

Adult Teaching Resources

October 18, 2020



A Prayer List for Today

Psalm 80:1-19 (RCL 80:7-15)—“Restore Us, Lord”

Psalm 23—“Lead Us, Lord”

Psalm 96:1-13—“Be Honored, Lord”

The Right Stuff

Matthew 22:34-46—“The Right Questions”

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“Be Honored, Lord”

Psalm 96:1-13

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Bible Background

Key Verse: Psalm 96:2—Sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.

Most songs have a short shelf-life. They come out, have a brief time of popularity, and then fade away. Then there are those songs that seem timeless. Some of the “oldies” are as popular now as they were when they were first released. Those songs have the magical combination of great lyrics and a memorable melody.

Today, we’ll explore one of those “oldies” that has remained popular throughout the years. While no one is certain of the melody, the lyrics continue to speak to us today.

Opening

After everyone arrives, keep everyone in the large group. Give each person a small slip of paper and a pen. Ask each person to write their favorite hymn/song of praise on the slip of paper. Collect all the slips, then as you read each title, let the group guess who chose that hymn/song of praise as their favorite.

It is very possible to have two or more people choose the same song. Before moving to the next slip of paper and song title, ask why that hymn/song of praise is that person(s) favorite. Continue until everyone’s song has been listed and every one has been matched with their song.

Ask these questions before moving to the Bible:

Did you recognize any themes with the songs you all chose? What were they?
What it is about the song you chose that makes it your favorite, or most memorable?
What does your song choice say about God and how you relate to God?

Reading the Bible

What does the psalmist want to sing to the Lord? (a new song)

What does the psalmist want to tell? (the Lord’s salvation from day to day)

Reading the Bible *continued*

What does the psalmist want to declare? (his glory among the nations and his marvelous works among all the peoples)

What are the gods of people? (idols)

What did the Lord do? (made the heavens) What is in his sanctuary? (strength and beauty)

What does the psalmist ascribe to the Lord? (glory and strength, glory due his name)

What does the psalmist tell us to do? (bring an offering, come into his courts)

When we worship, what should we say? (“The Lord is king! The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved. He will judge the peoples with equity.”)

How does creation react to the Lord? (Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy)

What is the Lord coming to do? (judge the earth)

How will he judge the world? (with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth)

Making Connections

Why do you think we sing in church? What do our songs say about us? What do our songs say about God?

If you were writing a song about God, what one idea or theme about God would you make sure was included in your song?

When has a hymn/song of praise had a significant impact on you? What was the situation? What were you dealing with? What was the song?

Why do you think we sing praise songs in worship? How does a song of praise affect your attitude and outlook?

Our Lesson Writer says, “The word for “worship” in v. 9 literally means ‘to bow down’ or ‘to prostrate oneself.’” How does your church invite you to worship God in that way? How do you worship God in that way?

What are the other gods that get in the way of us worshipping the true God? How do we let those gods get in the way?

What is the most impressive sanctuary you’ve been in? Where you able to worship in that space? If so, share your experience. If not, what do you think worship would be like in that space? Why do you consider that space to be the most impressive?

Making Connections *continued*

When you worship, what do you feel? What do you experience? How could you describe your time of worship to someone who had never been in a worship service before?

Our Lesson Writer says, “The message is not for Israel alone, but for all the nations – indeed, for “all the earth,” as in v. 9 and in the following verses. And the message is that “The LORD is king!” God reigns.” What does it mean for you that the Lord is king? How does that come to life in your faith journey? What does the kingdom of God look like to you? What can you celebrate about God’s kingdom? What work still needs to be done with God’s kingdom?

What do you think the psalmist meant when he wrote that God would “judge the peoples with equity?” Do you think we are doing a good job of judging the peoples with equity? Why do you say that? What, if anything, needs to change?

How do you rejoice and praise God? How is your praise different from other forms of excitement and joy? How does God know your praise is directed toward God?

So What?

Have everyone remain in the large group.

Share these words from Lesson Writer:

“For the psalmist, God’s coming judgment was more than that: it would be a time when God would restore a proper order and put all things right. We know that many things are out of order in our world; many things are not right.”

From your perspective, what is out of order in our world?

What needs to be put right in our world?

What can you do to restore order to our world?

What have you done last week to make the world a more just and equitable place?

What can you do next week make the world a more just and equitable place?

What can your church do to make the world a more just and equitable place?

Give the group time to share their thoughts and ideas.

Then, as a way of closing the lesson, ask your group to think of the words they would include in a new psalm that should be written as a praise to God for this new attempt at restoration, justice, and equity in the world.

The Challenge

This week do one thing you talked about in the So What section that will make the world a more just and equitable place.

Prayer

Loving God, we praise your name. You are a loving and just God. We know of injustices and need attention. We know of inequities we can help. Give us the wisdom and courage to step up and do the work your kingdom needs. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

How many verses?—While I have followed some scholars in perceiving three primary sections in the psalm (vv. 1-6, 7-10, 11-13), others divide it into two (vv. 1-6 and 7-13), and still others break it into four parts, subdividing it into vv. 1-3, 4-6, 7-10, and 11-13. The important thing is to note that the psalm contains both calls to rejoice and reasons for the rejoicing.

Wonderfulness—In verse three, the call to “declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples” includes some powerful words. The word translated as “glory” is *chabôd*, a noun derived from a verb that means “to be heavy” or “to be honored.” The noun form was commonly used to speak of the heavyweight glory or honor that was due to God.

The expression “marvelous works” (NRSV) or “amazing deeds” (NET) is a passive participle of a verb meaning “to be wonderful.” Terms like “works” and “deeds” are not in the text, but added for clarity: a literal translation might be “tell all the peoples about his being wonderful,” or “about his awesomeness.”

And the stars also—Yahweh is to be feared above all gods, the psalmist said, “For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the LORD made the heavens.” Mesopotamian gods like Shamash and Sin and Ishtar were identified with heavenly bodies like the sun, moon, and planet Venus, but it was Yahweh made the heavens and all that is in them.

Have you ever noticed that the story of creation in Genesis does not mention the sun or moon by name? That was intentional. The first chapter of Genesis was probably written after the exilic period, when the Hebrews had been exposed daily to Babylonian worship. The sun (*Shamash*) and moon (*Sin / Nanna*) were two of the most commonly worshiped gods in Babylon. The Hebrew word for sun (*shemesh*) was derived from the same Semitic root as *Shamash*, and the writer wanted there to be no indication that the heavenly bodies were divine, so he intentionally did not use the Hebrew words for “sun” or “moon.” Rather, he wrote that God created the “greater light to rule the day” and “the lesser light to rule the night.” As if it was an afterthought, he added “and the stars.”

The word choice is emphatic, insisting that the sun, moon, and stars were creations of the creator God, not divine beings in themselves.

Ascribe?—“Ascribe” (used three times in vv. 7-8) is not commonly used in English, but preferred by most translations (NRSV, NET, NIV 11, HCSB, NASB 95, ESV). It translates a word more commonly rendered as “give,” as in the KJV, but the context suggests a vocal component. Verbs like “attribute” or “credit” could catch the sense, but are no less unwieldy than “ascribe.”

Prostration—The psalmist’s call for worshipers to bow down or prostrate themselves before Yahweh may seem alien to most Christians, but would resonate clearly with those who practice Islam. Visit any mosque and you will find it carpeted with a distinct pattern but no

Digging Deeper *continued*

pews: worshipers stand or kneel on designated lines for much of the service, occasionally prostrating themselves during prayer. Those who pray at home or in other places at designated times of prayer also roll out a mat and kneel or prostrate themselves to show humility as they pray.

The Eco-psalmist—Long before modern ecologists began to emphasize the interdependence of the natural environment, the psalmist understood that all things are connected. He could not have described the importance of the ozone layer in the upper atmosphere, the dangers of acidification of the oceans, or the perils of pollution on land and streams, but he understood that everything from the skies to the seas and from fields to forests was part of God’s good creation.

Wealth disparity—Statistics on wealth disparity were taken from the Chicago Booth Review article, “Never Mind the 1 Percent: Let’s Talk About the .01 Percent,” by Howard R. Gold, and from The Washington Center for Equitable Growth, whose report includes this observation: “Wealth disparities have widened over time. In 1989, the bottom 90 percent of the U.S. population held 33 percent of all wealth. By 2016, the bottom 90 percent of the population held only 23 percent of wealth. The wealth share of the top 1 percent increased from about 30 percent to about 40 percent over the same period.” The articles may be found online at <https://review.chicagobooth.edu/economics/2017/article/never-mind-1-percent-lets-talk-about-001-percent> and at <https://equitablegrowth.org/the-distribution-of-wealth-in-the-united-states-and-implications-for-a-net-worth-tax/>.

Injustice and incarceration—The statistics cited in the lesson are drawn from a 2018 report from “The Sentencing Project” to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance. The report can be found here: <https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/un-report-on-racial-disparities/>.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

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What does it mean to “Worship the LORD in holy splendor”?

In v. 9, the psalmist calls for people to “Worship the LORD in holy splendor.” Knowing how to interpret this is difficult because the Hebrew expression is rarely used.

One view is that it might refer to the “holy splendor” of the sanctuary, or with reference to God, imaginatively clothed in majestic holiness. The NIV 11 and HCSB both have “Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.” The KJV took a similar approach, calling people to “worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.”

The NRSV seems to connect the phrase to the worshiper, but without much clarity: “Worship the LORD in holy splendor.” Is it God’s holy splendor, or a characteristic of the worshipers?

The word rendered as “splendor” occurs only five times in the Hebrew Bible, once as “the glory of a king (Prov. 14:28) and elsewhere in the context of worship (1 Chr. 16:29, 2 Chr. 20:21; Ps. 29:2, 96:9). In most cases, it seems to describe impressive clothing such as that worn by a king, the priests, or the temple singers. Thus, the NET and NASB 95 indicate that those who praise God are to “worship the LORD in holy attire.”

If this is the correct interpretation, it does not suggest that a person cannot worship in jeans and a T-shirt, but it does imply a certain formality to worship, one reason why many people like to dress in their “Sunday best” as a means of showing respect to God.

However we interpret it, the phrase indicates that worshipers, like God, should be characterized by a spirit of holiness—which is a splendid thing.