

- *Pray for those who lead worship in your church, and ask the Lord to bless them with a renewed vision of what they can do to help people truly worship the Lord!*

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Your love draws me onwards, through even the trials and temptations of life. Your love draws me to the Cross where, inexplicably, I have nothing left to give You. I am empty before You, but You fill me up with praise, because the Cross is empty and You are alive! All glory be to You, Lord Jesus Christ! AMEN

Prayer

Keep our eyes on Your Cross O Lord, and save us from the perils of temptation. Keep us from misunderstanding what You have said to us, from leading others astray, or from enjoying the fruits of our sin or wickedness. Keep our souls and spirits fixed firmly on the Cross, and the life and death of Christ our Saviour, until He comes in glory! AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Security

Pray about your own personal security; the security of your home, the security of your travel and transport, and the day by day security of all the members of your family.

On-going prayers

- *Give thanks for the challenges faced by God's people today*
- *Pray for children born with disabilities and their parents*
- *Pray for countries of the world that experience internal strife*

Meditation

The politician works to organise and control the world.
But Christ alone knows the true path of history;
He sees the sins that destroy human plans.

The economist gives advice based on financial projection.
But Christ knows the true value of everything;
He holds the future in His hands for all to see.

The entrepreneur seeks opportunities to generate wealth.
But Christ is the source of all earthly things;
He gives it all away with incomparable love.

The celebrities believe they can conquer the world.
But Christ alone knows how such victory is won;
He is known by the Cross throughout the world.

The impact of the 'great' people we read about each day,
Is set against the only true measure of fame;
The millions of lives saved forever by Christ.

Bible Study - Psalm 100

A Psalm of thanksgiving.

we are His people, the sheep of His pasture.

¹ *Raise a shout to the LORD, all the earth!*

⁴ *Enter His gates with thanksgiving, and His courts with praise.*

² *Worship the LORD with delight! come before Him with joyful songs!*

Give Him thanks and bless his name!

³ *Know that the LORD, He is God. It is He who made us, and we are His;*

⁵ *For the LORD is good; His steadfast love lasts forever,*

Review

Psalms 100 is a classic hymn of praise, which thanks God for His wonderful and amazing love (100:5), and expresses this praise in words that are familiar to us because they are found throughout the Bible. The line 'serve the Lord with ...' occurs over 30 times in the Old Testament, for example, and 'His steadfast love lasts forever', occurs 41 times! At Easter time, our hearts are indeed filled with gladness, and there are a wide variety of ways in which we can express this. However, we can be blessed by allowing ourselves to measure our praises against those described in the Old Testament. The words used for praising God in Scripture have a range of meaning that is different from what we all too often assume. With a little research and insight, however, our understanding of what it means to praise God can grow considerably, and as we look at the words used in this psalm, we must not lose sight of the human sense of awe and wonder in our praise of God.

Praising God

There are a number of words in Hebrew that translate into English as 'praise', but the commonest is 'tehillah', which appears in verse 4; 'Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise.' The word 'tehillim' (the plural of 'tehillah', meaning 'praises') is in fact the title of the book of Psalms in the Hebrew Bible! So according to those who wrote them, all the psalms are works of praise; but it is hard for us to understand this when more than half of the psalms express worries, concerns and even complaints addressed to God!

All this sounds odd, largely because we think of praise as offering joyful worship to God, but the ancients clearly thought of it as much more. For them, 'praise' was what people did to honour the God who made them, and thus respect the fundamental difference between divinity and humanity. In this broader definition, praise could be happy worship, but it could also be to come to God with confession or to express concern. The feelings involved were not the point; praise was an attitude of heart that recognised God as the source of everything. To praise God could be to speak to Him about everyday concerns or every aspect of normal life, whether 'happy' or not (as we find in the psalms as a whole). For this reason, we can 'praise God' for Jesus' death as well as His resurrection, for example. Psalm 100 is clearly a happy psalm, and it would be wrong if our praises of God did not include happiness and joy, as this psalm does when it says 'raise a shout' and 'come before Him with joyful songs' (11:1). However, in the light of what we have said, you may well find that verse 3 expresses a more fundamental praise; 'know that the Lord, He is God. It is He who made us, and we are His ...'

Worship, service and work

In addition to the word for 'praise', there is one other word in this psalm that is often misunderstood; it is found at the beginning of verse 2; 'worship the Lord with delight ...'. The word 'worship' (used here and also the New International and the New Revised Standard Versions) is sometimes translated as 'service' (as in the English Standard, the New American Standard and the New King James Versions). The Hebrew word here is 'avah', and it can mean either worship or service, but it also means 'work for!' It is used in the Bible to refer to everything from tilling the ground to military service, as well as worship in the Temple!

What are we to make of this, for surely, this word has too broad a base within the Hebrew language for us to be certain about what it means? To begin with, we must accept that the general sense of the psalm indicates the worship of God. However, within this worship is the idea that this means we must do work to serve God. If we think we can worship God without doing anything to express our worship through how we live our lives, then we are sorely mistaken, and the same is true if we think we can worship God without doing any

specific tasks for Him. Quite simply, this means that worship without work by way of service is far less than what the Lord expects from us, even if from our point of view, we are having a good time in our worship! In terms of Easter, our worshipful response to Jesus' death and resurrection must surely be that if God does these things for us in Jesus, then in return, we must give to Him everything we are, everything we have, and everything we do!

Steadfast love and faithfulness

Of the many other significant and powerful words in this psalm, the other two that have a high profile in the Old Testament are found in the last verse (100:5); firstly, God's 'steadfast love', and secondly, His 'faithfulness'. Both these words, 'cheseth' (steadfast love) and 'emunah' (faithfulness) are strongly related to the idea of God's Covenant relationship with His people, first found in the stories of Abraham (Gen 12,15,17). These words describe the fact that whatever people do, God has made a solemn promise that He will not stop loving, and He will maintain this love faithfully throughout time; He will not destroy people for their sins without giving them a chance to turn to Him.

At Easter time, of course, we celebrate the completion of this great promise, because through His love God has offered His own Son to endure death on the Cross for us, and for our salvation. This is the evidence of God's faithful and steadfast love, and the evidence of His offer of salvation. Surely God's faithfulness and steadfast love are the reason why we should give Him thanks and praise, for without these, God would be entitled to give up on humanity and our sinful nature; for we murdered His Son for no good reason! But because His love means He is prepared to forgive, we have the lifeline of redemption; for 'by grace you have been saved by faith' (Eph 2:8). There is much to give thanks to God for within this psalm, and the more we understand what worship and praise mean and the reason why we are saved, the more we can join in with everything this psalm says.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What does 'worship' mean to you, and how does this psalm add to what you think it means?
2. How can we show God our worship in our everyday lives, and how can this make a difference to us or to God?
3. In what ways does this psalm connect with Easter and how does it celebrate the Easter message?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

I have highlighted the themes of praise and worship here because they are essential to our understanding of the psalms. Unless we accept that praise is bigger than having a good time in God's presence, and worship is more than gathering for a sing song before listening to a sermon, then we have lost the plot. There is nothing wrong with enjoying a good session of singing spiritual songs and hymns or gathering together to have a good time in 'worship', but the Lord God has so much more for us. He can bless us through our praise and worship in so many different ways!

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *When you go to worship next, take with you a small note-pad, and jot down some notes about how the worship you attend connects with what is written in this psalm. Let the Lord guide you to grow in worship.*