

Call to Worship Scriptures: Bible Passages to Open a Service

Bible passages that open a worship service with a clear summons to worship — psalms and other scriptures with pastoral notes on delivery, congregational response, and seasonal use.

The Foundational Calls

PSALM 95:1-7 (ESV)

“Oh come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods... Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.”

The classic call to worship in the Bible. Works for almost any Sunday. Read verses 1-7a in most cases; the second half of verse 7 shifts to warning and belongs in a different context.

PSALM 100 (ESV)

“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.”

Short, complete, and a natural fit for a joyful or celebratory Sunday. Reads well as a full-congregation reading in unison.

HABAKKUK 2:20 (ESV)

“The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.”

One line. Best for a service that wants to open with weight and stillness rather than energy. Often followed by 20–30 seconds of silence before the first song begins.

Responsive Calls

PSALM 118:22-24 (ESV)

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

The historic Easter call to worship, but also fitting for any Sunday celebrating resurrection. Works well responsively: leader reads verse 22, congregation responds with 24.

PSALM 136:1-4, 26 (ESV)

“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. Give thanks to the God of gods, for his steadfast love endures forever. Give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his steadfast love endures forever... Give thanks to the God of heaven, for his steadfast love endures forever.”

Built for responsive reading. Leader reads the first half of each verse; congregation responds with 'for his steadfast love endures forever.' The repetition is the point — do not shorten it.

PSALM 34:1-3 (ESV)

“I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!”

The final line — 'magnify the Lord with me' — is a direct summons to congregational worship. Naturally leads into the first song.

Psalms of Praise

PSALM 96:1-4 (ESV)

“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.”

Especially fitting for missions Sunday or any service that emphasizes God's work among the nations.

PSALM 150 (ESV)

“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!... Let everything that has breath praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!”

The Bible's final word — praise. Fitting for a service that will feature instrumental worship, and a natural bridge into the first song.

ISAIAH 12:4-6 (ESV)

“Give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously; let this be made known in all the earth. Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.”

Names God as present in the midst of his people — a natural framing for a service where the congregation is being reminded that God is here, now.

Reverence and Awe

PSALM 46:10 (ESV)

“Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!”

For a Sunday when the congregation needs to slow down more than speed up. Pair with a moment of silence.

ISAIAH 6:3 (ESV)

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!”

The seraphim's cry — the shortest and weightiest call to worship in scripture. Especially fitting before communion or on a Sunday emphasizing God's holiness.

PSALM 29:1-2 (ESV)

“Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness.”

'Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness' is one of the great lines of liturgical call. Works for high-reverence services and processional openings.

Short Verses to Open a Church Service

PSALM 122:1 (ESV)

“I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord!'”

One sentence, and it names the gathering itself as the reason for gladness. A good opening line for a normal Sunday when nothing about the service needs special framing.

PSALM 118:24 (ESV)

“This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

The most quoted single-verse call to worship in English-speaking churches. Familiar enough that the congregation will finish it with you if you pause before the second half.

PSALM 100:1-2 (ESV)

“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth! Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!”

Two verses that end with the word singing, which makes them the cleanest possible handoff into the first song.

Calls to Worship by Season and Occasion

ISAIAH 9:2, 6 (ESV)

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone... For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

The Advent and Christmas Eve call. Read verse 2 alone in early Advent and add verse 6 on Christmas Eve, so the announcement lands on the night it belongs to.

LUKE 2:10-11 (ESV)

“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

Opens a Christmas service with the announcement itself rather than a description of it. Stop at verse 11 and go straight into the first carol.

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-23 (ESV)

"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."

The New Year call to worship, and the right passage for the first Sunday after a hard season in the life of the church.

PSALM 107:1-2 (ESV)

"Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever! Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble."

Thanksgiving Sunday and harvest services. The second verse invites testimony, so it pairs well with a service where members will share what God has done.

PSALM 34:8 (ESV)

"Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him."

For a communion Sunday, where the call to worship can point forward to the table the congregation will come to later in the service.

How to Use These to Open a Service

Read it, don't preach it. A call to worship is a summons, not an explanation. Read the passage clearly, let the words do their own work, and move directly into the first song or the invocation. Adding commentary dilutes the call.

Match the passage to the Sunday. A high-energy celebratory Sunday calls for Psalm 100 or Psalm 150. A somber or repentant Sunday calls for Habakkuk 2:20 or Psalm 46:10. Easter calls for Psalm 118:24. Missions Sunday calls for Psalm 96. The scripture should orient the room toward what this specific service is about to do.

Consider responsive readings. A back-and-forth call — leader reads a line, congregation responds — pulls people into worship rather than watching worship happen.

Psalm 136 is built for this. Psalm 118:22–24 works well split into leader and congregation lines. Print the response in the bulletin so no one has to guess.

Silence is a valid response. After Habakkuk 2:20, Psalm 46:10, or Isaiah 6:3, holding 15–30 seconds of silence before the first note plays is often more powerful than moving quickly. The silence itself becomes part of the worship.

Rotate the passages. Reading the same call to worship every week trains the congregation to tune it out. Rotate through 8–12 passages across a season so the words stay fresh and each Sunday's call actually functions as a summons rather than a routine.

Frequently Asked

What is a call to worship in a church service?

A call to worship is a short scriptural summons — usually read or spoken by the pastor or worship leader — that opens the service by naming who is being worshiped and inviting the congregation to join. It functions liturgically: it tells the congregation the service has begun and orients everyone toward God rather than the room.

What is a good scripture for a call to worship?

Psalm 95:1–7 is the classic call to worship in the Bible — 'Oh come, let us sing to the Lord' — and it works for almost any Sunday. Psalm 100 ('Make a joyful noise') is a strong second choice. For a shorter, more solemn opening, Habakkuk 2:20 ('The Lord is in his holy temple') is hard to beat.

How long should a call to worship be?

Short — usually 30 to 60 seconds spoken. A call to worship is a doorway into the service, not a sermon. Two to eight verses is the typical range. If the passage is longer, read only the section that carries the summons.

Should the congregation respond during the call to worship?

A responsive call to worship — where the leader reads one line and the congregation reads the next — engages the room and pulls people into worship rather than watching worship happen. It is especially effective with psalms structured as call and response (Psalm 136, Psalm 118). Print the responsive parts in the bulletin or on the screen.

What is the difference between a call to worship and an invocation?

The call to worship summons the congregation to worship God — its audience is the people. The invocation prays to God, asking his presence in the service — its audience is God. In most services the call to worship comes first, immediately followed by the invocation prayer.

What is a good call to worship for Easter?

Psalm 118:22-24 ('This is the day that the Lord has made') is the historic Easter call to worship — the psalm sung on the way to the temple, quoted by Jesus, and traditionally read on resurrection morning. Pair with a spoken 'Christ is risen — He is risen indeed!' congregational response.

What is the best psalm for a call to worship?

Psalm 95:1-7 is the single best psalm for a call to worship, because it does the two things a call has to do: it names who is being worshiped and it summons the people to come. Psalm 100 is the best short alternative, Psalm 96 fits a missions or outward-looking Sunday, and Psalm 29:1-2 fits a service that wants reverence rather than energy. If you rotate only four psalms across a season, use those four.

What Bible verse can I use to open a church service?

For a one-verse opening, Habakkuk 2:20, Psalm 46:10, Isaiah 6:3, and Psalm 122:1 all work on their own with no setup. For a two or three verse opening, use Psalm 100:1-3, Psalm 34:1-3, or Psalm 118:24. Pick the verse that matches the tone of the service, then read it and move straight into the first song.

What is a short call to worship verse?

Habakkuk 2:20, 'The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him,' is the shortest call to worship that still functions as a complete summons. Isaiah 6:3 and Psalm 46:10 are the same length and carry the same weight. Any of the three can be read in under ten seconds and followed by silence.

Who reads the call to worship in a service?

Most often the pastor or the worship leader, but the call does not have to come from the platform team. Having an elder, a student, or a family read it signals that the summons belongs to the whole congregation. Whoever reads it should have the passage in hand ahead of Sunday rather than reading it cold.

What is a good call to worship for Christmas?

Isaiah 9:2 and 9:6 read as a call to worship on Christmas Eve and through Advent, and Luke 2:10-11 works when the service opens with the announcement itself. Both are short enough to read before the first carol without turning into a reading of the whole nativity account.

Building this Sunday's service?

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