



D Y N A M I C

Steward

the power to live to submit to abide to give to serve

April-June, 2003

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Volume 7 Number 2

Total Praise

*Fabiola Vatel, Editorial Assistant
General Conference Stewardship Department*

The routine was the same every Sabbath. Following the praise music I would walk up to the podium and exchange greetings with the congregation.

“God is good?”

“All the time!”

“And all the time?”

“God is good!”

Then, I’d follow-up with a Scripture text, encourage the saints to enjoy the service, and finally return to my seat. Sabbath after Sabbath, like a robot, I fulfilled my duties and sat down. It was my responsibility to promote an attitude of praise throughout the congregation before divine service began. You see, I was the “Praise Coordinator.” However, I struggled with that title. How could I coordinate something I didn’t even understand?

The Bible tells us that the Lord inhabits our praise (Ps 22:3, KJV). I’ve come to realize that God feels welcome in our hearts when we take time to express our adoration for Him. He is pleased when we recognize Him for who He truly is: a magnificent, powerful, awesome Being. When we are finally able to acknowledge that God is God and that we are not, that’s when genuine praise begins. We glorify Him because of His surpassing greatness and praise Him for his goodness. However, in order to truly understand how good He is, we must understand who He is.

In our limited vocabulary, we sometimes fail to find the proper words to verbalize just how much God means to us. We must praise Him anyhow. Since God inhabits our praise, shouldn’t we work at building the most comfortable atmosphere where He can abide? We ought to give God a “sweet home” to live in by continually lifting our voices in admiration and joy, acknowledging who He is.

By getting to know Him better, I’ve grown to understand the extent of how good God really is. He is not only good, He is “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). He listens attentively, forgives completely, and loves wholeheartedly.

He deserves total praise.

What is a Sacrifice of Praise?

From the staff of Dynamic Steward

Small group study

1 *Read Hebrews 13:15 together: “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess His name.”*

From her book, *Glorious Intruder*,* in the chapter entitled: “Praise: A Thankful Heart in a World of Hurt,” Joni Eareckson Tada makes this profound observation:

“Reflect for a moment on the most frightening crises in your life or the life of your family: a cancerous lump, a debilitating illness, a financial emergency, a daughter’s illegitimate pregnancy, a son’s angry rebellion. If during those times you have steadfastly fastened your heart in praise to God, then you have offered a sacrifice. If with the psalmist you have said to the Lord, ‘I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more’ (Ps 71:14), you have offered words which have cost you something” (p. 43).

With this introduction, Joni Tada goes on to explain how a sacrifice of praise means that we must trade in our pride, anger, and even our “human logic” as God asks us to express praise in the light of our distress.

2 *Discuss together the concept of “a sacrifice of praise” and the meaning of the phrase, “through Jesus” in Hebrews 13:15.*

Share other scriptural texts or passages that reflect the same message of this text—praising God in the midst of trials. Two such passages you may read and reflect upon are James 1:2-5, 12 and Acts 16:22-25.

Personal experience

“I think God is especially honored when we offer a sacrifice of praise. He is glorified when we offer words of adoration wrenched from a pained and bruised heart. . . . Most of the verses written about praise in God’s Word were penned by men and women who faced crushing heartaches, injustice, treachery, slander, and scores of other intolerable situations.

“It is only ‘through Jesus’ that we are able to offer a sacrifice of praise. Why? Because Jesus was God’s sacrifice for us. Is it asking too much, then, for us to sacrifice mere words? Never! God is definitely not overstepping reasonable bounds when He asks us to offer a sacrifice of praise” (Ibid, p. 44).

Joni Eareckson Tada speaks from her own experience, and that makes her sharing all the more credible. As a teenager, Joni was injured in a diving accident that left her a quadriplegic in a wheelchair, unable to use her hands. Since that time, she has learned to paint with a brush between her teeth, written numerous books, and broadcasts her daily radio program, *Joni and Friends*. She continues praising God in her ministry for Him.

3 *In closing, share from your own personal experiences and, in prayer together, offer God your own “sacrifices of praise.”*

* *Unfortunately this book is out of print*

*What does it mean to offer
“a sacrifice of praise?”
Our hope is that this study
may lead you to new
insights into our need to
praise God at all times—
when things are going well,
but especially when things
are not going well at all!*



Small Group Qs

*Small Group Qs is a book full of questions!
And it puts them all at your fingertips.*

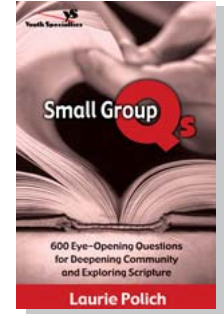
Brendon Prutzman, Youth Pastor
Spencerville SDA Church, Silver Spring, Maryland

If you have ever tried to lead a small youth group, you probably already know the value of having enough questions—and of having the *right* questions. *Small Group Qs* is a book full of questions! And it puts them all at your fingertips. There are questions for groups just getting acquainted, for groups growing spiritually, questions on specific topics, and questions on particular Bible study passages.

If you are a busy youth leader who needs to find shortcuts for Bible study planning, this is a book to have in your library. It takes minimal preparation to have a great study with your small group because the verses and the questions are there, ready to use.

The only drawback is that some questions may not fit your group. There are some that do not work well with my high school-aged group. However, I have found that with students I know well, it is fairly easy to adapt the questions to fit the group—which encourages the students to open up more.

Overall, I would rate the book as a “must-have.” Even if you don’t lead a small group, having the questions will help you build stronger relationships with your students.



by Laurie Polich
Zondervan Publishing
Grand Rapids, Michigan
2002 US \$9.99

Please note our new e-mail address in the credits on page 16!

Praise . . .

Gratitude is heaven itself.—William Blake

O, let our voice His praise exalt, till it arrive at Heaven's vault.—La Rochefoucauld

Nothing tends more to promote health of body and of soul than does a spirit of gratitude and praise.—Ellen White

Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God. For I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.—Psalm 42:11

So I will go about Your altar, O Lord, that I may pray with the voice of thanksgiving and tell of Your wondrous works.—Psalm 26:7

Pride slays thanksgiving, but a humble mind is the soil out of which thanks naturally grows.—Henry Ward Beecher

A thankful heart is not only the greatest virtue, but the parent of all other virtues.—Cicero

*We praise Thee, O God, for the Son of Thy love,
For Jesus who died and is now gone above.
We praise Thee, O God, for Thy Spirit of light,
Who has shown us our Saviour, and scattered our night.*—J. J. Husband

quotes

Learning to Praise

*Benjamin C. Maxson, Director
General Conference
Stewardship Department*

Praise helps us recognize God and His ability to impact our lives. It reminds us that He loves us and is deeply involved in the details of our daily living.



What is praise?

It was group prayer time. The leader invited the group to spend time in praise and adoration. Each person prayed, most of them focusing on thanking God for different blessings. As I listened, I heard many wonderful things, but very little in the way of praise and adoration. This same situation is often repeated. We do well with thanksgiving, but it seems we are not sure of how to praise or adore God.

So what is praise? Webster defines praise as “an expression of approval or admiration.” A secondary definition is “the extolling of a deity, ruler, or hero.” So why is it so difficult? What do we need to do to learn to praise?

There are several factors which make praise difficult. The first is that we are simply not accustomed to praise. We have few models from which to learn. Second is the fact that praise requires that we set self aside and think of God first. We cannot be thinking of self and praise God at the same time. Third, in order to praise, we need to change the rhythm of life. We must take time to focus on God and His attributes. Simply put, praise does not come naturally for most of us. We have to learn to praise.

Praising God has the power to change our lives. Praise takes the mind off self and helps us identify God and His reality. It transforms the perspective from which we approach life and places us in the context of who God is. Praise helps us recognize God and His ability to impact our lives. It reminds us that He loves us and is deeply involved in the details of our daily living.

I focus my mind on Him

I find there are several steps I take that help me praise God. The first is to focus my mind on Him. Especially when learning to praise, I find it helpful to spend a few moments contemplating God and His character. Second, I focus on a particular act or characteristic of God. Then I simply tell Him what I think of Him and recognize Him for that act or characteristic. Comparing God or one of His attributes to something or someone else helps me recognize His greatness or transcendence. Finally, I seek to move the praise from words to action. This goes far beyond a physical posture or movement. Instead, I seek to place my life in the context of praise—to make my life an act of worship and acknowledgment of who God is.

This type of praise is not easy. Nor does it come automatically. It demands a surrender of self that is described by the apostle Paul as a “living sacrifice,” a “spiritual act of worship” (Rm 12:1). It is something I am learning to do, and it is well worth the effort.

The Psalms are full of calls to praise God. They are helpful in teaching us how to praise. And they give us a number of topics for praise. The following are the praise categories I find helpful:

1 *Praise God for who He is.* God is Creator. He is Redeemer and Lord. The names of God are valuable in this kind of praise. Sometimes I find it beneficial to focus an entire prayer of praise on the different names of God. As I pray, I acknowledge His identity as revealed in His many names.

2 *Praise God for His character.* Every aspect of God’s character is worthy of praise. His love, His goodness, His majesty, His integrity, His greatness, His faithfulness, and all the rest of His attributes are helpful in praising Him.

3 *Praise God for what He does.* This includes what He has done in the past, what He is doing now, and what He has promised to do in the future. This type of

We do well with thanksgiving, but it seems we are not sure of how to praise or adore God.

praise can flow over into thanksgiving, but at times I find it helpful to simply praise God for what He does, and leave the thanksgiving to another part of my prayer, or another time.

There is no single “right” way to praise God. It can be done individually or in a group. And there are a number of ways that I have tried and found meaningful. A praise prayer is the first one which comes to mind. This means making praise the focus and content of an entire prayer. Singing praise is also very powerful. There is something about music which lends itself to praise. Journaling praise is a unique way of focusing the mind on praise. Simply write your praise to God in your spiritual journal. A “praise walk” in which we take a walk and focus our minds totally on praising God is another way of making praise meaningful. We can even dedicate an entire day to praising God and seek to focus our mind on praise throughout the day.

Practicing the praising of God

Let’s practice what we have explored together and just pause for a moment to praise God:

“We praise you our God, for you are King of kings and Lord of lords. You are God, and we choose to recognize and adore you. Before we were born, you loved us. Your love awakens us to a new life, and we accept you as Lord. We praise you for you are the Creator of all things. You shaped us with your hands and you speak your love to our hearts.

“We praise you, Oh, God, for you have redeemed us. You became one with us. You were made sin for us. And in your redemption we find life. We worship you for

you have made it possible for sinners to find life and hope. You have given us eternal life, and that assurance transforms our past, present, and future. You are worthy of praise, and we acknowledge your compassion and mercy.

“We praise you our God, for you have called us to partnership with you. You have placed us on your throne with you (Eph 2:6), and we accept your calling. You transform our days with your presence. You consent to walk with us and in doing so, you lift us to a new life. We worship you with our hearts. We praise you with our lips. And we choose to serve you with our lives. Accept our sacrifice of praise.

“Let all that we are praise you, our King and Lord. Let our lives live to glorify your name. Let us give you honor and praise, for you are worthy. You are the God of the ages, and the Lord of our days. Let us praise you forever and ever.”

stewardship window more from the director’s desk ...



NAD Receives Stewardship Award

The North American Division Stewardship Department was awarded the “Outstanding Stewardship Education Award for 2003” by the Christian Stewardship Association. The award was presented on January 25 to G. Edward Reid, NAD’s Stewardship Director, by Dr. Scott Priessler, president of CSA. The presentation was made at the CSA Awards Banquet during their annual convention held in Chicago, Illinois. The meeting was attended by more than 1,000 stewardship leaders from across the United States. In granting the award, Dr. Priessler noted the extensive stewardship certification program conducted by Seventh-day Adventists and recognized the NAD’s new Personal Giving Plan materials. Adventists have been involved in the Christian Stewardship Association since 1994.

SSD Summit

A division-wide Stewardship Summit was held in the Southern Asia Pacific Division, February 17-20. Nearly 200 administrators and departmental directors came together for four days to discuss issues and trends in contemporary stewardship, especially in this diverse division.

The group made recommendations for the future direction of stewardship for the division and its new director, Pastor Abner Roque. Pastor Bobby Sepang, former stewardship director, worked with Pastor Roque in coordinating the summit. We welcome Pastor Roque and say goodbye to Bobby Sepang as he makes the transition to serve as president of the East Indonesian Union Conference.

Worship: Who is the Audience?

*Dr. Terry Pooler, Senior Pastor
Forest Lake SDA Church
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Introduction

Picture a typical worship service. The congregation is seated in the pews facing the rostrum, waiting to hear the music and the sermon. The focal point is the pulpit and the preacher. Why this arrangement? Because we are a “proclamation” model church. The Word is at our worship center, and we are to proclaim it with power. Adventists even think of our proclamation in the context of the three angel’s messages of Revelation 14. The angels are “proclaiming” God’s message through the preached Word.

In this setting, it is obvious that the preacher and musicians are the “performers,” and the congregation is the “audience.” The fact that the congregation considers itself to be the audience is reinforced by the member evaluations shared as they leave the sanctuary. “I thought that was a good sermon.” “I didn’t like the soloist.” If the preacher and musicians did an acceptable job, then the congregation thinks it was a good worship service. But, if they didn’t like what the preacher said, didn’t like his suit, didn’t like the hairstyle of the soloist or the type of music the musicians played, well then, it wasn’t a good worship service.

SCRIPTURE:
1 Peter 2:9-11

Worship in heaven

Now compare that picture with a worship service in heaven:

“At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian ... Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders ... In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back....

“Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: ‘You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being’ (Rv 4:2, 3, 6, 9-11).

Who is the audience in this heavenly worship service, and who are the “performers”? Well, it is clear that God is the audience and Recipient of the praise offered by the beings around His throne. It is clear that God’s creatures are not there to critique the worship service. They are there to praise Him!

Can we apply this heavenly model to our worship services? Notice the reason for our calling: “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, *that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*” (1P 2:9-10, italics supplied). So we are called to praise the Lord in our hearts, in our lives, and most definitely in our worship services.

A powerful model

Perhaps we should understand what the word “worship” means. In the Bible, the most prevalent word for worship is “Shachah.” It is used over one hundred times and means, “to bow down.” The second most often-used word for worship is “proskuneo” which means “to throw a kiss toward” or “kiss the feet.” Combine the meaning of those two words and we have a very good definition of worship, i.e. “to bow down and kiss the Lord.” It conveys the idea of a king receiving the honor, homage, and gratitude of His subjects.

The heavenly model of worship is a pattern for the earthly. The very definition of worship instructs us to “bow down and throw Him a kiss.” We do this by expressing our gratitude for His mercy with our words, prayers, and songs of gratitude.

If God is the audience, then the “performers” are the worshipers. The pastor, musicians, and other platform presenters are merely facilitators helping the congregation to 1) recognize the presence of God and, 2) assist them in responding in an appropriate manner.

Some have suggested that a powerful model for a worship service format is to think of it like the Israelite’s journey up to Jerusalem to worship a God who had done great things for His people, rather than a variety program with an assortment of disconnected elements.

This journey begins with a “Call to Worship.” An excellent call not only invites people to come and worship, but also gives a reason why we should worship Him; e.g. He has created heaven and earth. I do this with a Responsive Reading found in

Who is the audience in this heavenly worship service, and who are the “performers?”

The SDA Hymnal and other published worship materials. Or I write the reading myself to fit the topic of day.

I then picture the Israelites moving up the dusty roadways, celebrating God’s power and goodness and His mercy in choosing them to be His community. In our worship services we can celebrate our calling into God’s community, called out of darkness to be a people who reflect His character and sing His praises. Community is celebrated in handshakes, baptisms, baby dedications, personal testimonies, and testimony songs that speak eloquently of our love for our gracious God.

Two kinds of songs

There are basically two types of worship songs. The testimony songs are those in which people tell other people what they think about their God and how we should respond to Him. Some examples are “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” and “The Lord in Zion Reigneth.” God is referenced but not addressed. The other kind of worship song is the song addressing God, and includes songs such as “How Great Thou Art,” “Holy, Holy, Holy,” and “I Love You, Lord.”

Next, in the Israelites’ journey to worship, as they approach Jerusalem’s temple, they sense God’s intimate presence and began to direct their songs of praise *toward* Him. In our worship songs like “I Exalt Thee” or “Holy, Holy, Holy,” we express our awareness of His presence. The offering gives another opportunity for worshipers to “throw a kiss toward” their King. Songs like “God Is So Good,” “Great Is Thy Faithfulness,” or “Sacrifice of Praise” enhance this exaltation.

As the Israelites approach yet closer to the holy temple, their loud, joyful songs transition into quieter, intimate songs of adoration. This is the time when we would fall to our knees in prayer before His awesome presence or sing a preparation hymn such as “I Love You Lord,” “Create in Me a Clean Heart, O Lord,” or “Open My Eyes, That I Might See.”

Another reason to praise

With a sense of awe and anticipation, the congregation now hears the preaching of the Word of God. At this point they *do* become the audience to His teaching. But a good sermon ought to have as its ultimate goal, the unveiling of God’s character of mercy and love in such a manner that the congregation is given yet another reason to praise God. Thus, the sermon helps facilitate the worshiper’s praise. A good response hymn will reflect the sermon’s insights and give the congregation the opportunity to show their gratitude to God for what they have learned.

Finally, the words of benediction should be a “sending forth” of the congregation back into their world. They go forth into their world to “show forth the praises of God” in their daily lifestyle, returning next Sabbath with fresh reasons to praise Him.

Many Adventists have difficulty making the transition from believing that they are the audience to the biblical idea that God is the audience. Why? Because of our “proclamation” model mentality. This model works perfectly for public evangelism. The evangelist is the “actor” who uses spotlights, stage props, and a video screen to attract and hold the audience’s attention and bring them to a decision.

Is worship supposed to be a “tamed down” version of an evangelistic meeting, where the focus is a good doctrinal or prophecy sermon with some preliminaries and a decision? An evangelistic service is not a worship service. They share some things in common, but the focus is entirely different. People are the audience in an evangelistic

service. God is the audience in a worship service. In evangelism we *proclaim* the Three Angel’s message *so that* people will make a decision to come and “*worship* Him who made heaven and earth” (Rv 14:6-7).

Conclusion

So how should we judge a “good” worship service? The biblical answer is: By how well the congregation bows down and kisses the feet of the Lord. Restated, it’s by how well we recognize God’s presence and sincerely express our praises as we proclaim His goodness and worthiness to be our Lord. Our worship services would be far more powerful and enjoyable if congregations realized that God is the audience of our worship and praise. We come to church to sing, preach, and pray: “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power.” The right question after a worship service ought not to be whether the preacher or musician did an acceptable job but, “Is God smiling with pleasure because I worshiped Him today?”



Worship as Therapy

*Dr. Terry Pooler, Senior Pastor
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Apopka, Florida*

Changing perspective

When our attitude changes, so does our altitude. Worship becomes therapy when our attitude switches from being a taker to a giver, from a spectator to a performer, from a comfort seeker to a God satisfier. With our focus shifting from self to God, we will find that in our attempt to please God we in turn are blessed. How does this work?

One day I brought a dead fly to church to illustrate how altitude changes perspective. Viewed through a magnifying glass, it looked like a monster! It could have been the star of a scary creature-feature monster movie. After laying down the magnifying glass, I slowly climbed an eight-foot ladder. When I reached the top, the fly was only a speck on the table. Surely it was nothing to fear. My altitude had changed my view of the problem.

We often see our problems as magnified monsters that are about to consume us. But the praise song bids us, "I will magnify the Lord, who is worthy to be praised. So shall I be saved from my enemies." "Monsters" shrink when seen from God's perspective.

Psalm 134 reads: "Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the Lord. May the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth, bless you from Zion."

SCRIPTURE:
Psalm 134: 2, 3

This text reminds me of my two-year old son at a crowded parade. From his perspective he can only see legs, feet, and dirt. So with arms raised he cries, "Lift me up, Daddy." When I elevate him to sit on my shoulders he sees what I see. His picture changes from dirt to clowns, from a forest of legs to marching bands and waving beauty queens. Altitude changes his perspective.

There are many good sermons encouraging us to look up to Jesus from the depth of our problems and find hope. But the Psalmist suggests that, like a little child, if we lift up our hearts and hands in worship, our heavenly Father will lift us up to receive a blessing. We don't want to merely look up; we want to be lifted up, so we can see our problems from His perspective.

Daddy, lift me up

Notice that the Psalmist pictures God blessing us from His throne on Mt. Zion. The blessing is the joy of standing with Him and looking down on our problems. Listen to some thoughts from that great hymn, *Higher Ground*:

*My heart has no desire to stay where doubts arise and fears dismay.
Though some may dwell where these abound. My prayer, my aim is higher ground.*

*I want to live above the world, though Satan's darts at me are hurled.
For faith has caught the joyful sound, the song of saints on higher ground.*

*I want to scale the utmost height and catch a gleam of glory bright.
But still I'll pray till heaven I've found, "Lord, lead me on to higher ground."*

Refrain

*Lord, lift me up, and I shall stand by faith on heaven's tableland.
A higher plane than I have found; Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.*

Here a worshiper is expecting to receive a blessing, which is a foretaste of heaven. It is the blessing of being elevated in spirit to God's higher ground, where the monsters of our doubts and fears can be crushed as the dead little flies that they really are!

This imagery of climbing Mt. Zion in worship has an interesting biblical background.¹ Psalm 134 was a "Song of Ascent" which the Israelites sang while ascending Mt. Zion in Jerusalem to worship God. What was another name for Mt. Zion? Mt. Moriah! The same mountain that Abraham ascended to offer Isaac as a sacrifice.

Abraham is instructed to offer Isaac as a sacrifice on Mt. Moriah. As they approach the mountain, Abraham tells his servants to stay with the donkey while he and Isaac go to "worship and then we will come back to you." (Gn 22:5). And as he and Isaac ascend the mountain to worship God, he has a heavy heart. Isaac is his future. The promises of being a great nation depend upon Isaac's good health. Have you ever entered the sanctuary with a heavy heart? I doubt that any modern worshiper approaches church with less joy than Abraham did when he starts up Mt. Moriah.

Suppose Abraham had stopped half-way up the mountain. "I just don't feel like going up any further. I don't feel like worshiping today. I don't like the scenery. I don't like the dress that other worshiper is wearing. I don't like this order of worship." Worshipers can easily be distracted by lesser gods and never reach the higher ground of God's blessing. But the Lord doesn't offer him a "rain check" until he feels better. He bids him come up and worship because the blessing is waiting at the top,

“Monsters” shrink when seen from God’s perspective.

not down in the valley. If Abraham had stopped climbing, the ram of blessing would have gone unclaimed. He would have returned home with a heavy, distracted and troubled heart.

Having “God’s eye view”

In Hebrew Moriah means: “seen of God.” It may also be translated or interpreted to mean “the mountain of God’s eye view.”² Abraham desperately needed to climb this mountain of worship and see his problem from God’s perspective. The Psalmist calls us to climb Mt. Zion (Mt. Moriah) as did Abraham. With our focus on God we ascend its heights and find its blessing, i.e. seeing our problem from “God’s eye view.” Yes, worship is therapy!

In Revelation 4 we see a worship service where God is the audience to heaven’s praise. In Revelation 5:4 we see an enlightening development. John views a scroll of obvious importance, but he weeps because no one is found worthy to open it. But the creatures around the throne, the one’s whose worship is directed toward God see the problem from a different perspective. They sing to Jesus, “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals.” He who weeps has his eyes on the problem. But those closest to the throne, focusing on God in worship, see the problem from a different perspective. John needs a change of altitude so he can see things from the perspective of God on Mt. Zion.

Blue monsters disarmed

Tommy Tenney tells of the day he took his youngest daughter to an amusement park. Just as they passed through the front gate, a big seven-foot blue TV character bounced over to shake his daughter’s hand. The story continues:

“She climbed me like I was a tree. The person in the costume quickly grasped the problem and silently moved on, but the daddy in me just knew that the rest of the day had been put on hold. Every time my little girl saw some oversized character in the park, she was going to be paranoid. That meant that I had to do something.

“Come on, baby, I took her in my arms and felt her grip around my neck reach vertebrae-fusion level as I set out to track down the source of my daughter’s fears... I caught the blue seven-footer just before he entered the character dressing room, and I tapped on his (or its) shoulder. ‘Sir?’ I said.

“Excuse me, Sir... I know you can’t really do this, and I’m sorry for asking you, but you startled my little girl. You scared her, and she’s going to be paranoid the rest of the day. Every time she sees somebody dressed up as you are, she’s going to climb my frame like a tree...”

“The front of the costume’s mask featured a finely woven grille or screen that helped him see where he was going. If you looked closely, you could just barely make out his eyes. I’d heard these workers are forbidden to even speak, but I said, ‘Sir, would you lean close enough?’

“Finally he said, ‘Put her real close,’ and I breathed a grateful sigh of relief and began to reel in my overworked arm with the girl dangling on the end. I had to wrestle with her to move her closer to the blue thing, and her eyes got even bigger.

“She was so scared that her little body just shook—until that young man leaned into that grille and said softly, ‘Hi, baby,’ The instant she could see his eyes, she could see that he was just a young boy.

“I said, ‘See, baby, that’s just a little boy all dressed up in costume.’

“The rest of the day, whenever my little girl saw somebody in costume, she’d grab my hand and she’d look at me, then she’d say, ‘Wook, Daddy. Widdle boys all dwsessed up.’”³

Conclusion

Satan is a dragon seeking to destroy us. From our perspective he looks pretty scary. But in worship we raise our hands and hearts, “Daddy, lift me up.” As He lifts us to higher ground we begin to see this Great Dragon (or the multitude of smaller dragons in our life) from our Father’s point of view—and he shrinks to merely a “little boy all dressed up” to look like a dragon. We ascend the Mountain of God and are blessed with renewed strength and hope.

Now we understand the Psalmist’s joy: “Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the Lord. May the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth, bless you from Zion.” Yes, God-focused, heart-directed worship really is therapy!

¹ *I thank Tommy Tenney for this thought, gleaned from his book, God’s Eye View, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers. 2002.*

² *Ibid. p. 144.*

³ *Ibid. p. 182-184.*



An Attitude of Gratitude

*Rick White, Senior Pastor
People's Church
Franklin, Tennessee*

Optimism or Pessimism?

A family had twin boys whose only resemblance to each other was their looks. If one felt it was too hot, the other thought it was too cold. If one said the television was too loud, the other claimed the volume needed to be turned up. Opposite in every way, one was an eternal optimist, the other a doom-and-gloom pessimist. Just to see what would happen, on the twins' birthday, their father loaded the pessimist's room with every imaginable toy and game. He loaded the optimist's room with hay. That night when the father passed by the pessimist's room, he found him sitting amid his new gifts crying bitterly. "Why are you crying?" Father asked.

"Because my friends will be jealous. I'll have to read all of these instructions before I can do anything with this stuff. I'll need batteries all the time, and my toys will get broken," answered the pessimistic twin.

Passing the optimist twin's room, the father found him dancing for joy in the pile of hay. "What are you so happy about?" he asked. To which his optimist twin replied, "There's got to be a pony in here somewhere!"

SCRIPTURE:
1Th 5: 16-18

This story illustrates a truth. We are either the master or the victim of our attitudes. It is a matter of choice. Who we are today is the result of choices made yesterday. Tomorrow we will become what we choose today. To change means to choose to change.

In the Canadian northlands there are just two seasons: Winter and July. When the back roads begin to thaw, they become muddy. Vehicles going into the backwoods country leave deep ruts that freeze with the cold weather. Upon entering this primitive area during the winter there is a sign which reads, "Driver, please choose carefully which rut you drive in, because you'll be in it for the next twenty miles."

Gratitude expressed

We are instructed to "give thanks." This is excellent advice, because a grateful person will be a happier, healthier, and holier person. But it is more than just good advice. It is a command "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (2Ti 3:1-2, NASB). "In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1Th 5:18, NASB).

Gratitude is expansive

Give thanks "in everything." Those two words are the words that make this verse so very difficult. If we were instructed to thank God in "most things" we could live with it. If we were told to thank God in "good things" we would find the verse a lot easier to accept and abide by. But Paul says we are to thank God in "everything."

Interestingly, there is no Scripture that commands us to feel grateful. Feelings come and go. They can be affected by the weather, by our physical condition, or by how much rest we got the night before. Thanksgiving has nothing to do with feelings. Whether things are good or bad, we are to be grateful.

You may say to yourself, "That's easy for Paul to say!" No, it wasn't. Paul had to flee Thessalonica for fear of losing his life. He had been beaten, whipped, imprisoned, shipwrecked, stoned, and left for dead. Yet he said, "In everything give thanks."

Still singing

In Acts 16 Paul and Silas are beaten with rods, whipped, scourged, and then thrown into prison. But instead of sighing, they began to sing praises to God. What does giving thanks in "everything" mean for daily living? Let's look at two areas.

1 *We are to be grateful for the blessings of life.* "The blessing of the Lord brings wealth, and he adds no trouble to it" (Pr 10:22). According to this verse, if you are His, you have been blessed by God. And if you have been blessed by God—you are rich.

Do you thank God for the blessings of life—just the simple everyday blessings? Take food. Do you know that two-thirds of the world goes to bed hungry every night? One-third of the world is underfed and one-third is starving. Thirty people starve to death every minute!

Do you ever thank God for water? Did you know that only three percent of the world's water is fit to drink? Only one-third of one percent of the world's water is available to drink? And over one-half of the world has no access to pure drinking water? How grateful we ought to be for the blessings of God!

2 *We are to be grateful for the burdens of life.* “In everything we are to give thanks.” Notice it is *in* everything, not necessarily *for* everything. Though we are not to be thankful for trouble, we are to be thankful in the *midst* of trouble. Indeed, one of the purposes of the trials and tribulations that come to us in life is to move us to thanksgiving.

“For all things are for your sakes, that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God” (2 Cor 4:15, NASB).

Everything that happens *to* you also happens *for* you. That is why you are to give thanks in every situation. Regardless of how bad it may seem to you, God wants to use it in your life to move you to thanksgiving.

The famous Bible teacher, Matthew Henry, was accosted by thieves who stole all of his money. He wrote these words in his diary: “I am so very thankful. First, because I have never been robbed before. Second, because, although they took my purse, they did not take my life. Third, because although they took everything I had, it wasn’t very much. And fourth, it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed.”

The mark of a growing Christian

Gratitude is a real test of character. For example, a baby is ungrateful. You can take an infant with colic and walk the floor with him for seven hours, and then when you put that little baby down, he won’t look up at you and say, “Thank you so much!” He may even yell a little louder. But we don’t blame him, because he’s just a baby.

What about a little child? A young child needs to be taught to be appreciative or grateful. Gratitude is not something that comes naturally but something you have to learn. You have probably experienced how difficult it is for a child to say “thank you.” A lack of gratitude in the heart indicates where we are spiritually.

The mark of a glowing Christian

“It is good to give thanks to the Lord” (Ps 92:1). Having an attitude of gratitude will change your life. It will shield you from cynicism. It will keep you from criticism. It will protect you from pessimism. It will draw you close to God. In, *A Finishing Touch: Pettiness*, by Chuck Swindoll, he writes:

“‘Pettiness,’ writes George Will ‘is the tendency of people without large purposes.’ Petty people are worse than stubborn; they are negative and rigidly inflexible. While we work overtime to come up with some soaring idea, they’ve already thought up eight reasons why it won’t ‘fly....’”

In one of his more serious moments, Mike Yaconelli, editor of *The Wittenburg Door*, addressed the issue of pettiness:

“Petty people ... are people who have lost their vision. They are people who have turned their eyes away from what matters and focus, instead, on what doesn’t matter. The result is that the rest of us are immobilized by their obsession with the insignificant.

It is time to rid the church of pettiness. It is time the church refused to be victimized by petty people. It is time the church stopped ignoring pettiness. It is time the church quit pretending that pettiness doesn’t matter...” (*The Wittenburg Door*, Dec 1984-Jan 1985).

You can give without being thankful, but you cannot be thankful without giving.

The mark of a giving Christian

Everything you have is a gift from God. James 1:17 says, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of lights.” If you are a grateful Christian, you will be a giving Christian.

Someone has said it well: “Thanksgiving, to be truly thanksgiving, is first thanks, then giving.” You can give without being thankful, but you cannot be thankful without giving. When you give, you not only are acknowledging that everything you have is a gift from God, but you are expressing your gratitude to Him.”



Praise, Who Needs It?

Claire L. Eva, Assistant Director
General Conference
Stewardship Department

*God cannot help but live up
to His nature—He
cannot help but give. It
flows from Him as
irrepressibly as the rushing
surge of a great waterfall.*

Seven-to-one

They say it takes seven affirmations to cancel out one negative remark. Now that's a point to truly ponder! Parents, think about this in terms of our day-to-day relationships with our children. Spouses, what about how we relate to our loved one?

Recently I received affirmation from a friend about a task I'd worked hard at. What was it about his praise that made me feel valued?

First, the praise was specific. It was related to objective work I had done. We often reject praise that is unspecific, because we know that it is not altogether true. It does not fit the image we have of ourselves—and we are our own worst critics! So, when someone says, "That was wonderful!" Or even less specific, "You are wonderful"; we don't "buy" it. We cannot accept it as true.

Second, the praise was genuine. How do I know? I could see it in his expression; I could hear it in his words. He did not flatter or overstate. He simply expressed appreciation in a specific way, with warmth and conviction.

There are times when we don't feel valued. And we shuffle through these silent times. We experience self-doubts. We *think* we have created meaningful work, but in our surroundings, voices are mute. It is then that the best thing we can do is praise God, accept our success, and move forward with quiet self-assurance.

The "giver's" point of view

But let's talk about praise from the perspective of the "giver." What do you experience when *you* express genuine praise to another person for a specific work or accomplishment? Or maybe you've observed the kindness or Christ-like compassion a friend has demonstrated to someone else in need?

It is curious to try to assess and express the emotion of such an event, isn't it? Sometimes you experience a rush of warmth, knowing that your spirit has linked with the life of your friend—a positive connection has been made.

Somehow, though, I am confident there is more to express about an encounter like this. It is as if the Spirit Himself has been released, creating an atmosphere charged with energizing, sustaining love.

Praise has a way of doing that! Especially the praise that we direct to the Giver of life and love. How much time do we spend praising God? I know for me, it is a growing mind-set. But praising God for His sake alone places us in a powerful posture. Even in our praise (or should I say *especially* in our praise!), God cannot help but live up to His nature—He cannot help but give. It flows from Him as irrepressibly as the rushing surge of a great waterfall. And everything His nature asks of us—to love, to obey, to praise—places us in the best possible attitude to receive the gift He so infinitely desires to give us.

And what is this gift? A Spirit-filled life! "I have come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly" (Jn 10:10). These words of Jesus almost express a paradox. For didn't His hearers, don't we, naturally have life? Not the kind of life He is talking about!

SCRIPTURE:
Psalm 64:8

An illustration

If you are a deskbound worker like me, or are engaged in work that keeps you fairly inactive physically, maybe this has happened to you: With lots of immobility, I sometimes experience my legs as heavy weights, noticeable appendages to my anatomy that hold me down. But when I do what I need to do—and for me, that is a brisk walk/run workout in the open air—I am continually amazed at what happens.

These legs no longer drag me down. Actually, I hardly know they are there, for they are transformed to lightness. My mind is clear. I am energized and more alive than I thought possible. I have strength that carries me through the day and am easily able to endure what would have been tiring to brain and body before my exercise.

The contrast between these two states is amazing. I was “dead”—mentally dull and physically weakened, but sadly, I hardly realized it. And then came “life.” I would not believe the difference if I did not experience it for myself!

This is a tiny illustration of what I believe it means to have that “life” Jesus speaks of. And we receive this powerful life from Him as we offer Him our praise and adoration:

“Praise the Lord with harp: sing unto him with the psaltery and an instrument of ten strings” (Ps 33:2)

“Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me bless his holy name” (Ps 103:1, KJV)

“Sing to God, sing praise to his name, extol him who rides on the clouds—his name is the Lord and rejoice before him” (Ps 68:4).

Conclusion

Praise Him for His goodness. Praise Him in plenty. Praise Him in scarcity. “Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord. . . .” (Ps 150:6, KJV).

As we praise the Giver of life, we receive Him—“I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one. I in them and you in me” (Jn 17:22, 23). And thus, we are equipped to share His life with those we meet.

Praise, who needs it? I do. You do. We need to affirm one another. And most of all, we need to live in an attitude of praise to our Father. He *is* our Life. And He is “worthy to be praised” (2S 22:4).

“The voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that shall say, Praise the Lord of hosts: for the Lord is good; for his mercy endureth forever...” (Jr 33:11)

It is as if the Spirit Himself has been released, creating an atmosphere charged with energizing, sustaining love.



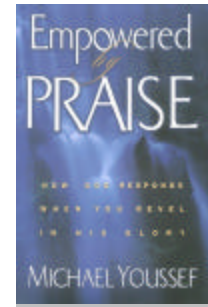
—book reviews

Empowered by Praise

*Reviewed by Claire L. Eva, Assistant Director
General Conference Stewardship Department*

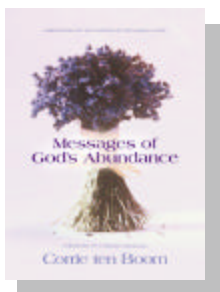
In the introduction to this work, Michael Youssef quotes from C. S. Lewis's *Reflections on the Psalms*: "...Only in the act of worship and praise can a person learn to believe in the goodness and the greatness of God. God wants us to praise him, not because he needs or craves, in any sense, our flattery. But because he knows that praise creates joy and thankfulness." (pp. 93-95.)

On this foundation, Youssef develops the four parts of his book: 1) The Blessings of Praise, 2) The Challenges of Praise, 3) The Elements of Praise and 4) The Power of Praise. The author shares how praise brings God near and connects us to heaven, how it touches our deepest emotions, overcomes negative circumstances, and wars against our pride. And, from a biblical stewardship perspective, he explains how praise involves generous giving. The work ends with a very helpful study guide!



by Michael Youssef
Waterbrook Press
Colorado Springs, Colorado
2002 US \$14.99

Messages of God's Abundance



by Corrie ten Boom
Zondervan Publishing
Grand Rapids, Michigan
2002 US \$14.99

As a survivor of Nazi concentration camps, Corrie ten Boom, well-known author of *The Hiding Place*, went out to the world to tell her story of hope, forgiveness, and of her trust in God.

Messages of God's Abundance is a collection of "lost writings" from the scripts of Miss ten Boom's Trans World Radio broadcasts in the Netherlands. These newly discovered writings have resulted in 24 meditations that glow with the warmth and simplicity of God's love and forgiveness.

Corrie is at her best when she tells her stories—from her imprisonment to her personal experiences as she travels the world. *Messages of God's Abundance* is a small, attractive volume that would make a lovely gift of encouragement.

Giving and Stewardship in an Effective Church

*Reviewed by Jean-Luc Lézeau, Associate Director
General Conference Stewardship Department*

There are two facts which are true in any congregation: 1) There is never enough money. 2) God will provide to accomplish His mission. How do we reconcile the two? Callahan stresses that before a church can be successful in fundraising, it needs a clear sense of mission. Giving, he says, is in direct proportion to the churches' sense of mission.

From this premise Callahan explores the six sources of giving: spontaneous giving, major community worship giving, short-term giving, annual giving, and enduring giving. He then goes into an area that we tend to neglect as stewardship leaders: the motivation that pushes people to give. And there, at the base of generosity, we can learn that compassion, community, challenge, reasonability, and endurance are sources that we have to tap if we want to fill our flask.

Although I would like to have seen the author develop a stronger biblical basis, this book will help pastors looking for counsel on practical tools for a stewardship program.



by Kennon L. Callahan
Jossey-Bass Publishing
San Francisco, California
1992 US \$17.95

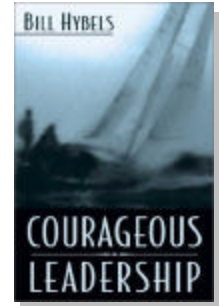
Courageous Leadership

*Reviewed by Benjamin C. Maxson, Director
General Conference Stewardship Department*

In this volume, Bill Hybels unpacks the leadership dynamics he uses to implement his basic vision: *The local church is the hope of the world*. Only a biblical vision of the church as the living body of Christ can effectively confront the challenges of a world beset by evil. There is much to be learned from this powerful leadership book.

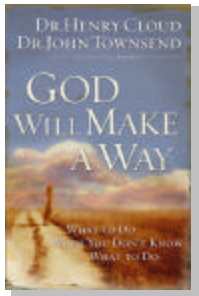
Hybels does an effective job of outlining the basic principles which guide his own leadership. His chapter on vision is especially worthwhile. He considers vision to be the source of a leader's passion, as well as the leader's most potent weapon.

The chapter on *The Resource Challenge* is worth the price of the entire book. Hybels calls the pastor the CRR—the *Chief Resource Raiser*. This chapter may be the best treatment of the pastor's role in church finances I have ever read.



by Bill Hybels
Zondervan Publishing
Grand Rapids, Michigan
2002 US \$19.99

God Will Make a Way



by Dr. Henry Cloud and
Dr. John Townsend
Integrity Publishing
Nashville, Tennessee
2002 US \$21.99

For many of us, life appears to be a series of crises. At times merely surviving seems to be in question. Yet God is always with us, and He will make a way. With this foundational assurance, Townsend and Cloud present a series of basic principles to help us face our struggles and get more out of life.

The authors outline eight powerful and dynamic principles. When applied to life, they transform the way we think and live. They help us walk with God and see ourselves as He sees us. With these principles, crises become opportunities for growing with God and for integrating God into every area of life.

After presenting the eight principles, the authors share realistic examples from life that illustrate and encourage. This book has the potential to transform and strengthen us in our walk with God.

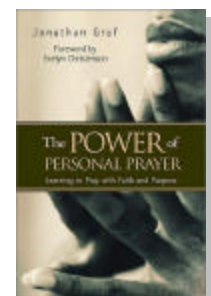
The Power of Personal Prayer

*Reviewed by Charlotte Ishkanian, Editor
Mission Magazine, General Conference Sabbath School*

This volume explains how prayer can help the Christian grow a love relationship with God and release God's will on earth. It discusses how to start a disciplined prayer life that will make prayer exciting.

Graf covers basic topics like knowing God's voice—how it differs from personal will and Satan's tactics. He says the importance of adoration is to put things in perspective, to build trust in God, and to develop a deeper sense of intimacy with God. He explains the distinction between praise (adoration) and thanksgiving.

Especially valuable is his discussion of "kingdom-focused prayer," praying with God's kingdom and eternity in view. If you want a straightforward book that focuses on prayer, try *The Power of Personal Prayer*. It provides basic tools to revitalize your prayer life and ample sources for further study.



by Jonathan Graf
NavPress
Colorado Springs, Colorado
2002 US \$10.00

resources

The Message—

The Bible in Contemporary Language NavPress, US \$ 39.99

The Message comes “out of 35 years of pastoring,” says author Eugene H. Peterson. Some time ago, Peterson struggled to share the book of Galatians with a group of fellow believers in his church in Baltimore, Maryland. From his frustration and desire to share God’s Word, he began his first steps on the way to this well-known contemporary Bible.

The question is asked, “Is this Bible a paraphrase or a translation?” Peterson’s answers that it is a “paraphrase from the original languages.” The object was to work from the original and express the Bible in American idioms.

Anyone who understands English will be blessed from reading this volume. Remembering that it is a paraphrase, it is a devotional resource that will stir your soul. Eugene Peterson has authored numerous other books that you will want to peruse. He may just become one of your favorite Christian writers!

editorial

*Claire L. Eva, Assistant Director
General Conference Stewardship Department*

I sent a brief e-mail to wish a friend a “Happy Birthday” a few days ago. And I was inspired by the words I received back. Here is her reply:

“I rejoice in all of God’s blessings to me. It’s good to be loved and surrounded by Christian friends here in the office ... and to have a wonderful family. God is so good.”

Have you ever wondered how the praise you express affects individuals close to you? Our families, our friends, our fellow workers, *and* people God places in our pathway every day? We truly are stewards, or “overseers” of our sincere praise.

I hope you won’t miss an article in this issue of *Dynamic Steward*! If you’ve ever spent time contemplating the very important matter of praise—and you have desired to enter into a deeper relationship with God—then this issue is for you!

In his “Concept” column, Ben Maxson gives us a practical and blessed example of what it means to praise God. The “Lead” article speaks of how *knowing* God shows us the way to effectively praise Him. And our “Application” study shares with us, the true joy we receive in praise—even when life is not going well! The sermons in this issue give us unique points of view that will bring new insights and messages for the heart.

Along with our book reviews, resources, and other regular columns, we pray that you will be impelled to grow in the joy and strength of what it means to “bless the Lord” (Ps 103:1).

DYNAMIC Steward

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Exploring partnership with God

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