

Psalm 100 is one of the better known psalms. Many of us memorized it as children in Sunday School. It’s brief, concrete and straightforward; plus, it gives us specific direction as to what God would have us to do:

- *Shout for joy to the Lord...*
- *Worship the Lord with gladness ...*
- *Know that the Lord is God ...*
- *Enter his gates with thanksgiving.*

These are action verbs...well within our ability. Let’s use these four actions as an outline as we delve more deeply into the psalm. First, *“Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.”*

In his book, *The Twelve*, Walter Underwood tells of going to a Dallas Cowboys game. He said he was seated in one of the end zones and could hardly see the players on the field. Frustrated, he started watching a man sitting a few rows in front of him. On just about every play, the man would jump up out of his seat, point to the officials or some player and scream at the top of his lungs.

Late in the 4th quarter, the score was tied, and the Cowboys had the ball. It was now or never. All of a sudden, the man turned to the fans seated behind him and started leading a cheer! Dr. Underwood said he saw the man’s face for the first time, and he recognized him as a member of his own congregation. He said, “I can’t remember ever seeing him that animated on Sunday morning!”

“Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the lands,” is the first line of Psalm 100 in the Revised Standard Version. Don’t just whisper or mumble or stand around, afraid you’re going to disturb the person next to you. SHOUT! MAKE NOISE! Let the whole world know that the sovereign Lord of all creation is with us, he loves us, and he wants us to interact with him.

That’s what Heather Entrekin would ask us to do. She says her husband went back to his alma mater for a football game. With two minutes to go, and the final outcome hanging in the balance, he called her and held up his cell phone to the crowd noise. There were 108,000 fans in the stadium, most of them rooting for Penn State. Everyone on one side of the stadium yelled, “WE ARE!” And everyone on the other side of the stadium yelled back, “PENN STATE!” Back and forth it went. WE ARE...PENN STATE, WE ARE...PENN STATE—until the final buzzer sounded and the game was over. Penn State beat Michigan State by four points and the crowd left the stadium in triumph. Heather writes, “I got teary listening to all those people yell. There’s something about thousands of fans shouting out who they are, claiming their identity, their colors, their mascot, their school. There’s something thrilling about shouting a declaration of belonging.”

Psalm 100 shouts about an even bigger kind of belonging. It says, “We are—God’s people.” It might not be quite as catchy as the Penn State cheer, but it means a whole lot more. We are—God’s people. *“Shout for joy to the Lord.”* That’s the first step. And the second is this: *“Worship the Lord with gladness.”* And before you say “OK” to that, think about what it implies:

- God is all-powerful. What can we possibly do for God that God can’t do for himself?

- God is all-knowing. What tidbit of wisdom could we possibly share with God that God doesn't already know far better than we do?
- All creation belongs to God, from the highest mountain range to the deepest ocean; from whole continents to the tiniest molecules. What can we possibly give to God that God doesn't already own?

So, what does it mean to worship God? First, it means to give what you have as a symbol of your gratitude and devotion. In the words of an old hymn,

*Give of your best to the Master; Give of the strength of your youth.
 Throw your soul's fresh, glowing ardor, into the battle for truth.
 Jesus has set the example, dauntless was He, young and brave.
 Give Him your loyal devotion; Give Him the best that you have.*

Think of it this way. A three-year-old painstakingly colors a picture to give to his mother, or comes up to her with a dust cloth in hand offering to help clean the house. Do you think she's going to be upset or critical? Heavens no! In the same way, God is pleased with our gifts of love and devotion, no matter how small or inadequate they may seem to be. To worship God is to bring who you are; and to give what you have. It's also to rise from worship and serve others in the name of Jesus Christ.

In Matthew 25 in the Parable of the Great Judgment, Jesus commended the righteous for showing kindness to those in need. He said, *"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."* When the righteous asked, *"When did we see you hungry...or thirsty?"* he said, *"Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me"* (Matthew 25:35-36, 40).

To worship the Lord with gladness is to be a cheerful giver, lending a helping hand to those in need, showing mercy to those who are struggling, practicing random acts of kindness wherever you go, not out of obligation or duty, but out of gratitude for what God has done for you.

Next Psalm 100 says, *"Know that the Lord is God..."* You may not be aware of this, but there are many different names for God in the Hebrew Bible. This verse uses two of them: Yahweh and Elohim. What the psalm writer wants us to know is that the same God who watches over us and cares for us like a loving father or mother—Yahweh—is none other than the all-powerful God who brought all creation into existence—Elohim. The Lord is God...Yahweh is Elohim.

Years ago, I heard a preacher say: One of the most liberating things you can ever learn is this: "God is God, and you're not." It works in two ways: First, it lifts the weight of the world from our shoulders and sets us free from trying to be responsible for things over which we have no control. God is God, and you're not. It's not all up to you. And secondly, it limits the power and authority we often give to others. No matter how imposing or wise they may seem, they're not God either. It doesn't matter what position or what title they hold, or their prominence or power.

God is God, and we're not. Remember that next time your world is going to pieces and everyone is looking to you to hold it together. Remember it next time you're around a bunch of VIPs, who act like they hung the moon. There's a little passage in the first chapter of John's gospel that sums it up nicely.

When the temple leaders got wind of John the Baptist, they sent a delegation out to investigate. They found him and asked, “*Who are you?*” And John confessed freely, “*I am not the Messiah.*” “*I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord’*” (John 1:20, 22 & 23).

God is God, and we’re not. That’s what the psalmist reminds us, when he says: “*Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his...*”

Psalm 100 encourages us to be mindful of all God’s gifts, and to be thankful. And how important that is! I once heard that it’s physically impossible to be stressed out and thankful at the same time. It has to do with endorphins, or something. Try this: In the midst of a stressful day, take a one-minute break. Find a quiet place and breathe deeply, holding your breath for a few seconds, then exhale slowly. As you gently relax, think about all the things you have to be thankful for. Just like that, your stress will be gone.

What are you most thankful for today? Here’s my short list to get you started:

- I’m thankful to be alive. Consider the alternative. To be alive is to have the potential of doing something creative, constructive and beneficial – if it’s only to feed the dog or the cat.
- I’m thankful for the gift of love. To love and to be loved turns existing into living.
- I’m thankful for the gift of time. We have twenty-four hours every day—no different than anyone else—to use in almost any way we choose.
- I’m thankful for the air I breathe, the water I drink, the food I eat. They not only sustain our life, they give us strength and pleasure.
- I’m thankful for the gift of color. Can you imagine a glorious sunset in black and white?
- I’m thankful for the gift of music. It warms my heart and speaks to my soul.
- I’m thankful for earthworms that till the soil, and a thousand other creatures working day and night in harmony with the earth.
- I’m thankful for the rotation of the earth, for night and day, and for the seasons—that winter won’t last all year long!
- More than anything else, I’m thankful for a God who loves us, warts and all, and has proven that love beyond all doubt by sacrificing his only Son to redeem us from our sinful nature and reconcile us to himself.

Take a moment to make a list of all the things you can think of to be thankful for, then offer them up to the Lord in praise and thanksgiving. Above all, recognize how God has proven his love, once and for all, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, to open the door to a loving, lasting relationship with God and all creation.

When Henri Mancini, the West Aliquippa songwriter, turned sixty-five, his daughter, Felice, composed a little poem to give to her father. He set it to music, and the Carpenters (remember them?) liked it so much they recorded it and put it on one of their albums. It goes like this: “*Sometimes—not often enough—we reflect upon the good things, and those thoughts always center around those we love. And I think about those people who mean so much to me; who, for so many years have made me so very happy. And I count the times I have forgotten to say, ‘Thank You!’ and just how much I love them.*”

“Enter his gates with thanksgiving” (v. 4), dear friends. Marvel at all of God’s good gifts. And never ever forget to say *thank you!* Amen.

(The content and ideas of this sermon come from a sermon by Philip McLarty, Copyright 2011.)