



## “Our Instruments in Worship”<sup>1</sup>

Last year I was talking with a nephew-in-law and explaining how I don’t have a lot of tools and that I’d like to get more, but they’re so expensive. He obviously took that phrase to heart because at Christmas he gave me a nice sized toolbox with many tools that were extras for him! I’m grateful for that because if needed, I have more options. But let’s say something breaks and I could fix it, but I neglect the tools? At a minimum, it’s going to make fixing harder and more frustrating. But if I used the tools, it would make things better and maybe even easier.

As I think through this sermon series on the psalms, I hope that you’ve been gifted with many *tools*, learning about the emotions, postures and stories that are a part of corporate worship. But the only way to grow in our worship is to actually *use* these tools and to continue to do so. I bring this up because we are almost at a close of this series through the psalms, and I think *many* of us have been tremendously encouraged. We’ve been strengthened and we have sought to apply this series practically from week to week. But a potential fear is that some of us (or maybe many) will go back to the same old habits once this series is done. You might be tempted to say, “Hold on. Are other people raising hands or bowing down?” Or, you’ll think, “Well, we’re not being encouraged to do this now; so, I’ll just revert back.”

I hope this doesn’t happen, and that’s why I’m stating as clearly as possible today that I hope the sermons were giving you tools to use. But now, the follow through of these sermons is for the good of each of us! Having these tools and not implementing them, will not help us. So, I genuinely hope and pray that these sermons continue to bear fruit from week-to-week, both encouraging and fueling our worship of the Lord.

When we gather together, I hope and pray that we each come in with the purpose to tell our souls to “Bless the Lord” through our worship with our mind, soul, emotions, strength and bodies! In transparency, when many of you have told me how much you’ve learned, I share that I’m right there with you. I’ve been strengthened by the lessons I’ve learned and also through you as you’ve responded in corporate praise!

Now, let’s seek to fan the flame more and more, from week to week – pursuing Jesus together as we sing our praise to the Lord.

While next week’s sermon is a part of this psalm series, and it will apply to corporate worship, this sermon is more focused on corporate praise – and this sermon focuses on the aspects that *all* of us would say are a part of all corporate worship gatherings: our instruments. And, by instruments, I’m including our voices as instruments.

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<sup>1</sup> This manuscript is still in the rough draft phase. I recommend you utilize these notes in conjunction to the sermon to gain greater insight and clarity.

The main idea of this sermon is that **God has gifted his people with the privilege of singing and playing music in order to express our joy in and worship of God.** Some here might think this is going to simply be a review sermon because we already know we should sing and have instruments. But I hope that even though some of this is review that you would be encouraged all the more in recognizing the gift of singing and playing that God has given to us!

So, let's dive into the sermon. Turn in your Bibles to Psalm 98. Before I read, let's pray for the Lord's mercy on us and his Church [Pray for Heuers and for Justin Smith of Emmanuel in Spring Lake.]

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*Oh sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things! His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. The Lord has made known his salvation; he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations. He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises! Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody! With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord! Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who dwell in it! Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.*<sup>2</sup>

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We'll start the sermon by first focusing on the privilege of singing to the Lord.

### **1. God has gifted his people with the privilege of singing (Ps. 98).**

Over the last few years during the summer months, my family has often sat in front of our television watching the TV show *America's Got Talent*. It's a competition between people with unique, beautiful, intriguing and sometimes absurd talents. At times, our family has been perplexed or even upset because so often the singers and musicians will win. I, along with my children, have said at different points, "They should have a separate *America's Got Talent* for singers." But, there's something that we learn when we realize that singers win over and over again. Human beings have an innate draw towards music. Even if you say you're not musical, music still affects you.

Now, there's some debate over what the most repeated command is in the Bible, and instead of debating over it, I'll simply share with you the two that vie for the top. It's "do not fear" (or some variation of that) and then to sing praise to God. Don't fear. **a. Sing praise!**

To sing is not an option. It's a command – and it's a command for all who have been rescued by Jesus. You might then think, "Well, now that takes away the joy of singing when I know I'm commanded to," but why would you feel that way? Instead, you should see how God's commands are good and freeing! Some think God is acting like a megalomaniac by commanding people to worship and praise him. But in commanding us to praise him, God is giving us the culmination of the greatest desires.

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<sup>2</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 98:1–9.

C.S. Lewis talks of praise like this:

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***I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed. It is frustrating to have discovered a new author and not to be able to tell anyone how good he is; to come suddenly, at the turn of the road, upon some mountain valley of unexpected grandeur and then to have to keep silent because the people with you care for it no more than for a tin can in the ditch; to hear a good joke and find no one to share it with. (bold mine; as quot. in <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/praise-the-consummation-of-joy>)***

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Praise is the consummation of our joy! The reality is that God doesn't need our singing. He doesn't need our praise. The Scriptures say that God doesn't need *anything*. He's not like us humans. So, when God commands praise of him, he's not doing it because he feels like he has no attention and that people are being rude. God commands praise for our good! And he commands praise to show us that praise is a seriously joyful privilege that he has given to us!

In Psalm 98, we're told why to sing praise to God. He has done marvelous things. And then the psalmist says his right hand and holy arm has worked salvation. Salvation isn't referring to him saving himself. He needs to saving. It's speaking of him saving human beings. I know it's an unpopular message, but the reality is that we are not born good. Humans are born sinful with tight fists against God – embracing sin and loving ourselves and our stuff more than God.

We read the Bible, and we continually see people whom God has been gracious to, and yet they perpetually deny the Lord and favor their own ways. They defiantly shake their fists at God. How can people who are focused on sin be rescued from that disobedience?

The only way we can be rescued is if God rescues us. But how does he do this? The psalmist says with his right hand – which refers to the hand of power! In the New Testament, we're told that Jesus is at the right hand of the Father. Jesus is the right hand of God; so-to-speak. And how did Jesus bring salvation? He, and he alone, is the perfect and righteous One who came in human flesh to do what humans could never do. Jesus came, not being sinful. He never was tight-fisted towards God. And yet, at the end of his life, he was treated as though he was a defiant sinner. People rejected him and crucified him. But even more than that, Jesus willingly took the place for sinners on the cross. While Jesus committed himself to the Lord, the pride-filled, defiant sins were placed on him. And then God's perfect justice punished Jesus as he was condemned in the place of sinners! Jesus was treated as the chiefest of sinners – becoming sin while being righteous.

In this act, God displayed his justice against sin, but he also displayed his glorious salvation for sinners. On the third day, Jesus rose from the dead, defeating death and revealing he has conquered sin! As the Righteous One, he conquered humanity's enemies. Now, he summons people to life. Have you experienced his salvation? For me, I realize that my fists were still closed. But I knew that was a problem. And one day in my past, I gave Jesus my tight fists, asking him to open them. He did that by changing my heart, and over time (and even to this day), he continues to lovingly open my hands towards him! And he promises to work all things in my life together for eternal good. What a great Savior!

In addition to all of this, Jesus' salvation isn't only centered on me and my own individual salvation. His salvation is something that rescues myriads of people. And, Jesus' rescue rescues creation! This creation is fallen and destined to pass away, but someday, Jesus will bring a New Heaven and New Earth – whether land and sky, beast and birds, moon and stars will shine for God's glory perfectly with no affects of the Fall!

In light of this great salvation, the psalmist says "Sing!" Meditate on the greatness and goodness of God, and then *sing!* Let your joy well up in God and don't cap it! Let it come out in words of song. Ventura, I hope you see this amazing privilege because not every human has this. So many around the world do not glory in Jesus. They haven't been rescued by him. But many hear have! You get to rejoice in God. Take up the privilege and loosen your tongue, employing it for the praise of God.

Psalm 147:1 says, "**Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and a song of praise is fitting.**"<sup>3</sup> Praising the Lord in song is good, pleasant and fitting. I like the word "fitting." It's saying "singing to the Lord" is just right! When you know who God is, there really is nothing else that fits as a right response. Only singing will do. Have you ever had that experience? I could be in a hard time, feeling at a loss of words, and a song comes to give me words. Or, I've been in situations where I've been praising God with people and I say, "Can we sing the doxology right now?"

I've quoted Psalm 86:11 many times in this series: Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name.<sup>4</sup> In singing, I believe God works to unite our hearts to what we know. And so, singing is fitting because while my words are limited and I feel I can't praise God adequately, God gives me the privilege of singing. And, in singing, my mind and heart are united in such a way where I present my whole self to the Lord, by his grace.

Praise is the right response to who God is and how he works. It's fitting. pleasant and good. I know that some here can say, "But I'm not a good singer" or maybe you say, "Well, other people are singing. I don't need to." When you realize this is one of the most repeated commands in Scripture, you then realize God wants all of his children to rise to the level of the culminating joy of singing to the Lord. In addition, even the psalmist says to make a joyful noise. And while many can jokingly say it just says "noise," not necessarily perfect singing, I want you to sincerely take that to heart. God doesn't accept singing because it's all on the right notes. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit and a contrite heart. I don't care how tone-deaf you are. To the Lord, singing to him from a heart of praise, is a beautiful sound to the Lord. Do you hear that? Once his enemy, and now because of Jesus, your praise is beautiful to the Lord.

But this command to sing isn't simply a command to sing alone in your car or in the shower. In the psalms, the context is also corporate singing. Church singing isn't the job of the people on the platform. It's the privilege of all who gather together. Martin Luther, the 16<sup>th</sup> century Protestant Reformer, wrote this regarding singing: "**I most heartily desire that music, that divine and precious gift, be praised and extolled before all people....Experience proves that, next to the Word of God, only music deserves to be seen as the mistress and governess of the feelings of the human heart....A greater praise than this we cannot imagine**" (Luther as quot. <http://www.firstlutheranchurchff.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/5-3-15-How-can-I-Keep-from-Singing-100-yrs-of-Music.pdf>).

Music should be extolled before all people. Therefore, it's completely understandable why in the New Testament, the apostle Paul talks of the place of music in the local church. He states that we are to sing to

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<sup>3</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 147:1.

<sup>4</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 86:11.

one another. In Ephesians 5, he says, **“be filled with the Spirit,<sup>19</sup> addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.”<sup>5</sup>**

Do you want to know what a Spirit-filled person looks like? Ephesians 5:18-19 says if you’re Spirit-filled, you will sing to each other in corporate worship! Why? Because God is so glorious and we must share in the joy. But notice in that passage, we don’t simply sing. **b. We sing with the intention of teaching each other.**

In Colossians 3:16, we read: <sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.<sup>6</sup>

When we sing, we teach and admonish each other. By the way, this is a reason why I like to have light in corporate worship. While it’s good to recognize that our focus is on God and God is working in each of us individually in corporate worship, God also says that we need to recognize in corporate worship, we are worshipping with others – with the intention to encourage others, too! Sometimes you might see me look around and I might catch your eye. I am encouraged in hearing you sing and even seeing your expressions in worship. I can look around and see your worship – and it strengthens me in my worship, too. As I hear words of songs being sung to me, I’m reminded of the faithfulness and goodness of God.

I said this a few weeks ago, and I think it’s helpful to re-state. But the time of corporate singing is our opportunity to preach and teach each other. And, it’s vital. Singing for 30-35 minutes in a service might seem long to some, but when we realize what we’re singing, to whom we’re singing and that we are pursuing Jesus together as we’re singing together; 35 minutes is a treasured privilege.

I’m telling you that I’ve heard comments from others in the midst of this psalm series, saying how encouraged they’ve been in watching and listening to the church family – almost feeling as though God’s reviving us because of the greater intensity in our singing and expressions of worship. I pray that’s the case! But, I think we can recognize how corporate worship strengthens us in the Lord.

Honestly, we don’t know how various people came in the corporate gathering today. Some are discouraged. Others are feeling desperate. Others are feeling strong and encouraged. Wherever you are, whatever your feeling, respond to God in song – and watch how God encourages others. Practically, a couple weeks ago, one of the songs (and your response) hit me. The lyrics go, “I lift my hands to believe again.” And I’ve wondered about those words in the past, but we sang that after I preached on the purposes of postures in praise – that postures are to express our heart, but God has given us postures to also preach reality to our heart. The words encouraged me, but in that service, I saw your hands. Wow! The lyrics, the singing, the posture came together and taught me and gave me pictures of dependent joy in the Lord.

So, with the psalmist, I pray we’d all wholeheartedly embrace the privilege of singing praise to the Lord! He is worthy. Now, let’s pray that we grow in giving him the songs of praise he deserves. These God-given instruments of our voices have been set free to worship.

But God doesn’t only want our voices. The psalms also teach us of the privilege to use instruments in corporate worship.

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<sup>5</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Eph 5:18–19.

<sup>6</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Col 3:16.

## 2. God has gifted his people with the privilege of instruments in worship (Psalm 150).

Many of the reasons of *why* singing are the same for *why* instruments. But I think it could be helpful to say something on the outset here. While some of you might simply assume instruments are good in corporate worship, there are Christians who believe instruments are wrong in corporate worship. The reason is because instruments are not mentioned at all in the New Testament. So, they'd read Psalm 150 and essentially say that Psalm 150 is all under the old covenant. But now that we are in Christ, we don't need types and symbols, like instruments.

I have a couple problems with this. First, at least some of these individuals would still believe we should hold to the Sabbath, and yet the Sabbath isn't commanded as explicitly in the New Testament as the Old Testament. No matter where you stand regarding the Sabbath, my point in bringing this up is that there are commands in the Old Testament that are less explicit in the New. Therefore, second point, the Old Testament is still the Bible with valid commands. Finally, if the New Testament prohibited instruments, then we'd have a case. But since the Old Testament commands, and the New doesn't prohibit, then we should assume the commands are still for us as a general principle.

Practically, playing instruments enhances our praise to the Lord as we sing with our bodies, minds and hearts. I don't believe these commands for instruments are saying that every person must play an instrument, but that instruments would be normative in corporate worship. And there are people gifted and talented in playing instruments. Instruments help to inform a situation and even guide our emotions. I remember the church I went to in South Carolina, and they would play "Before the Throne of God Above." The pianist was phenomenal, and when we would get to "one with himself, I cannot die," the player would play with such emphasis that it called my emotions to gratitude, joy and humility. If the instruments are used to guide and complement, they are beautiful gifts of God!

So, let's turn to Psalm 150 and read that passage together:

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*Praise the Lord! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens! Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his excellent greatness! Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! Praise him with sounding cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals! Let everything that has breath praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!*<sup>7</sup>

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I generally get concerned when people tell me that they think a certain instrument should *not* ever be in corporate worship because I don't think that fits the Scripture. I mean, that might be your personal preference, but when I read Psalm 150, I see a list of instruments – and I don't think that's an exhaustive list. Nor do I think this is the list of the only instruments we can play. Instead, David is calling us to praise God with any kind of instrumentation.

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<sup>7</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 150:1–6.

Now, it's interesting that at this point, someone might say, "But we don't want a concert feel!" And I get that immediate concern. The point of congregational worship is *congregational* worship. If what's taking place up here silences us all or overpowers voices, then we've missed the point. But we can't associate a number of instruments, or a specific instrument, automatically with *concert*.

As I think about this, I'm reminded of the organ. A few years ago, I was reading a biography on Bach, the musician. He was a church organist, and obviously very successful. But in my reading, I discovered that sometimes Bach would play the organ as an interlude in the church service for upwards to 15-20 minutes. That may be somewhat of a concert feel.

Now, I can't go back in time to see if and how it could have been worshipful, but my question is, "How is that helping the corporate gathering in their worship?" I think of Paul's words regarding speaking in tongues and prophesying, and he states that we should want to *understand* things in the corporate gathering. Music, by itself, has its place, but 15-20 minutes in the corporate gathering isn't teaching or training. Teaching one another is the primary concern.

So, a concert feel isn't an instrument or a number of people on the platform. It's when we're trying to emphasize the sound at the expense of the whole congregation. Or, when we encourage people to simply sit back and listen.

By the way, this doesn't mean that instrumentals are inappropriate. In Psalm 33:3, we read, "**Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts.**"<sup>8</sup>

Play skillfully. Now, I don't think this means that only professionals can play instruments. But I do think this means that we should seek to do a good job. The first-year piano student can play, and be taught to recognize the privilege to play in the corporate gathering. That said, I think skillfully can refer to multiple things in the corporate gathering.

To be skillful is to recognize when to be quieter or louder. What's the message of the song? How should the song be played? Also, depending on the instrument, you should recognize your place within the instrumentation. A skillful musician will know their place and seek to complement the main instruments so that the sound comes together well.

As I say all of this, some could say, "Ok, just give it to me, Pastor Timothy. Do you think cymbals are ok in a service?" Yes. Psalm 150. Any type of instrument would be ok? Certainly. As long as it is done in such a way that complements the corporate singing. "But you are saying that musical interludes are wrong?" No. I need to clarify that. There are places and times for music to be playing alone. I've been in contexts where music was playing with no one talking. It provided opportunity for reflection and response to the Lord.

"But could it be too loud?" Yes. "But couldn't there be too many instruments?" Absolutely. Every local church has to evaluate their music and see whether or not their music is distracting or done in a way that's helpful for the congregation. Sometimes I've heard church music teams that sound like failed musicians got together and finally made a band. I'm not trying to be mean. Instead, I think sometimes people focus so much on instruments. They think, "We have to have an electric guitar and drums to be relevant." Or, it can go to the other end: We must have only an organ and a piano. When we focus on the instruments in-and-of-themselves, we fail.

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<sup>8</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 33:3.

So, what is the focus? The focus is the corporate worship of God! God's glory in Jesus by the power of the Spirit is our primary concern. Then we pray we together rejoice in him – helping each other to do that! As instrumentalists come together, we seek to play skillfully – in ways helpful and focused on praising the Lord. But if some instruments end up becoming distracting or maybe the player just needs to practice more by themselves, then we modify. The point is God's glory and our helping each other in worshipping him.

Take the privilege of singing and instrumentation and let's worship God together. What a privilege that God would give us music to strengthen our hearts and each other's hearts in the faith. But there's one more point to be made. As we sing to the Lord corporately, it's also evangelistic.

By the way, if you were taught (like I was) that music wasn't intended to be evangelistic, that's wrong. I mentioned Psalm 40:3 a few weeks ago, which says God has put a song in our mouth, and many see and fear and trust. That's evangelistic. Psalm 96 is evangelistic, too. It's a song stating to the whole world to praise the Lord.

You know, the culmination of joy is to sing with others – and to want more to participate in it. I think of Romans 1, where we read about humanity being sinful. We're told that human beings are born worshipping and serving the creature (and created things) more than God. And, at the end of chapter 1, Paul writes that not only do sinners sin, but they give hearty approval of those who do the same things.

We were created to *enjoy* things in community – and if we love something, we want more and more people to participate. Since this is the case, this also happens with our joy in God as it's expressed in singing. I gather to sing with my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, but I also hope that as we sing together, if there are unbelievers here, they'd hear our songs and be drawn in to love the Savior who reconciled sinners to God.

I pray our songs would reveal the holiness of God, humanity's neediness, our laments, God's grace, Jesus' sacrifice, the Spirit's strength, the Word's power. As we sing and play instruments – as we involve our emotions and postures – I pray they would be an expression of our hearts and also that we'd preach to our hearts. And, as people hear us, they'd realize that not only do we believe these truths, but that we *love* Jesus and we want everyone around us to love and trust and believe on him, too. God is real. God is holy. God is just. God is good. God is gracious. God is forgiving. God is our hope and joy! So, let's worship the Lord!

Hear the words of Psalm 96:

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*96 Oh sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth! Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength! Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts! Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth! Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns! Yes, the world is established; it*

*shall never be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity.” Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord, for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness.<sup>9</sup>*

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**Someday, in eternity future, our worship will be perfected with all believers throughout all time. We will worship with no distractions of sin and temptations. We will worship in a perfect location. We will worship in the presence of God. We will clap, shout, bow. Our emotions will be perfect in their expressions. Until that day, God has given us the Spirit to fight for joy in God through corporate worship, preparing for that future day and calling others to glory in our Redeemer.**

**Together, let’s thank the Lord for our Savior who has gifted us with the privilege of corporate praise!**

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<sup>9</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 96:1–13.