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TRANSFORMATION

"we are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory." 2 Cor 3:18

Phil. 4:8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things.

TRANSFORMATION THROUGH PRAISE

This series of studies help us engage with God's work of changing us to become like Jesus Christ. Our task is not to transform ourselves, but to participate in God's work within and through us (Phil 2:12-13). We are changed from the inside out: God does in us what we cannot do by 'being good'. This is the work of God's Holy Spirit and yet we are called to be willing and active throughout the process: we cooperate with God.

In this study we are going to explore the way that God uses praise—the expression of our delight in his person—in this process.

Jesus left his disciples just one prayer, a model prayer, to ground their lives of prayer. It begins, "Our Father in heaven, *hallowed* by your name..." The root meaning of this word is *to revere* or *to set apart as holy*. This activity of praise is more than just one aspect of prayer, it is a way of life. As it says in one of the old catechisms, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever." Indeed, we might say that of all human activities, praise is the activity which best prepares us for the life of heaven (see Revelation 4-5 where we are represented by the Elders surrounding the throne of God with praise and adoration).

A life of praise is transforming and powerful in many ways. First, it shifts the centre of our being from self to God. We put God in the centre and ourself at his feet. Our problems, troubles and struggles then assume their true proportions next to the greatness of God. This practice of praise also trains our hearts in the way that all humans tend to become like their chosen object of worship: the more we enjoy God for who he is, the more we shall find our desires shaped to be in line with his.

SOME IDEAS FOR PRAISE

Praise the Lord for his Name. God's Name is equated with his person—who he is. Psalm 115:1 says, "Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness..." There are many Names through which God reveals himself in Scripture and these are fruitful pathways for praise. Remember also that the clearest revelation of God's person comes in the Lord Jesus Christ. It greatly honours God when we take time during prayer to 'prize' his name. An elderly Bible teacher once said, 'If you want to get in good with God, just brag on his Son.'

Optional Exercise:

Working as a group, think of one of God's names that begins with each letter of the alphabet and then pray through that list, working A-Z, praising God's name.

Hint: X is for Xtraordinarily Wonderful!

Another avenue for praise is God's righteousness. Psalm 35:28 says, "My tongue will speak of your righteousness and of your praises all day long..." God does more than meet a certain standard; He is the standard. Indeed, God's righteousness defines his manner of acting towards his creation. He is faithful, just, true, merciful, keeping covenant, and loving. His ways towards us are another rich seam for praise to be explored.

A third suggestion for praise is God's creation. As Paul's says in Romans 1:20 "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made,..". Several of the Psalms reflect this theme for praise. God has created countless species of plant and animal life; untold vistas of beauty, from microscopic wonders to spiralling galaxies and everything in between.

A fourth theme for praise flows from the third: God's word also ought to draw us to praise its author. Psalm 19 shows us this when it begins with praise for God's creation (vv 1-6) and then moves to praise God for his word and his words, his instruments of creation (vv7-12).

Some further (optional) questions to discuss over a cuppa:

What are your favourite songs or hymns that aid you in praising God? What is it about them that makes them useful?

Where do you think one's emotions come into the activity of praising God?

What do you think about 'worship leaders' who manipulate other's emotions in order to bring about 'praise'?

DISCUSSION

1. What do you think is the difference between 'praise' and 'thanksgiving'? Do you think this distinction is important?
2. What things have you found helpful in praising God in your personal devotional life?
3. What do you think is the place of music in a life of praise?
4. What helps and what hinders you in corporate praise (Church or small groups)?

GROUP EXERCISE

5. The remainder of your group time now is to be spent praising God. As a group, plan your time around some themes for praise and enjoy one another's creativity in this. Take delight in bringing your praises to God.
6. At the conclusion of your time, take a few moments to reflect on how this time has impacted you. Do you feel different at the end of the time than you did at the beginning? How might God use such times of praise—whether corporate or personal—to form your character before him.