

# PRAISE: The Gateway to Miracles

## FOREWORD

We hear it from our pulpits. We sing it in our songs. But when you really think about it, just what does it mean to praise? The book of Psalms, that heartfelt, straightforward and candidly honest collection of writings from godly men of the past, is literally brimming with the theme of praise. Yet how can praise possibly be relevant to our everyday lives? And even if we wanted to, how do we begin to praise? In Isaiah 61:3 we are instructed to put on "the garment of praise." Obviously God considers it a vital piece of our spiritual wardrobe, so we must assume that praise is to be an integral part of our lives. But how?

It is because of these and other questions that we're so glad Marianne Novoselac has written this book. A sensitive intercessor and mother of five, she has responded to the Lord's inspiration to parallel, creatively, the stages of praise with that of carrying a precious child in the womb. From intimacy to birth, Marianne walks us from the relevance and origins of praise through to its ultimate fulfillment in expression. Just as the beginnings of life must proceed gradually through various stages, so must the life conceived in praise. And with the utmost care and nurturing, that life will eventually mature and break forth, proclaiming its existence in a loud voice. What a glorious birth! Begin your journey of praise and one day soon you too will hold your miracle.

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## SAMPLE

### **Accepted in the Beloved**

As we receive forgiveness and extend forgiveness to others, God's grace makes us acceptable to God. To the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

While praying at the altar following an evangelistic service, I saw a vision of a doorway engulfed in flames. I immediately knew this represented God's holy presence. Beyond the doorway was a stairway similar to Jacob's ladder with angels on each step. It was brilliant with light. I felt beckoned to enter, but could not bring myself to walk through the fire. Strong arms then picked me up and carried me through to where I could climb the stairway. At the top, I found a throne emanating blinding, radiating, circular light. A scepter was pointing toward me. Written on it were the words, Accepted in the Beloved. As I stretched my hand out to touch the scepter, the four living creatures standing next to God's throne reached forward and drew me into God's presence, into that radiant circle of glorious light. The intensity of it penetrated every fiber of my being and I was consumed with God's glory. I was shown His awesome authority in the universe. He pointed to a star and commanded it to move.

Suddenly, in my vision, I found myself standing outside the door of fire through which I had entered. I felt alone and cried out to God: "I don't want to live outside of Your presence!" Immediately, I was back inside the throne room and heard Him say: "You can always live in my presence." I learned from this experience that living in God's loving, holy presence is infinitely better than living without Him.

Later that night at home, while I meditated on this experience, the Lord urged me to write a song about it. My immediate response was, "How, Lord?" Words and a melody began to form in me and I sang them out softly as I rocked my baby to sleep.

God's acceptance of each one of us as believers gives us the affirmation and encouragement we need. We do not have to try to win His approval or compete with others for it. We acquire the virtue and trust necessary for long-term commitment, not by demanding or performing, but by joining in spirit with Jesus. He has the power to cleanse, heal, restore and redefine us. When we are in relationship with Jesus, we are able to give of our most prized possession—our trust.

## **A true friend**

Godly intimacy between a man and woman requires total commitment through marriage. Today, more than ever, people want intimacy without commitment. God condemns this as sin. Our marriage commitment should be more enduring than the building in which we were married and more valuable than the wedding band we wear. How do we develop such a lasting commitment with another person? Our marriage commitment will last the test of time if it is based on commitment to God. He is the third strand in the three-stranded cord that is not easily broken.

God is also a friend, and the Bible says, A friend loves at all times.... A real friend remains true regardless of how we feel or act, or whether we reciprocate with friendship. Commitment to a cause or a duty may last for a while, but commitment to a three-stranded marriage relationship grows stronger each day. We demonstrate commitment to family members and friends when we love them for who they are, and not for their actions. Our commitment to God first and foremost helps us to make lasting commitments to others and keeps and protects us within these relationships. The problem with so many marriages today is a lack of deep commitment within the relationship. The reasons vary. We try to protect our rights and freedoms; we fear losing our individuality; we are unwilling to contribute more than our partner. As a result, we manipulate to ensure our needs are met. We also deny ourselves the joy of discovery, become bored with our chosen partner and see only faults and flaws in each other. We experience true intimacy in our relationship only when we are first committed to God and then to each other.

Commitment is crucial for relationships to endure, but we can have commitment without intimacy. This truth is illustrated by Jesus' parable of the wise and foolish virgins. The parable explains the folly of those who profess belief in God, but do not prepare for Jesus' second coming. When the virgins went out to meet the bridegroom, the wise virgins took oil with them while the foolish virgins did not. The bridegroom delayed, and they all fell asleep. When the bridegroom suddenly appeared, the wise virgins were ready to meet him, but the foolish ones first had to go and buy oil. When the foolish virgins eventually got to the wedding, the door was shut, and even though they cried out, the bridegroom answered: I tell you the truth, I don't know you.

Spiritual intimacy, or knowing God, is the only way to receive the invitation to Come and share your master's happiness! The foolish virgins had lamps that gave them enough light for the moment, but not enough oil to sustain the light. It seems they knew God with their heads, but not their hearts. Jesus warned us to watch out for such hypocrites and false prophets. He said that by their fruits we would know them: Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your Name, and in Your Name drive out demons and perform many miracles? He responded that He never knew them. Intimacy, not miracles, determines whether we bear good fruit. Personal intimacy with God through Jesus and commitment to His will are more important to God than what we do for Him. Jesus' commitment to the Father sets the backdrop for every aspect of our relationship with Him. His commitment to us sets the pattern for our relationship with others. Lasting intimacy is founded on this type of commitment.

## God, our Shepherd

Getting to know God as our Shepherd helps us to trust and follow Him. We trust that His judgment and direction will guide us even through danger, because we know He is able to take care of us. Trust like this takes a long time to develop. It involves faith forged during trying times together. We look back and say, "Oh yes, my gentle Shepherd guided me here and He was there." If our past has been very difficult, it is hard to trust God with the future. Learning to trust needs supernatural help from the Holy Spirit. People who are experiencing trouble trusting someone who has been unfaithful to them, whether in a friendship or marital relationship, need to learn to trust God first.

## On fire for God

Intimacy, whether spiritual or physical, involves passion. Intimacy must be renewed daily, or passion will cool. Lukewarm love is form without substance and it produces nothing. Lukewarmness leads many to profess to love God while they shun their brothers and sisters, the weak and needy and those difficult to love. True spiritual passion leads to spiritual fruit. Spiritual passion is translated into spiritual submission, not as a passive acceptance, but actively offering our lives—the anthem of true praise.

Passion is a powerful emotion seeking to lavish its strong affection upon the object of its desire. Passion is extravagant and enthusiastic. The word passion is used to describe Jesus' suffering on the cross. The days preceding Jesus' death, when He was beaten and put on trial, is known as Passion Week or Holy Week and is observed just before Easter. Passion is emotional and impulsive. This is why the Bible warns, do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires (Song of Songs 2:7b). Mature passion is equally emotional, but its planned, purposeful intentions produce lasting contentment. Passion for God is the pre-requisite for compassion for others.



## A touch

In the natural, doctors may be able to treat symptoms to enable us to live longer, and medicine may be able to eradicate some diseases, but we are subject to many conditions of body, mind and especially spirit that do not respond to these methods. A biblical illustration is the example of the woman with the issue of blood. She had been bleeding for 12 years and had suffered under the care of many doctors. Instead of getting better, she grew worse. What happened to stop the flow of blood? She touched Jesus. Here is how the story appears in Scripture:

When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind Him in the crowd and touched His cloak, because she thought, "If I just touch His clothes, I will be healed." Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. "Who touched me?" Jesus asked. When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you." But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me." Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at His feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched Him and how she had been instantly healed. Then He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace." (Mark 5:27-29 and Luke 8:45-48)

What does this word touch really mean in the context of Jesus' question "Who touched me?" It comes from the Greek words, hupto and huptomai, which mean, "to attach oneself, to touch, to fasten to, to set on fire, to kindle and to light." What this woman really did was to attach her faith to Jesus' miracle working power. This set her free. The healing virtue of Jesus is as real as your problem, and a single touch of God's presence will change you forever.

Parents in Jesus' day knew how important it was to have Him touch their little children:

People were bringing little children to Jesus to have Him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, He was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." And He took the children in His arms, put His hands on them and blessed them. (Mark 10:13-16)

Touching Jesus is not like touching anything else. When we touch Him, He touches us, and suddenly the supernatural breaks into the natural. And wherever He (Jesus) went—into villages, towns or countryside—they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged Him to let them touch even the edge of His cloak, and all who touched Him were healed. (Mark 6:56) Like the chorus says: "He touched me, He touched me and oh, the joy that fills my soul! Something happened and now I know, He touched me and made me whole." How does Jesus touch us when He is no longer physically present on earth? He touches us through the Holy Spirit He sent to earth when He returned to Heaven.

Jesus changed people's lives because He was filled with God's Spirit and shared a deep intimacy with His Father. As a result, He walked in God's love. Likewise, when we are filled with the Holy Spirit and walk in an intimate relationship with God our Father, we demonstrate God's love and power to others. This is a lifelong practice. As we receive healing and wholeness from God, we can become channels through whom others receive God's healing and wholeness. By loving others we see God's love manifested in miracles, signs and wonders. In the following chapters you will learn how God's Spirit conceives His love in us, fills us and overflows from our lives to touch others.