

PRAISE

Week 6 | Ancient | Acts 2:42

Acts 2:42-47

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

Deeper Dive

The book of Acts begins with Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit, as promised by Jesus before He ascended to heaven. Soon after, we see thousands coming to faith in Jesus, and the birth of the early Christian Church. Acts 2:42-47 describes the Spiritual Practices adopted by followers of Jesus, as this early body of Christ forms into what we know as the modern church.

Day 1 - Created to Praise

Take a moment to think about a time you received praise recently. Maybe it was a “shout out” from your boss this week, or a compliment from a friend that really encouraged you. Of course there is nothing wrong with receiving praise, and in fact, we all need positive encouragement. Our brains physically require a certain amount of positive encouragement to work properly. God literally wired and created us to need this goodness in our lives.

Take a moment to consider: What sources are you seeking goodness & praise from in your life? Are you seeking it from the world, or from the Lord? A better question might be, does the goodness in your life feel “earned” it or does it feel like an unconditional gift? God’s goodness is unlike anything we could ever “earn” or strive for. Throughout His word, He promises us His love, grace, goodness, and even His “delight in us” (Zephaniah 3:17). Like a loving Father to a child, God’s praise & delight is an unearned, unconditional gift. However, we often add human conditions to this good gift. We can fruitlessly spend our lives attempting to “earn” it, when it’s already freely given. We often seek cheap temporary counterfeit praise from the world, and look in all the wrong places to fulfill what can only come from God. When we do this, our sense of worth can begin to rest in whether someone praises or criticizes us. Then we can start fearfully hiding our shortcomings, or pridefully taking credit for something we shouldn’t. Of course, if our worth is “earned”, then it’s only temporary, and we will inevitably fail. God didn’t create US to be praised, worshiped, or famous. We can never live up to that standard. We were created to PRAISE HIM, worship HIM, and make HIS name known!

As we read about the early church, they had many reasons to feel like they deserved praise for what they were doing. Thousands were being saved, miracles were happening, and everyone had all that they needed. They could have easily boasted in how great they were at loving each other, doing good deeds, or their great teaching. Instead, it says they were “praising God”. They knew where their goodness came from, and they knew WHO was actually worthy of their praise!

Let’s dive deep this week into who or what you are receiving or seeking praise from in your life. More importantly, let’s prayerfully ask ourselves who or what are you giving your praise & worship to!

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Galatians 3:3** ~ "How foolish can you be? After starting your new lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort?"
- **James 1:17** ~ Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.
- **John 15:8** ~ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.
- **Isaiah 42:8** ~ I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols.
- **Matthew 5:16** ~ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.
- **Revelation 14:7** ~ "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

Day 2 - Worthy of Praise

If you've ever worked on a team, you can probably relate to a moment when someone praised you, or a teammate, when they actually should have praised someone else. Ooof, awkward right? Before we get "salty" and start remembering all the times someone took *your* praise, let's focus on a time when you took the credit from someone else. Sometimes it's subtle, unintentional, or even just quiet acceptance. Maybe you were a coach or a leader and you accepted the win without crediting your team's contributions. Maybe you justified that you were the leader, so technically you "deserve" it right? Take a moment to think about the last time you received praise, and how you responded. Were you honest, humble and generous with that praise? Or did you pridefully take all the credit for yourself?

Looking at this through the lens of our faith, how many times do we take the credit or praise for something God freely gave us? As it says in James 1:17 "every good and perfect gift is from above". As humans, we like to think we are in control, or that we "earned" or "deserved" it, but in reality anything good or praiseworthy comes from the Lord. Beyond the typical blessings of our friends, families, careers, or opportunities, what about the fruits of the Spirit? When we express love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness and faithfulness there is no way we could express these Godly attributes on our own. We need the Spirit working in us to shine in this way. This is also true with our natural God given abilities, talents, skills, and spiritual gifting. We didn't create ourselves, God is our maker and creator. He uniquely gives each of us the talents, skills, and abilities that we have.

While this truth is humbling, it is also freeing. In Galatians 3:3 it says "How foolish can you be? After starting your new lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort?" This may sound a bit harsh, but isn't this what we are doing when we try to take the praise for ourselves? We have a new life with Jesus, so why would we want to go back to "earning" or striving for perfection in our own efforts? There is freedom, peace and rest in surrendering to the one who truly is perfect!

What do you say when someone is actually praising the ONE in you? Do you accept it as "deserved" with your own efforts, or do you point them to Jesus? In pointing them to Jesus we recognize that we couldn't do it without Him, and that He is the provider of everything good in our lives, even our talents, skills and traits. He is the only ONE that is truly worthy to be praised!!

- Are there God given blessings in your life that you have been taking the credit for, even subtly or unintentionally? How could you point others to Him instead of pridefully accepting it as your own?
- Are there areas where you are still trying to "become perfect by your own efforts"? Pray and surrender those over to God today.

Deeper Dive

1. Praise is a choice:

- **Hebrews 13:15** ~Let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise
- **Psalms 34:1** ~I will extol the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips

2. Praise should be shared:

- **Matthew 5:16** ~In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.
- **Colossians 3:16** ~Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

3. Praise doesn't ignore hardship:

- **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18** ~Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances;
- **Philippians 4:6** ~in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

4. Praise is obedience:

- **Romans 12:1** ~offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.
- **John 17:4** ~I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.

Day 3 - Praising God with your life

If we were created to praise, and God is the only one worthy of our praise, then how do we actually live a life that praises God? When we think about "praising God" many of us probably envision singing worship songs or attending some type of church service. While that's great for Sundays, what does it look like to praise & worship God in our everyday lives? How do we live a life that truly points to God and away from ourselves? Let's take a look at what it truly means to fully surrender your life to praising God.

1. **Praise is a choice, not a feeling** - In Hebrews it says "let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise". Praise to God will cost us pride, comfort and control. It is declaring God's unconditional goodness, provision and power over our own prideful feelings of trying to "earn" His goodness from a place of control & self-righteousness. *Ask yourself ~ When is praise hardest for you? Is it during times of stress, exhaustion, or disappointment? How could you choose to praise Him during those moments?*
2. **Praise is meant to be shared** - Just as the early church modeled, praising God is meant to be shared as a community. This type of collective praise has the power to grow our faith & draw others to the Lord. Giving praise together fuels the unity in our fellowship, and allows us to be encouraged by the goodness of God working in the lives of those around us. It is a powerful testimony to be celebrated together. *Ask yourself ~ How could praise change the atmosphere of your small group? Instead of "prayer requests", maybe switch to a time of "praise reports" this week.*
3. **Praise doesn't ignore hardship, it invites His presence** - As it says in these verses, we are called to praise God in all circumstances because He is good in all circumstances. Even in times of struggle and hardship, God's goodness is unchanging and unconditional. Praising God is not ignoring that things are hard, it is trusting that He is good despite your circumstances. Praising God during times of anxiety, overwhelm or uncertainty shifts your focus from fear to faith. *Ask yourself ~ What would it look like to praise God BEFORE the outcome of your current struggles? How could an attitude of praise change or shift your mindset into a place of trust & faith instead of fear & despair?*
4. **Praise is obedience** - In Romans it says that obeying God is a living sacrifice to the Lord. When we surrender ourselves in obedience to the Lord, we are literally laying down our control, pride and selfishness as a sacrifice. We surrender going our own way, as an act of praising, worshipping and honoring God with our lives. *Ask yourself ~ Where is God calling you to praise Him through the acts of obedience? What is He calling you to surrender to Him as a sacrifice of praise in your life?*

Deeper Dive

Scripture for today's study time:

- **1 Samuel 17:45** ~You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel
- **Genesis 50:20** ~You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.
- **Act 12: 21-24** ~On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died. But the word of God continued to spread and flourish.
- **1 Corinthians 10: 31-33**
~So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God— even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

Day 4 - Praise for His glory

God's glory always demands our praise! God's Glory is defined as the manifestation of His divine attributes and Holy perfection. As we read in scripture, there are those who were obedient in this, and those that were not. Let's take a look at these examples in the Word and what can happen when we attempt to steal God's glory for ourselves, or when we are obedient in rightfully honoring Him.

- **David & Goliath** - Most of us have heard the story of a shepherd boy, named David, going up against the "giant", Goliath. Instead of trying to fight Goliath in his own strength with heavy armor or weapons, David took a small slingshot. Then, David gave God all the praise and glory before he even threw the first stone. He declared God's goodness & victory BEFORE the outcome, because he had such great faith. The result was God miraculously allowed David to defeat the giant with one small stone, and an entire nation joined in praising the Lord. *Ask Yourself ~ Is there an area in your life where God calling you to give Him the glory & praise BEFORE the outcome?*
- **Joseph** - Joseph's life was full of unimaginable hardship. His own brothers left him for dead, he was sold into slavery, and then he was falsely accused of adultery & thrown into prison. However, through all of the hardship, Joseph never stopped being faithful in praising the Lord. He saw God's goodness through all of the struggles and pain. He had faith in God's goodness even BEFORE he knew what would happen to him. Ultimately, God elevated Joseph to a great position of power in Egypt and worked through him to save his family and community. *Ask Yourself ~ When you are going through hardship, how could you continue to see God's goodness and have faith during the "waiting"?*
- **King Herod** - In Acts, we read about King Herod accepting God's glory & praise for himself. He took the credit and didn't praise the Lord. Immediately he perished because of his actions. However, the message of God's truth continued to spread. It is a good reminder that God's truth always prevails and we cannot steal His glory! *Ask Yourself ~ Where have you been accepting the praise for what God is doing in your life, instead of pointing others to Him?*
- **Paul** - Throughout his ministry, Paul continually points to God. He repeatedly reminds us of his own unlikely personal journey of following Jesus and authentically shares the great depths of his brokenness to point even further towards God's grace & power. We see Paul's example of praising the Lord whether he is locked in chains, or experiencing amazing signs and wonders. The result is God working through Paul's ministry to spread the gospel throughout his life, and literally still to this day! *Ask Yourself ~ Are there areas of your life where God has healed something in you, however, you have become prideful about how far you've come?* 4

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

• 1 Chronicles 16:8-12

~Give thanks to the Lord and proclaim his greatness. Let the whole world know what he has done. Sing to him; yes, sing his praises. Tell everyone about his wonderful deeds. Exult in his holy name; rejoice, you who worship the Lord. Search for the Lord and for his strength; continually seek him. Remember the wonders he has performed, his miracles, and the rulings he has given,

• **Psalm 19: 1-4** ~The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

Day 5 - Rhythm of Praise

As we seek to live a life that praises & brings glory to God, points others to Jesus, and recognizes that HE is the only one worthy of our praise, how do we practically create a rhythm for praise in our daily lives? David danced with all his might in 2 Samuel 6, the disciples fell on their faces in Luke 9, and in Acts 3 the lame man praised God for his healing using the exact same greek word, Aineo, for praise as we see in Acts 2:47. There are so many ways that we can offer praise to the Lord!

Many times when we think of praise in the Bible, we think of Psalms and the poetic words of David. Let's take a look at David's "Song of Praise" in 1 Chronicles 16 as an example of praising the Lord:

1. (vs. 8) - THANK God for how great He is.
2. (vs. 8-9) - TELL the world how great He is.
3. (vs. 9) - WORSHIP God for how great He is.
4. (vs. 10) - PRAISE His name for who He is.
5. (vs. 11) - SEEK, TRUST, and OBEY Him.
6. (vs. 12) - REMEMBER all the great things He has done.

These all sound great, right? But how do we incorporate them into our daily lives as a "rhythm of praise"?

Quiet Praise - Bookend your day with praise. Morning and evening before your feet hit the floor, or your head hits the pillow, thank and praise the Lord for the ways He showed up in your life today. It may help to keep a praise journal, or on a note in your phone, so you can remember all He has done.

Collective Praise - Either with your small group, your spouse, or with your family at dinner speak or pray praises to the Lord out loud as a group. Thank and praise Him for what He has done, is doing, and promises to do in your life. Listen and be encouraged by what the Lord is doing in other's lives around you.

Defiant Praise - Praise doesn't ignore the pain, it just refuses to let pain have the final word. When life gets hard name that hurt & pain to the Lord and surrender it to Him. Then, praise Him for His goodness in it, even if you can't see it yet. Psalms is full of lamenting praise examples. This is honest, not performative, praise.

Giving Praise - During those moments when someone praises the ONE in you, don't take the credit, point others to Him. Pray and ask the Lord to give you the words to say in these moments this week. Ask for the Holy Spirit to be your guide in being a light for Him in this way. Humbly give ALL the glory & praise to Him!