ There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number— living things both large and small.

²⁶ There the ships go to and fro, and Leviathan, which you formed to frolic there.

²⁷ All creatures look to you to give them their food at the proper time.

²⁸ When you give it to them,



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**they gather it up;
 when you open your hand,
 they are satisfied with good things.**
²⁹ **When you hide your face,
 they are terrified;
 when you take away their breath,
 they die and return to the dust.**
³⁰ **When you send your Spirit,
 they are created,
 and you renew the face of the ground.**

KEY VERSE

How many are your works, LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.—Psalm 104:24

LESSON AIMS

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

1. List some diverse elements of God's creation.
2. Explain the connection between the first segment of the lesson text (vv. 1-4) and the second (vv. 24-30).
3. Write a statement of respect and commitment to care for God's creation.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Recycle vs. Renew
- B. Lesson Background

I. Greatness of God (Psalm 104:1-4)

- A. Clothed in Majesty (v. 1)
- B. Served by Angels (vv. 2-4)
God's "Clothing" and Ours

II. Greatness of God's Works (Psalm 104:24-26)

- A. The Abundant Earth (v. 24)
- B. The Expansive Sea (vv. 25, 26)

III. Goodness of God's Works (Psalm 104:27-30)

- A. Feeding the World (vv. 27, 28)
- B. Allowing Death (v. 29)
- C. Renewing Life (v. 30)
Circle or Cycle?

Conclusion

- A. It Didn't Just Happen
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Recycle vs. Renew

Do you recycle? No one asked this question 40 years ago, but now it is common—and frequently accompanied by moral judgment. In certain ways, ecological awareness and practice has become the new morality. We are urged not to judge people regarding just about everything, but this seems to be a big exception. Filling the Internet with moral filth is OK, but filling our landfills when we could be recycling is deemed

unacceptable.

Recycling programs in some cities have gone from voluntary to mandatory, and efforts have expanded far beyond the mere saving of aluminum cans and glass jars. Manufacturers are now very conscious of the packaging they use, designing such materials to be easily recyclable.

The point at which this “green” emphasis does more harm than good (if ever) is a debate best conducted elsewhere. And whether or not we choose to participate in those debates, we must keep in mind that God planned his creation to be capable of more than recycling. He intended it to be continually renewing.

There is no word in the Bible for *recycle*, but *renew* is an important theme. Renewing, from the Bible’s perspective, is both part of the plan of God and a process that is dependent on God. Whether it is a renewal of the earth or a renewal of the human spirit, it cannot happen without God’s blessing and power. The God who renews is the focus of the celebration that makes up our lesson this week from [Psalm 104](#).

B. Lesson Background

[Psalm 104](#) falls within Psalms Book IV, the bookends of which are [Psalms 90](#) and [106](#). At least one scholar sees enough similarity among [Psalms 8](#), [33](#) (see [lesson 5](#)), [104](#), and [145](#) to categorize the four as “Songs of Creation.”

[Psalm 104](#) also is often paired with [Psalm 103](#), since both feature material drawn from Genesis and both are hymns of praise (note their similar beginnings and endings in that regard). Because of these similarities, some scholars propose that the named author of [Psalm 103](#), who is David, is also the author of [Psalm 104](#), which bears no designation of authorship.

Whether or not David wrote [Psalm 104](#), its original concept apparently came from a pagan source: Pharaoh Akhenaton’s Great Hymn to the Sun. This praise of a fictitious sun god is traced to Egyptian mythology of the fourteenth century BC. The fact that the pagan sun-hymn came first means that the writer of [Psalm 104](#) would be the borrower. Yet the two are different in vital ways! Their conclusions, the focus of their tribute, and [Psalm 104](#)’s dependence on [Genesis 1](#) assured the ancient Hebrew that there would be no confusion between the two compositions.

Even so, we may wonder why the psalmist would borrow from the Egyptian sun-hymn in the first place. Perhaps it was because his culture was already familiar with it. That possibility may lead us to theorize further that [Psalm 104](#)’s praise of the Creator is an intentional jab at the Egyptian hymn’s praise of a part of creation. We should not find such a procedure surprising. The apostle Paul, for his part, used pagan sources in his sermons and letters to uphold Christ (see [Acts 17:28](#); [1 Corinthians 15:33](#); and [Titus 1:12](#)).

Regarding tone, [Psalm 104](#) has more of the personal element than other praise psalms. The fact that it switches in speaking of the Lord with personal address (“You”) and narrative (“He”) makes it seem suited for both public worship and personal reflection. Vividness is enhanced by the psalmist’s use of the technique called *parallelism*. That feature, common in Hebrew poetry, involves saying the same thing (or nearly the same thing) with different words (see discussion in [lesson 5](#)).

Our lesson today focuses on verses from the beginning and the end of this great psalm, but students should read the whole thing. In so doing, many phrases used in our worship songs will be detected. This testifies to the richness and the eternal value of this hymn of praise.

HOW TO SAY IT

Akhenaton Ock-*naw*-tun.

Leviathan Luh-*vye*-uh-thun.

Pharaoh *Fair*-o (or *Fay*-roe).

I. Greatness of God

(PSALM 104:1-4)

A. Clothed in Majesty (v. 1)

^{1a.} Praise the LORD, my soul.

The book of Psalms feature the highest relative occurrences of the Hebrew word translated *praise*. In that regard, the psalmist begins with a command. The wording is intriguing, for the soul is the essence of a person. Is he telling himself to do something?

Yes! The psalmist’s comments serve as a reminder not to forget to give *the Lord* his deserved praise and blessing. This is a great start to a time of worship, whether group or private. Let’s focus on God, not ourselves.

^{1b.} LORD my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty.

We give the Lord the praise due him as we recognize his exceeding greatness. The psalmist’s word picture for this is God’s clothing as *splendor and majesty*. This describes a glorious king. In [Psalm 21:5](#), these qualities are bestowed on a human king by God; it is as if God lends the man a share of divine glory temporarily. But in the verse before us, we see far more than a tiny derivative of glory, for God wears his majesty like a robe. We are reminded of words of the cherished hymn “How Great Thou Art.”

What Do You Think?

How can we make sure our praise comes from the depths of our souls?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

In light of [Matthew 15:8](#)

In light of [Matthew 21:16](#)

In light of [James 3:10](#)

Other

B. Served by Angels (vv. 2-4)

**2. The LORD wraps himself in light as with a garment;
he stretches out the heavens like a tent**

The word picture is extended. The Lord not only wears a robe of majesty, but this *garment* is made of pure *light*. It is as if God takes the light of the sun and bends its rays to serve as a glorious cloak for himself (compare [Revelation 12:1](#)).

This idea of God's using the mighty elements of his creation as fabric goes one stage further when the psalmist sees God stretching *out the heavens like a tent*. This is an insight into the immensity of God, as if he covers the entire sky from the eastern to the western horizon with a stupendous bolt of heavenly cloth. God wraps himself in glory, and he brings his glorious touch to earth itself for us to experience.

GOD'S "CLOTHING" AND OURS

Current culture is less formal today than it was a few generations ago. One way this is seen is in the attire worn on various occasions. An older generation of men still wear coat and tie to weddings and funerals, while younger adults may prefer jeans.

A generational divide is also seen in what people wear to church. The senior saints, who often prefer the traditional worship service, will wear their "Sunday best." It is not uncommon to hear them complain that wearing anything less would fail to show proper respect for God.

The younger folks, on the other hand, may wear cutoffs and sandals to their preferred contemporary worship service. When concerns are voiced about their attire, they might respond that God is more interested in what is in their hearts than what they are wearing.

When we read how God is "clothed," is anything being implied regarding our own attire in approaching him? And does our choice of attire for worship say anything about the level of our regard for him? Perhaps the broader question, which includes the issue of attire but many other issues as well, is this: *How can we demonstrate our highest regard for God at all times and on all occasions?*—C. R. B.

**3. and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters.
He makes the clouds his chariot
and rides on the wings of the wind.**

The psalmist continues his praise of God's wonders by expanding the idea of the skyward presence of the Lord. This imagines *the beams of his upper chambers* to be posted in the deep waters of the earth. This is a picture of gigantic pillars driven into the seabed to support the structure of Heaven.

In his sky abode, God rides *clouds* as his personal, kingly *chariot* and walks or rides around by using the *wind* as we would the earth's ground (compare [Isaiah 66:15](#)). These powerful, poetic expressions of God are saying, "He is not like us. His ways are far above ours. He is glorious beyond our comprehension."

What Do You Think?

What word pictures have you found to be effective when explaining the nature of God?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

When conversing with a child

When conversing with an unbeliever

**4. He makes winds his messengers,
flames of fire his servants.**

The proper understanding of this verse is difficult, since some words have more than one possible meaning. First, the Hebrew word for *messengers* (see also [Numbers 24:12](#)) can also be translated "angels," as it is in [Genesis 32:1](#). Indeed, a function of angels is to bring God's messages to humans. [Hebrews 1:7](#) clearly identifies [Psalm 104:4](#) as "speaking of the angels." Thus angels are to be identified with both *messengers* and *servants* since the latter two stand parallel to one another (compare [Hebrews 1:14](#)).

The Hebrew word for *winds* also presents an uncertainty, since it can be translated "spirits," as it is in [Zechariah 6:5](#). The psalmist may be

using this fact to depict the heavenly servants as being somehow like winds (compare [Revelation 7:1](#)). If so, a couple of things are implied.

First, angels are powerful, for the wording here does not describe light breezes. This is a description of moving weather at its extreme, which can be violent and destructive. Second, these powerful beings are, like the wind, invisible to us (unless God chooses to make them visible). The psalmist truly understands and believes there are angels among us, and this is a humbling and comforting thing for him. We see him awestruck in his description of these heavenly beings as *flames of fire*, another way of indicating the power of God's angels. This is not the small fire of a candle, but the powerful fire of Heaven (compare [Psalm 97:3](#)).

II. Greatness of God's Works

(PSALM 104:24-26)

A. The Abundant Earth (v. 24)

**24. How many are your works, LORD!
In wisdom you made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.**

We see parallelism here as the phrases *your works* and *your creatures* reflect one another. The word *creatures* carries the idea of many different animals and the diversity of the earth's biosphere. Passages such as [Psalms 8:3, 4; 66:3](#); and [92:5](#) also marvel at the complexity and scope of God's creation.

The psalmist also introduces here a concept that may be less familiar to us: that creation itself is a testimony to the *wisdom* of God. Our universe is not self-explanatory or self-ordering. Its beauty and balance are the result of God's perfect wisdom. We are best able to appreciate the value of our natural world when we rely on the wisdom of God. This comes full circle when we realize that our awe or fear of the Lord is the beginning of our own pathway to wisdom ([Psalm 111:10](#)). Human reverence for God and human wisdom are two sides of the same coin.

What Do You Think?

How can our congregation best use God's great works in nature to bring people closer to him?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

For the spiritual growth of fellow Christians

For evangelistic outreach to unbelievers

B. The Expansive Sea (vv. 25, 26)

**25. There is the sea, vast and spacious,
teeming with creatures beyond number—
living things both large and small.**

In turning his attention from the dry land to *the sea, vast and spacious*, the psalmist speaks as one who has spent time on ships personally. Or perhaps he has conversed with others who have. Those who have spent time at sea have the greater appreciation of how vast the oceans are. The experience of sailing out far enough to lose sight of all land can be overwhelming. When no landmarks are visible, the rolling seas seem endless.

The psalmist is also knowledgeable regarding *creatures* of the sea. He knows that the sea has many *living things both large and small*. All this contributes mightily to the author's spirit of amazement and appreciation for the Creator.

**26. There the ships go to and fro,
and Leviathan, which you formed to frolic there.**

The psalmist continues expressing wonder at the size of the oceans. There is plenty of room for all *ships*, works of humans that seem puny by comparison to the works of God. The vastness of the ocean means that even the *Leviathan* is not cramped for space. *Leviathan* is a transliterated Hebrew term, and [Isaiah 27:1](#) describes it as a "serpent" of some kind. This may refer to an eel-like sea creature that is able to curl and contort itself.

The lengthy treatment of *Leviathan* in [Job 41](#) has led to different conclusions, however. Some see a reference to a mythological dragon that no longer exists. Others identify the Leviathan variously as a crocodile, a seagoing dinosaur, or a whale. At any rate, the Leviathan was a huge animal of the sea (see [Job 41:1](#)). We should not get so distracted by trying to figure out Leviathan that we lose sight of the psalmist's main point: that of an ocean so spacious that even a creature such as Leviathan seems like a minnow within it.

III. Goodness of God's Works

(PSALM 104:27-30)

A. Feeding the World (vv. 27, 28)

**27. All creatures look to you
to give them their food at the proper time.**

The phrase *all creatures* refers to animal life, including the sea creatures just mentioned. The psalmist solemnly notes that every single creature, from humans to fish, depend on the Lord himself to feed them. The Lord does this indirectly through the earth's systems of production, systems he created. Both humans and sharks may catch fish to eat, but ultimately all food comes from the self-renewing system that continues to operate by God's power. The earth God created in the first place, he continues to sustain to this day.

**28. When you give it to them,
they gather it up;
when you open your hand,
they are satisfied with good things.**

The fact of our dependence on God's provision for daily food is put in beautiful, basic terms. We *gather* at harvest because God gives. We are *satisfied* (nourished) because of the Lord's open *hand*.

Since most of us purchase our food in a store or a restaurant, we are far removed from the basic elements of food production. Farming takes work, to be sure, but we should still marvel that an empty field of dirt can fill with tall stalks of corn in a few weeks. We should pause in wonder that nets can be dipped into the vast sea and come up full of fish. We should never take our daily bread for granted.

What Do You Think?

What more can our church do to demonstrate the open hand of God? How will you help?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- In meeting physical needs
- In giving spiritual and emotional support
- Other

B. Allowing Death (v. 29)

**29. When you hide your face,
they are terrified;
when you take away their breath,
they die and return to the dust.**

As the psalmist considers the cycle of animal life, we see parallel thoughts that interpret each other. When the Lord hides his *face*, the creatures *are terrified*. What does this mean? The next line explains: when the Lord takes *away their breath*, *they die*. Thus the poetic expression of God's hidden face is a way of saying that the time of death has come.

Animals are *terrified* when death looms because of their instinct for survival, an instinct placed in them by God himself. We too have such an instinct, but he does not abandon us at the time of our death. Our relationship with him helps us overcome the fear of death. It gives us the courage to "walk through the darkest valley" ([Psalm 23:4](#)).

What Do You Think?

At what times other than death does God seem to be hiding? How do we cope?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- When things seems centered on one person (example: Job)
- When a wider group is affected (example: [Joshua 7:1](#))
- Other

To *return to the dust* is the common result of death. All living things—from trees to tigers to toddlers—are largely composed of the same foundational ingredients of hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, carbon, and phosphorus. When organisms die, they begin to decompose almost immediately. Eventually the components of what once was a living body become part (again) of the earth's elements—*dust* in Bible language.

The temporary nature of our current physical existence is a reminder of our mortality (see [Genesis 3:19](#)). We are not gods, and our bodies are not invincible or immortal (see [Psalm 103:14](#)). As we traditionally say at funerals, "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

C. Renewing Life (v. 30)

**30. When you send your Spirit,
they are created,**

and you renew the face of the ground.

This is not the end of the story, however. God continually renews the life of his earth. He never intended the animal or plant life to be a single generation. All plants and animals are created with the capability of reproduction, but that does not happen without God's life-giving *Spirit*. This is one of the wonders in the [Genesis 1](#) account of creation: that each order of plant and animal reproduces according to its kind. In this way, God's creatures multiply and renew *the face of the ground* continually (see [Genesis 1:22](#)).

CIRCLE OR CYCLE?

The Lion King is the popular 1994 animated film from Disney studios. The song "Circle of Life" sets the tone for the presentation of a newborn lion cub to the pride's rulers. The scene is reprised at the end of the film as a cub from the next generation is presented.

Some think the phrase *circle of life* is useful to describe what happens in human families as well: as those of the older generation die off, members of the next generation step up to take their place as leaders. Infants are born to keep the circle going.

We should be cautious, however, about haphazardly grabbing phrases from culture and using them uncritically in Christianity. A close look at the lyrics of the "Circle of Life" song reveals elements that are at odds with Scripture.

The self-renewing feature of life on planet Earth, as designed by the Creator, might better be called the *cycle of life*. The self-renewal is not endless, however. The power God uses to create and sustain, he will use again to destroy and create anew ([2 Peter 3:10-13](#)). In the meantime, we remember that what we do with our portion of the cycle of life will influence the generations that follow. We are at our best when we embrace fully and firmly the service to which God calls us. It starts with our praise.—C. R. B.

Conclusion

A. It Didn't Just Happen

Many Christians believe that science is an enemy of faith. This does not need to be so. Some elements of [Psalm 104](#) are the ancient version of scientific observations, but these observations drive the psalmist and the reader to greater faith in God, not less. Science has done a fantastic job of documenting the intricacies and interrelated nature of things. Science increases our knowledge of our world daily. As the ancient psalmist marveled at what he could see on the ocean's surface, today we look in awe at the life-forms on the deepest ocean floor.

As with the psalmist, however, a modern person should pause and ask, "Just how did all of this happen?" The explanation that our complex earth and its ecosystems simply developed through random chance over billions of years just doesn't ring true or seem plausible to most people. For example, why do plants and animals reproduce? Science can help us see *how* this happens, but cannot answer the basic question of *why*. Even if just one single-celled life form developed from unplanned processes, why did it develop with the capability of reproduction, which even amoebas have?



Visual for Lesson 8. After discussing this visual, write the word **CREATOR** on the board similarly and ask for learners' suggestions in completing it.

Since scientific observations offer no answer to this question, we are driven to the conclusion that there must be intentionality undergirding our world. We cannot help but see the hand of the transcendent Creator, who is greater than and distinct from his creation. May we, like the psalmist, recognize God in his mighty power to create as we offer praise and thanks of his care for us.

B. Prayer

O Lord, you created us, each and every one. You know us better than we know ourselves, from the number of hairs on our heads to the many memories of our hearts. We owe our existence to you. We owe our daily sustenance to you. May we never forget how truly dependent we are on you, on your grace and mercy. We pray this in the name of your Son, Jesus. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Before God was Redeemer,
he was Creator.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Into the Lesson

Before class, invite a member of your congregation who excels at a certain craft to demonstrate that craft or display examples of his or her work.

Give the class a few minutes to examine any displayed work and to ask questions about the process of creating this work.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Craftsmen Chaos” activity from the reproducible page, which can be downloaded. Have students work individually or in pairs.

After either activity, lead into Bible study saying, “Beautiful items do not come about by accident. They are the products of a person’s skill, effort, and passion. We can know quite a bit about an artist by examining his or her handiwork. The same is true of God. The psalmist tells us that we can understand more about God’s nature when we examine the vastness and goodness of his creation.”

Into the Word

Divide the class into three groups. Give each group pen and paper, and one of the following sections of the Bible text. Have each group summarize their portion of the text so a preschool child could understand it. Our suggested responses are in italics.

Group 1—God is the king of the world ([vv. 1-4](#)).

God is like a king. But he is so big, no royal robes will fit him! The only house big enough for him is the sky! Even the biggest cloud in the sky is too small to be his car!

Group 2—God makes everything ([vv. 24-26](#)).

God makes things. But he does not make just a few things. He makes everything there is! Everything he makes is just right. The big things he makes are not too big. The small things he makes are not too small. He gives everything he makes just the right home.

Group 3—God takes care of everything ([vv. 27-30](#)).

The animals God makes get hungry sometimes. But they do not have to worry. God will always give them food to eat and water to drink! Animals do not live forever. When the weather gets cold, leaves fall off the trees. But they are not gone forever! God makes fresh, green leaves again in the spring.

After groups have finished, reassemble the class and have groups share their preschool paraphrases.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Crafty Creator” activity from the reproducible page. Have students work individually or in pairs.

Close either activity by saying, “While God is the great king, he is not a harsh ruler. While he creates everything, he does not step back and let creation fend for itself. The greatness of God is matched by his goodness. How should we respond to such a powerful, loving Creator?”

Into Life

At the turn of the twenty-first century, author Peter Huber coined the term *hard green* in reference to environmentalism. His focus was to move away from “save the planet” rhetoric that seems to predict immediate destruction of the earth, barring government intervention. In its place he proposed taking a “respect the planet” approach that focused on personal responsibility for conservation, efficiency, and waste disposal.

In light of God’s ownership of the world described in [Psalm 104](#), have the class devise personal “hard green” action plans. Write the following headings and questions on the board, and follow them with discussion:

REVIEW—Considering your own possessions and sphere of influence, where might you show better stewardship of God’s creation?

RECYCLE—How could you better implement the old Great Depression rhyme: “Use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without!”?

REFRESH—How can your excess be used to help those who have less?