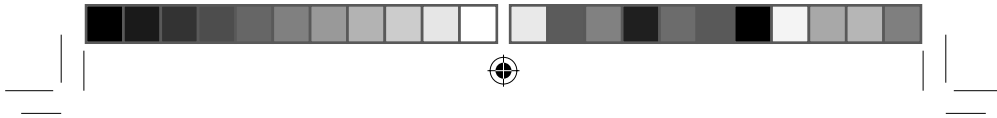


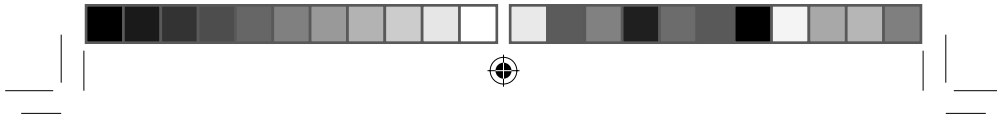
CALLS TO WORSHIP



ROBERT I. VASHOLZ







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A Pocket Resource



ROBERT I. VASHOLZ

CHRISTIAN
FOCUS






RobertVasholz was Chairman of the Old Testament Department at Covenant Theological Seminary, St Louis, Missouri for over twenty-five years. He completed his doctoral studies at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa. His dissertation compared the Aramaic in Daniel and Ezra with 38 fragments of a Targum of Job uncovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls. He holds a degree from Covenant Theological Seminary and has enjoyed post-doctoral studies at Brandeis and Harvard. He has also written *The Old Testament Canon in the Old Testament Church* which has been reproduced in several languages. He is a native of Kansas City, Missouri. He and his wife, Julia, have one daughter and five grandchildren.


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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



ISBN 978-1-84550-338-3

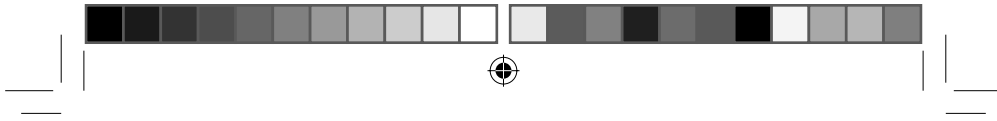
Published in 2008
by
Christian Focus Publications,
Geanies House, Fearn, Tain, Ross-shire,
IV20 1TW, Scotland, UK

www.christianfocus.com

Cover design by Daniel Van Straaten

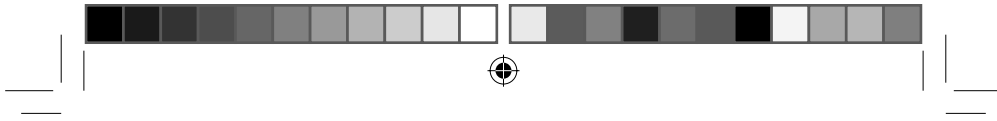
Printed and bound by Cromwell Press, Wiltshire

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**SEEK THE LORD
WHILE HE MAY BE FOUND
CALL UPON HIM
WHILE HE IS NEAR**








FOREWORD





Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth!
Serve the LORD with gladness!
Come into his presence with singing!
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.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise!
Give thanks to him; bless his name!
For the LORD is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.





(Ps. 100 ESV)

These joyful words of the Psalmist that call God's covenant people to worship exemplify the qualities of a call to worship that begins a worship service. In the common practice of Christian churches across many traditions, a call to worship typically is a few lines of Scripture (or a combination of Scripture texts) expressed by a minister or worship leader at the beginning of a church service. The call to worship exhorts God's people to turn from worldly distractions and to focus hearts, minds and actions on revering him. The beloved words of Psalm 100



well demonstrate the principles that for centuries have guided worship leaders in their expression and choice of words for the call to worship:

1) God calls us to worship. God's Word exhorts his people, 'Make a joyful noise to the LORD,' and 'Serve the LORD with gladness.' In writing these words under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Psalmist is actually speaking for God as he calls the ancient people to worship. The example should remind us that a contemporary worship leader who uses the words of Scripture to call the congregation to worship still speaks in behalf of God. The host of the worship service is divine. We do not invite him to be present. He invites us to, 'Come into his presence' (v. 2). God calls us from all other preoccupations to join the people he has redeemed in recognition, praise and service of his omnipresent glory.





2) Because the call to worship is from God, we are reminded that he always initiates; we respond. This is a profound truth not only for our salvation, but also for our worship of the One who saves us. The call to worship is not simply a perfunctory greeting of human cordiality, but is at once a weighty responsibility and a joyful privilege. The worship leader issues God's invitation to join the heavenly throng that always praises him. The traditions of each church and occasion will help determine the appropriateness of gathering people from stray thoughts and conversations with informal words of welcome (e.g. 'Good morning. How good to have you here in God's house!'), but the privileges



and responsibilities of the call to worship that actually commences our focus on revering God are too good to displace with comments regarding the weather and yesterday's football game.

With a scriptural call to worship God invites us by his Word to join the worship of the ages and angels. God does not simply invite us to a party of friends, or a lecture on religion, or a concert of sacred music – he invites us into the presence of the King of the Universe before whom all creation will bow and for whom all heaven now sings. With the call to worship God's people are invited to participate in the wondrous praise that already and eternally enraptures the hosts of heaven. This awesome news and great privilege should be reflected with appropriate enthusiasm and joy by the worship leader in the call to worship. Such a call will typically lead directly into a corporate or choral hymn of praise as God's people respond to the blessings of worship into which they are called. A well-planned call to worship often reflects the theme of the service or the nature the occasion so that the remaining elements of service are a natural outflow of, and response to, the content of the call.



3) God calls us to respond to his revelation. By using the words of Scripture as a call to worship, the leader automatically urges God's people to respond to his disclosure of his own nature and purposes. This pattern established by the call to worship shapes the rest of the worship service. We do not approach God on our terms, but his. When he speaks, it is our obligation and privilege to respond appropriately in praise, prayer, repentance,



testimony, encouragement of others, and service to what he declares about himself. This corporate dialogue in which we as God's people respond to God's revelation is the sacred rhythm of covenant worship that begins with the call to worship.



God reveals himself in Psalm 100: 'Know that the LORD, he is God. It is he who made us...' (v. 3). This revelation of God as Lord and Creator immediately leads the Psalmist to exhortations for further exaltation: 'Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him; bless his name!' (v. 4). These words remind us that a call to worship has an imperative quality. We are not simply informing others of the attributes of God or creating a holy aura by the citation of a poignant Scripture passage. In the call to worship, the worship leader specifically calls God's people to respond to God's revelation.

Though it may seem obvious, it is often important to remind worship leaders that the text chosen for a call to worship is, in fact, a 'call.' In the call to worship the leader exhorts God's people to respond to the revelation of the divine nature and blessings. Thus, the text should call the people to shout, sing, praise, bow, bless or in some other way express their worship of God. If the text itself does not have this imperative aspect (and virtually all texts chosen as calls to worship in historic liturgies do possess such an imperative), then the worship leader should provide a word or phrase that instructs God's people how to respond to the text cited. An added phrase as simple as, 'In light of what God has told us about his love, let us worship him,' can turn



a Scripture that has no 'call' quality into an appropriate call to worship.

4) God calls us to respond to his redemption. Because God invites our praise, we know our worship pleases him – somehow we have been made precious to him. The Psalmist does not merely remind us that God made us, but also '...we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture' (v. 3). As we face our weakness, frailty and sin, it seems impossible that God would be pleased by us – or our praise. Yet, his invitation to worship is itself a revelation of his grace that makes us willing and able to respond to him. In fact, knowledge of God's redemptive qualities serves as the impetus for the climax of the Psalmist's call to worship. The Psalmist's adoration crescendos with these words: 'Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise' (v. 4); and the reasons follow: 'For the LORD is good and his steadfast love endures forever; and his faithfulness to all generations' (v. 5).



The entire message of the Gospel is not usually verbalized in the call to worship, but its features inevitably glisten. By a scriptural call to worship we understand that God welcomes us to his presence and invites us to participate in his purposes. Though we are weak, he is welcoming; though our iniquities are great, he remains inviting. The call to worship necessarily and simultaneously commends God's worthiness and consoles us in our unworthiness. We can come to him; he wants us; and, he delights in our praise. All this reminds us that God has established our relationship with him by his grace and – far from releasing us from all



holy obligations – that grace now compels our response of worship.

In the call to worship God calls us to give him praise, but the command is not onerous. It is an invitation to respond to God's revelation of himself and his grace. In offering this invitation God is both host and honoree, and God's people are both invited and compelled by his mercy to give him glory. God gives us the privilege of welcome into his presence that we might reciprocate with the gift of worship. Right perception of this gift exchange encourages the worship leader to speak the call to worship with the warmth of heart and openness of gesture that such an occasion of mutual blessing deserves.

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