

SESSION 1: JOY TO THE WORLD

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

Psalm 98

QUESTIONS

1. Read Psalm 98. What words are used to describe the "noise" that we are called to make toward God?
2. How would you prepare to receive a king in your home?
3. What is meant by "Let ev'ry heart prepare Him room" in the carol, "Joy to the World"? What is a place in your life that you need to prepare for the coming of Jesus, our King?
4. In the video/script it is mentioned that, *all the words of the hymn are written in the present tense, not something that had happened and is over with, but something that is happening and is still to come*. How can this inspire you to sing the lyrics of "Joy to the World" with a fresh perspective?
5. All of creation was designed and came into being with the purpose of bringing glory to God. How can we glorify God in the things we do? Read Matthew 5:16. What is Christ saying here?
6. When pausing for a moment to ponder the wonder of the birth of Jesus Christ, His future return, and its personal meaning for you, what emotions fill your soul?
7. All creation rejoices over the omnipotent and just King. What are some ways in which you can radiate this joy to all during this Advent season?
8. **PERSONAL TAKE-HOME:** Write out the blessings that God has flowed into your life. Reflecting on these blessings, how can you sing "Joy to the World" in a new way?

[illegible]

JOY TO THE WORLD

(by Isaac Watts)

Joy to the world, the Lord is come,
Let earth receive her King:
Let ev'ry heart prepare him room,
And heav'n and nature sing!

Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
Repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make his blessings flow
Far as the curse is found!

**(this verse is often omitted in renditions of the hymn today)*

He rules the world with truth and grace;
And makes the nations prove
The glories of his righteousness.
And wonders of his love.

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal lines.

SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 1: JOY TO THE WORLD

In this session, we'll spend some time looking at the history and Scripture behind a beloved Christmas hymn - "Joy to the World" - one of the most published Christmas hymns in North America.

The lyrics, inspired by Psalm 98 and written by Isaac Watts, were first published in 1719. As a theologian and hymn-writer, Watts had a desire to write lyrics for the Psalms in such a way that they pointed believers to Christ. This is clearly evident in the lyrics for "Joy to the World."

However, this Christmas hymn, as we know and sing it today, did not exist until 1839, when it was first published as a hymn arranged by Lowell Mason. Mason, who heavily influenced church music in America in the 1800s, used fragments of melodies from George Handel's oratorio, "Messiah," to create the melody for a song he called "Antioch." This tune is the one most commonly paired with the lyrics of "Joy to the World." So, the song that we sing today was the work of three people that took over 100 years to come into being.

Let's take a look now at Psalm 98 to see how it influenced the lyrics for "Joy to the World."

In verse 4, we read, *Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth; break forth in song, rejoice, and sing praises.* This verse sets up the entire mood of the hymn. We have joy because of the coming of our King. He reigns on earth and rules it with truth and with grace. Therefore, we shout joyfully to Him with songs of praise.

In verses 7 through 9, we read, *Let the sea roar, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell in it; let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills be joyful together before the Lord, for He is coming to judge the earth.* All of God's creation is called to make joyful noises to the Lord, even the rivers and the hills. This is displayed in both the first and second verses of "Joy to the World," where heaven and nature sing to God, where the fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains repeat the sounding joy of His coming. As part of creation, it is our joy and calling to bring glory to God and to praise Him loudly and triumphantly for everyone to hear.

Now, we see that in Psalm 98, verse 9, the psalmist speaks of being joyful because God is coming to judge the earth. There is joy in this because of what follows in the rest of the verse: *With righteousness He shall judge the world, and the peoples with equity* (Psalm 98:9). God is the only One who knows what true justice looks like for the world. With His wisdom and

knowledge of every person and of every thing, we can trust Him to judge each one perfectly and equally. And so, in verse 3 of "Joy to the World," we are called to "prove the glories of His righteousness." What does this mean? To prove means to test and to see if something is reliable or true. Because Christ "rules the world with truth and grace," and we experience His truth and grace in our own lives, we have tested, we have proven, that He is reliable. His grace is so overwhelming, that we can't help but see and prove His righteousness. And all people, one day, will have to prove for themselves the glories of His righteousness.

When we consider Psalm 98 and what the psalmist wrote, we can understand that this Psalm was about rejoicing over the coming Lord, the Savior of Israel. But what about when Isaac Watts wrote the lyrics for "Joy to the World"? For him, the Savior had already come to earth. It was a historical fact and a divine reality. But all the words of the hymn are written in the present tense, not something that *had* happened and is over with, but something that is happening and is still to come. So is "Joy to the World" really even a Christmas song about the birth of Christ?

Looking at the book that this carol was originally published in, Watts wrote a hymn about the first few verses of Psalm 98, and titled it, "First Part, Praise for the Gospel." Psalm 98:4-9, the verses that "Joy to the World" is based on, are then labeled, "Second Part, The Messiah's coming and Kingdom." Chronologically speaking, we can see that "Joy to the World" is in fact about Christ's second coming, not His birth. Take some time to read through Watts' lyrics for the hymn which are provided in your guide. How do they call us to celebrate the second and final coming of Jesus Christ?

We don't need to get caught up in if "Joy to the World" is actually a Christmas song or not. It's a song that speaks to the past, to the present, and to the future. Jesus Christ came to earth, He reveals Himself through the Spirit today, and He will come again, to judge all people equally. Through all, we are to be joyful. We can have joy because of Jesus Christ, joy because of the wonders of His love, and joy in proclaiming His gospel. The Advent season is the anticipation of Christ's coming, both as a past and future celebration, and this news is cause enough to praise God so that all the world may know and joyfully worship our Savior and King.