

# The Old Hundredth

Psalm 100:1 *"A Psalm for giving thanks.*  
Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth!  
<sup>2</sup> Serve the LORD with gladness!  
Come into his presence with singing!  
<sup>3</sup> Know that the LORD, he is God!  
It is he who made us, and we are his;  
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.  
<sup>4</sup> Enter his gates with thanksgiving,  
and his courts with praise!  
Give thanks to him;  
bless his name!  
<sup>5</sup> For the LORD is good;  
his steadfast love endures forever,  
and his faithfulness to all generations."

Psalm 100

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## Peace Piece

FACEBOOK IS ALWAYS SURPRISING, sometimes even in good ways! Recently, a friend posted a link to a remarkable song by a jazz pianist named **Bill Evans** (1929-80). Maybe I'm not quite old enough, or I've just not hung out in jazz circles,

but I had never heard of Bill Evans. Yet, knowing my friend, I clicked the link expectantly. Words can't express what I heard or how I felt for the next few moments. I wasn't expecting it. I wasn't prepared for it or even really in a state of mind to receive it properly. Still, I've rarely experienced anything like it. I also know it's the very reason God gave man the gift of music.

I'm not alone. I did a little digging and found an old article called "The Genius of Bill Evans."<sup>1</sup> The author writes, "A large number of musicians and fans can recall with great clarity the moment they first heard Bill Evans, much as they can recall the moment they learned of John Kennedy's assassination." I now count myself as one, though I'm too young for JFK (I remember where I was when Reagan was shot).

She then tells her own story of initiation. "My husband, Gunnar, was attending a faculty retreat for the SDSU Music Department. David Ward Steinman, faculty member, pianist, composer and Bill Evans scholar, took me aside and played the 1958 recording of 'Peace Piece' for me." This is

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<sup>1</sup> **Bonnie Biggs**, "The Genius of Bill Evans," *The Jazz Link* II:16 (Sept 1989), <http://www.billevans.nl/Nenette.htm>

the very same song I was listening to thanks to my friend! I had to keep reading. “On many occasions I have tried to describe my experience of those six and a half minutes. People who know Bill’s music nod and share their own unique ‘discovery’ story. People who don’t, smile with caution. Suffice it to say, it changed my life forever. Bill’s music is replete with a raw, meaningful beauty that transcends all that we think we ‘know’ about life.”

Several Youtubers have uploaded the song. Here’s what some of them say on the link I was sent. “I want this at my funeral, and my wedding, and everywhere forever.” “Just pure beauty. Heard this for the first time the other day and had to pull over in the car.” “One of the most beautiful things ever made. You know you have no soul when you don’t get touched by this.” “Thank you Bill Evans for reminding me that beauty still exists in the world.” “It’s been so long since a song gave me the chills.” “What just happened? Think I had an out of body experience and went to a place where words are impossible.”

What may be the most remarkable thing about this song is that it was an unrehearsed pastoral (that is, carefully thought through) improvisation that he did at the end of

one of his recording sessions. This particular track is unlike so much jazz music where a barrage of notes and scales that can become overwhelming. Instead, the piece is built on two gentle repeating left-hand cords. That's it. Its root is incredibly simple. Music doesn't have to be complicated or bombastic to be transcendent and enduring.

It doesn't matter if you have never heard "Peace Piece" before. I'm sure everyone has experienced some musical selection at some time in their life that they can insert here just as easily. And that's the point. There is an "other-world" that music is able to transport us to, a world with which we have some cloudy dim contact down here below apart from it, but which on occasion our souls seem able to wake up and see through music's eyes.

Let's take this discussion into [a more Christian context](#). Of the following selection of music someone has written, "There is probably no musical composition, with the exception of the ancient Ambrosian and Gregorian tones, that has been so universally sung by worshipping assemblies ... and certainly none so familiar to the ear of Protestant

communities.”<sup>2</sup> Can you think of a tune that might fit that bill (not Evans this time)? The author continues,

It has proved equally acceptable to the instructed and the uninstructed musical taste. When in any congregation, through ignorance or bad taste, it has been for a time laid aside to make way for more modern yet more feeble tunes [this was written in 1854, how much more today!], it has been taken up again, after the intermission, with increased interest; and as its strains have been given out by the organ, and its first tones raised by the choir or the clerk, devout affections have been roused, and voices which had been long silent have swelled the loud chorus of praise.<sup>3</sup>

We live in a day when we are told by pundits and preachers alike that everything has to be brand new. There’s nothing necessarily wrong with new, of course. But in a culture where *everything must* be new to be valued, what does that do to the tried and true? To gain more appreciation for our song, listen to a little of its American history,

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<sup>2</sup> J. M. Wainwright (Bishop of New York), “Prefatory Note,” in William Henry Havergal, *A History of the Old Hundredth Psalm Tune, With Specimens* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1854), iii.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

It has been known in this country from its first settlement. It was in all probability used by the earliest Church of England missionaries in Virginia, and it was certainly one of the songs of the Puritan fathers of New England, since we find it in Ainsworth's Psalms, the book of Psalmody which they brought from Holland. It was, therefore, one of the tunes to which the wild forests in this new world were first made vocal with the praise of God. Nor was its use confined to the early European settlers; its lofty strains were taught by them to the inhabitants of the forest they found here; it was sung by the new-made converts of the missionary John Elliot, and in the various missionary settlements amongst the Indians it may yet be heard.<sup>4</sup>

Someone else adds,

To the devout Christian, such a tune cannot be otherwise than deeply interesting. The thought of its having been sung, for many an age, “in the great congregation,” and of its having formed the solace of many a heart in the cottage or the closet, must always add a hallowed pleasure

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

to its use. The consideration, too, that Protestant martyrs and exiled confessors have listened to its strains or joined in them, may well give an exalted and even an affecting energy, to our modulation of them.<sup>5</sup>

The first known copy of the tune appears in a 1561 Genevan edition of an English Psalter. In other words, it was composed *as a tune for a Psalm*. I'm using this whole idea of "song" for so much of the early part of this sermon, in part, because *we don't have any of the original tunes of Psalter*. They are lost to time. In some ways, this keeps us from appreciating that this unique book in the Bible was originally a hymnal, rather than a theology textbook. God wanted these songs *sung*, so that hearts could transcend to that other-worldly place through lyrics that originated from there that take our thoughts captive to what it must be like. But how do you convey this in a sermon?

I think part of why God did not preserve the original songs is because he knows that music is culturally bound, and to preserve one form of song would not allow the

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<sup>5</sup> William Henry Havergal, *A History of the Old Hundredth Psalm Tune, With Specimens* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1854), 10.

fullness of the human race that King Jesus came to save to give fullest expression to the song book that his Holy Spirit inspired. Nevertheless, we do have some uninspired old tunes with which we are still familiar. This particular one is truly transcendent, and perhaps by thinking about it together with the song you can learn to appreciate this subjective side of the Psalter. Have you figured out the tune yet?

Here's another hint. Of the melody, someone has written, "The symmetry ... is strikingly beautiful, and it is certain that no tune has ever been written which will compare with it in point of rhythmic structure."<sup>6</sup> (Even without being able to read music, you can see it in the illustration from its first printed edition below):



<sup>6</sup> "The Old Hundredth Psalm Tune," *The Quiver: An Illustrated Magazine for Sunday and General Reading*, vol. xviii (New York: Cassell & Company, Limited, 1883), 193 [193-95].

It was originally assigned to the 134<sup>th</sup> Psalm, but it more popularly was aligned with the 100<sup>th</sup>. Hence its most common title: “[The Old Hundreth](#).” Most people today, if they have heard it at all, probably assign the tune to “[The Doxology](#),” written in 1674 by [Thomas Ken](#) as the last stanza of a hymn called *Awake, My Soul and With the Sun*:

*Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow;  
Praise Him, all creatures here below;  
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.*

The rhyme and meter of Old Hundredth Psalm, like its musical counterpart, is itself a masterpiece of simplicity and beauty. It does just about everything I can think of that a good poetic translation of the Scripture should do. As we come to the 100<sup>th</sup> Psalm this morning, I will be looking as much at the poetic version as I will the English ESV translation and original language (where needed). Because what I want more than anything today to do is get you to think about the psalms from this more artistic point of view,

in hopes that something might stir your soul by getting the other side of your brain to do a little thinking about God's word.

## Context of Psalm 100

I'm doing this in part because we've seen most of Psalm 100 very recently. As we have been looking at Book IV, particularly the set of songs from 93-100, we've discovered that they all share the theme of God as King. Though the word "king" does not appear in it, we know it is about God as King because most of the song is taken from **Psalm 95:1-7**, which is about the King explicitly:

<b>Ps 100:1-5</b>	<b>Ps 95:1-11</b>
<p><i>"A Psalm for giving thanks.</i></p> <p>Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth! <sup>2</sup> Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!</p>	<p>Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!</p> <p><sup>2</sup> Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!</p>

<p><sup>3</sup> Know that the LORD, he is God!</p> <p>It is he who made us, and we are his;</p> <p>we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.</p> <p><sup>4</sup> Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!</p> <p><sup>5</sup> For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, his faithfulness to all generations.</p>	<p><sup>3</sup> For the LORD is a great God, and <b>a great King above all gods.</b></p> <p><sup>4</sup> In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also.</p> <p><sup>5</sup> The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.</p> <p><sup>6</sup> Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!</p> <p><sup>7</sup> For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.</p>
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Psalm 100 is the climax of this collection. Interestingly (based on what we have just discussed), some have called it

the collection's “doxology.”<sup>7</sup> Truly, it is fitting that the tune for the Doxology, The Old Hundredth, became linked to this psalm.

Psalm 100 is shorter than even the portion of Psalm 95 that it so closely parallels, though it adds something important, as we will see. It is among five psalms (Ps 15, 43, 125, and 127) that have just five verses. It has less than a hundred words. There are only five others (Ps 117, 123, 131, 133, and 134) that are shorter than it. Nevertheless, as Feinberg has written, “once having studied the comprehensiveness of the portion, the inescapable conclusion will be: only divine inspiration can account for so much in so little.”<sup>8</sup> This thought starts to make my mind expand upwards to the greatness I'm reminded of by the tune we have been thinking about.

This song has been of great importance throughout history. The Jews recite it in the synagogues every day except on Sabbaths and Festivals.<sup>9</sup> However, especially in light of today—December 31, the Jews would sing this

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<sup>7</sup> Charles Lee Feinberg, “‘Old Hundredth’-Psalm C,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 100 (1943): 54 [53-66]; John James Steward Perowne, *The Book of Psalms; a New Translation*, vol. 2 (London: George Bell and Sons, 1882), 210.

<sup>8</sup> Feinberg, 53–54.

<sup>9</sup> Perowne, 210.

entire set of songs during their last feast of the year, celebrating the harvest, ushering in the new year to this song, as they celebrated anew Yahweh's enthronement over them.<sup>10</sup> In the church, as far back as Basil the Great they taught that “at break of day the Church, as with one heart and one mouth, offers to the Lord in prayer the sacrifice of the ‘Psalm of thanksgiving’” meaning Psalm 100.<sup>11</sup> Yet again, I start thinking about the history of The Old Hundredth that we've seen already, as virgin forests first heard the gospel to this song and tune.

As we've just recently (again, Psalm 95) looked at most of its content, this allows us the opportunity to take a different kind of look at this song. By combining our study of the words with the tune of The Old Hundredth, perhaps it can help garner emotions that are often missing in purely exegetical treatments of the psalms. Perhaps you can find in what follows some kind of longing, nostalgia, or even homesickness for the things the song depicts. In this way, maybe you can be transported to that enigmatic, mysterious

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Wallace, *The Narrative Effect of Book IV of the Hebrew Psalter*, Studied in Biblical Literature 112 (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 34.

<sup>11</sup> Franz Delitzsch, *A Commentary on the Book of Psalms* vol. 3 (Funk and Wagnalls, 1883), 70. He seemingly cites Basil, Letter 207 to the clergy of Neocaesarea. The reference is Ep. lxxiii. Ad Neocaes.

place of “song” that the lyrics themselves are trying to get you to see.

## Homeward Longing

F. W. Grant, notes in his book on the Psalms: “The hundredth psalm closes this series with the full anthem of praise. Naught else remains. Perfection is found and rest; and both are in God.”<sup>12</sup> Rest is that thing the counterpart Psalm 95 was so focused on. Psalm 100 now brings us to it.

Have you ever had a deep ache inside of you that just wanted to be home? You’ve been travelling for weeks for work in a foreign country or Nebraska, you’ve been away at college and miss your parents, you’ve gone off to summer camp for the first time, and like the old Alan Sherman song “Hello Muddah” where after just one day things are so bad (everything from poison ivy to food poisoning to alligators in the lake and bears in the forest) that you write a “dear mom” letter promising to let aunt Bertha hug and kiss you if she’ll just come and get you! It is the natural disposition of the Christian to long for home.

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<sup>12</sup> *Numerical Bible*, “The Psalms,” p. 365, in Feinberg, 55.

Have you ever [worshipped](#) for a long while at a place that you thought was probably not the best way to be worshiping God, but you had little or no choice but to go along with it? Many have. In fact, in many Protestant circles these days, regulated, biblical worship is on the endangered species list. I have many friends, especially in small towns, but not even confined to them, that just can't find anything even remotely biblical. They are tired of the dry ice, the tight pants, the driving motorcycles in stage; their souls are starving.

So, let that question stand. Have you ever found yourself in a situation like this, but suddenly you went to a worship service that felt like home? I'm not saying there's only one kind of service that can do this, but a service that you knew honored God or that brought back feelings through its songs or liturgy that you know Christians have been doing for 2,000 years?

What does it feel like to sit through [the first kind of service](#) week after week? I can speak from experience that it can be a profoundly frustrating struggle against my flesh. I sit there nit-picking on everything that is wrong and am unable to worship. On the other hand, in [the second kind](#)

of service, rather than fighting, I instantly find myself resting, and in it, worship is no struggle at all. The familiarity, longing, the rightness—it sort of all just works together and makes you be at peace.

This is what the quotes above were trying to get at with the feeling that the tune of The Old Hundredth can give to a person. But now, let's combine this with the lyrics of Psalm 100. For in this song, I want you to be thinking about how such a psalm can “bring you home.”

Psalm 100 has a superscription: *A Psalm for giving thanks*. It is the only song in the Psalter with this kind of title. Its purpose is to help you learn how to thank God. This is terribly important, because as Romans 1 teaches, it is thanklessness that is at the heart of every other sin. Keeping with our theme, Spurgeon says this about it:

*A Psalm of Praise; or rather of thanksgiving. This is the only Psalm bearing this precise inscription. It is all ablaze with grateful adoration, and has for this reason been a great favourite with the people of God ever since it was written. “Let us sing the Old Hundredth” is one of the everyday expressions of the Christian church, and will be so while men exist whose hearts are loyal to*

*the Great King. Nothing can be more sublime this side heaven than the singing of this noble Psalm by a vast congregation. Watts' paraphrase, beginning "Before Jehovah's awful throne," and the Scotch "All people that on earth do dwell," are both noble versions; and even Tate and Brady rise beyond themselves when they sing—*

*"With one consent let all the earth To God their cheerful voices raise" [italics original].<sup>13</sup>*

As we come to the psalm's content, we see that it is very basic. It has **seven lines** that deal with **summoning us to praise God** (1-3a, 4) and **four** that provide **reasons to justify it** (3bc, 5).<sup>14</sup> Simple, just like the tune. That's it. Four imperative verbs teach the church corporately (they are plural) to **"make a noise"** (1), **"come/enter"** (2, 4), **"give thanks"** (4), and **"bless"** (4). Their focus is on **corporate worship**. In this song, we come to rest *together*. Two more

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<sup>13</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Psalms 88-110*, vol. 4 (London; Edinburgh; New York: Marshall Brothers, n.d.), 233.

<sup>14</sup> J. Kenneth Kuntz, "Grounds for Praise: The Nature and Function of the Motive Clause in the Hymns of the Hebrew Psalter," in *Worship and the Hebrew Bible: Essays in Honor of John T. Willis*, ed. M. Patrick Graham, Rick R. Marrs, Steven L. McKenzie, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 284 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 177 [148-83].

imperatives teach you about worship beyond the walls of the church. “Serve” (2a) and “know” (3a).

It isn't just the bare verbs that are important. It is what they are attached to. “Make a noise” is sometimes translated as “shout.” But this is not the shouting of school children fighting over the one good thing in their combined lunchboxes that they all want to share. This is a corporate, resounding shout of the whole earth (1) to Yahweh in worship. Few things in this world can really capture what is being said. A whole stadium full of people yelling a single chant might come close. Except those are chants of pagans. One might try to imagine Middle-Eastern Jews all gathering at the temple by the tens of thousands and suddenly, like their ancestors at the wall of Jericho, blasting shouts of Psalm 100. While impossible to bring to full scale in a local church, an old Anglican pastor and hymn writer named William Havergal, who wrote a little book on The Old Hundredth, was able to capture in his church a bit of the flavor. They would chant back and forth, the whole congregation, “between the occupants of the lower floor and those of the galleries—but the song was universal—

men, women, and children uniting harmonious voices.”<sup>15</sup>  
You can about imagine, in an old Anglican marble church building, how that would have sounded. That’s what the song is telling us.

The object of these shouts is Yahweh. Again, this is not the shouts of some angry person mad at God for some reason. These are people making a “joyful” noise to the LORD. The parallel expression says, “Serve the LORD with gladness” (2). It is joy and gladness that are to resound from this noise. And God sees those in the heart as surely as he hears the cries from the lips.

“Come into his presence with singing” (2). Set to the tune of The Old Hundredth, the psalter translated all this:

All people that on earth do dwell,  
sing to the LORD with cheerful voice;  
Him serve with mirth, His praise forth tell;  
come ye before Him and rejoice.

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<sup>15</sup> Lowell Mason, *Musical Letters from Abroad: Including Detailed Accounts of the Birmingham, Norwich, and Dusseldorf Musical Festivals of 1852* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1854), 13.

Dwell, then tell. With the voice, rejoice. You can hear in the rhyme the clear note that it is with joy, cheer, and mirth that we are to make this noise. *The Trinity Hymnal* has “fear” instead of “mirth.” While the latter is a rather antiquated word, this change is inexplicable. The word (*simchah*) means “joy, gladness, mirth;” not “fear.” The whole idea is happiness in the LORD. Here, tempo can be important. We all know about funeral home dirges done on cheap organs. Not this song. “Mr. H. has shown [that the original Old Hundreth Psalm Tune was] sung in a quick time, or ‘as fast as propriety would allow the enunciation of the words.’”<sup>16</sup> This is what it means to “come into his presence with singing!”

This is what it means in the context to, “Know that the LORD, he is God!” This is much more than a head-knowledge. That kind of knowing can become an end to itself, leading to great pride, arrogance, narcissism, and a loveless attitude towards others. It’s like thinking you know a celebrity because you read *People* magazine. It’s deceptive. Ironically, this bare-knowing short-circuits the deeper, truer, person-to-person knowledge of God himself.

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<sup>16</sup> Wainwright, vi; Mason, 13.

To know that the LORD is God is to rejoice in this fact. To rejoice in something like that means that it has been made personal to you, that you receive it and love it. This is faith, rejoicing that the LORD alone is God.

This knowledge then **rests** upon a major justification for praising him. It is he who made us, we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Creator. Adopter. Caretaker. It isn't just that God is this All-Powerful Force somewhere out there that we must bow down to or die. It is that he made us for himself. Again, the poetic translation is helpful here.

Know that the LORD is God indeed;  
without our aid He did us make;  
we are His flock, He doth us feed,  
and for His sheep He doth us take.

He did us **make**, and he doth us **take**. It is marriage language. But the metaphor here is of a Shepherd to the sheep. He takes his sheep to be his own, not to slaughter them for food, but to feed them with it. He does us **feed**, therefore, he is God **indeed**! It is his care for his sheep that

is the reason to celebrate the LORD as God. He takes care of his people.

Therefore, again, we come to praise him. We do not do it by ourselves, but rather we enter his gates, the place where he is, his home, **together**. The sheep come not to the sheep pen, but to the home of the Shepherd! They come not as isolated lambs, but as a flock. We come **through the pearly vaulted gates** with thanksgiving. We come into his golden, marbled courts with praise. We give him thanks and we bless his Name. And while we bless his Name, we realize that this is the very place where his Name resides. He is near in his Name: Emmanuel—God With Us. It is the condescension of the God-man to our midst to be King that becomes the climax of the set of songs. We mustn't forget where we've come from or what songs come before this.

O enter then His gates with praise,  
approach with joy His courts unto;  
praise, laud, and bless His name always,  
for it is seemly so to do.

As I was looking at the score of the doxology, something struck me about the music. Sing through it and notice how it goes up and down, up and down, up and down.



When do we go into the courts of God with praise? Always. With the rhythms of life. Whether life is up or down. Whether we feel good or bad. Whatever God has put in your way, you always go to his courts with praise, not because of the circumstances, but because he is God and you know that you are his sheep and no matter he puts in your way, blessing or discipline, health or disease, feast or famine, he never leaves or forsakes you. He is God indeed.

But you must come to know something about God's character here, and it is just at this point that Psalm 100

diverges from the theology taught in Psalm 95. One verse stands out in this song as having no counterpart in the previous song. It is **vs. 5**. Whereas Psalm 95 takes its own turn around vs. 7, becoming a warning to enter God's rest, Psalm 100's turn allows you to see abundantly why it is a good thing to praise and rest in this God.

It gives you **three attributes of God** that you can always hold on to. “**For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.**” I love the way this is translated into the poem in the Old Hundredth. They are some of the most precious lyrics to me in all of hymnody.

For why? The LORD our God is good,  
His mercy is forever sure;  
His truth at all times firmly stood  
and shall from age to age endure.

This is obviously a little different from the ESV translation. But two things are worth pointing out. Probably my favorite words in the whole song are “**For why?**” And this is the same as it is in the ESV. *Why should I*

*bless his Name? Why should I give him thanks? Why should I do his bidding and enter his courts? Why should I come through those gates week after week? Why should I serve the LORD with gladness? Why should I make a joyful noise to him?*

Too often, we don't ask this question. And we suffer for it. Someone sent me a link to one of the famous atheists of our day, the late **Christopher Hitchens**. Like his comrade in arms **Richard Dawkins** who goes on long rants about this evil tyrant God of the Bible, Hitchens is asked a question in a debate setting, "Why, if God is not real, do you spend your whole life trying to convince people he isn't real?" His answer? "It has become a major preoccupation of his life since 9-11." He then proceeds into this epic rant on this tyrannical eschatology found in monotheistic religions. "God wants us all to die!" he says. "He wants this world to come to an end, a separation of sheep and goats, condemnation, contempt for this world. His followers [Muslim, Jewish, Christian] cannot wait for death and destruction to overtake the world. So, the painful business of living as humans, of acquiring knowledge and building civilization, and health and medicine can all be scrapped, and the cult of death can take over."

My point is not to refute Hitchens. In fact, let's assume that there are a lot of followers of one God out there that are just like this, from all three of the main branches of monotheism in this world, including Christians. [What does Psalm 100:5 say?](#) The opposite of Hitchens. He has his facts wrong.

The LORD is [good](#). The word is *tov*. Synonyms are *beautiful, agreeable, pleasant, gracious, kind, upright, sweet*. The word is translated in all of those ways. We need to tell the world more about this Good God.

The LORD is full of [steadfast love](#). *Hesed*. This is his covenantal love. This one is especially for you Christians. It comes because God decided to enter into a covenant with you, not the other way around. He instigated love, while you were all busy being as rebellious and wicked towards him as you possibly could be. This, of course, is what all people like Hitchens do not want to admit about themselves. That they are sinful and that God will judge their sin. But beloved (think about that very term that is used so often in the Bible—beloved), [“God so loved the world” \(John 3:16\)](#). [“God is love” \(1Jn 4:8\)](#). Why should I praise God? Because he is full of love. Of course, he gets to

define what that word means, and to a large extent it means exactly what you think it means. Those who have been forgiven of their rebellion against him know very personally what it means. It means he is patient, kind, longsuffering, not arrogant, not easily provoked, holds no record of wrongs, etc. Because his character is love, when he says his steadfast love endures forever, we know that nothing in heaven or on earth will be able to separate them from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Paul ends his great discourse in Romans 8 on this very topic.

Finally, **faithfulness** (*emunah*) is God's firmness, his fidelity to his promises, his reliability to carry out on his word. God is true to his word. He is not capricious, not vindictive, not out to get you. God can be trusted. Trusted how? In his steadfast love and goodness towards you.

Is there anything in your heart that aches for this kind of reality to be true? Do you spend your life trying to find such things, to no avail? Are you constantly frustrated even in your Christian life, feeling as if you just can't grasp the fullness of the truth of these things? Like you can hold them for a second, but then they melt away by your touch, leaving you empty?

Psalm 100 is telling you that this is what King Jesus is like. It is the doxology of a host of songs that have taught you about this King, about his coming, about his life, about his death, his resurrection, his ascension, and even his sovereignty over his people in the OT. And in singing it, the thankfulness finds its way into the deep places of your heart, where it won't easily escape. And it teaches you though that thankfulness that these things are true.

This is a very, very old truth we are thinking about. It was codified, not into a text book for seminary students, but into a song book for God's people. This is a very, very old song. It is simple to grasp, and with the help of a good tune and poetic translation, even simpler. But it still takes a special move of the Holy Spirit to believe it. God must touch you through these words with their truth that yes indeed, he is these things *for you*. That's what the song is saying though. The whole earth is to sing this, for this is what God is like to all the earth.

This is the first song in our hymnal, and for good reason. But the second song in it, which is Psalm 143, has a line that I love almost as much as this fourth verse. It is just as important and complementary to what we're talking about

now. “Full of kindness and compassion, slow to anger, vast in love, God is good to all creation; all his works his goodness prove.”

If our great land was inaugurated with the Gospel through this song and the great tune that accompanies it, if Christians every morning used to wake up reciting this song, if Jews sing it every day in their synagogues, and used to usher each new year with it, if this 3,000 year old song is that important, and this best known of all tunes that is capable of evoking such powerful feelings of longing and homesickness, then beloved, [sing The Old Hundredth](#). I love that on Sunday evenings, this song is a regular request by our children. Let us revive that once well-known saying among God’s churches that Spurgeon said would never die out. Let us remember again with our minds and hearts working together in unison what kind of a God it is that we worship. Let us thank him each day anew. May he be pleased once more to use this Psalm to teach his people about a place that exists that they can only imagine. A place that is real. A place they may call home. A place where even now he is reigning as King, where the bard Taliesin said:

Is a land shining with goodness ... where war and want have ceased and all races live under the same law of love and honor ... a land bright with truth, where ... falsehood is banished, where children sleep safe in their mother's arms and never know fear or pain ... where mercy, kindness and compassion flow like deep water over the land, and men revere virtue, revere truth, revere beauty, above comfort, pleasure, or selfish gain ... where peace reigns in the hearts of men, where faith blazes like a beacon from every hill, and love like a fire from every hearth, where the True God is worshiped and his ways acclaimed by all.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> **Stephen R. Lawhead**, *Merlin* (New York: Avon Books, 1988), p. 108-09.