

DAY 5
READING:
PSALM 65: 12-13

*The grasslands of the wilderness overflow;
the hills are clothed with gladness.
The meadows are covered with flocks
and the valleys are mantled with corn;
they shout for joy and sing.*

FULL – OF JOY?

When our freezer, cupboards and even bodies are full, we still may be missing the most important aspect of the harvest – joy. Indeed we can have so much that we become overwhelmed by it or obsessed with maintaining more than ample supplies. Alternatively we can be so anxious that we don't have enough, or as much as other people, that life becomes a struggle.

When the psalmist looked at the harvest of crops and animals he sensed joy. God had provided abundantly, the fields responded and so did the psalmist's heart. The pre-eminent issue was not possession of things but a responsive joy to God's generosity. It was this thrilling sense of 'gift' which generated joy. It still is.

If we take the harvests on which we depend for granted and reduce everything to produce or even product, we miss out on the wonder of it all. That's why celebrating and reflecting on God's goodness at harvest time in church is no bad thing! Taking time to discern that, ultimately, whether our food has come from Chile or down the road, it has come from God as a love gift, enhances everything. The ordinary sparkles with joy. Allowing ourselves to express this joy by praising God enhances it.

Loving Father, thank you that the joy you give us is far more than those who do not see your goodness in creation can ever have, no matter how much wealth and fame they accumulate. Amen

What next?

There are many excellent Bible reading notes available in the UK today to help you engage daily with the Word of God. To find out more visit

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This leaflet is produced by Grow with the Bible in association with BibleFresh www.biblefresh.com and The King James Bible Trust

www.kingjamesbibletrust.org

Other leaflets in this series include Bible readings for Bible Sunday, Christmas and Easter.



WORKING TOGETHER TO HELP YOU EXPLORE THE BIBLE EVERY DAY

HARVEST READINGS

Harvest is a great opportunity for us to get to know the Bible better. The readings and reflections in this leaflet explore the theme of God's generosity to us and how we might respond to this.

We hope you will enjoy these readings, part of a series of leaflets produced by Grow with the Bible as we celebrate the Bible in the English language and mark the 400th anniversary of the King James Version Bible in 2011. If you want to know more visit www.grow-with-the-bible.org.uk

Psalm 65

KING JAMES VERSION (SHORTENED)

¹Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Sion: and unto thee shall the vow be performed. ²O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come. ³Iniquities prevail against me: as for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away. ⁴Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causeth to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple. ⁵By terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer us, O God of our salvation; who art the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of them that are afar off upon the sea: ⁶Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it: thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water: thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it. ⁷Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly: thou settlest the furrows thereof: thou makest it soft with showers: thou blessest the springing thereof. ⁸Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness. ⁹They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness: and the little hills rejoice on every side. ¹⁰The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing.

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

(SHORTENED)

¹Praise awaits you, our God, in Zion; to you our vows will be fulfilled. ²You who answer prayer, to you all people will come. ³When we were overwhelmed by sins, you forgave our transgressions. ⁴Blessed are those you choose and bring near to live in your courts! We are filled with the good things of your house, of your holy temple. ⁵You answer us with awesome and righteous deeds, God our Saviour, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas, ⁶You care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly. The streams of God are filled with water to provide the people with corn, for so you have ordained it. ⁷You drench its furrows and level its ridges; you soften it with showers and bless its crops. ⁸You crown the year with your bounty, and your carts overflow with abundance. ⁹The grasslands of the wilderness overflow; the hills are clothed with gladness. ¹⁰The meadows are covered with flocks and the valleys are mantled with corn; they shout for joy and sing.

DAY 1
READING:
PSALM 65: 1-2

*Praise awaits you, our God, in Zion;
to you our vows will be fulfilled.
You who answer prayer,
to you all people will come.*

A SMILE ON OUR FACES

What puts a smile on your face? For some of us it's seeing the unrestrained delight of a toddler discovering something new – it's hard not to find our own face responding to those laughing eyes with a broad smile. Then there are certain songs. If we hear them they can blow the clouds of anxiety away and the sun shines again – and it shows in us as we relax and smile.

This psalm is a song from the Old Testament and although we can't hear the music the words are overflowing with vitality. They convey the freshness of a toddler looking at the world with energized amazement. Allowing them to flow through us makes us join in the smiles.

As we look round the church displaying all the joys of harvest time, hopefully this has

the same effect on us. The rich beauty of the flowers arranged so that the colours enhance one another; the texture, shapes and colours of the vegetables; even the stack of corn which seems to have absorbed the sun's rays; all re-enchanted our weary imaginations and appetites. It's good to smile.

But even better is the smile that comes when we understand this amazing harvest is God's response to our prayers.

Loving Father, thank you that once again you have responded to your people's prayers 'Give us this day our daily bread' and you have done it so amazingly. Amen

DAY 2
READING:
PSALM 65: 5

*You answer us with awesome and righteous deeds,
God our Saviour,
the hope of all the ends of the earth
and of the farthest seas,*

A HARVEST FOR ALL

But who is it all for? Living in the West, we can eat strawberries or display roses in our homes all year round. We might grumble that they don't taste as good as the English ones, or complain that the flowers from Africa don't last as long, but it seems that all the world is attuned to meeting our needs! Yet if we take it as a right that we can have what we want when we want it, or even forget the cost to those who serve us, our smiles can fade.

How much better the generous spirit of these words! The psalmist, and all who truly sing the Lord's song, recognise and delight in the fact that God's harvest is for everyone.

The constant availability of crops to satisfy our demands requires 'one world' –

organisation, production, distribution. But Christian worship requires 'one community' – recognising that God cares for all people, that we belong to one another wherever we live because we are all God's creation, and that while people struggle for food, water and health we cannot be at ease.

Yet, while the knowledge of human selfishness and the resulting suffering must make us sad, the privilege of sharing our wealth with others can make the smile grow deeper.

Loving God, as we enjoy so many good things, we thank you for all who serve us through hard work and planning around the world and pray that they may enjoy your harvest too. Amen

DAY 3
READING:
PSALM 65: 9

*You care for the land and water it;
you enrich it abundantly.
The streams of God are filled with water
to provide the people with corn.*

CARE FOR THE LAND

'Not again!' – it's hard not to respond that way when we see pictures of some dried out country where even the trees have died and the children cry for food!

In the face of such horror it is good to recall that this is not God's doing. God's doing is to create beauty, prosperity and fertility. God's doing is to ensure that the land is well-watered so crops flourish. God's doing is to delight in the abundance of the harvest – for food, for drink, for beauty. But we also do well to recall that God cares for the world's land as well as its people.

So often it is our doing that brings the devastation – whether through war, deforestation driven by greed, years of mis-

management of the land, or the long term disturbance to the eco-system which our demanding selfish lifestyles may have caused.

It's good to remember that God's desire is to do us good. Perhaps we need the multi-sensory stimulus of harvest worship to restore our confidence in God's love and his capacity to restore. Then, captivated afresh by this hope, we can move on and, through giving, creativity and love, work with others to bring his blessings of abundance to those who struggle today to exist.

Loving Father, we thank you for all who work in Christian Aid, Tearfund and other aid agencies to help people in desperate need and to foster effective development. Amen

DAY 4
READING:
PSALM 65: 11

*You crown the year with your bounty,
and your carts overflow with abundance.*

A GLIMPSE OF GOD

'What are the gods like?' or even 'If there is a God what is s/he like?' are the kinds of questions that people have always asked themselves. The answer we come to can profoundly shape the way we approach life and the kind of values we live out.

Sometimes people have concluded that the gods are quarrelsome and demanding, like most human rulers. Sometimes they have felt they are capricious, deceptive and not to be trusted. Often some of the gods were viewed as malicious towards humans.

If we consider the variety of our human experiences and then project these on to the gods, all of these images become understandable, because life can seem cruel and

capricious, leaving us vulnerable and exposed to whatever is thrown at us.

This psalm invites us to shape our understanding of God by looking elsewhere: reflecting on the message of harvest. God not only cares for the land (which he might do for selfish reasons) but the abundant harvest flows out of his goodness and his provision for us.

We can accept this picture even more firmly and fully because this is exactly the way that Jesus taught us to understand God: 'When you pray, say "Our Father..."'

Loving God, help us to see you more clearly and love you more dearly as we enjoy the gifts of harvest. Help us to show other people your goodness and grace too. Amen