

# JOY IN PRAISING GOD

By Nancy McCambridge

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My talk tonight is based on the book *Power in Praise* by Merlin Carothers and the talk that Mark gave two weeks ago, which I thought was an awesome talk! I am very grateful for my brother Mark's sharing what God is teaching him and passing it on to us!

I know God has brought me to Mother of God and has given me the gift of praise through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It is a priceless gift. I was challenged by Mark's teaching on praise and began to look at the basis of my praise. I was very much struck with the fact that God wants me to praise Him for every detail in my life! As I started to examine my prayer and my life it was very enlightening. If I woke up that day and there were circumstances in my life that were not very pleasant along with physical ailments that I have had, my feelings plus circumstances would dictate what kind of prayer I had. I would try to praise God and God would honor that, but I could not maintain my praise throughout the day. I would be complaining about how hard life was. My prayer was also based on what I could get out of it and most of the time I would be asking for this or that. There was also a silent grumbling, martyr attitude – 'I'll grin and bear it.' I thought, 'I'll be happy when this person or the circumstances change. Then I can be truly joyful.' Through Mark's teaching, I saw that grumbling is rooted in unbelief, which means I think that God does not have His best interests in mind for me and is not working for my good. I was living on a 10-cent faith level vs. a million-dollar faith level! Everything depends on how we respond to the little things in life. Grumbling comes so easily to me, that I often don't realize that I am doing it. But as I began to examine my heart I saw that grumbling is the very opposite of thanksgiving, a complaint is the opposite of trust, and a murmur against someone is the opposite of loving acceptance. John 16:33

## I. REJOICE IN PRAISE

**1 Thes 5:16-18** Rejoice always, never cease praying, render constant thanks; such is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

I always thought this passage was impossible to do. 'Praise,' as Merlin Carothers states, 'is an active response to what we know God has done and is doing for us. To praise God is to express our acceptance of something that God is permitting to happen.' So to praise God for difficult situations means literally that we accept their happening as part of God's plan to reveal His perfect love to us. Praising involves both gratitude and joy that God is keeping His word to work good through everything if we love Him. Rom 8:28

**Luke 11:11-13** What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!

**James 1:2-4** Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

**Rom 12:1-2** I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

**John 7:37-39** On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Carothers goes on and says 'Our understanding gets us into trouble when we try to figure out why and how God brings certain circumstances into our lives. We can never understand why and how God does something, but He wants us to accept with our understanding that He does it.' Praise is acceptance of what God has brought into our lives. We enter this attitude of praise by an act of our will, by a decision to praise God regardless of how we feel.

Praise is based on an acceptance of the present as part of God's loving, perfect will for us. Praise is not based on what we think or hope will happen in the future. We praise God, not for what we expect will happen in and around us – what we want to get out of it, but we praise Him for who He is and where and how we are right now.

The change may be that we come to experience a real joy and happiness in the midst of what once appeared to be a miserable situation – or the situation may change. But this is a result of praise and must not be the motivation for praise. Praise is not a bargaining position: 'I'll praise you so that you can bless me, Lord.' To praise God is to delight ourselves in Him.

**Ps 37:4** Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

**I Thes 5:15-18** See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

**Phil 4:12** I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want.

When we trust God fully, He is free to work, and He always brings victory. Praise releases the powers of God into our lives and circumstances because praise is faith in action. It may be a victory that changes circumstances or a victory in our hearts. Death may be turned away, or made to lose its sting. When my sister Marybeth died of cancer 12 years ago the passage that was Bryan and Marybeth's favorite was 1 Cor 15:54.

When Elena died, I know that God's grace and mercy were poured out in abundance even though her death was very painful to all of us. I know at her funeral I felt like dancing!

**Phil 2:14-16** Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

**Phil 3:1** Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.

**Psalm 50:14-15** Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High;  
and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.

**Psalm 50:23** He who brings thanksgiving as his sacrifice honors me;  
to him who orders his way aright I will show the salvation of God!

**Psalm 56:3-4** When I am afraid, I put my trust in thee. In God, whose word I praise,  
in God I trust without a fear. What can flesh do to me?

**Psalm 57:7** My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast! I will sing and make melody!

Whether you are surrounded by what seems to you like mountains of accumulated misery or just irritating little molehills, the turning point is the same. Confess your complaining and murmuring as a sin, and promise God that you will be thankful from now on. God will furnish the strength to do it. People will see our joy and this is how we bear fruit. We must learn how to cultivate this joy already planted in us by the Holy Spirit. We cannot make ourselves joyful any more than we can save ourselves, give ourselves peace or make ourselves more loving. What we can do is choose to accept what Jesus has done for us and allow Him to perfect His joy in us. In practice this means that we deliberately set out to practice joy, regardless of how we feel, trusting that God then goes to work, transforming our sorrows into pure joy.

**Psalm 27:6** And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies round about me;  
and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord.

In 2 Chron 20:1-30 there is a wonderful passage of how Jehoshaphat overcame his enemies by simply crying out to God and acknowledging his helplessness. God told him not to be occupied with the appearance of evil around him, but to simply praise Him and his enemies would be defeated. Acceptance comes before understanding. Even when we realize our own powerlessness to cope with the enemy, we are afraid to let go and trust ourselves to God's power. We must step out in faith, believing that God's promises are true, accepting them and daring to trust in them. This leads to understanding.

Jesus totally relied on his father: **Mark 6:41-43** And taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. And they all ate and were satisfied.

**John 14:12-13** Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father.

**John 11:41** So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me."

St Therese of Lisieux's feast day was October 1. All the gospel readings were about becoming a little child. She saw the world as nothing and her only happiness was in finding how to delight Jesus and to unite herself more intimately with him. She said "The world's thy ship and not thy home." She offered up all her suffering for the conversion of poor souls and saw her trials as gifts from God. We can offer up all of our suffering for the conversion of terrorists!

## II. LOVING IN A NEW WAY

As we begin to trust God for everything in our lives, Jesus will teach us how to love in a new way. God brings certain people into our lives just to show us how incapable we are of loving others in our own strength. He does not do it to make us feel bad, He does it to give us an opportunity to experience His transforming love in our life and in the lives of the people He has called us to love. For We must thank God for the people in our life that are difficult to love. Accept one another and thank God for each other. Can we thank God for them just as they are, and especially for the things that make them hard to love? Can we confess our inability to love them for their irritating habits? Can we tell God we want to love them and then submit ourselves to Him to be remolded so that we can love them according to His will for us? Expect miracles then! These trials are God's blessings in disguise. Then after we ask God how to love them, ask God to bless them abundantly. I know that Bob and I were brought together by God and God knew the perfect person for me to be married to – to heal me of my self-reliance, self-righteousness and lack of trust in our heavenly Father.

**Eph 1:3** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

**Eph 1:12** We who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory.

**Eph 3:12** In him we have boldness and confidence of access through our faith in him.

**Eph 3:20** Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

## III. THE WORLD SITUATION

With all the tragedies that are taking place in the world today we wonder whether or not we have a loving Father who 'knows the very hairs on our head.' We think the victims of evil suffer because of their own sin or someone else's sin. God is love and we don't have to be good enough to deserve His loving care. It is impossible to praise God for all things if we think that He is not ultimately responsible for everything that happens, or if we think that He is sometimes indifferent to suffering.

The media is constantly painting such a bleak picture of life. God does not want evil to control us. He created us with a free will and the capacity for evil. Evil remains in this world with God's permission, but is always subject to His will. Nothing evil can come near us without God's permission.

**1 John 5:1, 4** Every one who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God... whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith.

If we praise God in all circumstances, I believe that some sparrows will be prevented from falling, some little children will not die, some cancers will be halted or leave. Yet this is not to be our motivation for praising God. Some sparrows will still fall, some children will die and some people will succumb to cancer. Our praise must be for these instances also.

We are told to praise God for allowing evil to come into our lives, trusting that He has a plan and purpose for it, but what are we supposed to do next? How do we personally react to evil when we come face-to-face with it? We need to recognize that in ourselves we have no power to overcome evil. The overcoming power is always God. The essence of God's message to us is that we must learn to focus our attention on Him, the source of overcoming power, and not direct our attention toward the evil confronting us. He will then direct our action moment by moment. Jesus' submission to the Father's will broke the power of evil in the world. 1 Peter 5:8-9

Our Holy Father has also urged us to pray the rosary against the evil in our world. One of the wonderful tools that we have as Catholics is our love for Mary. She is our great intercessor along with the Communion of Saints. When we put things in her hands and stand firm in our faith with all the angels and saints that God is in perfect and loving control of every detail of the circumstances surrounding us, God's mighty power is released. If we let fear and doubts and a preoccupation with the presence of evil take over our minds, we block the power of God from entering the situation. Our part is to stand firm in faith, obedient to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, who will guide our outward actions in the situation. Inwardly, our part is always to keep our eyes on God and to praise and thank Him for His goodness and mercy in all things.

Habakkuk was a prophet who complained about the conditions of his country, much like some of us complain about the world today.

**Hab 1:2-4** O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save? Why do you make me see wrongs and look upon trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law is slacked and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous, so justice goes forth perverted.

God answered the prophet: **Hab 1:5-6** Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told. For lo, I am rousing the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, who march through the breadth of the earth, to seize habitations not their own.

God didn't just allow the Chaldeans to conquer, He roused them up. Can we accept God's word that He is using evil – forcing it to work for our good? Can we praise Him for it?

I have questioned God so many times about all the suffering that has taken place in our world. "Is God really in control?" Habakkuk continued. Hab 1:12-15, 17

God did not turn a deaf ear to Habakkuk's question but told him to write down the answer for all the world to see and remember.

**Hab 2:3** For still the vision awaits its time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seem slow, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay.

God is never late! His timing is perfect, but we sometimes complain because it is our time schedule that is wrong.

**Hab 2:4** Behold, he whose soul is not upright in him shall fail, but the righteous shall live by his faith.

Now Habakkuk saw the greatness of God's plan and he cried out in triumph singing to God.

**Hab 3:2-6** O LORD, I have heard the report of thee, and thy work, O LORD, do I fear. In the midst of the years renew it; in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy. God came from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. His brightness was like the light, rays flashed from his hand; and there he veiled his power. Before him went pestilence, and plague followed close behind. He stood and measured the earth; he looked and shook the nations; then the eternal mountains were scattered, the everlasting hills sank low. His ways were as of old.

Habakkuk was awed by the vision he had seen. He no longer questioned God's control over the fires, earthquakes, pestilence, famines and wars. Habakkuk's lips quivered with fear, his legs gave way under him and he was shaking in terror, but he sang to God. He realized that God was a God of love, justice and mercy and he did not hesitate to trust himself completely into His hands, praising Him for His perfect plan for Israel. Hab 3:17-19

When things get worse in this world of ours, it is no evidence that God is absent or indifferent. Quite the contrary. All these signs are evidence that God is very near, that every part of His plan and purpose is being fulfilled, just as His Word has promised us. Receive the love, the peace, and the joy that Jesus is offering you. Believe that Jesus is with you and that God is working in every circumstance of your life to meet your need. The very thing you think is painful proof of God's absence from your life is in fact His loving provision to draw you toward Himself – so that your joy may be full!

### Questions

1. Can you share about a recent situation where choosing to praise and thank God changed your attitude and opened you to the graces He wanted to give?
2. Choose one or two of the scripture verses above that you find challenging and see if you can put it into practice. What changes do you see as a result?
3. What is God teaching you about loving others, especially about any relationship where you find it difficult to love?
4. Can you identify with Habakkuk in his view of his contemporary situation? How do you think God is calling you to think about and respond to the evils in the world around us?
5. What role do you think God wants praise and rejoicing to play in your life?