

15. Transforming Lives Through Praise

In our last seven topics, we said that our goal, in developing a church structure, is to develop a structure that will transform the life and thinking of each person. We saw that was the goal of the early church, from the day that it began, in Acts 2. New believers continually began to meet in small groups to begin that life transformation. Acts 2:42 says, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” In Acts 2:41-47, we saw that those small groups focused on at least eight things. Those can be summarized by saying that those small groups were FLOCKS that were praying and praising. FLOCKS stands for:

F - fellowship

L - leadership development

O - outreach

C - caring

K - knowledge

S - service

Today, we will look at the Biblical principles that apply to help transform each person in the group and equip them to grow in their spiritual life through praise to God. In Acts 2:47, we read, “Praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” In this verse, we see that the early believers were joining together and expressing their praise to God. This same thought is expressed in Luke 24:52-53. “And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen.” As we look at these two passages, we see that the early church was continually praising God.

Romans 15:11 shows that it is the plan of God for all of the Gentiles to learn to praise God. That verse says, “And again: ‘Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!’” This verse is a quote from Psalm 117:1 and shows that it is the desire of God for the Gentiles to also praise the Lord. Psalm 150:6 summarizes the desire of God for all people. That verse says, “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!”

As we read Acts 2:47, we see that the early church understood that praise to God was an important part of the ministry of new believers. In fact, the Lord used that praise to draw additional people to Christ. Acts 2:47 says, “Praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” The people gave praise to God and the Lord added to the church daily.

One key thing that we notice, in each of these passages, is that praise is to be directed to the Lord. Many Christians have a very confused idea about what happens when they gather together. Many people think that a few singers and a speaker are the participants, and they are the audience or spectators. However, that means that those Christians have not understood the purpose of praise to God. When Christians gather together to give praise to God, God is the audience, and the Christians are the participants. That is true whether the group is large or small. As Christians give praise to God, the Father draws others to Christ.

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Acts 2:46-47 shows that this praise to God happened both in the temple and from house-to-house. Here, we see that praise should be a part of small groups, as well as meetings of the whole church. This points out the fact that the early believers gave praise to God as they met from house-to-house. This provided an ideal time for people who were gathered to express praise to God for what He was doing in their lives. As they expressed praise to God, other family members heard what the Lord was doing. The Lord used this praise to draw others to Himself.

We also see that the Lord used praise in the temple to draw people to Himself. In Acts 3, Peter and John went to the temple at the hour of prayer. They met a man who was unable to walk. This man had been crippled for many years. In fact, chapter 4 says that he was more than forty years old. Peter and John healed the man in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Acts 3:8-9 gives the result, when it says, “So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them--walking, leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God.” He praised God, and all of the people heard him praise God.

Peter used the praise of this man to God as an opportunity to share about Christ. Acts 4:4 tells the result, when it says, “However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.” The Lord used the praise of this man to continue to draw other people to Christ. That brings us to the question, “What is it that causes Christians to give praise to God?” Ephesians 5:20 says, “Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” True praise to God is the result of having a thankful heart. In this verse, we see two important things about a thankful heart:

- God wants us to give thanks always.
- God wants us to give thanks for all things.

Colossians 3:17 gives us a key to giving thanks always. That verse says, “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” We see that all that we say is to be done in the name of the Lord Jesus. All that we do is to be done in the name of the Lord Jesus. When all that we say and do is done in the name of the Lord Jesus, we are depending on His strength, not our own. As we gather in small group Bible studies, we need to give people the opportunity to share how the Lord has given them His strength to say and do the things they have done that week. As they tell what Christ has done in their lives, they are giving thanks.

The second thing we see that Christians are to learn to do is to give thanks for all things. Many Christians find this difficult, because they have never understood the Biblical principle taught in James 1:2. That verse says, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials.” This verse does not say to feel joy when experiencing trials. Instead, it says to count it all joy. Paul expresses the meaning of that word in Philippians 3:7-8, where we read: “But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ.” Paul chose to consider all things loss for Christ. This was a decision. James tells us to make a choice to count it all joy when we fall

into various trials.

Happiness is related to what is going on around us. Joy is related to what is going on within us. Hebrews 12:2 says, “Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Jesus gave us an example of joy in the midst of suffering. Christ looked beyond the cross to the fact that He was doing the will of the Father and it filled Him with joy. The same is true in our lives. If we are focused on doing the will of the Father, we will experience joy, even at a time when we are experiencing tribulation or suffering.

We want to develop a church structure that helps people to see things from the viewpoint of God rather than the viewpoint of the world. This means that people need the opportunity to discuss tribulation and suffering from the viewpoint of God rather than the viewpoint of the world. That was one of the first things Paul did to help disciples grow in their spiritual lives. Acts 14:22 says, “Strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, ‘We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.’” Paul and Barnabas knew the importance of preparing the disciples for many tribulations before they left to return to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch.

The disciples in the cities of Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia were going to be working with small groups of Christians to help them in their spiritual growth and development. As a result, Paul and Barnabas knew that they must be prepared for tribulation if they were going to help the newer Christians learn to count it all joy when they experienced various tribulations. This was an important part of preparing those developing leaders to be able to help others learn to praise God, in all situations, and for all things.

New Christians are transformed as they are shown in small groups how to praise God, in all situations, and for all things. That is why developing a structure that equips small group Bible study leaders to respond to tribulation with joy is such an important part of developing the structure of a church. May the Lord richly bless you as you help small group leaders learn to count all things joy, so they can be an example to others of what it means to give praise to God, in all situations, and for all things.