



# THE PSALTER

A SEASON THROUGH THE PSALMS

## *Psalm 95*

Psalm 95 is a call to worship. It begins with a challenge for the people of God to gather and sing about how great their God is. He is the Creator of the World and the Caregiver for His people. Without borrowing all the shepherd imagery we find in Psalm 23, this psalm clearly borrows the general idea of God caring for His people like someone tending over their flock. The goodness of God might be evident to some of us and less evident to others. If governed only by your feelings, have you ever struggled to worship God because of the troubles that were happening in your life or a preoccupation for worldly things? I think we can all relate to times when it was difficult to focus our attention on the greatness of God because of the greatness of our troubles.

And yet, this Psalm makes it clear that God is worthy of our praise and adoration, not because of how we feel, but because of who He is. YHWH God is the great king over all other gods. He is the one who has made the great earth that we live in and His greatness exceeds the height of the mountains and the depth of the seas. Everything that we see, the entire universe, is His. He made it and, for that reason alone, He is deserving of our adoration and praise. The greatness of God is not up for a vote. It is not decided by humanity. The greatness of God just is!

The psalm ends with a warning. It cautions the people to not harden their hearts against God's guidance and direction. This blend of worship and warning is both interesting and troublesome. How do you begin with, "Come let us worship and bow down," and end with, "Do not harden your hearts?" Following the pattern found in Psalm 78 (God's faithfulness and Israel's rebellion), Psalm 95 recognizes that God's people, even after being eyewitnesses to the great powers and wonders of God, can be overwhelmed by their circumstances and fail to trust in God.

Drawing specific reference to Exodus 17 and Numbers 20, this warning calls the people of God to worship well in order to avoid falling into the same sin of complaining and quarreling against God. This is a repeated theme throughout the Scriptures. Seeing God's judgment against Egypt did not prevent the Israelites from complaining against God when they were thirsty or hungry in the desert. The people in Jesus' day, even after seeing His miracles, were able to doubt and eventually deny the obvious truth about Jesus' identity and purpose for coming into the world.

Not many of us recognize the dangers of worship or, better stated, the danger of not worshiping when an invitation has been offered. Too often the church, even our church, can be guilty of not accepting the invitation to worship God. If we are honest, we must admit that our ability to worship God is usually more influenced by our life's circumstances than God's presence and power. This psalm reminds us that every time we choose to focus on our struggles, instead of trusting in God's care, our hearts begin to close themselves off towards Him.

Worship should draw us into the presence of God and remind us that the reality of His goodness is more important than our current circumstances.

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### *Discussion*

1. What do you do when you do not feel like worshiping? When your troubles are so great that you cannot see the greatness of God, do you stop worshiping?
2. What advice would you give someone who does not feel like worshiping God because of something that is happening in their life? (Remember, it isn't always something bad that keeps us from worshiping. Sometimes we can be distracted from worshiping God by the good things in our lives!)
3. What advice does Psalm 95 offer us?
4. How has this Psalm encouraged, strengthened, or challenged you?

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### *Our Corporate Prayer*

*God, thank you for the opportunity to worship you today and for your goodness that stands over and above whatever circumstances we find ourselves in at this moment. We confess that sometimes the good things in this life, the bad things in this life, or the mundane things in this life can distract us, entertain us, or discourage us from worshiping you as we should. Help our hearts to respond to you in praise. Guard our hearts against being hardened by the troubles and temptations of the world. Awaken us to the dangers of complaining and quarreling. With thanksgiving, we praise you for creating and caring for us. It is in the great and powerful name of Jesus, our Savior, we pray. Amen.*