

FOLLOWING JESUS
A Disciple's Handbook

Lesson 5:
“Following Jesus in Praying and Praising”

Praying and Praising Introduction

Read Luke 11:1-13 and 1 Peter 2:9-10

The One who spoke the universe into existence and holds it together by the word of His power used His earthly voice for prevailing prayer and powerful praise. (Read Hebrews 1:1-3.) Jesus lived a life of prayer with signs and wonders in between. (Read Luke 5:15-16.) Prayer wasn't an occasional activity for Jesus. Prayer was a part of His constant ministry to God and man. Jesus was also a Man of great praise. He displayed a life of profound gratitude to the Father; always rightly representing God's glory to others. Jesus' disciples followed His example. From the wonderful works of God declared at Pentecost to the beautiful refrains of God's praises declared in the epistles, the early followers of Jesus loved declaring God's praises. (Read Acts 2:11; Ephesians 4:20-21.) The early church was also deeply devoted to prayer. (Read Acts 2:42.) The writers of the New Testament made prayer an all-the-time lifestyle.

Every disciple of Jesus has joined a holy and royal priesthood and has been given a ministry of prayer and praise. (Read 1 Peter 2:9-10.) It is the honor and inheritance of every disciple to live a life of answered prayer. It is the joy and privilege of every disciple to behold the greatness of the Father and the Son and boldly declare God's praises. Praying and praising like Jesus are top priorities and tremendous privileges for true disciples.

Praying and Praising Defined

The words for *prayer* in the Bible have to do with making vocal, constant, faith-filled requests to God that are in accordance with His will for the earth. In the New Testament, prayer is an attitude as well as an action. It is an always-listening, every-ready attitude to agree with the revealed will of God. The Apostle Paul instructed the Thessalonian church to pray without ceasing. (Read 1 Thessalonians 5:17.) This doesn't mean a nonstop, uninterrupted flow of words and requests, but rather an attitude of ever-ready praying. Prayer is a disciple's ministry of an unending willingness and divine eagerness to pray to God at any time for anything the Holy Spirit directs us to pray. Prayer produces a powerful partnership between us and God. It isn't an attempt to overcome God's unwillingness to act on our behalf, but an exercise of accessing God's overwhelming willingness to act on our behalf, bringing man to God and God to man. (Read Matthew 7:7-11.) Prayer is a lifestyle pattern of listening to the Spirit, receiving revelation concerning God's will, agreeing with God's will through faith-filled requests, and engaging God's provision and direction.

The words for *praise* in the Bible have to do with vocal declarations of the essence and exploits of God. God's essence is about who He is. God's exploits are about what He's done, is doing, and will do. Praise can be spoken, sung, accompanied by instruments or the lifting of hands. Praise can provoke to action or pacify the soul to peace. Praise is full of faith, and accompanied by gratitude and rejoicing. Praise is an attitude of gratitude that becomes a vocal expression concerning God's goodness. The two primary books in the Bible that teach us about worship are the book of Psalms and the book of Revelation. These books tell us that praise is about continually putting all our focus on the Father and the Son. Praise is unceasing and triumphant (Read Psalm 34:1; Psalm 47:1; Revelation 4:8; Revelation 11:16-18.) God's praises should be great because He is great. (Read Psalm 145:3; Revelation 5:13-14.)

Praying and Praising in the Life of Jesus

Jesus lived a life of constant prayer. In the first chapter of Mark we see Jesus in a solitary place praying to the Father, early in the morning, after a long evening of supernatural ministry. (Read Mark 1:32-35.) In the third chapter of Luke we read about Jesus coming up from the waters of John's baptism praying and receiving the Holy Spirit. (Read Luke 3:21-22.) In Luke 5:16, we see that the more the crowds grew, the more Jesus withdrew to pray. In every instance we see Jesus praying, His prayers were actually answered. The constant in Christ's life of answered prayer was that He only did what He saw the Father doing and only said (including in prayer) what He heard the Father saying. (Read John 5:19; 12:49-50.) Jesus was always listening, receiving, agreeing, and engaging. He never had a doubt the Father was listening or that His petitions would be granted because His life of prayer was aligned with the Father's will. (Read John 11:41-42.)

Jesus was a Man of great praise and gratitude. Jesus was always revealing and lifting up the goodness of the Father. For Jesus, gratitude was a proactive, faith-filled exercise that demonstrated to people His settled confidence in God's plan and provision. (Read Matthew 14:19; 26:26; John 11:41.) In the gospel of Mark we see that Jesus sang the Passover hymns with His disciples before heading to the cross. (Read Mark 14:26.) This collection of hymns came from Psalms 115-118 and includes some of most profound praise language in the Bible. You couldn't be around Jesus without constantly hearing about the wonder and works of the Father.

Praying and Praising in the Lives of Jesus' Followers

The early church was steadfastly devoted to prayer. (Read Acts 2:42; 6:4.) Guided by the Spirit, Christ's early followers lived lives of answered prayer. Healing, deliverance, miracles, provision, wisdom, and divine protection were normal for the early church. Why? The Father's will was discovered by the Spirit, agreed with, and accessed through prayer. From the moment Christ's disciples received the baptism with the Holy Spirit, the wonderful works of God were proclaimed. (Read Acts 2:11.) The New Testament writers fill their letters with lavish praise to the Father and the Son. Any time the crowds wanted to ascribe praise to the apostles for mighty miracles, the apostles were quick to give glory to God. (Read Acts 3:12-16; 14:8-18.)

We see in the life of the apostle Paul that rejoicing in God's wonder and works was a constant in his life. (Read Philippians 4:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:16.) He commanded the early churches not only to rejoice in everything, but to give thanks all the time for every single blessing of God. (Read Ephesians 5:20; Philippians 4:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:18). The early church filled the Roman Empire with God's Good News and God's great praise.

Praying and Praising in Our Lives

If someone is going to follow Jesus, a life of prayer is not an option; it is a lifestyle. Jesus instructs us in His Word, "*when* you pray," not "*if* you pray." (Read Matthew 6:6-15.) The key to a life of answered prayer is discovering the will of God and agreeing with it in faith. (Read 1 John 5:14-15.) The challenge in prayer is that we don't know what to pray for as we ought to. (Read Romans 8:26-27.) God freely reveals His will to us through His Word and by His Spirit. Then, He calls us to lift our voices and confidently ask that His will would be done. Directed by God's Spirit and anchored in God's Word, we are able to see the things God desires to do. When we ask in faith – free from doubt – for God's will to be done in the earth, we can be filled with confidence that our petitions will be granted.

Just like our praying must be led of the Spirit, our praising must be led of the Spirit. (Read Ephesians 5:18-20; 1 Corinthians 14:15.) It is the Holy Spirit who inspired the psalmists and the apostle John's Revelation of Jesus Christ. David, the sweet psalmist of Israel who always scribed and declared God's praise, did so by the Holy Spirit's guidance and empowerment. David said it was the Spirit of the LORD who would give him the words that he turned back into praise. (Read 2 Samuel 23:1-2.) As disciples, we are to fill the earth with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD. (Read Habakkuk 2:14.) A primary way we do this is through our ministry of perpetually praising the wonder and works of God.

As members of the royal priesthood under Jesus the High Priest, we are now priests of prayer and praise. The most important key to this ministry of prayer and praise is being led and empowered by the Holy Spirit. He reveals God's will in prayer. He gives us fresh revelation of the glory of the Father and the Son and the appropriate praise response. Following Christ's example, empowered by His Spirit, anchored in God's Word, we will be disciples walking in the ministry of prayer and praise.

MEMORIZE: Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

KEY TRUTH: Disciples of Jesus follow His example of praying God's will and declaring God's praise.

YOUR RESPONSE:

This is how you can respond in loving obedience to Jesus as you apply the truths from this lesson to your life.

- Allow the Holy Spirit to empower you for an always-listening, ever-ready attitude of praying.
- As the Spirit reveals to you God's Word and God's will, agree in faith-filled prayer.
- Allow the Holy Spirit to reveal to you new revelations of the Father and the Son. Respond with words of faith-filled praise.
- Take every opportunity possible to rejoice in the Lord Jesus and to give God the Father thanks for all His blessings.

WRITTEN RESPONSE: Lesson Reinforcement

Review each section from the lesson on the previous pages to fill in each blank below. This will reinforce the truths from this lesson in your life.

1. Prayer is a _____ pattern of _____ to the Spirit, _____ revelation concerning God's will, _____ with God's will through faith-filled requests, and _____ God's provision and direction.
2. The words for _____ in the Bible have to do with vocal _____ of the _____ and _____ of God.
3. Jesus was always _____, _____, _____, and _____. He never had a _____ the Father was _____ or that His _____ would be _____ because His life of prayer was _____ with the Father's _____.
4. The early church filled the Roman Empire with God's _____ and God's _____.
5. Following _____ example, _____ by His Spirit, _____ in God's Word, we will be _____ walking in the ministry of _____ and _____.

WRITTEN RESPONSE: Life Reflection

Using the journaling section on the pages at the end of this lesson, write in your own words your responses to the following questions.

1. What have you learned and what has impacted you personally from this lesson?
2. In reading the scripture references in this lesson, what are you sensing and seeing the Holy Spirit highlighting and revealing to you that will enable you to better follow Jesus?
3. As a disciple and follower of Jesus, what steps of loving obedience do you need to take to see what you have learned in this lesson become ongoing practices and patterns in your life?