

9. A Life of Praise

Biblical material: Josh. 5:13–6:20, 2 Chron. 20:1-30, Psalm 145, Acts 16:16-34, Phil. 4:4-7.

Quotes

- Jesus is honey in the mouth, music in the ear, a song of gladness in the heart. *Bernard of Clairvaux*
- There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful than that of a continual walk with God. Those only can comprehend it who practice and experience it; yet I do not advise you to do it from that motive. *Brother Lawrence*
- For truly it is the most joy that may be that He that is highest and mightiest, noblest and worthiest, is lowest and meekest, homeliest and most courteous: and truly this marvelous joy shall be shewn us all when we see Him. *Juliana of Norwich*
- As we shared together our feelings about the study groups, we realised that we were not meeting together each week for an intellectual exercise: some thing very real and significant was taking place. We were coming to know that the Christian faith is not primarily an ethic; it is not the struggle to do good or be good, but an encounter with Christ, of which morality and ethical living are by-products. *Harold R. Fray, Jr.*
- Joy is the most infallible sign of the presence of God. *Teilhard de Chardin*

Questions

Is it possible to be “always cheerful,” as the song says? Can we praise without singing or shouting? How do we define praise, and what kind of praise would God most appreciate? Can we think that our praise then deserves a commitment to us on the part of God? Do some praise services try to “manipulate” God? How best to share the truth about God?

Discussion/ Comment

Acts 16 records Paul and Silas singing and praying while in prison. While their circumstances were far from ideal, they could still praise God. But what really impressed the jailer there in Philippi? That they were singing—or that they revealed a complete trust in God? It was their inner attitude more than the songs that led the jailer to the conviction that these men had a view of God very different to what he believed—and convinced him to ask what he needed to do to be saved—to have the same confidence despite an earthquake!

So how do we “practice praise”? Is it just about singing or a praise service? What of the quiet meditation that spontaneously brings out thoughts of praise to God? Is it better to simply repeat some phrase over and over, whether through chant or song, or to really think about God and his goodness to us?

Praise is not a requirement, but a natural consequence of our relationship with God. It is the delight of recognizing God as he truly is, as of understanding the truth, and of participating in the whole process of confirmation—that God is indeed right and trustworthy. Consequently praise is far more than feelings, since it is based on a knowledge of God.

Nor should we conclude that if we don’t feel happy, or are depressed, that we are in some way failing God. Depression has many causes, and we should not add guilt over being depressed to those already suffering. Because of sin and disease, our brains are far from the ideal God created, and we must allow for the damage caused both by our forefathers and ourselves.

We can perhaps best praise God when we do not “feel” happy—because then praise is far more a statement of confidence and trust in God, rather than simply some expression of some “feel-good factor.” In fact praise in the middle of tragedy reflects not blind faith but assured confidence based on evidence of a trustworthy God.

The truth is that we *are* here for a reason. More than that, we were not made for this world alone. And ultimately, the heart of joy and satisfaction and meaning is in knowing that God made us, and saves us. As Christina Rossetti writes, “Were there no God, we would be in this glorious world with grateful hearts and no one to thank.”

When I reflect on those times when I have felt so close to God, I realize that my delight has not been in achievements we so often define as success. Nor is there the lasting satisfaction in the things we usually chase after for enjoyment—the physical simply does not last, and eventually every earthly pleasure cloys. Ultimately all our grasping after feeling good leaves us empty, unsatisfied.

For this life cannot be all there is. “Our Creator would never have made such lovely days, and given us the deep hearts to enjoy them, above and beyond all thought, unless we were meant to be immortal,” says Nathaniel Hawthorne.

And for that I praise. That God does not leave us satisfied here, but leads us on. To him.

Ellen White Comments

I want to say to those who have been desponding, When Satan comes in to tempt you, and you have no evidence that the Lord accepts you, do not look to see how dark you are, but look up to the light. Begin to praise God for the plan of salvation, and hold every victory gained through Christ. As you repeat the confidence you have in Jesus, Satan will flee; for he cannot bear the name of Jesus. Thus, step by step, you can fight the fight of faith. Remember that Jesus has borne long with you, and he does not want you to be lost. He says, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock. If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.” {HS 141}

I want to say, my sister, you need not cast away your confidence. Poor, trembling soul, rest in the promises of God. In so doing, the enemy’s fetters will be broken, his suggestions will be powerless. Heed not the whisperings of the enemy. Go free, oppressed soul. Be of good courage. Say to your poor, desponding heart: “Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.” {2T 319}

For months I had suffered such constant pain in my heart that I did not have one joyful feeling, but my spirits were constantly depressed. I had tried to serve God from principle, without feeling, but I now thirsted for the salvation of God, to realize his blessing, notwithstanding the pain in my heart. The brethren and sisters came together to make my case a special subject of prayer. My desire was granted. Prayer was heard, and I received the blessing of God, and had the assurance that he loved me.... I was filled with gratitude. The praise of God was upon my lips. O what a change! It seemed to me that an angel of God had touched me while I was sleeping. I awoke my husband and related to him the wonderful work that the Lord had wrought for me. He could scarcely comprehend it at first. But when I arose and dressed, and walked around the house, and he witnessed the change in my countenance, he could praise God with me. {2SG 186}