

Session Eight

Climbing Higher

THE ASCENDING LIFE

God's Golden Stairway to Glory

PRINCIPLES OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

THE PRINCIPLE OF RISING HIGHER BY CONTINUAL PRAISE!

(Eph. 5:18-20, I Thess. 5:16-18)



Rising Higher on Wings of Praise

Introduction.

After we have climbed up the various stages on God's Golden Stairway to Glory through recognition of our ideal, repentance, faith, forgiveness, being crucified with Christ, being filled with the Holy Spirit and abiding continually in Him, there is still at least one more step which is MOST helpful to our rising higher and that is the principle of continual praise. Philippians 4:4 says, ⁴ *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!* This will be our theme song for this session!

We read in Eph. 5:18-20: ¹⁸ *And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,* ¹⁹ *addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,* ²⁰ *giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

One thing which has always made me smile is the laughter I have heard in the halls and classrooms of seminaries and Bible Schools! Studying the Bible and having fellowship with God as we do so, brings joy! Getting drunk with wine or any other alcoholic beverage is the devil's counterfeit to the pure joy of abiding in Christ, and, of course, as is the case with anything the devil leads us into, it ends with debauchery and death.

But on the other hand, being continuously filled with the Holy Spirit (and not un-holy spirits!) releases in us such joy that we just naturally want to sing *psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with our hearts.* Singing has always been a big part of Christian worship. Psalms were for many years the hymnbook of the church. I'm not sure if it is possible to define psalms and hymns so as to differentiate between them. In recent years many other kinds of spiritual songs have been written and sung as we express our love to the Lord and offer our prayers and praises and gratitude to Him.

. . . giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We can do this both in music and in words as we express our love for Him.

There are many verses in the Old Testament which urge us to praise God such as

Ps. 86:12-13 - ¹² *I will praise you, O Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever.* ¹³ *For great is your love toward me; you have delivered me from the depths of the grave.*

92:1 - *It is good to praise the LORD and make music to your name, O Most High.*

100:4 - ⁴*Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.*

106:1 - ¹*Praise the LORD. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. . . .*

⁴⁸*Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Let all the people say, "Amen!" Praise the LORD.*

111:1-3 ¹*Praise the LORD. I will extol the LORD with all my heart in the council of the upright and in the assembly. ²Great are the works of the LORD; they are pondered by all who delight in them. ³Glorious and majestic are his deeds, and his righteousness endures forever.*

117 - ¹*Praise the LORD, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples. ²For great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD.*

147:1 - ¹*Praise the LORD. How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him!*

148:1-6 - ¹*Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD from the heavens, praise him in the heights above. ²Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his heavenly hosts. ³Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars. ⁴Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies. ⁵Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created. ⁶He set them in place for ever and ever; he gave a decree that will never pass away. And all the rest of the psalm.*

150 - ¹*Praise the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. ²Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. ³Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, ⁴praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, ⁵praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals. ⁶Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. **Praise the LORD.***

Just the reading of these passages lifts our spirits.

It is fitting that much of our worship experience should be praise. Even our prayers ought to consist largely of praise to God for who He is, for what He does and has done and for what He will do in answer to our needs.

I. The principle of continuous praise is

1. **a biblical principle** -- We have already seen this in the scriptures printed above, but we also see in II Chron. 20:1-24 how the Lord sometimes responds to our praise. Judah's king Jehoshaphat was being attacked by a huge army composed of Moabites, Ammonites and Meunites. They had gathered in the area south and east of the Dead Sea. They had begun moving around to the west side of the Dead Sea and had arrived at En Gedi. *2 Chronicles 20:3-19 (NIV)* tells us: ³ *Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah.* ⁴ *The people of Judah came together to seek help from the LORD; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him.* ⁵ *Then Jehoshaphat stood up in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem at the temple of the LORD in the front of the new courtyard* ⁶ *and said: "O LORD, God of our fathers, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you.* ⁷ *O our God, did you not drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham your friend?* ⁸ *They have lived in it and have built in it a sanctuary for your Name, saying,* ⁹ *'If calamity comes upon us, whether the sword of judgment, or plague or famine, we will stand in your presence before this temple that bears your Name and will cry out to you in our distress, and you will hear us and save us.'* ¹⁰ *"But now here are men from Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, whose territory you would not allow Israel to invade when they came from Egypt; so they turned away from them and did not destroy them.* ¹¹ *See how they are repaying us by coming to drive us out of the possession you gave us as an inheritance.* ¹² *O our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you."* ¹³ *All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the LORD.* ¹⁴ *Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon*

Jahaziel son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite and descendant of Asaph, as he stood in the assembly. ¹⁵ He said: "Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the LORD says to you: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's.'¹⁶ Tomorrow march down against them. They will be climbing up by the Pass of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the gorge in the Desert of Jeruel. ¹⁷ You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the LORD will be with you."= ¹⁸ Jehoshaphat bowed with his face to the ground, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the LORD. ¹⁹ Then some Levites from the Kohathites and Korahites stood up and praised the LORD, the God of Israel, with very loud voice.

As the story progresses, we read in verses 21-23: ²¹ After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the LORD and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying: >Give thanks to the LORD, for his love endures forever.= ²² As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated. ²³ The men of Ammon and Moab rose up against the men from Mount Seir to destroy and annihilate them. After they finished slaughtering the men from Seir, they helped to destroy one another.

God does not guarantee such a response, but when He promises a victory, He provides it! He is faithful to His Word.

In the New Testament we find a similar situation. Paul and Silas were preaching in Philippi and had healed a slave-girl who had been earning money for her masters by fortune telling. When she no longer was possessed by this evil spirit, she could not tell fortunes any more so they blamed Paul and Silas and beat them and put them in prison. The story is told in Acts

16:16-34. However, at midnight, Paul and Silas were singing praises to the Lord in spite of their pain and suffering and the prisoners were listening to them. Acts 16:25-26, 29-33 (NIV) tells us that ²⁵ *About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.* ²⁶ *Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. . . .* ²⁹ *The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas.* ³⁰ *He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"* ³¹ *They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved--you and your household."* ³² *Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house.* ³³ *At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized.*

It was while Paul and Silas sang and praised the Lord in spite of their circumstances, that the Lord sent the earthquake which resulted in the salvation of the jailer and his whole household! Often God allows us to go through very difficult circumstances, but when we praise Him in those circumstances, He turns the situation into something good and valuable for us and for others. It is not guaranteed, but in His time and for His purpose it is good to praise Him no matter what our circumstances may be: bad hair; broken fingernails; a diagnosis of cancer; a robbery; whatever! Praise Him **anyway!**

2. **a psychological principle** -- It is good for our mental health as well as for our spiritual health to give thanks and praise to the Lord and to fill our minds and our hearts with positive thoughts. It keeps us looking up -- to the silver lining around the clouds. We can give thanks for all that God permits to happen to us because we know that He has a good purpose for everything He allows to come into our lives. God redeems all He allows.
3. **It is a spiritual principle** -- It keeps our eyes on the LORD. He knows what He is doing (Rom. 8:28). In Heb. 2:10 and 5:7- 8 we read that Jesus learned much through suffering and was

thus qualified to be our Savior. How, then, can we expect anything less? (See also Heb. 12:4-11 where, through the discipline of suffering, we are shaped by God to become His sons.)

II. Some problems with continual praise:

1. **in the face of evil.** -- For some, the phrase *giving thanks always for everything* is troubling.

How can we give thanks and praise to God for evil, for war, famine, corruption, violence, crime, sickness, disease, cancer, suffering and pain and death? This does not seem reasonable. I find it helpful to read I Thess. 5:17-18 along with this verse because it says, ¹⁷ *pray without ceasing,* ¹⁸ *give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.* Paul tells us here to give thanks **IN** all circumstances rather than **FOR** all things. We do not praise God for evil although we know that God can, and often does bring good out of evil, but we do praise Him **in** all circumstances because we know that He knows our circumstances and He allows some things to happen to us to test our faith or to help us to mature in our faith. The key here is to look for something for which to praise the Lord in all the circumstances of our lives. We can praise Him for whatever He allows to come to us (like Job), though we do not praise Him for what others may be suffering. We must work to eliminate, as much as possible, the causes of suffering and pain in this world. We can also be assured that whatever God allows to happen to us will turn out for our good, if we react to it in faith and praise, because He knows how to bring good out of evil (Rom. 8:28).

When we ask "Why, Lord?" it must be the why of **purpose** or **result** and not the Awhy@ of **cause**. Most times, when we ask Awhy,@ we are seeking to know the cause of whatever happened and who may be at fault, who we can blame. A better way is to ask the why of purpose or result. We cannot change whatever happened, even if would could know the cause; however, if we can discover the purpose for which this happened, then we can see a way forward and move forward to a better result.

When Joni Erikson Tada was injured in a swimming accident and became a paraplegic, she became bitter against God at first, but later prayed for healing and was very disappointed when it did not happen. Finally, she was able to accept her situation and to praise the Lord for it because it allowed her to find purpose in ministering to millions of people with various disabilities and to show them that God loves them and wants to use them to share His grace with others who may also be suffering.

Another example of praising God in dire circumstances is Jesus on the cross. As He hung there He cried out, *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* (Matt. 27:46). I like to think that He was asking *What is the purpose for which you have allowed this to happen to me?* rather than asking *What have I done that you have allowed this to happen to me?* The answer, of course, is that he was forsaken so that God could be righteous in forgiving us of all of our sins and redeem us for our good and for His glory. Right there, on the cross, he was able to forgive his enemies, to turn the repentant thief to faith in Himself, and finally to commend His Spirit to God who gave it. Hebrews 12:2 tells us: ² *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who **for the joy set before him** endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* He had hope in the midst of suffering because He knew He was fulfilling His Father's will and knew that it would bring Him and the Father real JOY!

I really don't like the idea of suffering or of pain, but if, in the will of God it should become necessary, I think I would pray for grace to accept it and to find a way to bring Him glory and honor through it.

Think of the backside of a tapestry. From the front, a tapestry is a beautiful work of art. From the back it seems to be only a tangle of various colored threads. Our lives are more like the backside of a tapestry as we look at it, but if we could see the front as God sees it, we would know that he is producing something beautiful. Corrie ten Boom has written a poem about this which expresses it better than I can.

Here is Corrie Ten Boom's poem:

My life is but a weaving
Between my God and me.
I cannot choose the colors

He weaveth steadily.
Oft= times He weaveth sorrow;
And I in foolish pride
Forget He sees the upper
And I the underside.
Not =til the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly
Will God unroll the canvas
And reveal the reason why
The dark threads are as needful
In the weaver=s skillful hand
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned
He knows, He loves, He cares;
Nothing this truth can dim.
He gives the very best to those
Who leave the choice to Him.

We can also praise Him in spite of evil because we know that He is in control of everything, even evil itself (Job 1 & 2). Everything is moving toward the culmination of His good purpose. Then comes judgment when all evil will be punished and then the restoration of the earth into a paradise in which evil is eliminated (Is. 11:3b-9, Rom. 8:18-23)

2. **in the tensions of life** B We can praise the Lord when the tensions of life, caused by overburdened schedules, keeping up with one's peers and so many needs around the world and all around us and our inability to do very much about them weigh heavily on our hearts and minds. When we are being mis-treated or mis-understood or rejected and other problems tend to rob us of the joy of praise, it is then time to read again the scriptures we printed at the beginning of this session and once again praise the Lord anyway!

(1) **Tension is the enemy of spirituality** -- So take steps to reduce tension in your life.

Learn to say, "No, I'm sorry, but my schedule is already as full as I can manage to pray over." Learn to set priorities and to stick with them. Make them HIS priorities.

(2) **Learn to relax in the Lord** -- If you are doing His will, exactly what He wants you to do at this time, then you will have His strength and you can do it without stress. Lean hard on Him!

(3) **Give thanks even for rainy days, flat tires, blocked plumbing, dead batteries, etc., etc.!**

(See James 1:2-4)

3. **in the midst of depression** -- Sometimes NOTHING seems to go right! Especially when we are physically tired, emotionally drained and spiritually dry.

(1) Overcoming this requires an act of the will.

(2) If you are truly depressed in psychological and medical terms, you may need medical or professional help to get to the source of the problem and to find a remedy. Oftentimes, however, **counting our blessings** -- slowly and thoughtfully -- and praising the Lord for all the GOOD with which He has surrounded us will help pull us up. **Read a psalm of praise to prime your pump and get you going! Use a good dose of DAILY praise to AVOID depression!**

Conclusion: Perhaps we can sum up by saying that it is best to have the continuous attitude which says, "Praise the Lord ANYWAY!!!" No matter what happens, praise God for it IMMEDIATELY! Make this a habit of life. Look for explanations and purposes later, but for now, "Let's just praise the Lord!"

Rejoice in the Lord always! I will say it again, Rejoice@