

17. Developing Praise in Small Group Bible Studies

In our past few topics, we have been talking about Bible study and fellowship groups (apostles' doctrine and fellowship groups). We said that the purpose of small group Bible studies can be summarized by the statement: FLOCKS that are Praying and Praising from Acts 2:42-47. Today, we will be looking at the eighth purpose of Bible study and fellowship groups which is: Praise.

In Acts 2:47, we read that the early church was, "Praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." The very first thing we notice about praise is that it was directed to God. This is important to note in the day and age in which we live, because the focus in many churches today is entertainment in order to compete with the world. We need to remember that we are not in competition with the world, with other churches, or with anything else. When we express our praise, that praise is to God for who He is and for what He has done.

The book of Psalms teaches us many things about expressing our praise to God. In Psalm 147:1, we see that we express praise to God through singing, "Praise the LORD! For *it is* good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, *and* praise is beautiful." However, singing is not the only way we can express our praise to God. In Psalm 150:3-5, we see that we can praise God with musical instruments, "Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet; Praise Him with the lute and harp! Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes! Praise Him with loud cymbals; Praise Him with clashing cymbals!"

Music is only one of many ways to express our praise to God. In Psalm 9:1, David said, "I will praise *You*, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will tell of all Your marvelous works." In this verse, we see that praise must begin in the heart. Unless we have praise in our heart, our words will be meaningless. However, we also see something else about praise in this verse. David said that he would praise the Lord by telling of all of the marvelous works of God. Praise is expressed as we speak about what God has done. When we talk about God sending Christ to die for our sins, we are expressing praise to God for His provision of salvation.

We also express praise to God in prayer. This is illustrated in Psalm 67, where we have a prayer for the salvation of the people of the nations. Psalm 67:3-5 says, "Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. Oh, let the nations be glad and sing for joy! For You shall judge the people righteously, And govern the nations on earth. Selah. Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You." According to 2 Peter 3:9, it is not the desire of God for anyone to perish. As a result, when we pray for the salvation of others, we are expressing praise to God because prayer is focused on the desire of God for the world.

We also see that praise is an attitude as we come before God. Psalm 100:3-4 says, "Know that the LORD, He *is* God; *It is* He *who* has made us, and not we ourselves; *We are* His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, *And* into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, *and* bless His name." In these verses, we see that praise recognizes God as the provider of all. As a result, our response is an attitude that gives thanksgiving, praise, and blessing

to Him for who He is.

Psalms 107:8, 15, 21, and 31 all say exactly the same thing. Each of those verses tell us, “Oh, that *men* would give thanks to the LORD *for* His goodness, And *for* His wonderful works to the children of men!” In these four verses, we see why we should give praise to the Lord. We are to:

- Give thanks for His goodness
- Give thanks for His wonderful works

In Bible studies, we can help those in the Bible study to develop an attitude that should be present in their lives throughout the day, not just when they are in Bible study. Psalm 113:1-3 says, “Praise the LORD! Praise, O servants of the LORD, Praise the name of the LORD! Blessed be the name of the LORD From this time forth and forevermore! From the rising of the sun to its going down The LORD’s name *is* to be praised.” In these verses, we see that our goal in helping people learn to praise the Lord is to see them begin to understand that they can praise the Lord throughout the day. This includes both the good times and the difficult times. In Acts 16:25, we see what Paul and Silas did when they were put in prison in the stocks after they had been beaten, “But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.”

Psalm 145 teaches us that people of all ages can praise the Lord together. Psalm 145:3-4 says, “Great *is* the LORD, and greatly to be praised; And His greatness *is* unsearchable. One generation shall praise Your works to another, And shall declare Your mighty acts.” In these verses, we see that praise expresses the greatness of the Lord. However, we all see that the various generations are expressing praise to God together. Today, we live in a world that has many homes where children are lacking one or both parents. As a result, in the world, children are often not learning to relate to the older generations and the adults are not learning to relate to children. Here, we see that when praise to God is placed in its proper place, it will bring the generations together.

Psalm 147 tells us many times to express praise to the Lord. However, right in the middle of these expressions of praise is a very key statement. Psalm 147:3 says, “He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.” Here, we see that praise to God causes healing to those wounds that a person may have in their spirit. Proverbs 17:22 says, “A merry heart does good like a medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones.” As Christians gather together and give praise to God, the Lord uses these times to bring healing to the inner spirit. Praise to God helps us focus on the One who heals instead of focusing on the hurts caused by people.

Individual and group praise have a powerful impact on the lives of those who are giving praise to God. Praise helps us to begin to develop a thankful attitude in our hearts. Before we became a Christian, our spirit caused us to be negative and critical because our human spirit was controlled by fear, guilt, and shame (Genesis 3:9). Becoming a Christians does not automatically cause us to become thankful. However, as we give praise to God for who He is, and for what He has done in providing salvation and all of its benefits, we start to become thankful. Ephesians 5:20 says, “Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” In this verse, we see that:

- * We are to give thanks at all times – always
- * We are to give thanks for all things – both the good and the bad

- * We are to give thanks to the Father – He is the source of all good things
- * We are to give thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ – He is the One who brought us into a relationship with God when we placed our trust in Christ

As Bible study groups learn to praise God together for who He is and what He is doing, that attitude will begin to carry over into the daily lives of those who are in the Bible study. That will develop a thankful attitude rather than a negative, critical attitude. Philippians 4:6-7 tells us, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” As we bring our requests to God, with thanksgiving, God says that:

- ◆ We will experience the peace of God
- ◆ We will realize that the peace of God is far beyond our understanding
- ◆ We will see that the peace of God guards our hearts
- ◆ We will see that the peace of God guards our minds

The Lord wants every Christian to experience His peace. That peace will only happen as Christians learn to praise the Lord and become thankful. May the Lord richly bless you as you help Bible study groups learn to praise the Lord.