

## introduction

This week begins our new series, *Practices of the Christian Life*. As we conclude our “to know the living God” ministry year vision, we turn our focus to spiritual practices. Through God’s Spirit working with our spirit, these practices are the ways we grow up into the image of Jesus. Engaging in these practices doesn’t earn salvation but enables someone to experience, grow in, and enjoy the salvation that is already theirs in Christ.

When Christian traditions emphasize only a few practices to the neglect of others, it can lead to a quick burst of initial spiritual growth followed by a frustrating plateau. Boredom creeps in, and deep-seated pain or sin patterns remain unaddressed and unhealed. By engaging with a wider set of spiritual practices — starting today with worship — we open ourselves up to a more comprehensive spiritual health.



**What habit or routine in your life most helps you feel centered and grounded?**

## read **Psalm 95 (NIV)**

<sup>1</sup> Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord;  
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our  
salvation.  
<sup>2</sup> Let us come before him with thanksgiving  
and extol him with music and song.  
<sup>3</sup> For the Lord is the great God,  
the great King above all gods.  
<sup>4</sup> In his hand are the depths of the earth,  
and the mountain peaks belong to him.  
<sup>5</sup> The sea is his, for he made it,  
and his hands formed the dry land.

<sup>6</sup> Come, let us bow down in worship,  
let us kneel before the Lord our Maker;  
<sup>7</sup> for he is our God  
and we are the people of his pasture,  
the flock under his care.  
Today, if only you would hear his voice,  
<sup>8</sup> “Do not harden your hearts as you did at  
Meribah,  
as you did that day at Massah in the  
wilderness,

<sup>9</sup> where your ancestors tested me;  
they tried me, though they had seen  
what I did.

<sup>10</sup> For forty years I was angry with that  
generation;

I said, 'They are a people whose  
hearts go astray,  
and they have not known my ways.'

<sup>11</sup> So I declared on oath in my anger,  
'They shall never enter my rest.'"

**Take a few moments to reflect on the Scripture. Share some insights, questions, or points that strike you. Then read what follows.**

## context

Psalm 95 is a communal call to worship. Historically known in the Christian tradition as the *Venite* (Latin for "O come"), Psalm 95 has served as the Church's guide to worship for centuries, inviting congregations to praise God together and remember who he is. There are two distinct movements to the psalm. The first half celebrates God as Creator, King, and Shepherd and calls people to joyful worship. The second half becomes more serious, warning against hard-heartedness and reminding Israel of the rebellion in the wilderness. Worship, then, is not only about celebration; it is also about listening, responding, and surrendering to God. True worship involves both joyful praise and obedient hearts.

## the why and how of worship

The opening movement of the psalm issues an urgent, energetic command to "move it" ("come," v. 1) and get going into the presence of God. The language used by the psalmist indicates that true worship is meant to be profoundly vocal, participatory, and full-throated — an acclamation fit for a saving King. It requires our full engagement, expecting God's people to sing, shout aloud, and extol him with instruments and song. We are called to celebrate both his infinite *greatness* as the cosmic creator who holds the mountain peaks and the chaotic seas in his hands, and his intimate *closeness* as our personal maker and caring shepherd.

This vibrant praise is not a mindless, emotional high. The call to come before him with "thanksgiving" inherently includes intellectual consideration and deep reflection. To be

thankful means you must have a specific object of gratitude and a concrete reason to be grateful. This is precisely why teaching and sermons are central to our corporate gatherings; they remind us of who God is and what he has done, providing the necessary basis for our thankfulness. Robust thinking and worship go hand in hand.

Furthermore, this passage reminds us that we are not just brains on sticks; we are embodied creatures made in the image of God. The psalmist explicitly commands us to bow down, kneel, and use our physical bodies in worship. What is happening inside our hearts is meant to be expressed through our physical frames — as Lamentations 3:41 says, “we lift our hearts with our hands” (KJV). In an increasingly pervasive digital AI landscape and a highly disembodied world, gathering to physically and communally use our bodies to bow and sing is a radical, indispensable counter-cultural act that forms our souls.

*“The full-throated cries urged in the verbs of verses 1 and 2 suggest an acclamation fit for a king who is the saviour of his people.”*

—Derek Kidner

## discuss

- 1. We live in an increasingly individualized and atomized world. Why do you think worship is meant to be something we experience together rather than only individually?**
- 2. We also live in an increasingly digital and disembodied world. In what ways do you feel the pull toward a disembodied lifestyle during the week, and how does gathering physically with other believers for worship on Sunday combat that?**
- 3. Reflect on the descriptions of God in vv. 3-5 (the great King over the depths and heights) and vv. 6-7 (our maker and shepherd). Which of these two**

realities — God’s vast greatness or his tender closeness — do you find easier to connect with right now, and why?

4. What are the “seas” in your life — the chaotic places that seem out of control, hard to understand and make sense of, and threatening to your security and well-being? How does worshiping the God who “made the seas” and “formed the dry land” (v. 4) impact your faith and change the way you experience your troubles?

## guarding against a hard heart

In the second half of the psalm (starting with the last line of v. 7), the tone shifts dramatically as God delivers a blunt oracle. He points his people back to their ancestral history in the wilderness, specifically referencing Meribah (“quarreling”) and Massah (“testing”) (see [Exodus 17](#) and [Numbers 20](#)). The Israelites had been miraculously saved from Egypt but were now journeying through a barren desert, having not yet arrived at their new home in the promised land. Facing a severe lack of water, they began evaluating God based entirely on their immediate, difficult circumstances. They grew spiritually jaded and cynical as they grumbled, “*Why did you bring us out of Egypt to die of thirst?*”

The wilderness narrative highlights the constant, terrifying danger facing every believer: the progressive hardening of the heart. Like Israel, Christians today find themselves in a spiritual wilderness — saved by Christ but not yet home in the new creation. When life gets painful or confusing, it becomes easy to allow our circumstances to dictate our view of God, causing us to become cynical about his goodness and feeling like God has forgotten us. “What good is following God? We’re suffering, we’re struggling; what’s the point of all this?” God’s sharp warning — “Do not harden your hearts” (v. 8) — reminds us that worship is a serious business where our spiritual survival is on the line.

Worship is a way for the heart to become and stay soft towards God in the wilderness of this life. Through the desert of our days, our thirsts often become unbearable and cry out with a demand for immediate satisfaction. The world feels chaotic and threatening, we grow dissatisfied with God, and our feet easily slip. But when we enter corporate worship, we find

our anchor. Through the singing of truth, the preaching of the Word, and the practice of the Lord's Supper, our hearts are reoriented to who God really is and how our lives fall into place under his rule and care. Worship softens our hearts and restores our bearings, giving us a steady place to plant our feet so we can renew our daily pilgrimage until we reach the new creation.

*"[Psalm 95] has about it a ring like that of the church bells, and like the bells it sounds both merrily and solemnly, at first ringing out a lively peal, and then dropping into a funeral knell as if tolling at the funeral of the generation which perished in the wilderness."*

—Charles Spurgeon

## discuss

- 5. The Israelites allowed their difficult circumstances in the desert to make them dissatisfied with God, leading to progressive hardening despite past experiences of God's miraculous deliverance. When you go through a personal wilderness season, what specific thoughts or doubts tend to enter your mind and harden your heart toward God?**
- 6. Even apart from acute suffering, our deep but unsatisfied longings can harden our hearts to God. What are the typical "thirsts" of your own heart that you demand for God to fulfill, or else you become jaded toward him? How do you see this process practically showing up in your life?**
- 7. Derek Kidner notes that worship is severely practical, "nothing less than a bending of wills and a renewal of pilgrimage." How does a weekly habit of corporate worship help us bend our hearts and choices back to God rather than remaining distracted, heavy, cynical, or wandering astray?**

8. Are there any areas in your life where you need your fellow community group members to exhort you, “Do not harden your heart” (see also [Hebrews 3:13](#))? Consider inviting one another to do so now, perhaps splitting up into smaller groups for this.

## group application

Choose a worship song to sing together. Spend some time singing in worship of who God is, slowly savoring and delighting in all that he is for us (see verses 1-7). Allow that worship to search the longings and posture of your heart, slowly reorienting your heart back to trust, obedience, and joy.

## upcoming

- Monday, June 1 | **Nominations for Elected Leaders**  
*Nominate a fellow church member to roles of elder, deacon or deaconess. Training and discernment will begin this summer to prepare them to stand for election in May 2027. Visit the link for more details and church members may submit nominations online.*  
[redeemerws.com/nominate](https://redeemerws.com/nominate)
- Sunday, June 14 | **Spiritual Practices Workshop, 1:15-2:30 pm**  
*Join for lunch and this month’s discussion on the spiritual practice of worship.*  
[redeemerws.com/spiritualpractices](https://redeemerws.com/spiritualpractices)
- Sunday, June 14 | **All Angels’ Community Meal, 5:35-7:15 pm** at All Angels’ Church (W 80th St & Broadway)  
*Volunteer with other Redeemer West Siders to serve and share a meal for the All Angels’ community, including our neighbors experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity.*  
[redeemerws.com/allangels](https://redeemerws.com/allangels)