

Small Group Leaders Pit Stop

Introduction to Psalm 93-100

The Poetry of the Psalms - Parallelism

Psalm 1:6, 6:1, 24:13, 34:15, 37:21, 73:26, 92:9, 93:1 93:3, 93:4, 103:10, 120:2.

Reinforce	Elaborate	Contrast	Climax
Line 2 reinforces line 1 e.g. Proverbs 3:10	Line 2 elaborates on line 1 e.g. Psalm 4:1	Line 2 contrasts with line 1 e.g. Proverbs 10:1	The verse builds to a climax e.g Habakkuk 3:17-18

The Variety of the Psalms - Psalms for every season of the soul

In the Psalms *"Everyone in whatever state he is, finds words that fit his case and suit his exactly, as though they were put there for his sake alone... Then he becomes sure that he is in in the community of saints."* (Martin Luther)

The Psalms help us to express ourselves to God. As we pray and sing the Psalms we are "praying back to God what he has spoken." Indeed as we find ourselves identifying with the Psalmist so "their words become our words." (Harman)

The Structure of the Psalms - Praise the LORD

Book 1 - Ps1-41 (Ps 1&2 act as gateway to the whole Psalter.)

Book 2 - Ps 42-73

Book 3 - Ps 74-89

Book 4 - Ps90-106

Book 5 - Ps107-150

It's hard to identify one unifying theme in each book.

Groups of Psalms Around A Theme

e.g. **Ps93-100** - The LORD is King, **Ps 120-134** - Songs of Ascent sung by pilgrims on the way to Jerusalem, **Ps144-150** - Praise the LORD

Climax of Praise

At the end of each book - 41:13, 72:18-19, **89:46-52**, 106:48, 150:6.

At the end of the Psalter - 144-150.

--> The Purpose of the Psalms - Praise the LORD in every season

The Themes of Psalm 93-100

The LORD is King of all because he is the creator of all...

Ps 93:1-4, 95:3-5, 100:3

This is the key theme from which everything else flows. It bookends these Psalms

...The LORD is King above all other gods

Ps 95:3, 96:4-5, 97:7, 97:9-12, 98:2, 99:8-9

...The LORD is the Saviour of his people

Ps 97:10-12, 98:2, 99:8-9.

...The LORD is the Judge of all

Ps 94:1-3, 94:10-11, 94:22-23, 96:10, 96:13, 97:2-6, 98:9.

...The LORD is to be Praised and Worshipped by everyone and everything everywhere

95:1-2, 95:6-7, 96:1-3, 96:7-10, 96:11-13, 97:1-2, 97:8-12, 98:1-3, 98:4-6, 98:7-9, 99:1-3, 99:8-9, 100:1-3.

Group work - Which of themes occur in Psalm 96?

Psalm 93-100 and Israel

Encouragement - Throughout Israel's history there was a fear of the powerful surrounding nations who each had their own gods. What an encouragement to be reminded that the LORD is YOUR God and the LORD reigns over all nations and all gods.

Challenge - These Psalms remind Israel that God chose them so that they would be a light and a blessing to the nations. The LORD is not just their God, he is the God of everyone everywhere and so everyone needs to come to praise and worship the LORD. Ps96:3...

Psalm 93-100 and Christ

Philippians 2:9-11

Jesus Christ is Lord! He is the eternal king of the universe and one day every knee will bow to him! As we sing these Psalms about God's kingship they will inevitably take us to Christ and cause us to delight in the beauty and majesty of his kingship.

Psalms 93-100 and Us

Encouragement - *Our God reigns! Israel's songs are now our songs in Christ and so in a world that is hostile and in a society where we feel small and marginalised we can celebrate and rejoice as we sing these Psalms.*

Challenge - *The LORD is the creator of all and so it is not just enough for us to worship him. Everyone everywhere should worship him and so his people must go out and tell the world that the LORD is the creator of all and so he reigns and one day he is the one we will all stand before as our judge.*

This term our focus as a church is on loving the lost and that's why we are reading and studying these Psalms. These Psalms call us to mission. The logic of these Psalms is that as we love and praise the LORD we will also urge those around us to join in praising the LORD.

Small Group Leaders Notes

Psalm 93

Context

• **Psalm 93-100**

- These Psalms are united together by the theme of the Kingship of the LORD. They are a declaration and a celebration of the fact that the LORD reigns (93:1.) This declaration that the LORD reigns is built upon the fact that he is the creator of all. He is therefore the judge of all, he alone can save his people and all other gods are nothing compared to him. For more on these themes see the introduction to the Psalms handout from Pit Stop.

• **Psalm 89:9-13**

- Psalm 89 comes at the end of book 3 (Psalm 93 is in book 4) and is a Psalm that reflects both the reign of God and the way that the rebellious nations seek to challenge God's rule. Psalm 89:9-13 contain several themes that we will encounter in Psalm 93. These verses emphasise the LORD's reign (89:90), his strength (89:10), his status as creator (89:10-11) and the fact that forces of wickedness are hostile to God, his reign and his people (89:9.)

• **Mark 4:35-41**

- Psalm 93 tells us that the waves of the sea are mighty and yet the LORD is mightier still. This Old Testament background makes Jesus calming the storm in Mark 4:35-41 all the more remarkable. By mightily calming the sea with just a word Jesus is showing that he is the LORD, he is the mighty ruler who reigns. This means that we can rightly sing this song about Christ.

Structure

• ***The LORD Reigns - Everywhere and Always (v1-2)***

• **"... Robed in Majesty and armed with Strength (v1)**

- Notice the poetic elaboration in the first two lines of v1. The idea of the LORD "robed in majesty" is repeated but also built upon in the second line because we see that the LORD is not just majestic, he is also "armed with strength."
- Think of the picture being painted for us here. Right at the start we have been told that "the LORD reigns." This is the big idea of the Psalm and everything else in the Psalm hangs off this. The question is 'what sort of king is the LORD?' Here we see he is a majestic King. He's like a King processing through his palace clothed in the finest purple robe.
- Yet he's not just a ceremonial king. He's not like our royalty who are effectively powerless. He is not just wheeled out as a figure head for special occasions (though many of us treat him like this.) Instead he is "armed with strength." He's a warrior king. He's ready for battle. He's strong, he's got real power. He's not just a constitutional monarch.

• **"The world is established, firm and secure" (v1)**

- The LORD reigns and he is armed with strength and so the world, his world is established, firm and secure. Society questions whether there really is anyone on the throne. Yet the LORD reigns, he's on the throne, he is armed with power, he has established the world. He is the creator and sustainer and so the world is firm and secure. The universe operates according to laws of physics and science precisely

because the LORD reigns. If he did not reign and if he were not armed with strength then there would be chaos and uncertainty.

- In v1 we see the geographical scope of God's kingdom. He is the king of the world because he is the majestic, strong king who created, established and sustained the world. The LORD reigns everywhere!
- **"You are from all eternity" (v2)**
 - The world is only established (v1) because the LORD's throne was established long ago, indeed the LORD is from all eternity.
 - We have seen that the LORD reigns everywhere (v1), now we see that the LORD has always reigned (v2) and he will always reign (v5). The LORD always has been and always will be the king.
 - The LORD reigns everywhere you look and any time you choose. This is great to remember. There are times when we just need to be reminded of the simple and yet profound truth - The LORD Reigns! He reigns everywhere from Saudi Arabia to Scunthorpe and he has always reigned, from eternity in the past to eternity in the future. Before you read on just stop and reflect on that. Take a moment to dwell on this great reassuring truth. Think of how comforting it is to know that, our God reigns! He always has done and he always will do.
- ***The LORD Reigns - Even when the Seas Rage (v3-4)***
 - **"The Seas have lifted up..." (v3)**
 - Notice the repetition and building up that we get in v3. The repetition of "the seas have lifted up..." escalates through the verse and captures something of the rhythm of the waves of a storm growing in strength as they pound the shore. It's important to take the time to notice this. With poetry we don't just want to focus on what is being said, we also want to pay attention to how the Psalmist is saying it. Whenever the Psalmist repeats himself ask yourself why? What is he trying to achieve? What emotion is he trying to bring to us? What is the mood of a verse like this and how does the repetition help to develop this?
 - **"Mightier than... mightier than... the LORD on high is mighty." (v4)**
 - Again we get repetition which builds momentum until finally v3-4 reach their climax with the declaration that "The LORD on high is mighty." The seas are a great picture of power and chaos and yet the LORD is mightier even than the storms and seas. The Psalmist knows that the physical world is one of turbulence and upheaval. Like us he lives in a world of natural disasters. He knows that it is a world of storms and floods... but he also knows that above it all "the LORD reigns!" The forces of nature are mighty... but the LORD on high is mightier!
 - Again the Psalmist could have just said, "The LORD is the Almighty" but because this is poetry he elaborates and uses images to draw us into so that we will not just know "the LORD on high is mighty" but we will also feel it. That's what v3-4 are all about.
- **The Seas in Jewish thinking**
 - On the one hand these verses work on a literal level. The seas do have great power and yet the LORD is mightier even than the seas. Yet in Jewish thinking the seas also often used metaphorically to represent the forces of wickedness and foreign gods (see 89:9-10 where Rahab is used as a name for Egypt.) The seas are often a picture of the forces that are hostile to God and to his kingdom. These forces will raise their voices and flex their muscles (just look at what's going on in our country

and in the world at the moment) but the LORD on high is mightier! The waves will crash down on God's people but God still reigns! He reigns in spite of opposition not without opposition.

- Stop and think of the different powerful "seas" and mighty "waves" that we see in the world today. Think of Atheism, Militant Islam. Think of the personal storms that you have experienced in your own life. Then re-read v3-4 and enjoy the fact that the LORD on high is mightier than all these things! Through all these storms the LORD your God still reigns!

- **The LORD Reigns - With His Holy Word (v5)**

- **"Your Statutes, LORD, stand firm"**

- God's statutes are his promises, his word that he has spoken to his people in the context of his covenant with them. Notice how the theme of being "established, firm and secure" that we saw back in v1-2 comes again at the end of the Psalm. The LORD reigns and so not only is his creation secure but so to is his word. It doesn't change, it remains true and certain because the LORD doesn't change. He is the eternal king and so his word stands firm.
- Even after the seas and storms have done their worst in v3-4 the word of the LORD stands firm/ his promises still stand.

- **Holiness adorns your house for endless days**

- Not only does God's word stand forever but so does his holiness. He is the eternal and holy God and so his call to his people is always one of holiness. Whether in the Old Covenant or the New Covenant God calls his people to be holy because he is holy.
- Even when the storms rage, as in v3-4, God calls his people to be Holy. The pursuit of holiness is not just a hobby for when the sun is out and the waves are flat. Instead God calls his people to pursue holiness and live for him even when the storms are raging and the waves are pounding down on us.

Tricky Bits

- ***"It's Poetry!"***

- Lets be honest, many of us find the logical flow of Paul's letters easier to read and study than the poetry of the Psalms. As we read these Psalms we need to recognise that we read poetry in a different way to prose. With a letter we study word by word and line by line to work out the logical flow of the argument. We look for connecting words like "therefore... so then... because." Such an approach is not really appropriate for poetry.
- Instead with poetry the feel and the mood and the imagery that is being used matters. How the Psalmist says something is as important as what he says. Poetry is designed to move us and to get us to see and experience God and the world differently. Poetry is not just about imparting information.
- As a result consider the general mood of the Psalm. Don't get too bogged down in the tiny detail of the Psalm. Instead consider the mood of the Psalm. Think about the picture and big message that is being presented to you. Spend time in the imagery that is used. Pay attention to the repetition and parallelism that is used. If there is repetition then ask yourself why? What is the Psalmist trying to achieve? Think about how the Psalm makes you feel? What sort of emotions does the Psalmist want to evoke in you?

- **"How does v5 relate to v1-4?"**
 - At first there does seem to be a bit of a clunky gear change between v4 and v5. In v1-4 there's a big emphasis on God's power over creation and now in v5 we are being told about his holiness and his word.
 - Yet as we saw in the structure section above there are several themes that link v1-4 with v5 (standing firm/ established, firm and secure as well as the theme of eternity/ endless days.) The Psalmist wants us to see that even when the powers (both natural, human and spiritual) have done their worst God still reigns, his word and his promises still stand and come what may he calls his people to holiness.
- **"What is God's house in v5?"**
 - In it's original context it could refer to the tabernacle or the temple. In light of 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 it could be referring to the church as the people of God or in light of 1 Corinthians 6:18-19 it could be referring to the individual Christian. Equally it could be referring to heaven or it could be looking forward to the New Creation (Revelation 21:22-22:5.)
 - To be honest it doesn't really matter because the principle applies to all of them. Holiness is always the mark of where God dwells with people. Holiness was the mark of the tabernacle and the temple. Holiness is to be the mark of the Spirit-filled corporate people of God as well as the spirit-filled individual Christian. Similarly holiness is the characteristic of heaven and the New Jerusalem will be God's holy city! So on every level we can say "holiness adorns your house for endless days" and so those who are going to dwell with him in his holy house must be made holy/righteous by the blood of the lamb and must be sanctified/continually made holy by the work of the Spirit.

Big Idea - The LORD Reigns everywhere and forever, even when the storms are raging

Suggested Applications

I know that time is tight but try and spend some time dwelling on this passage and working through these applications for yourself before you prepare study.

- **Find your comfort and rest in the security of knowing that the LORD your God reigns!**
 - In some ways this is a very simple Psalm with a very simply message - The LORD reigns. It's Sunday school 101 and so we can be tempted to pass over it without engaging with this simple and yet profound truth.
 - As God's people we will often be surrounded by loud and hostile voices and we will know times when we are being pounded by the waves. How great it is to know that our God and father is the one who is mightier than all other things. He is the eternal one, he reigned before the seas and the waves and he will reign long after they are God. He is the rock on whom we can stand and as we stand on him and rest in him we are safe and secure.
- **Praise the LORD for his eternal majesty, power and holiness**
 - This Psalm is declared to us that we might respond with praise! As we find our security in the LORD it is right that we praise him. Take a few minutes now to turn this Psalm into prayers of praise and adoration of the LORD our God who reigns!

- Similarly when you have finished your study with your group make sure that you leave time to respond with praise (whether that's sung or prayed.)
- **Pursue Holiness even in the storms of life**
 - As we've already seen God's call to his people is always "Be Holy." Even in the storms of life he calls us to walk in his ways and to honour him. Perhaps you are facing particular storms and battles and struggles at the moment and you are struggling to be holy and honour God in them. Spend some time praying that God would give you the strength to respond to these storms with holiness.

Suggested Bible Study

Starter Question

1. You could start by talking about power and where we see it today.

Perhaps you could play a word association game. When you say "power" what's the first thing that pops into people's heads. You could also talk about where we see power in nature, society or around the world. One way or another we want the groups to start thinking about the various different powerful and strong things in the world because this Psalm is going to show us that the LORD on high is mightier!

Digging into Psalm 93

2. What images and metaphors are used?

There is the picture of God robed in majesty like an impressive king. There is the idea of God being armed with strength like a warrior armed for battle. There is then the repeated picture of the seas and the waves and the storms lifting up in strength as a picture not just of the power of nature but the power of the forces opposed to God. All these are used together to convey the fact that God reigns eternally in majesty, strength and holiness!

The Psalmist could have just said this but by using pictures and metaphors it means that his message comes with power! That's why it's worth getting the group to notice and reflect on the images that are used and not simply to jump straight to the point being made. Remember this is poetry not prose.

3. What words and themes are repeated?

Again this is important because with poetry it's not just what is said but how it's said that matters.

Notice therefore how the idea of the LORD being "robed in majesty" is repeated and elaborated upon in v1.

Also notice the world is established and yet God's throne was established long ago. In other words creation is established only because God's throne is eternally established.

Again notice how "the seas have lifted up..." and "mightier... mightier..." are repeated and build with a crescendo through v3-4 until they reach their climax in the great truth that "the LORD on high is mighty."

Notice too how v1 & v5 both contain the theme of God's eternity. The Psalm is therefore bookended by the great truth that God is the Eternal King!

4. What is the tone and feeling of the Psalm?

We are meant to be struck by the power and majesty and holiness of God. We are meant to be left in awe and wonder as we consider the LORD. The Psalmist doesn't downplay the power of the seas which only serves to magnify the power and majesty of the LORD.

Applying Psalm 93

5. What is this Psalm teaching us about;

1. God?

He reigns! He always has done and he always will. He is majesty, mighty and holy! Other things may be mighty but God is mightier! Make sure we don't miss his Holiness in v5!

2. The World?

There is strength in the world but no matter how strong the forces of the world may seem, God is stronger! We also see that the world is secure because God is the eternal creator, sustainer and ruler of the earth. Many people (who ignore God) get very worried about the world and it's future. Yet as Christians we don't just see the world. We see the LORD who made the world, sustains the world and reigns over the world and so we know that the world is established, firm and secure.

3. Ourselves?

This all depends on who we are.

If we aren't a Christian then this Psalm says "Do you really want to go up against this God?" All human power, splendour and majesty pales in comparison to the power, splendour and majesty of the LORD.

As Christians this Psalm shows us that we are safe and secure if we take shelter in the LORD. No matter what storms we may face, our God is mightier! There is also an implicit challenge in v5. If holiness adorns God's house then the implication is that God's people are to live holy lives.

6. How does this Psalm point forward to Jesus?

In Mark 4:35-41 we see Jesus calming the wind and waves of a storm with a word. He is the King! He is robed in majesty and armed with strength. He is the mighty one who has even defeated death. He is the holy one. When we read this Psalm in light of the Lord Jesus we see that it's a song that is all about him!

7. How do you think we are meant to think and feel after reading this Psalm?

Whoever we are this Psalm is to leave us with a sense of awe and wonder at who God is. If we're not yet a Christian then this should unsettle us but if we are a Christian then it should reassure us and encourage that our God is the LORD on high who reigns everywhere and always!

8. How does this Psalm encourage you as a Christian?

You may not need to ask this question but it is here just in case the themes of encouragement and reassurance haven't come out in Question 7.

9. How does this Psalm challenge us to change how we think or live?

There is a challenge to holiness because holiness adorns the LORD's house and his statutes stand firm. So whatever we're going through, whether it's storms or sunshine God calls his people to holiness.

This Psalm also challenges those of us who are naturally anxious and worriers to question our anxieties and worries. We need to place our anxieties and fears alongside the picture of the LORD that we find in this Psalm. As we do that we need to ask ourselves why we are so worried about these different things when the LORD our God reigns. That isn't to say that we should belittle the battles and storms that we face. Some of us in the church are going through some really tough things! The wind and waves of the storms of life are strong and mighty but the LORD on high is mightier!

Small Group Leaders Notes

Psalm 96

Context

- **1 Chronicles 16:22-33** - Psalm 96 is one of the songs that is sung by God's people when the Ark of the Covenant is brought into Jerusalem. As God's people brought the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem, the city that had formerly been their enemies stronghold, God was declaring his victory over the nations! This theme resonates with the Psalm where God is to be worshipped because he is greater than all gods of the other nations and because he will come in righteous judgment.
- **Psalm 96-100** - In these Psalms the theme of God as the King over all comes again and again (see the introduction handout for more details.) In particular notice how the theme of idolatry is repeated in this Psalm and the next (see 97:7.) In both cases we are left in no doubt, idols are nothing compared to the living God and so those who worship them will be put to shame when God comes in judgment.
- **Matthew 28:16-20** - This Psalm calls on all nations to worship the LORD (not just Israel.) The Psalm *"forms part of the missionary outlook of the Old Testament. It is an anticipation of the worldwide mission of the Christian church"* (Harman.) We cannot read this Psalm without recognising the call to mission and evangelism.

Structure

- This Psalm divides into two parts; v1-6 and v7-13. Each part begins with a threefold command to praise the LORD ("Sing to the LORD..." in v1-2, and "Ascribe to the LORD..." in v7-8.)
- Throughout the Psalm God's people are to be focused up in praise to God (v1-2, v7-9) but also out in proclamation to the nations (v3, v10.)
- The Psalm comes to a climax as not only God's people and the nations but indeed the whole of creation is called upon to worship the LORD (v11-13.) There is a sense then of ever-increasing spheres of worship radiating out from God's people, then to the nations and finally to the whole of creation.

v1-6 - Everyone, Everywhere is to Praise the LORD because he is the majestic Creator and Rescuer

- **"Sing to the LORD..."** - Threefold repetition like this is used by the Psalmist to add emphasis! It's the Hebrew poet's equivalent of "!!!" Yet it's important to notice that each line repeats whilst telling us something slightly different (what is to be sung, who is to sing etc.)
- **"Proclaim... Declare..."** - It is not enough for God's people to worship the LORD. If he and his salvation (presumably the Exodus but also possible the conquest of the land because of the 1 Chronicles context) really is deserving of their worship then everyone else should also be worshipping him. God's people are to tell the nations of what the LORD their God has done in saving Israel and the nations are then expected to join Israel in worshipping the LORD.
- **"For great is the LORD..."** - In v4-6 we are given the primary and foundational reason why everyone everywhere is to worship the LORD. The LORD is far above all other gods (which are merely man-made idols.) He is the one and only God, majestic,

powerful, glorious and robed in splendour! As Christians we are not only to praise God for salvation, we are also to praise him for Creation!

v7-10 - Everyone, Everywhere is to Praise the LORD because he is Reigns and will come in Judgment

- **“Worship the LORD in the splendour of his holiness...”** This is an interesting phrase that’s worth pausing on. If we read it too quickly we can think that it says “Worship the LORD because of the splendour of his holiness” but that’s not what it says. Instead it seems to be saying that we, as worshippers, are to come and worship God clothed in the splendour of his holiness. In other words this line has the sense of saying, “come to worship the LORD in clean and pure garments.” When read like this we are reminded how it is Christ who has washed us clean, and given his righteous robes so that we, who are by nature sinful, can come and worship the LORD who is holy!
- **“Tremble before him, all the earth...”** - Notice here that the idea of trembling parallels the theme of “fear” in v4. As we worship God we are to come in awe as we remember that he is our creator, sustainer, redeemer and judge! He is the Uncreated Creator and we creatures. When we really begin to appreciate the gulf between us and God then we will really begin to worship him as we should.
- **“The LORD reigns...”** Here is the big reason for worship that is given in v7-10. The whole world is to worship God because he reigns! And because he reigns “the world is firmly established, it cannot be moved.” God reigns over his creation and so there is a degree of certainty and safety about his world. God reigns so he will sustain his world. Yet because God reigns he will also come in judgment. It is not enough for God’s people simply to tell the world that God reigns and that all other gods are really worthless idols. They also need to tell people that because God reigns he will judge. This theme of judgment is expanded in the following verses...

v11-13 The whole of Creation will praise God because he is Coming in Righteous Judgment

- This is an astonishing picture. The whole of creation is praising God! After what we have heard in v1-10 we would assume that creation is praising God because he is its creator. Yet the reason creation is praising God is that **“he comes to judge the earth...”** Why would anyone, let alone creation be praising God for his future judgment? That leads us on to...

Tricky Bits

“What kind of offering are we meant to bring as God’s People under the New Covenant? (v8)

- In it’s original context this would have been urging God’s people to bring literal sacrifices and offerings to the temple as part of their worship of God (see 1 Chronicles 16.)
- As New Covenant believers we can look to the cross and see that the ultimate sacrifice of the Lord Jesus has been offered once and for all (see Hebrews 10:5-10.)
- Yet the language of sacrifice and offering is still relevant to us today as new covenant believers. In Hebrews 13:15 we are urged “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise - the fruit of lips that openly profess his name.” Similarly in Romans 12:1 Paul urges us “in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living

sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God - this is your true and proper worship.” Again in 1 Peter 2:5 we are “like living stones, being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

- This helps us to see that we are to worship God with the whole of our bodies not just with our lips. It also helps us to see that worship is not just what we do when we gather (though this is very important), it is also what we are to do throughout our day to day lives as we live them for Christ. Perhaps you could spend time thinking about how you can worship God day by day throughout a typical week?

“Why is Creation Praising God for his future judgment? (v11-13)

- Romans 8:18-22 seems to be key here. In Romans 8 we are told that creation “groans” and “waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration.” Ever since the fall creation has been subject to a “bondage of decay” and so creation longs for the day of judgment when Christ will come in glory. On that day sin will be destroyed, all the effects of the curse will be completely banished and creation along with God’s children will be “brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.”
- Creation therefore is praising God in anticipation of his coming judgment because that is when the groaning of creation and God’s people will be over as sin is judged once and for all!

Big Idea

- **Everyone and everything is to praise the LORD for his creation, rule and coming judgment!**

Suggested Applications

- Let’s start with the obvious... **Praise the LORD**
 - The key application is worship so make sure you give time so that the group can respond to God’s word. You may want to do this by singing or by a time of prayer where people can praise God. If your group isn’t used to praying for a passage then why not write out some simple prayers of praise that people could use (thank you Raymond for that idea on Tuesday.)
 - As I mentioned earlier it would also be good to spend some time talking about the different ways that we can worship the LORD as we go about our day. Think about how you could do ordinary day to day tasks in a way that worships the LORD and declares his glory. For example “Can you worship the LORD in how you wash the dishes or cook or clean?” “Can you worship the LORD in the way that you do your work?” “Can you worship the LORD as you care for family and friends?”
- **Declare his glory among the nations**
 - While the primary application is obviously worship, we also must not miss this key application. The whole message of the Psalm is that it’s not enough for God’s people to worship the LORD. Everyone everywhere is also to worship the LORD. We can’t read this Psalm without hearing the call to mission that flows through it. This term our focus is on loving the lost and this Psalm is clearly relevant.
 - We all know that we are to be seeking to share the gospel with others around us and we all find it hard. Why not spend some time talking about why we find it so hard but

make sure you also spend some time talking about ways that you can help and encourage each other to witness. Why not talk about particular individuals who you want to share the gospel with and then pray for each other that you would have opportunities with that person in the coming week.

Suggested Bible Study

Starter Question

1. **You could play a word association game around the theme of worship.**

You say a series of words and the group have to say what immediately comes into their head. For example you could use words like “church” “singing” “praise” “worship” etc.

2. **Alternatively you could pose this question; “if your non-Christian neighbour asked you why you worship God, what would you say?”**

This question would help to introduce the idea of why we worship the LORD. This Psalm will present us with lots of different reasons why everyone should worship the LORD. If you use this question you just have to be careful because you may have people in your group who aren't yet Christians and so this question may make them feel awkward.

Digging into Psalm 96

3. **Re-read the Psalm and look out for any words or themes that are repeated;**

1. **What does this tell us about what God's People are to do?**

2. **Who else is to worship the LORD?**

These opening questions could be done as one big group or in smaller groups. There are lots of repeated verbs and commands in this Psalm and many of them are around the themes of worship and evangelism. For example “sing to the LORD” (v1-3), “proclaim/ declare” (v2-3), “ascribe to the LORD...” (v7-8), “let the heavens/ sea/ fields/ all creation” (v11-13). By noticing these it should help the group to see straight away what we as God's people should be doing. We are to worship the LORD and encourage others to join us in worshipping him (we will think about why we are to do this in the next question.)

These initial observation questions also help us to see that the whole of humanity and indeed the whole of creation are to worship the LORD. Don't worry if people are a bit confused by the idea of the whole of creation worshipping the LORD, we will see the reason for this in the next question.

4. **What are we told about the LORD in this Psalm? Why is he worthy of all this worship?**

There are so many reasons to worship the LORD in this Psalm. Don't rush over them but rather stop and discuss each of them in turn. In particular focus on his salvation/ marvellous deeds (v2-3), his creation (v4-6), his majestic rule (v7-10), his judgment - (v10-13.)

5. **We probably feel quite comfortable with worshipping God for his creation and salvation but how do you feel about worshipping God for his judgment?**

For most of us the idea of worshipping God for his judgment will seem strange and even uncomfortable. It is good to acknowledge this but we also need to see why God's coming

judgment really is a reason to praise him. Go to Romans 8 to help the group see why creation is praising God for his coming judgment.

Applying Psalm 96

6. In this Psalm we have seen that everyone, everywhere is to worship the LORD for his creation, his salvation, his rule and his judgment. How do you think this should impact;

1. Our Sunday Services?

2. Our Home Group?

3. Our Daily Lives?

4. Our Evangelism?

This general question is designed to open up various avenues of application around the theme of evangelism and worship.

As we think about our worship on Sunday mornings you might want to think about why we come together to worship? For example, when was the last time we praised God for his judgment? You might also talk about our attitude to corporate worship? Do we just go through the motions? If so then how does this passage challenge us?

Similarly if everyone everywhere is meant to worship the LORD then you might want to talk about how accessible our services are to people who don't normally come to church? What practical things could we do both corporately and individually to make it easier for others to join us?

As you talk about worship and your home group you might want to talk about how you can use part of your evenings for worship? As a group you could think about how you as a group can respond in praise to God? As mentioned above you could reorganise your prayer time so as to create space to praise God for what you have read in the Psalm.

Make sure you spend time talking about how we can worship the LORD in our day to day lives? Here would be a great opportunity for people to share how they as families and individuals worship the LORD day by day? It would also be good to spend some time thinking about what it will mean for us as new covenant believers "to bring an offering and come into his courts?" (v8) What might that look like for us in our daily lives? Try and help your group to see that worship is not just our singing but rather our whole lives are to be given in worship to God.

Finally don't ignore evangelism - it's a clear application from this passage. Rather than focusing on how tough and scary it is, why not focus on how this passage motivates us to do evangelism?

Small Group Leaders Notes

Psalm 97

Context

- **Exodus 20:18-21** - Psalm 97:2-5 draws on the imagery of Sinai to speak of the LORD's unapproachable holiness.
- **Psalm 19 and Romans 1:20** - Psalm 97 repeats the idea, found in Psalm 19 and Romans 1 that God reveals himself to all of humanity through his creation. "The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all people see his glory." As a result of this general revelation everyone is without excuse for not worshipping the LORD. From creation we do not know everything about God, but we do know enough to know that we should worship him! As a result, "All who worship images are put to shame..." The revelation of God in creation is sufficient and yet we ignore it.
- **Psalm 93-100** - Like it's neighbours, this Psalm picks up the theme of God's universal kingship. Yet as Kidner says "whereas Psalms 96 and 98 catch the sheer delight that is in store for the world, here the doom of rebels brings out the darker side of that event. If 96:10ff. pictured, as it were, the home-coming of a beloved master, this psalm shows the awesome approach of a conqueror."

Structure

- This Psalm falls neatly into 2 sections, v1-7 and v8-12. V7 is the pivotal verse around which the rest of the Psalm revolves. The two sections both begin with the same verbs;

v1 The LORD reigns, let the earth be *glad*;
 let the distant shores *rejoice*.

v8 Zion hears and *rejoices*
 and the villages of Judah are *glad*

The parallelism in these verses hold the whole Psalm together around this theme of rejoicing in God's universal kingship. This theme appears again in the final verse;

v12 *Rejoice* in the LORD, you who are righteous,
 and praise his holy name.

- **v1-7 - Let All People Rejoice and Worship the LORD for he reigns over all**
 - **v1 *The LORD is the Universal King*** - As these Psalms repeatedly tell us, the LORD reigns over all and therefore everyone everywhere should rejoice and worship him! The phrase "distant shores/islands" is a favourite of Isaiah's and is used to describe "the remote, innumerable outposts of mankind" (Kidner.) A more contemporary equivalent might be to talk about "the far flung corners of the globe" or something like that.
 - **v2-5 - *The LORD is the Holy King*** - As previously mentioned the imagery in these verses is taken from Sinai when God established his covenant with his people. It

speaks of his unapproachable holiness and purity. Interestingly whilst the appearance in Exodus 20 is primarily directed at God's covenant people, here in Psalm 97 God's holiness is being displayed for all people. In many ways these verses are scary (and rightly so.) The mountains, which we think of as so permanent and immovable, melt before the Lord of all the earth. These verses remind us of Hebrews 12:29 "Our God is a consuming fire" and the message in this Psalm is that no-one will escape his holiness and righteousness (notice how many times the idea of God's holiness and righteousness comes up in this Psalm - this is a key feature of the Psalm) when he comes.

- **v6 - *The LORD is the Holy and Righteous King...*** And everyone knows it - There is no escaping the fact that the LORD reigns and he is a holy God. Creation might not tell us everything about the LORD (for that we need special revelation of the scriptures and Christ) but creation tells us enough to convict us of our guilt for not worshipping the LORD.
- **v7 - *... So Everyone should Worship the LORD*** - I will say more about this verse in the Tricky Bits below but for now let's see that the big message in this verse is that everyone (even the idols) should worship the LORD. If we continue to worship our man-made idols rather than the LORD of v25 then we will be rightly put to shame. This verse is the climax of v1-7 which have been directed at the nations. Here is how the gentiles who are not yet part of God's people are to respond to the universal, holy and righteous, all consuming rule of the LORD - "Stop your idolatry and worship the LORD!"
- **v8-12 - Let God's People Rejoice and Worship him with Holiness for the LORD reigns over all**
 - **v8-9 - God's People hear and rejoice** - God's people hear the same declaration of the LORD's universal kingship and rejoice. God's beleaguered people rejoice to hear that their God reigns over all other gods in holiness and power. His "judgments" here are acts of deliverance for his people from their enemies as made clear by v10 "for he guards the lives of his faithful ones and delivers them from the hand of the wicked."
 - **v10-12 - God's People Respond**
 - Just as the nations were to respond to the LORD's reign with worship so his people are to respond in worship too. Their worship is not just to be with singing and rejoicing, though this is clearly important as it frames these verses in v8 and v12. God's people are also to respond with how they live - "let those who love the LORD hate evil..." In other words God's people are to mirror something of his holy character by loving the LORD and hating evil. When you think about it, this is surely the only fitting response to the LORD of v2-5.
 - These verses also pick up on the blessings God's people enjoy as they live under his universal, holy rule - "Light shines on the righteous and joy in the upright in heart." Whilst it is a terrifying prospect to be the enemies of the LORD (v2-7), it is a truly wonderful and blessed thing to be the people of the LORD (v10-12.)
 - In celebrating these blessings we, like Israel, are reminded that it's only by grace that we enjoy the blessings of being his people. It's only through Christ that we can "Rejoice in the LORD... and praise his holy name" as those who have been clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

Tricky Bits

- **“How can man-made idols/gods worship the LORD?”**
 - At first glance v7 does seem strange doesn't it? Throughout the Bible we are repeatedly told that idols are nothing, they're just inanimate, man-made objects that can't do anything. So why does the Psalmist say that idols are to worship the LORD? Doesn't that suggest that actually they are real and that they can do things?
 - The big thing to remember is that we're dealing with poetry and not prose. The Psalmist is therefore using poetic language to make his point. The big point in this verse is that idol worshippers are being called upon to renounce their idols and worship the one true, living and holy God who reigns over all! If they don't then they will be put to shame. To help make this point that the nations are to repent and turn to worship the LORD the Psalmist makes it clear that even these fake gods are really subject to the LORD and must prostrate themselves before him. The implication is “If your gods are worshipping the LORD then don't you think you should be too?”
 - We see something of this in 1 Samuel 5 where the Philistines had captured the Ark of God and put it in Dagon's temple and set it down beside Dagon. *“When the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the LORD! They took Dagon and put him back in his place. But the following morning when they rose, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the LORD! His head and hands had been broken off and were lying on the threshold; only his body remained.”* (1 Samuel 5:3-4.)

Big Idea

Whoever you are, rejoice in the LORD, and worship him, the universal, holy king

Suggested Applications

- **Rejoice in the LORD and praise him** - This is quite clearly the big application of the passage (see how it comes at key points through the chapter - v1, v8, v12.) Whoever we are there is reason to rejoice in the LORD and to worship him. As you prepare why not spend some time in prayer, praising the LORD for his universal reign (v1), his holiness (v2-5), and his salvation (v10). As a group make sure that you are giving plenty of time to praise and worship the LORD in response to this Psalm.
- **Turn from our idols** - As mentioned in the notes v7 is something of a pivotal verse. We are left in no doubt, all who worship images are put to shame, there will be no escape. Before we think about non-Christians who worship idols we need to stop and examine our own hearts. What are the idols in our lives that attract our worship. What things in our lives are rivals to God, competing for our affections. As you prepare meditate on this and examine yourself and repent of any idols that you are worshipping. As a group it would be good to acknowledge that even as God's people we can still be guilty of worshipping and living for things other than the LORD. v7 is therefore a warning to us as well as to the nations.
- **Be concerned for everyone we know who worship idols rather than the LORD** - As with so many of these Psalms it is not enough for God's people to worship the LORD. The LORD is the universal king and so he is deserving of everyone's worship. This Psalm shows us the terrifying consequences for this who refuse to turn from idols to

serve the living God. It would be good to give members of the group time to mention particular people they are concerned for so that you can be praying for each other and for these individuals.

Suggested Bible Study

Starter Question - Why do you think most people in Britain today don't worship the LORD?

This question is designed to get people talking as it's simply asking for people's opinions and there is not necessarily a right or wrong answer. You could talk about society in general or particular people that each of you know. This question should hopefully tie into the study because the big message of the passage is that everyone should worship the LORD because he is the Holy Most High who reigns over all the earth!

Digging into v1-7

1. What are we told about God in these verses?

This question is a simple observation question where people simply have to say what they see. At this stage you just want people to pick out the details even if they don't understand what it means. To help people understand what some of the poetic details mean (for example v2) you could turn up Exodus 20 or you if you have a knowledgeable group you could simply ask.

A. What sort of picture of God do these verses paint for us?

Having picked out the specific details it is good to stand back and look at these verses as a whole because this is a poem rather than prose. The Psalmist is painting a picture with words and he is trying to stir up particular emotions so it is good for us to stop, think about these and articulate them. This question and the next one should draw out the fact that this picture conveys God's power and holiness. This picture will stir up a range of emotions in us but particularly I think it's meant to stir up a sense of awe, wonder and fear.

B. What feelings do these verses stir up? Why?

See above.

2. How is everyone to respond to this God? Why?

We are told how we're to respond in v1 and v7. Everyone throughout the world is to rejoice and worship the LORD. You might want to explore why non-Christians should rejoice that God is king, surely that's not going to be their natural reaction.

In v7 the implied response is that we're to abandon our idolatry and turn to worship the living God. The implication is that you can't worship idols and God, you need to turn from one to the other. You might want to spend some time discussing what are the main idols in our society and even be more specific and talk about what are our own specific, personal idols.

Digging into v8-12

3. What else are we told about God in these verses?

The fact that God reigns and is greater than all other gods is reiterated for us (v9.) We're also told that he guards and rescues his people and that those who live under his reign enjoy his blessing (v10-11.) As God's people here are still more reasons for us to praise the LORD and rejoice in him.

4. How are God's people to respond to the LORD? Why?

As already mentioned we are to praise and rejoice in the LORD, not only because he reigns over all but because he rescues, protects and blesses his people as they live under his reign. As a group of Christians it is good to stop and give thanks for and rejoice in God's goodness to us. So often we can be so busy and overwhelmed with life that we don't stop to give thanks for the ways in which God has blessed us as his people. Perhaps you could stop at this point and give the group the chance to share ways God has blessed, saved and protected them and then spend time praying and giving thanks for these things.

Applying Psalm 97

5. It can be relatively easy to rejoice in the LORD as we sing at church on a Sunday morning. But what will it look like for you to rejoice in the LORD as you go about your daily life through the week?

Rejoicing in the LORD and praising his holy name is not just something that we are to do on a Sunday morning as we sing together. The implication of this Psalm is that it is to be our constant default throughout the week. Spend some time thinking about what this would actually look like for each of you in your daily lives. What will it look like to rejoice in the LORD on the school run? Or when you're ill? Or when work is stressful? Try and be as specific to your life situations as possible. To help this you might want to split into smaller groups so that application can be more personal.

6. Practically what sort of things could you do to help you rejoice in the LORD and praise his holy name throughout the week?

Again try and think of ways to help each other. In some sense it's easy to work out the application from this passage because it's repeated several times (v1, v8, v12) but in another sense it's really hard to know what this should look like in our daily lives. Try to give lots of time for these application questions. How as a group could you be encouraging each other and helping each other to praise the LORD through the week as you go about your daily lives?

Small Group Leaders Notes

Psalm 98

Context

- **Psalm 93-100 - The LORD, the King**
 - Unlike many of the other psalms in this section, Psalm 98 doesn't contain the phrase "the LORD reigns" but the theme of God's kingship is still central in v6. Indeed the LORD's kingship is a key reason why all the earth is to praise him. He is not just Israel's local king, he's the universal king!
 - Psalm 98 shares many similarities with Psalm 96. In particular notice how they start and finish on the same notes. Both begin "Sing to the LORD a new song" and both finish with creation praising the LORD for his righteousness and justice in judgment.
- **Isaiah 55:12-13 - Creation Sings**
 - Isaiah and the Psalmist use poetic imagery to speak of the whole of creation praising it's creator. This is a repeated theme through the Old Testament and it is picked up in the New Testament where in Romans 8 we are told that creation waits and longs for Christ's return. See the notes on Psalm 96 for more on this.
- **Revelation 15:3 - Praise God for his mighty deeds and justice**
 - In Revelation 15, as with Psalm 98, God's people stand in victory and sing the song of Moses and the Lamb which picks up the theme of praising the LORD for his great and marvellous deeds, his justice and truth, his kingship over the nations.

Structure

- Harman sees a progression in this Psalm of praise "as the call to sing to the Lord is progressively widened." First the congregation of Israel is called to sing the LORD (v1-3), then all the nations are to join in (v4-6) before finally creation itself is called to join the chorus (v7-9.)
- Another way to approach the structure of this Psalm is to see v1-3 as telling us **why** we are to sing to the LORD. Then v4-6 tell us **how** we are to sing to the LORD before in v7-9 we see **who** is to sing to the LORD.
- Either way the Psalm naturally falls into three segments; v1-3, v4-6, v7-9.
- **Sing to the LORD because of his Salvation (v1-3)**
 - **"Sing to the LORD..."** Here is the big application of the Psalm. Notice how many times the idea of singing occurs through this Psalm (v1, v4, v5, v6, v7, v8, v9.)
 - **"His Salvation"** Verses 1-3 are tied together by the LORD's Salvation. Notice how it occurs in each verse. Whilst the LORD's mighty deeds (v1) could be creation, the context of v1-3 show us that it is his salvation that are the mighty deeds in question here. In his covenant love God has remembered and rescued his people. Notice too that this is the LORD's salvation. It is his right hand (hand of power) and his holy arm that have achieved it (v1). Similarly it is the LORD who has revealed his salvation (v2) and in v3 it is he who remembered his love and his faithfulness. We are being left in no doubt, salvation is God's from first to last and so he alone deserves our worship!
 - "Revealed his righteousness to the nations... all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God." When God saves his people he does not do it in a dark corner. This is not a private salvation. Instead God acts in full view of the nations and

therefore reveals something of his power and character to the world. This is why the nations are called to worship the LORD (v4.) The nations have seen what the LORD has done for his people and therefore the nations are to join Israel in singing the praises of the LORD.

- **Shout for Joy to the LORD all the Earth (v4-6)**
 - **“Shout for joy...”** Immediately we notice that these verses are book-ended with this command to “Shout for joy to the LORD.” The tone of these verses is exultant and unrestrained. The nations are not just to go through the motions of singing to the LORD, they are to put some welly into it! There is also a sense of spontaneity in their worship as they are told to “burst into jubilant song...” The picture being painted is one where by the nations cannot help but burst out in songs of praise for the nations. It is a picture, of life, joy and genuine praise.
 - **“Make music to the LORD with...”** Music in church is probably the cause of more arguments in church than almost anything else. In studying a Psalm such as this one there is the danger that it could start such an argument. Regardless of our personal preferences let us notice that the Psalm encourages people to use all sorts of different instruments as they sing to the LORD (harps, trumpets, ram’s horn and human voices.) Similarly Psalm 150 encourages worshippers to use trumpet, harp, lyre, tambourine, strings, pipe and cymbals. The message seems to be that all sorts of instruments are to be used to worship the LORD because he is the Creator and King of all.
 - **“... The LORD, the King.”** Here is the reason why the nations are to join Israel in worshipping the LORD. This call to worship is in effect a call to conversion whereby the nations will submit themselves to the LORD as their king. His kingship has been displayed to the nations through his salvation and righteousness that he has revealed to them.
- **Let Creation sing to the LORD because of his coming judgment (v7-9)**
 - **“Let the sea resound...”** As the Psalm builds towards its climax, the choirmaster now calls on creation to join in this chorus of praise. Both land and sea and all that are in them are to join in worship. The message is clear - everything everywhere is to joyfully worship the LORD.
 - **“For he comes to judge the earth”** Here is the reason for creation joining in worshipping the LORD. See the notes on Psalm 96 for why creation would celebrate God’s coming judgment. Kidner provides a helpful summary “Nature will not come into its own until man himself, its proper master, is ruled in righteousness and equity.”

Tricky Bits

- **What does the Psalmist mean by “a new song”?**
 - Harman helpfully explains that “as in Psalm 96 a ‘new song’ is one with eschatological (end-time) overtones.” This means that it is one that looks forward to and anticipates God’s final salvation and judgment. This means that whilst it looks back to the Exodus in v2-3, it also looks forward to the greater Exodus of Christ’ first coming and his second coming as the conquering judge and king (v4-9.) This idea of a new song occurs in Revelation as well (for example 5:9) where again it picks up both God’s salvation and judgment that is tied up with Christ’s first and second coming.

- ***If the LORD “remembered his love and faithfulness to Israel” then doesn’t that suggest that he had forgotten them?***
 - When the Bible speaks of God remembering (see also Genesis 8:1 and Exodus 2:24) it doesn’t imply that God had forgotten about his people as we might do. Such forgetfulness would deny God’s omniscience which scripture clearly teaches (Psalm 147:5.) Instead when the Bible speaks of God remembering it means that now God has decided to act upon his covenant promise. It is a question of God’s timing rather than God’s memory.
- ***Why does the Psalmist say that salvation is for the LORD (v1)? Surely salvation is for us isn’t it?***
 - Ultimately God acts for his own glory. His glory is his highest concern and so the ultimate end of God acting to save his people is that he might be glorified. We need to be careful that we don’t think more of ourselves than we ought to.
- ***How can the rivers clap their hands?***
 - Remember that this Psalm is poetry and so the imagery is clearly not to be taken literally. The Psalmist uses poetic license to personify creation as a means of expressing creation’s worship in a way that we can comprehend. Don’t try and nail down the details of how rivers could clap their hands but instead stand back and take in the big picture - creation praises the LORD for his coming righteous judgment.

Big Idea

Everyone and everything is to joyfully sing praise to the LORD for his salvation and judgment.

Suggested Applications

- **When was the last time you sung joyfully about God’s judgment?**
 - As with Psalm 96 the theme of praising God for his judgment can jar with us. As Christians we are obviously keen to praise the LORD for his salvation but the thought of praising God for his coming judgment probably doesn’t sit so comfortably with us.
 - If we do feel uneasy about worshipping God for his judgment then what does that say about us? Have we failed to grasp that God’s coming judgment is actually good news because “he will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity”? When we don’t celebrate God’s judgment is it because actually we have believed our culture’s lie that says that all judgment is intolerant and wrong?
 - God’s judgment is something that his people should celebrate because it is the day when justice will finally be done once and for all. It is shocking to think that people like Stalin died in their sleep without being brought to justice (in this life) for what they did. Yet God’s final judgment means that every wrong will be righted, there will be no place for the guilty to hide and there will be no miscarriages of justice. So as counter-cultural as it might be we should join creation in singing “before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth.”
- **How heartfelt and joyful is our sung worship?**
 - The tone of this Psalm is one of heartfelt, jubilant worship of the LORD. How does this compare to our worship as we join together Sunday by Sunday? This is a question of our hearts in worship rather than the external form and style of our worship. Do our hearts reflect this sort of joy and celebration of God’s salvation and judgment?

Personally ask yourself whether you are just going through the motions as you sing. Are you so distracted with all the things that need to be done that you are not really focused on the LORD. As someone who is normally very busy on a Sunday this can be a problem for me. What could you do to prepare your hearts to focus on worshipping the LORD? Would reading and meditating beforehand on the passage that is going to be preached help? Could you as an individual or as a family spend time singing or praying before you come to church on Sunday to prepare for corporate worship? Are there things that we could do as a church so that we really are coming to the LORD in joyful song? Perhaps your group could share things that they do to help them worship the LORD joyfully.

- **Worship is not just the duty of the church?**

- As with so many of these Psalms we see that the whole earth is to worship the LORD not just God's people. John Piper famously says that "Mission exists because worship doesn't." In other words the church is compelled to go out on mission because there are people, made by God in his image, who are not bringing him the worship that he deserves. This means that as we sing and worship together on a Sunday it should motivate to reach out with the gospel to those who aren't yet worshipping with us.
- Very often our evangelism can be motivated by a sense of duty and yet I think that if you asked the Psalmist for his motivation in evangelism you would get a very different answer. From Psalm 98 the Psalmist's motivation for mission seems to be that God would get all the praise and worship that he deserves from everyone. So let's ask ourselves this challenging questions; "Is my evangelism of so lacklustre because I do not have sufficient concern for God's glory?" If I were more concerned with God getting the worship that he deserves then I would probably be more energetic in evangelism.

Suggested Bible Study

Starter Question - If you asked your non-Christian friends to describe church services, what sorts of words would they use?

This question could help the group to begin to think about the mood and tone of church worship. I would guess that most non-Christians feel that church services are dull, lifeless and boring and perhaps there are times when that is sadly true. Hopefully this should set up a contrast with what we are going to see in Psalm 98.

Digging into Psalm 98

1. What words, phrases or ideas are repeated in this Psalm?

- *Hopefully everyone in the group can get involved in this question and shout out some answers. Quite quickly we begin to see that singing, salvation, shouting for joy to the LORD, and judgment are some of the things that keep being repeated.*

2. How would you describe the tone and mood of this Psalm?

- *You'd say that it's one of joy and jubilation. You get the sense that the Psalmist really means what he's saying. At this point the group might pick up on how it is strange to celebrate God's judgment. If that happens then you could get the group to consider why it is that God's judgment is such good news. This might feel like repeating a discussion that you had around Psalm 96 but it's good for us to see that the Psalms repeatedly celebrate God's judgment.*

3. Who is called to worship the LORD in this Psalm?

- *As we noticed in the structure we see three circles of worshippers; God's people in v1-3, the nations in v4-6 and then creation in v7-9.*

4. What reasons does Psalm 98 give for worshipping the LORD?

- *In v1-3 the big reason for worship is the LORD's salvation. Encourage the group to think about what particular events the Psalmist would have been thinking of in his context (it is probably looking back to the Exodus or a great military victory.) Then get the group to think about the even greater work of salvation that God has achieved through Jesus. If the Psalmist had reason to worship the LORD for his salvation then we have an even greater reason!*
- *In v7-9 we see that God's judgment is something to sing joyfully about. If you haven't already then here is a chance to explore this counter-cultural issue. Let people be honest if they find this difficult. It certainly doesn't sit comfortably in our culture today. Use the suggested application section above to explore this and think about why it is that we find this part of God's word so difficult and uncomfortable. What does this say about us and how do we need to change our thinking?*

5. How does Psalm 98 say we are to worship the LORD?

- *Picking up on the tone of the Psalm we can see that we are to worship him joyfully and jubilantly.*
- *You might also want to discuss the range of instruments that are mentioned in v4-6. Clearly this is not an exhaustive list, instead it reflects the fact that God's people are to use all sorts of instruments to worship the LORD. Try to avoid a discussion of music descending into people merely expressing their own personal tastes. Help the group to see that the Bible gives us freedom to use a variety of instruments as we worship the LORD.*

Applying Psalm 98

6. Psalm 98 celebrates God's judgment as well as his salvation. How do you feel about celebrating God's judgment? Why?

- *You might have already touched on this earlier but if not now is the time to engage with this difficult part of the Psalm. Let's be honest about how it makes us feel. If we are uncomfortable with this part of God's word then we need to recognise that the fault is with us rather than with God's word.*

1. Why is God's judgment good news worth celebrating?

It's really important that we see that God's judgment is good because it ensures that justice is done. God's word is telling us to sing to the LORD because of his judgment so we need to change our thinking to see that, despite what our culture says, God's judgment really is a good thing,

7. Psalm 98 is a song of heartfelt worship. How does our corporate worship on a Sunday compare?

This is a potentially dangerous question but one that we need to consider. The danger is that it just gives people an opportunity to moan about how they don't like the services. Try and avoid letting this descend into a group moan. Instead encourage the group to examine themselves. What is our attitude and mood as we come to worship? Are there times when we just go through the motions and are not very heartfelt in our worship? If so, why?

1. What things could we do as individuals to help us joyfully worship the LORD?

Again lets start with ourselves as individuals before we think about the church at large. See the suggested application section for different ways you could take this.

2. Are there things that we could do as a church to help us joyfully worship the LORD?

Again try to avoid this just becoming a moan, try and keep the tone of the discussion positive and constructive.

8. How does Psalm 98 help to motivate us for evangelism?

- *As with previous Psalms in this section we cannot avoid the implications for mission and evangelism. Perhaps you could use the quote from John Piper (see the suggested application section) to help the group see the connection between worship and mission. Perhaps you could ask the group about what normally motivates them to share the gospel or invite a friend to church? Do we normally do this simply out of a sense of duty? This Psalm offers a different motivation. It encourages us to be sharing the gospel and inviting people to church because we long for God to get the worship he deserves. Here is a much more positive motivation for mission.*