

# Growing Closer

## Week 5: Worship

Psalm 95

Dr. Matt Cassidy ---- June 30, 2024

Welcome to Grace Covenant Church! We're in a series on growing closer to God, and we're looking at various ways or disciplines to do that. I was thinking this week and before the beginning of the series about cognitive behavioral therapy. Cognitive behavioral therapy is a style of therapy that has had tremendous success for a wide range of problems, from chemical addiction to even marriage issues. There have been numerous research studies done on its effectiveness in changing lives. It is considered by most as the most effective behavioral therapy out there.

There are several principles in cognitive behavioral therapy but let me just tell you the three main ones. One is that our psychological issues are quite often the result of bad thinking—erroneous thinking. Part two is that many of our psychological problems are often related to learned patterns of unhealthy behavior. And the third principle is that our thinking is attached to our behavior, and our behavior is attached to our thinking.

So, cognitive behavioral therapy says that right thinking will lead to right behavior. And then, also, right behavior will reinforce right thinking. Your beliefs are reinforced by your behavior.

Two thousand years before cognitive behavioral therapy was talked about, it was in the Church. The Church had been doing it all along. The Church has called it “the practices of the Christian faith,” “the disciplines,” “the spiritual disciplines.” And it believes those same things: right thinking leads to right behavior, and right behavior can reinforce right thinking. They're connected. They need each other. We'll say “practice what you preach.” Because as you practice, you get better at what you're preaching. What you believe needs to be reinforced by your behavior, and that's what we've been doing in our series together. We've been trying to engage the entire self—intellect, emotion, and will—as we practice our beliefs. We have these values; let's do them.

So, we study our Bibles and we meditate on the Word of God. We pray our beliefs; we pray and speak to God and listen to God, and that action is reinforcing our belief systems. Last week we talked about having strategic, purposeful friends that reinforce the beliefs that we have. You can't do it without these disciplines.

Tonight we're going to have quite a banquet of disciplines. We'll do five of them. We'll all gather (purposeful friendships), and then we're going to meditate on Bible passages. We'll pray together. We will worship together and have holy communion. That's another one of the disciplines—doing the ordinances together. In the space of one hour, we'll do all these things. Come tonight from 7:00 to 8:00 and we'll have quite the banquet for you.

Today we're focusing on this discipline: worship. The emphasis today is the power of music and song. When we talk about the disciplines of the faith, just to be clear, they're not suggestions in the Bible; they're commands. Throughout the Bible you'll see that God is commanding us to do these physical practices to help us better strengthen what we intellectually believe.

And probably the most common command of the practices is prayer. Throughout the Bible, God says that we need to pray. And the second, believe it or not, is that we need to praise. We need to worship. In the Psalms alone there are forty-one times where it says, "Sing to the Lord." It's not a suggestion. No, you need to do this. You have to do this. There are a hundred times in the Bible where it says that you need to sing God's truth or sing praises to God. It's to help us grow closer to God.

### **Psalm 33:1-3**

**Sing joyfully to the Lord, for it is fitting thus to praise Him. <sup>2</sup> Make music to Him. <sup>3</sup> Sing to Him a new song. Play skillfully and shout for joy.**

Psalm 33 is a great template for worship: "Sing joyfully to the Lord, for it is fitting thus to praise Him." It is fitting. "Make music to Him. Sing to Him a new song. Play skillfully and shout for joy." Play skillfully. Shout joyfully. Sing to Him. Why? Because it's fitting. It makes sense. He's worth it.

Let me just pause for a second and address how we actually apply this passage to what we do around here sometimes. Because it says that we're to shout joyfully, and I just want to tell you why we drop our shades and turn our lights down so low when we worship. It's because we've found—and so have a lot of other churches—that if you want people to fully experience a sense of lack of self-consciousness while they're worshipping, it's better if it's dark. In other words, people are self-conscious in their expression of joy. Sometimes people are crying and don't want other people to see them cry. They want to raise their hands but don't want to draw attention to that. And so, when we drop the shades and make it dark in here, it's so that you can fully express what it means to shout joyfully so that you can hide behind somebody else's singing. Because when you sing poorly and the lights are up, we all know who's singing poorly. But when the lights are down low, there's somebody back there—there's a dog that's dying or something—the lights are down low, so, *Hey, I'm going to keep belting this out, then.*

And then, another thing that we do here is because it says to play skillfully. One of the reasons we insert a bridge—in other words, there's singing and then there's music—that's called a bridge—and then back to singing—is because of the outstanding quality of musicians that we have on the stage here. And music all by itself is worshipful. And we want you to appreciate beautiful concert-level (these are studio-grade musicians that we have) music. And we'll let one or two of them show their gifts and talents by just having an extended instrumental. What we're doing is adhering to this passage where it says to play skillfully, and, in our case, delegate, and have those people play skillfully.

The single best passage on worship in the Bible is really not up for much debate. It's Psalm 95. If you want to turn to Psalm 95, that would be great. We're going to study the first seven verses today. It's called by scholars *venite*. *Venite* is a Latin word. It's the first word in the Psalm, and it means “O come.” And this is such the gold standard for what worship should look like. It's regularly sought out and taught for this very purpose.

Now before we read the details here, let me explain what worship is. Worship is when you ascribe value or worth, and sometimes, in the case of God, ultimate worth, ultimate value. And it's to include the entire person. And that means intellect, emotion, and will. Our soul has intellect, emotion, and will. And the reason I say that is because, just in the seven verses we're about to look at, I've made the slides so that you're going to see that the intellect passages will be in all capital letters. The emotional appeals are going to be in italics. And volition, the will,

will be underlined. That's how important it is for this writer to include the whole person in what it means to worship.

So, with that in mind, here is Psalm 95: "*Venite*—come—let us sing for joy to Jehovah; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before Him with thanksgiving and extol Him with music and song. For Jehovah is the great God, the great King above all gods. In His hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to Him. The sea is His, for He made it, and His hands formed the dry land. *Venite, venite*—come, let us bow down and worship, let us kneel before Jehovah our Maker; for He is our God and we are the people of His pasture, the flock under His care."

Let's look and see what we can learn from this passage. The first thing is the word itself—worship. "Worship" comes from an old English phrase *worth-shape*. It means that you're ascribing great worth to something, and that great worth that you have put value on is now shaping you. It's an attribution of worth, and that worth has the power to shape you. It's both. So, you see something of great value—you can see this in non-religious, non-church ways—*Man, if I had that house or that job or that speedboat, or whatever, then I would be a person of great value.* I've attached value to something, and then that value inside my heart and soul—intellect, emotion, and will—is now shaping me and making choices for me.

And so, this psalmist here is saying, *Hey, do you want to change your life? Do you want your life to be valuable? Do you want to have eternal rewards without regrets?* He says, *Well, first acknowledge this: don't give anything too much value, too much worth, because it has the potential to shape you.*

And then second, you can see here, he says, *Give ultimate value to Jehovah, God Almighty.* When you meditate on Him, who He is, what He's done, that will shape you. That will change you when you do that in this context of worshiping.

Here's an easy way to see how our giving worth to something shapes us. Forgive me—I've used this illustration this year already, but I can't get it out of my head. The *Antique Roadshow*—a classic—you've seen one of them, you've seen them all—but somebody has an artifact of some kind. Usually, they inherited it and they have not given it much worth at all. The *Antique Roadshow* comes to town. They say, "Here's a picture my grandmother gave me. It's been in the attic." They say, "Oh, it's worth \$30,000."

And the people almost always say, "Oh, okay." That's it. "Okay."

Now that's not worship, because they're not attributing worth to it. And it's not going to change them. They're going to put it back in the attic.

In 2023, finally, it happens. Somebody is representing my type of people, and he is a Vietnam veteran. In 1974 he bought a Rolex watch at the military base and he paid \$345.97. He didn't attribute much worth to it. It didn't fit his lifestyle, so he just kind of boxed it up and put it in the back of the closet. Now, forty-nine years later, *Antique Roadshow* is in town. And the expert on precious watches comes back to him and says, "This has a value up to \$700,000."

And this Vietnam veteran fell to the ground and then started cussing joyously. It was not angry cussing—it was joyous cussing. And now he's attributing great worth to this watch, and it's starting to shape him. It's shaping him intellectually. Now he has a different value towards that Rolex watch. It's shaping him emotionally. He got slain in the Spirit, like a charismatic or a Pentecostal: boom, on the ground! And then, it's going to change his will. He's going to treat the watch differently. He will be an evangelist, will he not? Everywhere he goes he's going to bring his friends over to the house and he's going to tell them the good news. And the good news is, "I have a watch worth \$700,000! Anybody want to buy it?" He is attributing great worth to something that had great worth, but he didn't know. And now it's shaping him.

If you look at Psalm 95 you can see this appeal to the intellect and the emotion and the will. The whole person is being wrapped up in the nature of God and getting lost in it. He has ultimate worth. And because of that, it has ultimate power to shape us.

He ascribes this absolute value to Jehovah. I used His formal name because that's L-O-R-D with all capital letters means. And I want us to see, first of all, how he's appealing to the intellect. He's going to give us reasons why we should be shaped by the value of God. He's going to use this preposition, the word "for." Or it could be "because."

## Psalm 95

**<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.**

Now let's take a look at it, verses 1-3 and 7. "Come, let us sing for joy to Jehovah; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before Him with thanksgiving and extol Him with music and song." Why? "For"—because—"the Lord is the great God, the great King over all the gods." And then later in verse 7: "For"—because—"He is our God and we are the people of His pasture, the flock underneath His care."

The writer is answering the question, "Why do we shout for joy? Why we do approach Him, embarrassing ourselves with this overflow of thanksgiving and singing?" He says, "Because Jehovah is a great god, a king over all the other gods." And then he says, "We belong to Him." He's telling us to think right.

Then he appeals to the emotion. Impassionedly, he will say, "Shout," "Sing," "Sing joyfully." Let yourself go. Just lose yourself in the emotion because of who God is.

And then he appeals to the will, volition. Look at the words of submission here in verse 6: “Let us bow down and worship, let us kneel before the Lord Jehovah our Maker.” Bow down and kneel because He’s the king of all the gods. He rules. “King” means that He rules, He’s sovereign. It means we’re supposed to let this fact shape our ego. We’re in submission on our knees. In other words, pray, “Thy will be done.” *I want you to live your life through me. I belong to you.*

So, in summary, it’s ultimately giving ultimate worth to Yahweh, and he’s giving his entire self to that. He’s giving his entire life to that because God is worth that.

I love that if you look carefully at this passage, you’ll see that the psalmist is calculating, and he’s weighing. He’s doing the math, he’s thinking through, *What is the nature of God? And then, how do we respond?* He says that the nature of God is that He’s the rock of our salvation. Watch how this ends up. He’s the rock of our salvation. He’s the great King, sovereign over all the other gods. He created the mountains and the valleys and the water, and He formed the land. He’s the Maker and the Creator.

And so, here’s the key: we’re to worship, kneel, bow down, shout for joy, become ecstatic, because He’s the creator, the owner, the king.

It does not stop there. God deserves all of that as being creator, owner, and king—to be worshiped, for us to bow down to, for us to give our lives and our wills to Him.

But he doesn’t leave it there. What kind of creator, owner, and king is Yahweh? Because He can be any way He wants as creator, owner, and king. Verse 7: He’s the shepherd God. He’s the creator, owner, and king, and He’s the shepherd that cares for us. And this original audience that knows good shepherding was flooded with stories and pictures of good shepherds that love and care for the helpless flock. And the psalmist is saying, *He owns us. We’re part of His flock. He’s our shepherd.* And that’s why there’s this explosion of emotions that’s taking place. There’s this avalanche of surrender to who He is, because of the worth attributed to Him; not just because He’s the creator, owner, and king, but because He’s the shepherd God and He’s the creator, owner, and king.

Bono wrote a book on the psalms. And he wrote about the power of the psalms to get us in touch with the experience of our beliefs. He wrote this: “[Words and music did for me what solid, even rigorous, religious arguments could never do: they introduced me to God. Not belief in God, but more of an experiential sense of who God was.](#)” It was the words and the music.

Today I want us to walk away understanding and respecting the power of music—the power of music and its potential to change us, to alter our souls. Music is one of the greatest gifts that God ever gave mankind.

The ancient Greeks knew there was something mysterious and supernatural about music. That's why they gave credit to music coming from the Muses, the gods. That's why we call it "music." It's from the gods.

Ancient Chinese emperors would rule their vast kingdom by sending spies into the villages and even into the big cities. And their assignment was to listen to the music of the people. If the music was healthy, the souls were healthy. If the music was sick, he had to send in people to make them well.

And that's not just ancient China. Also, in the 1940s, there was a famous Harvard scholar who taught a class called *Poetics of Music*. And Igor Stravinsky lived in Russia in the early 1900s. And when he's talking about the power of music, Stravinsky said, "Yeah, when I was living there the Soviets had complete control over the music, because they knew they could control the culture if they could control the music."

That's why Andrew Fletcher has this famous quote: "[Let me write the songs of a nation, and I care not who writes the rules.](#)" *Who cares who writes the laws? I'm writing the music.*

It's said that Martin Luther converted Germany to his Reformation through the theology in the songs that he taught people to sing. It was the hymns of Martin Luther that converted Germany, they say.

And here's why music has so much power. It has stealth capabilities. Music is able to fly past our intellect and pierce the soul in our emotions and in our will. We can have a certain set of values, but when we are challenged in an argument about your values versus my values, we can go back and forth and keep up. But if someone sings it in the right tempo and tone, we absorb it without even knowing it.

Let me give you a few examples. Ashley Kahn is a music critic, and she wrote a book on Coltrane, a jazz saxophonist. And she wrote a book about his famous album *A Love Supreme*. Now she's as secular as the day is long. She just believes in matter. She doesn't think there's a god or any meaning or ultimate truth. But after listening to Coltrane's album over and over again, here's her quote: "[As I listened to the album again and again, I felt impelled to address Coltrane's spirituality. Though I consider myself a dedicated agnostic and a die-hard rationalist, I](#)



am ready to admit there is much that can be seen the handiwork of some eternal force under spiritual direction”---in a saxophone album.

There’s something divine in this music. Leonard Bernstein, as many of you know, was a famous American composer, but was also notorious for his atheistic beliefs. And some of his more famous comments are from when he’s writing about and speaking on Beethoven’s Fifth. Because he couldn’t hold onto his pure secularism. He writes this: “Beethoven turned out pieces of breathtaking rightness. Beethoven has the stuff from heaven.” (He didn’t believe in heaven.) “Beethoven has the power the make us feel at the finish of his symphony that there’s something right in the world, something that follows its own set of laws consistently, something we can trust, something that will never let us down.”

Music has stealth power. It goes right through Leonard Bernstein’s agnosticism and atheism and makes him start believing in absolutes: natural law, natural truth. It’s above his thoughts. He’s believing in some kind of spiritual power.

Some of you are familiar with Anne Lamott’s works. She’s a best-selling author. Her friends and followers asked her, “Tell us about your spiritual journey,” because she was notorious for her antagonism towards Christianity, and she ends up becoming a Christian. And so, in *Traveling Mercies* she tells the story of how she didn’t want to have open conversations about the truth that we’re being told in the Bible. She wasn’t interested. She knew what she believed.

But there was this church that was near where she lived. And it was a rickety old building, and the music and the songs coming out of the building called her like the sirens. She was drawn to it. It was beautiful. It was of this other world. And so, she went in, stood at the back, and then couldn’t stop from singing along. This is her testimony: “Something inside me that was stiff and rotting would feel soft and tender. Somehow the singing wore down all the boundaries and distinctions that kept me so isolated. Sitting there, standing with them to sing, sometimes so shaky and sick that I felt like I might tip over, I felt bigger than myself, like I was being taken care of, tricked into coming back to life.” She says, “God was tricking me through the music”—tricking her in coming back to life.

That’s the power of music. Do you appreciate that? Are you using worship and music to grow closer to God? You can’t grow closer to God without music and worship.

### **Ephesians 5:18-20**

**Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. <sup>19</sup> Speak to one another with PSALMS, HYMNS, AND SPIRITUAL SONGS. SING AND MAKE MUSIC in your heart to the Lord, <sup>20</sup> always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Here's what the New Testament says about singing and worship in Ephesians 5, a passage that many of you know. "Do not get drunk on wine, for it leads to debauchery. But instead, be filled with the Spirit." Lead a Spirit-filled life. Well, what does that look like? Let's read the next sentence. Here's what it looks like. "Speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Look at the attributes of what it looks like to live a consistent, spirit-filled, Christian life. Five have to do with music: psalms, hymns, spiritual songs—sing and make music. And then he throws in gratitude, thankfulness.

### **Colossians 3:16-17**

**Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish each other with PSALMS and HYMNS and SPIRITUAL SONGS, with gratitude in your hearts to God, <sup>17</sup> and whatever you do, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.**

In a passage to another church giving another very similar application, it says, "Let the word of Christ dwell richly as you teach and admonish each other ..." How do you do that? "... with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs ..." Add some thanksgiving ... "...with gratitude in your hearts to God, and whatever you do, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

Do you want God's Word to dwell richly inside of you? Do you want to live the life of someone who's grown close to God? Well, this is what it looks like: psalms and hymns and

spiritual songs with gratitude. You can't grow closer to God without worship, without respecting the power of music. We need to use it (*Use it for good, Luke*)—we need to use worship and music for the goodness of our souls, because it can break through, and God can use it to trick you—trick you into becoming a more consistent follower of Christ.

Let me give you some individual applications and some corporate applications for this truth of the power of worship and music. Individually, here's what you do. Start every single day by picking the first song that you're going to hear. Have you ever—I'm sure you have—gone through the day and you have this song stuck in your head and you can't get it out of your head? It's usually the first song you hear. What if you were strategic and picked that first song? Start your day knowing what you're going to hear first. Find a hymn or some worship music that you want stuck in your head. It's the first thing you hear. You want to do this before life enters your nine hours and starts overturning your life. Start it with promises of God.

Sometime during the day while you're making your drive, you don't have to listen to a book or a podcast. You could listen to beautiful music. And then I'd highly recommend that the last thing you hear before you drift off to sleep is God-honoring, beautiful music. End each day that way as well.

Just last month, someone was asking me about my adult children. And right now, no one's in jail, everyone seems to be doing well. So, the day is still young, but ... Anyway, they were saying, "Give me one or two things that you feel like were helpful in raising your children." And I immediately said, "Music." I remember hearing a Diana Krall biography, and she said, "I grew up in a house full of music." And I thought, "I'm going to do that." And when we moved into our house, the first thing I did was to run speaker wire into every room in the house. And every morning we started the day by waking our children up, not to an alarm or even shaking them; we woke them up to very sweet-sounding Christian hymns written for children. They woke up slowly, they work up peacefully. Every night before we put the kids to bed, that's what we did after we prayed with them. We put back on the same music—Michael Card's *Sleep Sound in Jesus*—hymns or songs that he wrote that were straight out of the Bible and turned into really nice music. They went to bed with that, they woke up with that. And then throughout the day, Melinda raised them on musicals. That's the other music. I think that was powerful to them. I think it's taking advantage of this mystical fact that music has power. It has power over our soul.

And if you want to grow closer to God, you must gain access to that power and make the most of it. Worship in music.

That's how I would individually apply today's truth. Corporately, it's interesting—in the passage itself is the word “come.” Look what it says: “Come let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.” It's not “Come let me worship”—“Come let me sing.” There's an assumption of corporate worship. Throughout the Bible there are very few second person singulars. The you's in the Bible, especially in the New Testament, are plural. It's “y'all.” Y'all are growing in Christ together. There's a corporate need for prayer, there's a corporate need for Bible study, there's a corporate need for worship. It's strategically choosing the right kind of friends so that y'all can go through life together. You have to be here. You have to be here to enjoy corporate worship. You have to be here to enjoy the outstanding music. There's power in music in shaping your soul. Worth shapes you. Ascribing ultimate worth to God and then singing about it is one of the most powerful cognitive behavioral therapies that you can enjoy in this lifetime. Music and worship is so powerful that music is a universal language throughout all of time. F-sharp is F-sharp in every place in the world, in every era. And music is one of the few things that is eternal. It's in this life and in the next life. It's a gift from God. We need to use it, understand it, submit to it, respect it, and let it shape us.

One of our former members had a tragic event in her life where her husband took his own life and then left her in the middle of a scandal and millions of dollars in debt. And in her recovery from that event in her life, she ended up writing a book about it. And I think it's in one of the early chapters that she did this. She knew she was sailing straight into a hurricane. And so, she resolved two things before she even started her journey into sorrow. While grieving her husband's death, having to deal with the scandal, and making a commitment to pay every single person back, she said, “I'll never do that unless I make a commitment to, one, no alcohol—not for a whole year. I'm not running and finding safety there. It will destroy me. And two, I will only listen to the right kind of music.” She said only country and western and Christian. But when Melinda was reading that out loud to me, I thought, *She gets it. She understands what music can do to her and for her.* She knew the power of that. God bless her, she did it, too. She paid everyone back, walking with God.

If you want to grow closer to God, I hope today that you walk out of the auditorium with a newfound respect for the gift of music and the power of worship. It will shape you. An easy

application is that I'll see you at 7:00 tonight. We'll do five of these disciplines together in sixty-one minutes.

Let's pray.

*Lord Jesus, Yahweh, Jehovah God, the creator of all things and the creator of music, we are so grateful that You did not leave this world in a place of tone deafness, and even in the fall You let us enjoy the beauty of music. And we can turn the music into theology and sing truth back to You. And Lord, I'd ask that You help us let that great ultimate worth shape us in becoming loving and courageous followers of Christ.*

*"Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation." Lord, I'd ask that You would help us be expressive and emotional and passionate in our worship. Let us come before You with thanksgiving and exalt You with music and song. For Jehovah, You are the great God and the King over all the gods. Your hand is in the depth of the earth and the mountain peaks belong to You. The sea is Yours. You made it. Your hands formed the dry land. And so, come, let us bow down face first in worship of You. Let us kneel before Jehovah our maker.*

*And You're not just the king, the maker, and the owner, for You are our God, and we are the people of Your pasture. We're the flock underneath Your care. You are the shepherd God who cares for us. So, we celebrate that in word and deed. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*