

Children's Sabbaths Faith Expression

Let's Get Loud

Psalm 104:1-9, 24, 35c New Revised Standard Version

104:1 Bless the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, you are very great. You are clothed with honor and majesty, 2 wrapped in light as with a garment. You stretch out the heavens like a tent, 3 you set the beams of your chambers on the waters, you make the clouds your chariot, you ride on the wings of the wind, 4 you make the winds your messengers, fire and flame your ministers. 5 You set the earth on its foundations, so that it shall never be shaken. 6 You cover it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains. 7 At your rebuke they flee; at the sound of your thunder they take to flight. 8 They rose up to the mountains, ran down to the valleys to the place that you appointed for them. 9 You set a boundary that they may not pass, so that they might not again cover the earth. 24 O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.

35c Praise the LORD!

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It's been said that music is a universal language. It transcends borders, cultures, and time. Music's melodies and rhythms evoke emotions, connect hearts, and communicate feelings that words alone cannot express. Whether it is a hymn, an anthem, opera composition or a solo in a worship setting, there is something unmistakable about lifting our voices, or experiencing the movement of the rhythm, or even "listening" to the music through sign language. From our favorite singers performing on the world stage at the Super Bowl, to school plays and musicals where our children are front and center, singing the refrain of a chorus or belting out tunes as the lead, music brings us together. Music mitigates our differences and opens the door to a range of emotions from lament and sorrow to Powhatan tribal dances and Sikh chants to hip hop rhymes and hashtags of #blackboyjoy across social media platforms.

In a world where weariness climbs the charts like songs on music's Billboards, and the heaviness of an election year has us singing the blues, we can find solace and comfort in singing God's praises. It's no wonder then, that the psalms are an album, a compilation of emotions of thanksgiving, lament, praise, and adoration from the real-lived experiences of the psalmist, directly from their lips to God's ear. In times like these, we find ourselves in unison saying these words written by poet Lucille Clifton, "won't you celebrate with me that everyday something has tried to kill me and has failed."

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In other words, praise be to God that the things that tried to take us out, have not succeeded. When we offer God praise, it is a sacrifice. Hebrews 13:15 tells us to praise God by offering God the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. When we do this, it brings God's kindom/kingdom and throne into our situations because God dwells among the praises of God's people.

The words found in Psalm 104 are lyrics. They are sung to God. Melodies to Heaven to give praise and adoration to who God is and for the great things that God has done. The psalmist sings God's praises by naming just some of the magnificent things that demonstrate God's handiwork. And the imagery here is beautiful. Much like a child who uses her imagination to create a story or a picture with a rainbow of shining colors that help to tell the story of what's on her mind, the psalmist unleashes her joy to describe God's awesomeness. Then sings her soul, her Savior God to thee, how Great Thou Art!

Praise means expressing approval and admiration. Praise is also a form of social interaction where you give someone reassurance and recognition. More than a compliment of telling someone that you like their new hairstyle or the matching tie and handkerchief with the suit that they are wearing, praise is verbal acknowledgement and an affirming expressive response; it is to convey a sense that the recipient of the praise is to be prized.



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Today as we celebrate Children's Sabbaths joining with multi-faith places of worship all across the nation in shared concern and action for children and youth, intentionally announcing our commitment to improving children's lives and working for liberating justice with and on their behalf, let us also remember to praise our children. Children are a gift from God, and we give thanks and praise for our children. Children are our future, and they are our "right now," and they deserve to hear words of affirmation and expressions of healthy love toward them. In the words of singer Whitney Houston from her iconic chart-topping song The Greatest Love of All, "I believe the children are our future. Teach them well and let them lead the way. Show them all the beauty they possess inside. Give them a sense of pride."

Beloved, these lyrics are an invitation for us to praise our children and to offer words of affirmation that are critical to their growth, self-esteem, and character. When was the last time you praised a child? Whether you are a parent, caregiver, teacher, leader, uncle or aunt, or there are children in your midst, when is the last time that you spoke words and named your appreciation for something that a child did, or for simply who the child is, as a gift from God, made in the image of God?

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Unfortunately for so many of our children, they hear criticism rather than praise. Many of our children are bullied or exposed to the effects of bullying systems that leave our children vulnerable and stressed. These experiences can be traumatic for a child. In fact, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, child trauma occurs more than we even realize or think. A startling 26% of children will experience a traumatic event by the age of four.[1] Things like war, neglect, family violence, natural disasters, even military family-related stressors like a parent being deployed, are all traumatic events for children. And these traumatizing experiences can rob our children of their joy.

Music can help heal them. According to the Children's Music Fund,[2] an organization that offers assistance by focusing on the mental well-being of sick children through music therapy – restoring joy and laughter, singing and playing of instruments, teaching coping mechanisms, alleviating pain-levels, and so much more, music is a balm. Music is therapeutic. It's not just for children who are dealing with sickness or physical pain, but for children who simply need an environment where they can be nourished and nurtured and praised.

If the psalmist can get loud and expressive about our great God, then what would it look like for us to get loud and expressive about children and singing their praises for who they are. Our praise can be a defense and shield for our children, protecting them from the erosive mean words, arrows, heartless policies and unfair decisions that come to target them.

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The same God that the psalmist sings about in this passage is the same God who created our children and youth. Psalm 104 is a celebration of who God is as Creator of the Universe. The psalmist praises God's marvelous, ingenious ordering. Everything – from the sun that gives us light to the grass the cattle feed on – is intricately connected. Listen at this testament of who the psalmist proclaims God to be – One who is clothed with honor and majesty, wrapped in light as with a garment, a cloak. That's what the word garment means here. It is as if God is wearing light like a cloak.

The same God who orders the sun to shine and the moon to rise is the same God whose light peers over the playgrounds where our children play; God's garments of honor and majesty set the pathway for our children to thrive and flourish and to enjoy being a kid and seeing life through the wide-eyed wonder of dance, art, sports, and music.

On this Children's Sabbaths celebration, let's get loud about our children, even as we praise God. Let's get loud with our voices and advocate for the well-being of all children.

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When Will Things Get Better?

Job 38:1-7, (34-41) New Revised Standard Version

Closing Prayer (Mohawk Nation Prayer)

Oh, Great Spirit, Creator of all things; human beings, trees, grass, berries. Help us, be kind to us. Let us be happy on earth. Let us lead our children to a good life and old age. These our people; give them good minds to love one another. Oh, Great Spirit, be kind to us. Give these people the favor to see green trees, green grass, flowers and berries, this next spring. So we all meet again. Oh, Great Spirit, we ask of you.

Reflection Questions on the Text

- In verse 5, the psalmist says this about God: you set the earth on its foundation so that it shall never be shaken. In what ways are you seeing the foundations and stability of children shaken? What action can you take today that leads to helping secure their foundation?
- Children deserve praise. Name at least three “praises” that you are committed to giving your children (or children in your sphere of influence) this week? How will you keep the momentum going of giving them regular praise?
- God is clothed in a garment of light. Where are some places where God’s light needs to be carried by you? How will you shine a light on the things that endanger our children?

Consider this Activity for Children:

Encourage children to explore their creativity and faith by engaging with the Psalms of Praise and Reflection section for kids. Here, they can read, reflect on, and create their own Psalms, expressing their thoughts and feelings through poetry and art. This activity not only helps children connect with the biblical texts but also allows them to share their unique voices in a meaningful way.