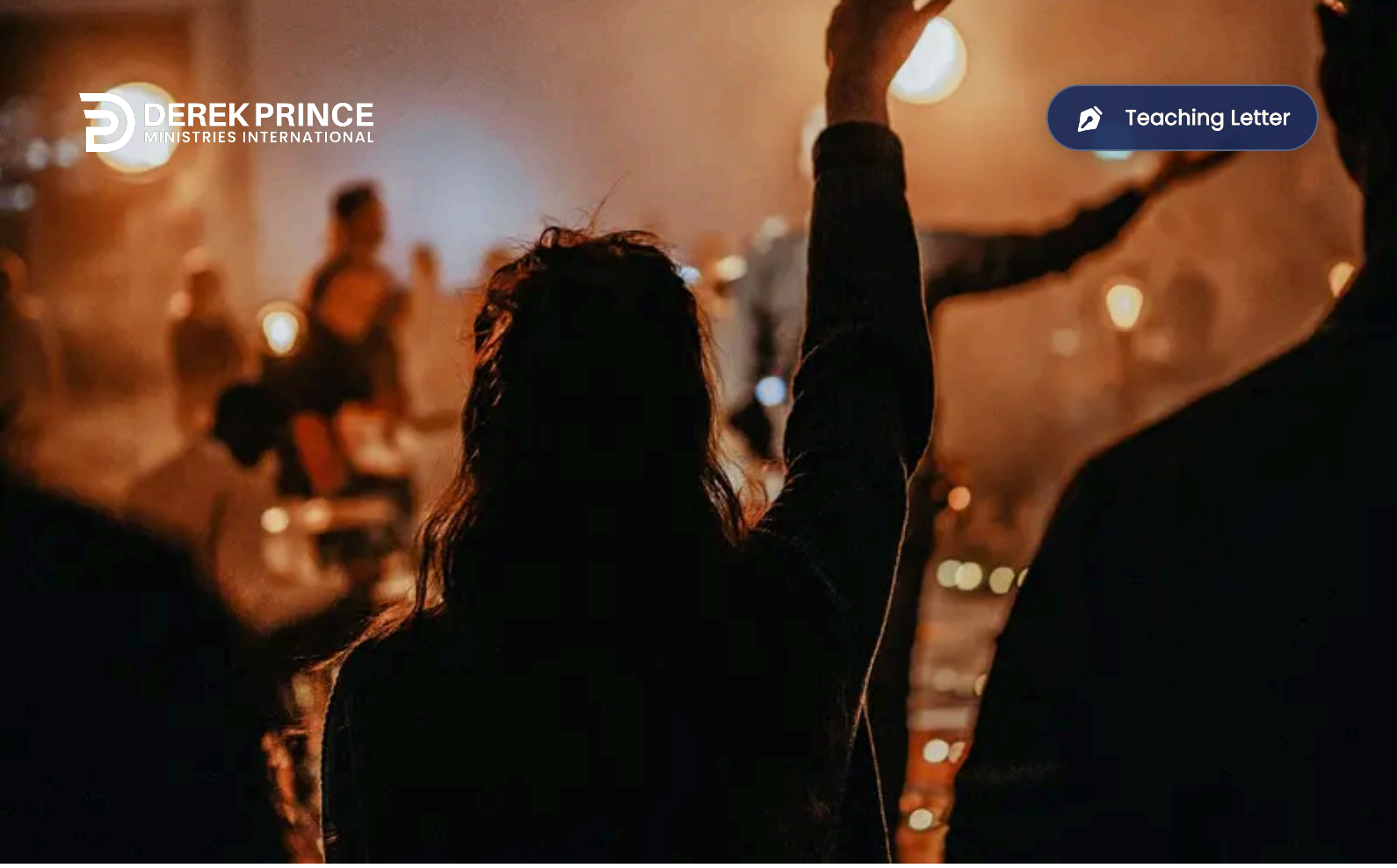

DEREK PRINCE MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Teaching Letter

Praise



Part 2/3

Thanksgiving, Praise, and Worship
By Derek Prince

As previously stated, three activities of the human spirit – thanksgiving, praise and worship – enable us to relate to three different aspects of God's nature. By thanksgiving for all the kind, good things He does for us, we acknowledge God's goodness. By praise – our appropriate response to His awe-inspiring majesty – we acknowledge God's greatness. And by worship we acknowledge God's holiness.

In our current focus on praise, it is appropriate to begin with Psalm 48:1:

> "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised
> In the city of our God, in His holy mountain."

Our praise, in other words, should be in proportion to God's greatness – which means it has to be measureless. We can never exhaust the power and the possibility of praise. The more we praise God, the more we acknowledge His greatness.

We have already seen from Psalm 100 that thanksgiving is the first stage in our approach to God. The second stage is praise.

Both thanksgiving and praise have an important upbuilding effect on the believer. When we come to God with requests that seem very difficult, it is easier to believe God for what we want Him to do next when we thank Him for all He has already done. If we do not come with praise and thanksgiving, on the other hand, we lack this catalyst for our faith.

Let us look once again at Psalm 100:4–5:

> "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name."

It is by no means wearisome to repeat the three unchanging reasons for thanking and praising God:

> "For the Lord is good, His mercy is everlasting, And His truth endures to all generations."

Why not repeat these three reasons aloud right now as an act of faith? 'For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting;

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and His truth endures to all generations. 'Now take time to thank God. That is the application of the lesson!

A description is given in Isaiah 60 of the city of God, the city to which we have the right of access through salvation and through the blood of Jesus. Isaiah 60:18 gives a very beautiful picture of this city:

> "Violence shall no longer be heard in your land, neither wasting nor destruction within your borders..."

We can come to a place where violence and destruction are just faint echoes from a distance; in the presence of God they have no reality. How do we get there?

> "But you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise."

The wall surrounding the presence of God is Salvation. But all the gates have just one name: Praise. If you want to get in through the walls, in other words, the gate you have to go through is Praise. No praise, no access. Praise is the only way into immediate presence of God.

If you find it difficult to praise God, try taking time to read the Psalms – in Hebrew, 'Praises'. It is by far the longest book in the Bible, making praise a major element in the total revelation of God. Read different psalms out loud when you are alone and say, 'Lord, this is my prayer. It was a prayer given by the Holy Spirit through the psalmist, and I'm reading it now to You.' I believe you will find that, after a little while, praise will become much more natural, and you will begin to cultivate the habit.

To encourage you, here are seven scriptural facts about praise. There are many more, but these seven significant principles will help to build your faith.

Consider first Psalm 22:3, which is addressed to the Lord. In the NKJ it reads:

> "But You are holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel."

The Hebrew word translated 'enthroned' is also the word for' to sit on' or 'to inhabit'. As a matter of fact, when people in Israel ask Ruth and me where we live, we answer in Hebrew, 'We are sitting in Jerusalem,' using the standard Hebrew word for 'to inhabit'.

What kind of seat does God sit on? A throne. There is a popular song today that says, 'As we worship, we build Your throne. Come, Lord Jesus, and take Your place.' So when we praise God, we are, in effect, offering Him a throne.

From now on, whenever you join other believers and begin to Praise God, picture yourself offering Jesus a throne to sit upon. In this way you acknowledge Him as your King.

Psalm 106:47 reveals how thanksgiving, followed by praise, can bring God's people into total victory:

> "Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the Gentiles, to give thanks to Your holy name, To triumph in Your praise."

Notice the same order: thanks, then praise. When we praise God, we triumph. In the culture of ancient Rome, a triumph was not the winning of a victory, but the celebration of a victory that had already been won. So when we praise God, we are not asking Him for victory, we are celebrating the fact that He has already won. Paul says as much in 2 Corinthians 2:14:

> "Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ..."

In the triumphal procession, the victorious general was drawn through the streets of Rome in a chariot led by a white horse, while all the people lining the pavements praised him. And his captives, the enemies whom he had defeated, were led in chains behind him.

Where do we belong in this picture? We are not being led in chains behind Jesus Christ, the victorious General. We are not even on the pavement praising Him. Rather, we are riding in the chariot. And praising Him is the step into the chariot.

A third scriptural fact about praise appears in Psalm 30:11–12.I experienced it at first hand in 1975 when I lost my first wife –the hardest experience of my life. I want to say that verse 11 is really true. It works.

> "You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; You have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, to the end that my glory may sing praise to You and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to You forever."

When God removes our sackcloth and delivers us from mourning, He does it for a purpose – that 'our glory' may give praise to Him. What is our glory? There is no need to speculate; we can find the answer directly from Scripture by putting together two other passages.

First in Psalm 16:9 (emphasis mine):

> "Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices, My flesh also will rest in hope."

Again, 'my glory'. Different versions translate this differently, but in Acts 2:26 the apostle Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, quotes Psalm 16:9 and interprets the word 'glory' for us:

> "Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad..."

So what is your glory? Your tongue. The primary reason God gave you a tongue is to praise Him. Any use of it that does not glorify Him is a misuse. The tongue is the supreme member with which you can praise God. And it is 'your glory' when you use it to glorify Him.

The fourth spiritual fact about praise is found in Isaiah 61:3. This is a message, once again, for those who have been mourning and depressed. In fact, it was through this verse many years ago that the Lord delivered me from a spirit of depression.

> "...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 is precisely what God delivered me from – the spirit of heaviness. So if you do not want to be depressed and you do not want Satan to come to you with his dark forebodings and evil thoughts, put on the garment of praise. He will not come near you!

Many years ago when I was pastoring a small congregation in West London, there were two Russian Jewish sisters who used to come and visit my first wife and me. They had met the Lord Jesus inside Russia and later had been delivered from Russia by a miracle. After their escape they had been filled with the Holy Spirit.

By denomination they were Baptists, but when they prayed with us, they were noisier than most Pentecostals in the West. They knew how to praise the Lord!

Well, the four of us were there having a wonderful time praising the Lord, when there was a ring at our front door. I went to answer it, and there stood a lady who was a member of our congregation, leading a man by the hand.

'This is my husband', she said. 'He's just come out of prison. He has a demon. Will you pray for him?'

In those days I stayed a long way from demons. I was embarrassed by them. And just now I had no idea what to do. So I said,' Come up, we're praying.' It was all I could think to say.

So we went upstairs and just went on praying, really making a noise, until the husband came up to me and said, 'I don't like this – too much noise. I'm going.'

God inspired my answer. 'Listen,' I said, 'it's the devil who doesn't like the noise because we're praising Jesus and he hates that. You have two options. If you go now, the devil will go with you. If you stay, the devil will go without you.

'I'll stay,' he said.

And about ten minutes later he came up to me once again. 'It's gone!' he said. 'I felt it leave my throat.'

I have never forgotten that because it demonstrates how praise embarrasses the devil much more than he can embarrass us.

In Psalm 33:1 the psalmist says that 'praise from the upright is beautiful.' Praise is indeed a beautiful garment for your spirit.

So when you are tempted to be depressed or moody or unhappy, put on the garment of praise in place of the spirit of heaviness. It will work for you just as it worked for me – and for thousands of others!

In Jeremiah 33:11, speaking about the restoration of God's people and the sounds that will be heard in the streets of Jerusalem, we find a fifth aspect of praise. A beautiful, modern Hebrew song is based on these words:

> "...the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of those who will say:" Praise the Lord of hosts, For the Lord is good, For His mercy endures forever" – [notice two of the three reasons are there]

> and of those who will bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the Lord."

Some versions refer instead to 'the sacrifice of thanksgiving'. Both renditions make it clear that either praise or thanksgiving is a sacrifice. It costs you something. It is not always easy. And the time that is most important to praise the Lord is the time you least feel like it. Do not let your feelings dictate your response to God's limitless greatness. The Word of God tells you what to do, even when it goes absolutely contrary to your feelings. Hebrews 13:15–16 reinforces this idea:

> "Therefore by Him [that is, Jesus] let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. [How much should we praise God and how often? Continually.] But do not forget to do good and share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."

So praise or thanksgiving is a sacrifice. And it is most acceptable to God when it costs us the most. When everything seems to be against us, that is the time to praise God the most – in faith.

In Psalm 8:2 – and this is the sixth scriptural fact – praise is a spiritual weapon. This is one of my favourite Scriptures. It is difficult for me to preach long without getting to Psalm 8:2,where David says to God:

> "Out of the mouths of babes and nursing infants you have ordained strength, Because of Your enemies, that You may silence the enemy and the avenger."

Look first at that phrase 'you have ordained strength'. Here again the New Testament offers a commentary on the Old. From the last week of ministry of Jesus in Jerusalem, we read (Matthew 21:15–16):

> "But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' they were indignant and said to Him, 'Do You hear what these are saying?' And Jesus said to them [quoting Psalm 8:2], 'Yes. Have you never read, "Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants you have perfected praise"?'"

Where the psalmist said, 'You have ordained strength, 'Jesus said, 'You have perfected praise.' This tells us that the ordained strength of God's people is perfect praise. Regardless of human weakness, the spiritual weapon is irresistible. The psalmist chooses the example of the weakest– babies and nursing infants. Even they become instruments of God's strength when they praise Him, and thereby silence the enemy.

Never forget that God has enemies, and one in particular, 'the enemy and the avenger', Satan.

I was preaching in Lausanne, Switzerland, with a French interpreter some years ago. I was listening to the interpretation since I understand French, and I have neve never forgotten the rendering of Psalm 8:2: 'God imposes silence on the devil.' When does God impose silence? When we praise Him. Why do we need to silence the devil? Because he is accusing us, all the time, night and day. We might ask God, 'Why don't You silence the devil?' God replies, 'Because I've given you the weapon with which to do it.'

To me, it is a joy to wield the weapon of praise and impose silence on the devil!

Finally, seventh in the list of scriptural facts, praise (like thanksgiving) prepares the way for God's supernatural intervention. Let us look at Psalm 50:23. (Are you noticing how many times we are turning to the Psalms in this theme of praise?) God is speaking:

> "Whoever offers praise glorifies Me, and to him who orders his conduct aright I will show the salvation of God."

In this version the word aright (as well as his) was inserted by the translators. There is another legitimate way to translate this verse:

> "He who offers praise prepares a way so that I may show him the salvation of God."

The person who offers praise, in other words, prepares a way for the manifestation of salvation in his situation.

There are some beautiful Old and New Testament examples of this principle. In 2 Chronicles 20, for instance, when

Jehoshaphat was king of Judah, a vast army marched against him from the east. He knew he had neither the personnel nor the resources to meet that army. So he proclaimed a fast, calling all of God's people Judah together.

As they fasted and prayed, the Lord spoke prophetically through a Levite and told them what to do: 'Simply go down to a certain place. You don't have to fight this battle, the Lord will fight for you.' And Jehoshaphat assured the people, 'Believe in the Lord God, and His prophets, and you will prosper.'

The next day they set out. And this is what happened next. From 2 Chronicles 20:21:

> "And when [Jehoshaphat] had consulted with the people, he appointed those who should sing to the Lord, and who should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army and were saying, 'Praise the Lord, for His mercy endures forever.'"

otice that the same reason to praise God comes up again. Now to verse 22:

> "Now when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were defeated."

If you read the rest of the story, you will see that God's people did not have to use a single military weapon. The weapon of praise obtained for them total victory. Their enemies turned against each other and killed one another, so that all God's people had to do when they came to the battlefield was take the plunder. What a tremendous picture of the power of praise!

For a second example, let us look at poor Jonah for a moment, right in the middle of his problems. You know the story. He was in the belly of the fish praying to God. From Jonah 2:2–3:

> "Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and You heard my voice. For You cast me into the deep..."

His prayer goes on for seven verses – but nothing happened. Then he started to thank God, and the fish could hold him no longer. Take a look at verse 9:

> "But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanks giving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord."

That really was a sacrifice! When you are in the belly of a fish, it takes real determination to start thanking God. But God heard! Verse 10:

> "So the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land."

When did the Lord speak to the fish? When Jonah began to praise and thank the Lord.

A beautiful example of the same principle appears in Acts 16in the ministry of Paul and Silas. Paul had cast a demon out of a fortune-telling woman and all of Philippi was thrown into an uproar. Paul and Silas had been badly beaten and shut up in the maximum security jail. It was midnight. A close friend of mine conjectures that at that point Silas could have said to Paul, 'Why did you ever start that deliverance ministry? Everything was going all right till you started casting out demons!'

This is not, however, what happened. From Acts 16:25:

> "But at midnight [the darkest hour] Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them."

They had never had such people in that jail before! Verse 26:

> "Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed."

This was no ordinary earthquake; it was a supernatural earthquake that unfastened the prisoners' chains. And this supernatural earthquake was precipitated by praise. Here again God showed His salvation to those who offered praise.

Let me close with three brief questions and answers.

First of all, when should we praise God? There can be no doubt: every day, for ever and ever, at all times and continually.

How should we praise God? With the whole heart (Psalm 111:1), with understanding (Psalm 47:7), with lifted hands –joyful mouth and lips (Psalm 63:4–5), lifting the hands – as an evening sacrifice (Psalm 141:2), with the dance (Psalm 149:3),with the timbrel and dance (Psalm 150:4).

Who is to praise God? Psalm 148 gives a list of twenty-nine different kinds of people and orders of creation that are to praise God. If you are still in doubt, Psalm 150 specifies' everything that has breath'. That leaves out no one. In fact, there is just one class of people who do not praise the Lord –the dead (Psalm 115:17). So if you are not praising the Lord, you have your own diagnosis!

By now you know the remedy: change your way of thinking! Make a firm decision – with your will, not your emotions. Begin to praise the Lord. In due course, your emotions will come into line with your will!

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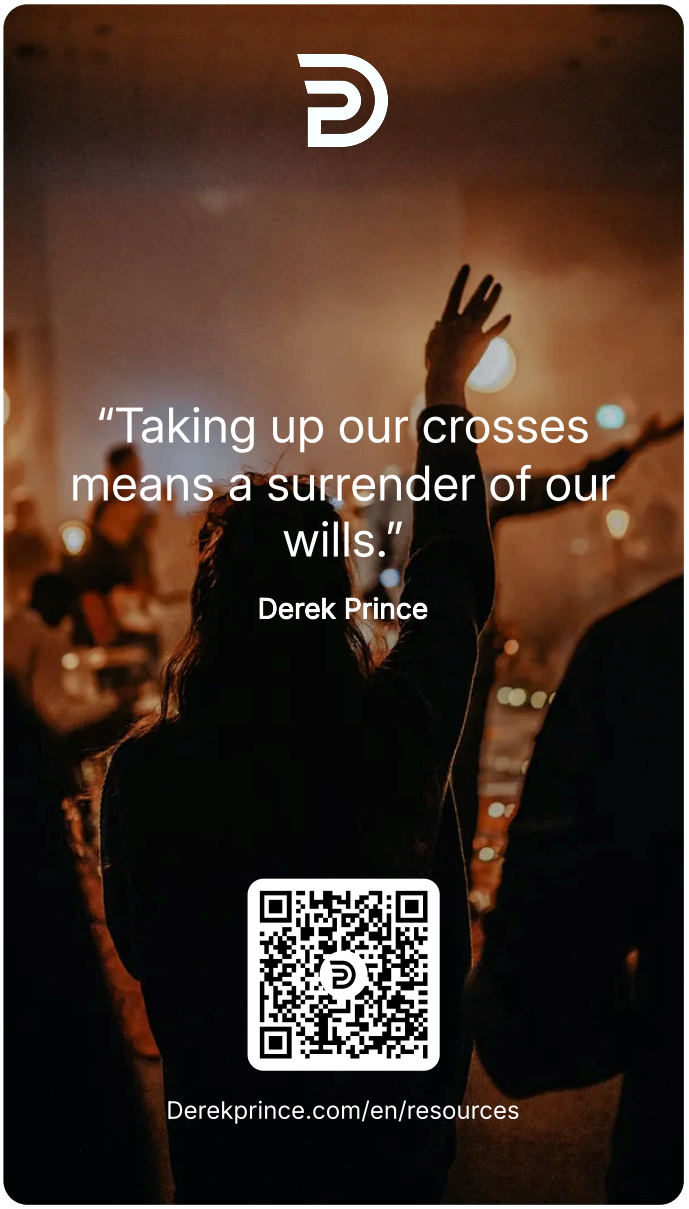

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