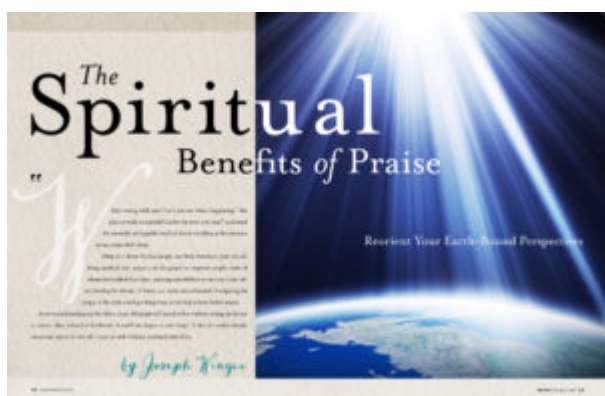


The Spiritual Benefits of Praise

Reorient Your Earth-Bound Perspectives

By Joseph Winger



“What’s wrong with you? Can’t you see what’s happening? This place is ready to explode! Gather the team and pray!” exclaimed the normally unflappable medical doctor standing at the entrance to our make-shift clinic.

Deep in a dense Haitian jungle, our little American team was offering medical care, prayer, and the gospel to desperate people, some of whom had walked three days, carrying sick children to our tiny clinic. After laboring for almost 12 hours, our team was exhausted. Navigating the jungle in the dark could get dangerous, so we had to leave before sunset.

As we started packing up the clinic, about 60 people still stood in line without seeing the doctor or nurses. They refused to be denied. A small riot began to take shape. A blur of voodoo rituals, curses and machetes was all I recall as mob violence escalated around us. The terror in the doctor’s eyes and voice jolted me to attention. At that moment, I realized

that hostility and impending violence transcend all cultures and languages! The thought that kept flooding my mind was, "We could all be killed and no one would even know about it for days!"

I yelled, "Father save us! What are we to do?"

The Holy Spirit immediately spoke to me, "Praise with all of your heart."

I grabbed our guitarist and yelled, "Follow me. We've got to sing praises with all of our hearts!" He and I marched around the area singing every praise song we could think of in both Haitian Creole and English. Miraculously, we observed the power of praise in a tangible way. After circling the area and lifting high the praises of God for the third time, the atmosphere literally shifted.

The doctor later reported that the very moment we began to sing praises, God told him what to do: briefly meet with each remaining family and dispense vitamins, bandages and topical treatments. As he did so, the hostility immediately diminished and the voodoo activity ceased as God's presence filled that part of a remote, steamy jungle.

Praise Sets God's Will in Motion

In intense, life-threatening situations, our natural response is to pray. But this time, the Holy Spirit directed me not only to pray, but to praise. That day, prayer with praise brought a little more of heaven into that isolated plot of the earth.

I cannot forget this testimony of praise touching heaven and affecting earth. Praise happens in heaven (Rev. 19:1). When we come into alignment with this key activity of heaven, here's what happens on earth: It is as if His Kingdom comes and His

will is set in motion on earth as it is in heaven. Forces of darkness become confused and flee because of the simple, sincere praises of God's people.

We see this truth of praise routing God's enemies in Jehoshaphat's battle in 2 Chronicles 20. "And when they began to sing and praise, the Lord set an ambush against the men of Ammon . . . so that they were routed" (2 Chron. 20:22, ESV).

David's praise also underscores this truth. ". . . David would take the harp and play it with his hand; and Saul would be refreshed and be well, and the evil spirit would depart from him" (1 Sam. 16:23, NASB).

The New Testament gives us an exceptional illustration of the power of praise. Praise actually reversed a difficult situation. "But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened" (Acts 16:25–26, NASB).

Is this just a unique historical example or does this story indicate a timeless principle of the power of praise breaking into our world?

While I was polishing this article, I received a call from a godly brother who was going through a seriously tough time at his job. If anyone had a right to complain, this brother, like Paul and Silas, certainly did. He had reason to forget about praise. I sent him a segment of this article, and his response addressed a major reason most of us don't engage in a life of praise.

With his permission, here are his insights: "My grumbling and complaining really needs to stop. It's a symptom of a bigger issue (lack of trust maybe? entitlement?). I think praise is definitely the antidote. I spent time writing down some of the

things I am grateful for last night . . . it is encouraging. And guess what happened today? I received positive feedback on the project that I had been working on for some time.”

Praise altered the course of his challenging circumstances.

The Difference Praise Makes

In addition to being a weapon against darkness and making a difference in our circumstances, praise produces four key differences in us.

First, a heightened awareness of His manifest presence best invades our world through praise. He inhabits the place where praise is offered. “But You are holy, O You Who dwell in [the holy place where] the praises of Israel [are offered]” (Ps. 22:3, AMP).

Second, praise helps orient our limited, earthbound perspectives toward eternity and His greatness. Years ago I heard someone say, “Don’t make anything bigger than Jesus.” When we praise Him, many of the things that overwhelm us are overshadowed by His immensity and majesty. We are exhorted in the Psalms to “magnify” the Lord. To magnify is simply to make something bigger. So, in my simple mind, magnifying the Lord means to declare that He and His abilities are huge and vast—much bigger than my problems.

Psalm 145 is a great passage to motivate our praise as it explores the marvelous nature and character of our Father. This psalm beautifully reveals the attributes of the Lord weaving in and out of each other as He cares for creation.

Psalm 145 is the only psalm entitled “A Psalm of Praise.” Verse three says, “Great is the Lord and highly to be praised; and His greatness is [so vast and deep as to be] unsearchable” (amp). The greatness of the Lord is unfathomable. None of us

can understand its depths as we praise Him. We can explore His traits our entire lives and never see a limit to His immeasurable greatness!

Third, as we praise Him, we come to know Him better. We will know His attributes better as we praise Him as the answer to our needs. For example, if I need wisdom, I can tap into His wisdom as I praise Him for being wise (Col. 2:2–3). If I have fear, I can praise Him as my security and deepen my relationship with Him as the One who makes me live confidently (Ps. 27:1–3). Whatever situation you face, think of God’s specific attribute that you need to deal with the challenge—and then praise Him for that attribute. Your understanding of Him in that area will increase as you praise Him.

Fourth, praise has transforming power to release grace. In Isaiah 61, we see the Holy Spirit’s dramatic ministry through the promised Messiah to His people. Through Isaiah God contrasts a list of negative traits with blessings. In verse 3, He offers a garment of praise in exchange for a spirit of despair. Praise can actually lift off a heavy cloud of depression and infuse us with a faith-filled attitude.

There are times I have struggled with heaviness, and praise released a grace of faith into my soul. My praise ignited my faith and trust in God in spite of the circumstances surrounding me and my oppressive outlook.

We must decide that we will cease letting circumstances dominate our perspective and attitude. This can happen best when we incorporate praise into our daily disciplines.

A Life of Praise

Notice these scriptural insights to believers about living a life of praise:

- Praise is a choice and sometimes a sacrifice: “Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name” (Heb. 13:15, NKJV). Every morning, one of the first things I do is read Psalm 34. I let this psalm set my heart in motion to bless and praise the Lord. A key verse in the psalm that sets the tone for my day is, “I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth” (Ps. 34:1, ESV).
- Praise is an accurate assessment of His love: “Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise You” (Ps. 63:3, NKJV).
- Praise is an activity that we can grow in: “But I will hope continually, and will praise You yet more and more” (Ps. 71:14, NKJV).

Saturate your prayers with praise. Watch what happens. You will find your faith focusing more on the One with the answers instead of being consumed with your pressures and problems. Most assuredly, praising will change something in you, it will push back the forces of darkness, and quite possibly something dramatic may just happen in your circumstances!

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