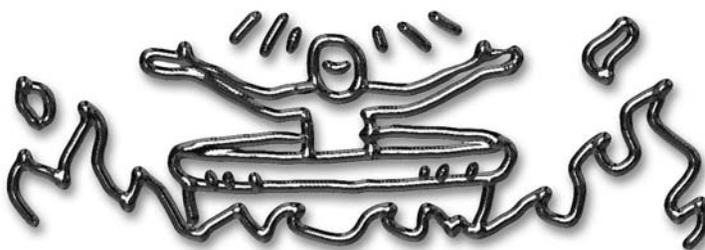


A Life of Praise



SABBATH—NOVEMBER 24

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Joshua 5:13–6:20; 2 Chronicles 20:1–30; Psalm 145; Acts 16:16–34; Philippians 4:4–7.

MEMORY VERSE: “Always be joyful because you belong to the Lord. I’ll [I will] say it again. Be joyful!” (Philippians 4:4, NIV).

IT IS ALWAYS EASY TO SHOUT WITH JOY TO THE LORD when we feel joy. But it is not so easy when things are bad. It is not easy when trouble becomes worse. But perhaps this is the time when we need more than ever to praise God. This is because praise is a way of helping us keep faith strong.

Praise can change even our darkest situations. Praise can change us and those around us in a way that helps us face challenges.

Praise is faith in action. It may not always be natural to us. But we need to practice praise so much that it becomes a natural part of our lives. Then praise has the power both to change and to conquer (to win the battle).

THIS WEEK'S LESSON UP CLOSE: What is praise? How could praise be such a powerful spiritual weapon in difficult situations? How can praise change us and the situation around us?

SUNDAY—NOVEMBER 25**FRAMEWORK FOR PRAISE
(Philippians 4:4–7)**

The great Russian writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky had been sentenced to death. But he received pardon from the death sentence at the last moment. He spent years in prison instead. Talking about his prison experience, Dostoyevsky wrote: “Believe to the end, even if all men go wrong and you are left the only one faithful. Bring your offering even then and praise God in your loneliness” (adapted).

In these lessons we have already learned how Paul went through attacks from his enemies and suffered. But now Paul is sitting in a Roman prison. But he is not depressed (sad). Instead he is eagerly writing to encourage the believers in Philippi!

How do you think Paul could have written such things in Philippians 4:4–7 when he himself was sitting in a prison? What is the secret in this verse of having the “peace of God”?

It may be easy to rejoice when everything is going well. But Paul advises us to rejoice always. That may sound strange. If we accept what Paul writes, there are two important suggestions for us.

First, if we are to rejoice always, it must mean that we should be rejoicing even when situations are very sad. Second, if we are to rejoice always, it

must mean that we have to learn to rejoice at times when we do not feel like it.



Paul wrote letters from prison to give hope to believers in Philippi.

Paul is calling us to praise God even when it may seem unnatural to us. It may even seem unreasonable. As we will learn, there are times when it appears unreasonable that we are called to rejoice. In other words, praise is an act of faith. Faith is based not on our situations but rather on the truth about God. So, praise is something we do because of the truth of who God is and what He has promised us. And such faith (are you surprised!) begins to influence¹ our thoughts, feelings, and events.

What is the truth about God in Philippians 4:4–7—the truth that helps Paul to rejoice, even in prison? Write down a short list of what you know to be the truth about God. Go through the list and praise God for each item. How does

1. influence—to have power, or effect, over persons or things.

this change the way that you think and feel about your situations?

MONDAY—NOVEMBER 26

PRAYING DOWN WALLS (Joshua 5:13–6:20)

There is a phrase in English that says “to be painted into a corner.” Just imagine you are painting the floor of a room. Then you suddenly notice that you have ended up in a corner and cannot get out. The only way out is by walking over the fresh paint or staying where you are until the paint dries!



Sometimes our faith seems to paint us into a corner.

Sometimes our faith seems to paint us into a corner. We arrive at a situation and find ourselves trapped. The wet paint on the floor is the same as our faith. And it “traps” us. We look at the situation and have to make a choice. We have to reject God, faith, and everything we have believed. Or our faith encourages us to believe what appears impossible.

God brought the Israelites to a corner. The Israelites had wandered for

40 years in the wilderness. But God did not lead His people to empty, peaceful grasslands. Instead, God led them to one of the cities with strong forts in the area. Then they had to walk around Jericho in silence for six days. On the seventh day God told them to shout—and that shouting, together with the trumpets, would bring victory (a win).

What is God trying to teach the Israelites in Joshua 5:13–6:20?

Shouting loudly was not going to cause the walls to collapse. When God asked the Israelites to “shout,” it was the same kind of shouting that David writes about in Psalm 66. “Shout to God with joy, everyone on earth! Sing about the glory of his name! Give him glorious praise!” (verses 1, 2, NIV). This shouting was praise!



Faith, not shouting, brought down the walls of Jericho.

How does this idea help us understand the meaning of Hebrews 11:30?

When God is ready to do something new in our lives, He may bring us to a Jericho. For this reason, He may need to teach us that the power to win does not come in our own strength or from our own plans. Everything we need comes from Him. So, no matter how difficult our situation may seem, our duty is to praise God. He is the Author of everything we need. Praise is faith in action.

TUESDAY—NOVEMBER 27

THE LIFE OF PRAISE (Psalm 145)

Praising the Lord might not be natural to us even when times are good. So, how much more difficult to do it in bad times? But that is what God has asked us to do. Praise is something that must be practiced until it changes from something we do at a certain time to an important part of Christian lives. Praise should not be an act but a special way of life.

What are the reasons David gives for praising God in Psalm 145? In what ways should the words of this psalm be your own?

The great British preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon wrote a book called *The Practice of Praise*. It is based on verse 7 of today's psalm. In this short verse, Spurgeon shows three important things that can help

in developing praise in our lives.

1. Praise God as we do our work and live our lives. We need to notice the greatness of God in the world around us. Then we will have a good reason for praising Him. What can you find in the created world that deserves praise? How about the beauty of God's creation? What can you find in the spiritual (holy) world that deserves praise? How about the growing faith in a young Christian?

2. Praise God as we remember what He has done for us. If we want to praise God all the time, we must be able to remember the reason for it. What ways can we remember the great things about God, so that we do not forget His goodness? (For example, develop new acts or symbols [word pictures] that remind us of His goodness.)

3. Praise God as we talk about Him to others. Praise is not something that we do in our heads. Praise is to be shared with those around us. What reasons can you think of to praise God openly? What will the result of such praise be? And on whom?

What can you do to develop the habit of praise in your life?

WEDNESDAY—NOVEMBER 28

A SONG OF PRAISE (Acts 16:16–34)

In the book of Acts, praise had a surprising result on those who heard it. Paul and Silas were stripped and

beaten hard in Acts 16:16–34. Then they were thrown into a dark prison. No one was there to put ointment on Paul’s and Silas’s badly cut and bruised backs. They were in great physical pain and their feet were chained. But as the other prisoners sat listening, Paul and Silas begin to pray and sing.

Suddenly an earthquake came. The jailer discovered that Paul and Silas and the other prisoners did not escape. The jailer “fell down in front of Paul and Silas. He brought them out. He asked, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ ” (verses 29, 30, NlrV).

Why did this event (the earthquake) cause the jailer to think about his own need of salvation²? How do you think Paul and Silas’s prayers and songs influenced the prisoners’ not trying to escape? How does it influence the conversion³ of this man (the jailer) and his whole family?

It is amazing to think that our praise can change the eternal (without end) future of those around us. If Paul and Silas had sat in the dark complaining, do you think anyone would have been saved that night?

We do not know what happened to the jailer and his family later on. But imagine them reading the words that Paul later wrote from another prison in Rome: “Here is what he [God] has given you to do for Christ. You must

not only believe in him. You must also suffer for him. You are going through the same struggle [fight] you saw me go through. As you have heard, I am still struggling [fighting]” (Philippians 1:29, 30, NlrV). Suppose they read this and thought about how Paul’s suffering brought them joy. Then it surely would have brought a song to their hearts and a new challenge to remain faithful, no matter what the cost.

Who could be influenced for⁴ God by a song of praise that came from your heart? Make a strong effort to be more open in your praise to God around others. You do not know the positive result it could have on others.

THURSDAY—NOVEMBER 29

A WEAPON THAT CONQUERS (2 Chronicles 20:1–30)

As Jehoshaphat learned in 2 Chronicles 20:1–30, praise is a powerful weapon. He received a report that a “vast [large] army” was coming against him. But Jehoshaphat did not quickly jump into war. He “decided to ask the Lord for advice” (verse 3, NlrV). As the people of Judah came to Jerusalem for a fast, Jehoshaphat admitted the situation was very serious. He prayed “ ‘We don’t [do not] have the power to face this huge [large] army that’s [that is] attacking

2. salvation—God’s plan for saving sinners from eternal (without end) death.

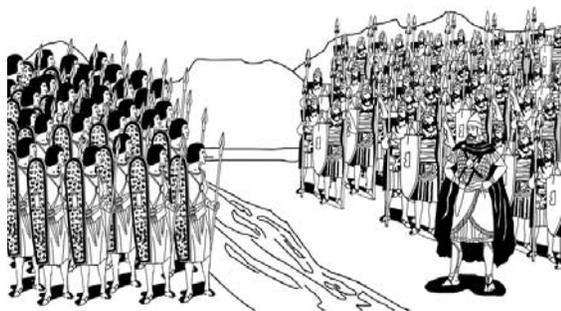
3. conversion—becoming a true disciple (follower) of God.

4. be influenced for—to be affected or changed by the power of another person or thing.

us. We don't [do not] know what to do. But we're [we are] looking to you to help us" (verse 12, NIV).

When you learn a "vast army" is approaching, what is your first feeling? From Jehoshaphat's answer in verses 3–12, what can you learn about dealing with great problems?

The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel. The Lord boldly announced: " ' "You will not have to fight this battle. Take your positions. Stand firm. You will see how I will save you. Judah and Jerusalem, do not be afraid. Do not lose hope. Go out and face them tomorrow. I will be with you" ' " (verse 17, NIV). After that, they worshiped God and sang praises to Him "with very loud voice" (verse 19, NIV). God was going to fight for them, but they still had to go out to meet the enemy.



God promised to fight for King Jehoshaphat, but the king's army still had to go out and meet the enemy.

But this was not a common march to war. Jehoshaphat chose a choir to sing praises to the Lord as they marched out. "They began to sing

and praise him. Then the Lord hid some men and told them to wait. He wanted them to attack the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir. They destroyed them" (verse 22, NIV). The author said that God acted at the very moment they showed their faith in His promise. They did so by beginning to "praise him because of his glory and holiness" (verse 21, NIV).

Read through the verses for today again. What spiritual (holy) principles (rules) can you find there to use in your own walk with God during times of trial?

FRIDAY—NOVEMBER 30

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, "Jehoshaphat," pp. 190–203, in *Prophets⁵ and Kings*; "The Fall of Jericho," pp. 487–498, in *Patriarchs⁶ and Prophets*.

"Let us educate our hearts and lips to speak the praise of God for His unequalled love. Let us teach our souls to be hopeful and to remain in the light shining from the cross of Calvary. We should never forget that we are children of the heavenly King, sons and daughters of the Lord of hosts. It is our honor to keep a calm, peaceful faith in God."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Ministry [Work] of Healing*, p. 253.

"And I worship and honor Him. I want you to glorify Him with me. Praise

5. prophets—men or women sent by God to warn us about what will happen in the future.

6. patriarchs—leaders in early Bible times, such as Abraham and Isaac, or other leaders of Israel, such as Moses.

the Lord even when you fall into darkness. Praise Him even in temptation.⁷ ‘Rejoice in the Lord always,’ says the apostle.⁸ ‘And again I say, Rejoice.’ Will that bring gloom and darkness into your families? No! Really, it will bring a sunbeam. You will gather rays of eternal [without end] light from the throne of glory and spread them around you. Let me encourage you to become involved in this work. Spread this light and life around you, not only in your own path, but in the paths of people you fellowship [meet] with. Let it be your goal to make those around you better and to make them more spiritual [godly]. Point them to heaven and glory and lead them to look up to heavenly and spiritual things that cannot ever be destroyed.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*⁹ for the Church, volume 2, pp. 593, 594.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ What part does group praise have in the life of the Christian? How would you describe the praise in your Sabbath services? Is it spiritually uplifting? Does it encourage members to keep faith during trials and trouble? If not, what can be done?
- ❷ What does it mean to “praise the Lord even when you fall into darkness” or to “praise Him even in temptation”? How can praise help us through these situations?
- ❸ Let members give testimonies (experiences) on how praise has influenced their lives. What can you learn from one another’s experiences?
- ❹ As a class, pick a psalm of praise to read. What does it teach you about praise? What influence (power) does praise have on your faith?

7. temptation—anything that tries to turn us away from God and tries to get us to do, think, feel, or say what is wrong.

8. apostle—a disciple (follower) of Jesus who preached the gospel after Jesus returned to heaven.

9. testimonies—the writings of Ellen G. White.