

Living His Praise

Praise: to express approval of (someone or something).*

Praise ye the LORD. . . . Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness. Ps. 150:1, 2.

I will sing to the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. Ps. 104:33, NIV.

Jesus lived a life that quietly and continually praised His heavenly Father. Since heartfelt praise, exaltation, and worship of God drew Jesus closer to His heavenly Father, should we perhaps be more purposeful about living our lives as a continual praise?

Absolutely.

Of God, King David said, “You are holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel” (Ps. 22:3, NKJV). If, as David implies, God inhabits our praises, why do we so often forget to praise Him for His goodness?

And if we praised God not only for answered prayer, but also for hemorrhaged vocal cords, unpredictable grandchildren, potholes in the road, broken walls and even broken dreams, as do this month’s authors, imagine how close, how unbelievably close, God could be.

* All definitions are taken from the *Merriam-Webster online dictionary*.



January 1

The God of New Beginnings

"Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." Neh. 2:17, NIV.

When Nehemiah, exiled to Persia where he served as steward in the king's palace, learned of Jerusalem's lamentable situation, he cried. He also fasted and sought God's help and guidance. It seemed that lying among the rubble of Jerusalem's broken walls were also God's promises for His people along with their hopes that appeared to be destroyed.

Yet God heard Nehemiah's prayers and showed him how to proceed with the city's restoration and rebuilding. More important, God reminded Nehemiah that He is the God of new beginnings. One of Nehemiah's prayer requests during his months' long fast was that God would grant him favor in the eyes of the king, King Artaxerxes. Nehemiah was asked by the king one day why he looked so pale and sad. Offering a silent prayer for wisdom, Nehemiah carefully laid out Jerusalem's dilemma.

Not only did God grant Nehemiah favor in the king's eyes, but He also ordained that the king become the very channel through which Heaven would finance the restoration project. In addition, the king gave Nehemiah authority, despite the opposition of Israel's enemies in the surrounding nations, to head up the construction project. In so doing, Nehemiah was able to make secure both the city and its rebuilt temple, God's earthly center of worship.

The work was hard, the opposition fierce. But the wall was rebuilt. In gratitude, Nehemiah declared that all of Israel take part in a celebration of praise (Neh. 8:2) to the God of restoration and new beginnings. He said, "The joy of the LORD is your strength" (verse 10).

Do you have any broken places, relationships, or dreams? God can pick up the pieces and create a new beginning for you. He promises, " 'I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten' " (Joel 2:25, NIV). At the start of this new year, Jesus offers restoration and will draw near to us—with hope and healing. For with God, nothing is impossible.

Believe this is a new day. A new and exciting year for you to experience with God as never before. "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name" (Ps. 100:4).

Accept His restoration. His release. And have a happy—and most blessed—new year!

Maria Raimunda Lopes Costa

A Party for God

Give thanks to the LORD and proclaim his greatness. Let the whole world know what he has done. Sing to him; yes, sing his praises. Tell everyone about his wonderful deeds. Exult in his holy name.

Ps. 105:1–3, NLT.

Have you ever had a party for God? I know it may sound strange, but don't most people enjoy parties? They are times of fun, laughter, and a celebration of a life. So having a party to celebrate God would be wonderful. When I read the verses from Psalm 105, it seems like the psalmist is telling us to have a party for our heavenly Father.

Verse 3 begins with the word “Exult” (in the NLT) or “Glory” (in the NIV and KJV).

That word “exult” or “glory” is from the Hebrew word *halal*, which can mean “to make a show, to boast, to rave, to celebrate, to be [clamorously] foolish.” So the psalmist is telling us that each day we should live a life of praise and glory to God. We should rave about God, be boastful in our praise of Him, and even be foolish in our praise of Him.

Many know my favorite word is *joy* and my favorite saying is, “Don't let anyone steal your joy.” One way I have found to hold on to my joy each day is to begin my day by having a party for God and to continue that party all through the day. Each day I begin my morning devotional time with praise and thanksgiving to God. I give Him praise with psalms and hymns. And as the day—and my party for God progresses—I continue my praise and thanksgiving. I look for opportunities to tell someone about what God has done in my life.

At the end of my day as the party winds down, I end with a time of thanksgiving. Each evening before I go to bed, I write down five things that God has done for me that day. I want God to know that I love Him and thank Him for the things He has done in my life—little things and big things. And so I fall asleep each night with praise and thanks to God on my mind.

This all may sound really easy but it's not. There are times in my life, difficult times, when giving God praise and thanks is the last thing I want to do, yet I find that when I look at my life, no matter the trial, there is always, always some reason for me to praise and thank God. So try it. Have a party of praise and thanksgiving for God and let that party go all day long. Be foolish in your praise, rave about God's goodness in your life. Now that's a reason to celebrate!

Heather-Dawn Small



January 3

A Garment of Praise

"To console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified." Isa. 61:3, NKJV.

As soon as the plane landed in Beira, Mozambique, I felt that something was not right. I'd had a tight connection in Johannesburg due to a delay, and I was almost sure my bags had not made it through. Sure enough! When I passed through the immigration and ran to the baggage claim area, my fears were confirmed. No bags, no clothes, no nothing for five days. I was in a panic. What would I do? Then gradually I became aware of music, songs of joy outside the airport. I had been so upset about my situation that I had not even heard the amazing music. But as I listened, I realized I had two choices: to praise or to complain. I decided to praise.

Leaving the airport, I joined more than one hundred women who were singing—praising God for His blessings and thanking Him that I had arrived safely.

The days ahead were full of meetings, training, and fellowship. Did I miss my bags? Yes, at first, but I quickly learned to live without many things. I felt comfortable and happy. The ladies brought me a *capulana*, a piece of cloth that can be used in many ways. With the *capulana*, I survived the five days, rarely thinking about my lost bags. I was learning that if we will allow God to dress our spirit with praise, we will begin to sing again.

The day I left Beira, my bags were waiting for me at the airport. I praised God for bringing my things back, but I also thanked Him for teaching me to live with less. Today, when I face the same experience (and because I travel frequently, it happens often), I remember what God taught me in Mozambique, and my attitude changes immediately for the better. Why? Because when God dresses our hearts with praise, we are able to sing again.

Today is your day to sing. Maybe you are not waiting for luggage or material things; perhaps you are facing sickness, loss, or trials. Ask God to dress you with praise and help you to "give thanks in all things." You will discover changes in your thoughts and behavior, and you will never be the same. This morning, and every morning, you have the choice: to praise or to complain. Choose to praise. Choose blessings.

Raquel Queiroz da Costa Arrais

Rescuing Luke

O LORD, You preserve man and beast. How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings. Ps. 36:6, 7, NKJV.

The white, blue-eyed kitten with gray on his head sat on the church porch. The bewildered expression on his three-month-old face suggested that someone had left him there despite the rainy downpour. I saw him as I arrived to play the piano for choir practice. Other choir members saw him too. We spoke kindly to him and petted him.

After practice, we discussed what to do. He purred when we gave him bowls of water, milk, and bread. What next? I couldn't take him because the three cats I already had wouldn't welcome him. No one else there could take him in, either. Sadly, we bade him goodbye.

Once home, I made phone calls, putting an ad on his behalf in two local papers. My friend Peggy suggested that I call Lorraine, a mutual friend who wasn't in choir.

Lorraine promised, "If nobody else shows any interest by Sunday and the kitten is still there, I'll take him to stay with me until I can find him a home." I prayed that the kitty would be there when she came to church. When Lorraine saw him, she named him Luke. And she did take him home with her.

On my end of things, the person taking my advertisement at the newspaper was reluctant to add Luke's name to the ad when I called to renew it.

"If he has a name, he's a pet," she insisted.

"But his humans deserted him," I explained. "His temporary rescuer named him. She names all the animals she takes care of. You can leave the name out if you feel you must."

"No, I'll go ahead and add it," she finally agreed. After Lorraine had kept Luke for at least a month, a kind couple read the ad and decided that they would like to have Luke. So they picked him up and gave him a permanent home.

When Luke was lost, he wasn't sure what to do. We, too, at times in life, may feel as if we're lost and looking at an uncertain future. But God, who cares about the smaller members of His creation, including sparrows (see Matt. 10:29–31), also cares about us. All we have to do is ask Him and then trust Him the way sweet, gentle Luke put his trust in us.

Bonnie Moyers