

THE POWER OF PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING

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Introduction

What I'm going to do this afternoon is look at the what, why, who, where, when and how of praise, to deepen your understanding and appreciation of praise; and also your experience of praise as a way of thanking God and releasing supernatural blessing and power. This is going to be an interactive session – meaning you don't get the chance of an afternoon nap. If I get the timing right, just at the point where my words are sending you to sleep, I'm going to get you to sing or do something to wake you up.

I suppose it's polite to start by saying a little about myself – for the sake of those who are new or infrequent visitors to Alton Day of Renewal, but also for many regulars who may be used to me leading the day and the worship, but still don't know much about me.

I've been a Catholic all my life; between the age of 8 and 17 I went to a Catholic boarding school attached to a seminary (St Edmunds College in Hertfordshire) but my faith only came alive in 1983. My older brother Richard – who incidentally used to come to ADoRE regularly in the 80s – witnessed to me about the power of the Holy Spirit and I made a personal commitment to Jesus as Lord about 36 years ago.

I've been married to Jenny for 46 years and we have 2 children and 6 grandchildren aged between 1 and 5. We have lived in Farnham since 1984 and are heavily involved in the Parish of St Joan of Arc. I have led the weekly charismatic prayer group there since about 1992; we also have evenings of renewal and/ or healing once a month in the church; over the years we have run many Life in the Spirit, Alpha and Cafe Course and we have just finished running 2 concurrent Alpha courses for about 87 participants. As we're talking about thanksgiving today, I would like to express a huge thank you to Jenny, not only for being a fantastic wife, mother and grandmother; but for being an absolutely essential support to me in all I do. I may be the visible one up the front talking the talk but she is hard at work in the background, "walking the walk" - supporting, welcoming, managing the diary, making the coffee; and actually she is a far better Christian than I am because she is much better at caring for people, discerning their feelings, helping them in practical ways and telling me when my ideas are completely impractical!

I retired at the end of last year from working in the fundraising department of the Catholic charity Apostleship of the Sea and was working part time for about 5 years before that, which meant I was able to join the Core group which organises ADoRe; and I stepped up to leadership last year when Deacon John Foley decided to step down.

I've been playing guitar and singing ever since the early 60's but in those days it was Beatles, Rolling Stones etc. It wasn't until my "conversion" experience in my early 30s that I knew God was calling me to use the talents he had given me to lead praise and worship initially, and then subsequently initiating a Life in the Spirit seminar in Farnham, leading our prayer group, getting involved in Confirmation catechesis, Adult formation and so forth.

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What is Praise?

By the way, I should say at this point that this talk is presenting my current take on praise – 5 years ago I probably would have slightly different things, and in 5 years time I would probably say something different again. Faith is essentially a relationship with God and relationships develop over time.

What is praise? The two words Praise and Worship are often lumped together, and in my early days of discovering charismatic renewal I tended to think of praise as the noisy singing bit and worship as the quiet bit - but of course there is more to it than that. Praise and worship are closely linked, but praise is just one expression of worship. So first we better look at

What is worship?

If we understand who we worship and why, it will help us to understand why and how to praise and give thanks. The dictionary definition of worship is: to have or show a strong feeling of respect and admiration for God; or to go to a religious ceremony. To expand that a bit, I would say that Worship is more than an act of reverence: it is an attitude of the heart.

It's about what or who we give importance to. We can worship money, power, celebrities, appearance or even a lifestyle. It's not that there's anything intrinsically wrong with any of those things, but if we give them first place in our heart, then they become idols. We need to differentiate between God's good gifts and God himself: we must put our trust in God, not in things he has created. Why? For two reasons: first, because what we worship influences the way we live and behave.

As the Scripture scholar and former Anglican Bishop of Durham Tom Wright puts it:

When human beings worship that which is not God, they progressively cease to reflect the image of God. One of the primary laws of human life is that you become like what you worship; what's more, you reflect what you worship to the world around.ⁱ

The second reason why we worship God and not anything or anyone he has created is because all creation will ultimately pass away; but God's plan for us is that we will live in his heavenly kingdom forever. As Jesus says in Matthew 6:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth,but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.ⁱⁱ

Worshipping and praising as we breathe

God said that his name is YHWH (Yahweh), which can be translated as *I am who I am* or *I am he who calls everything into existence*. And actually, the very sound of the name is in itself a prayer of worship. The Franciscan Author and mystic Fr Richard Rohr says:

The name for God was not spoken, but breathed. Its correct pronunciation is an attempt to imitate the sound of inhalation and exhalation. The one thing we do every moment of our lives is therefore to speak the name of God.ⁱⁱⁱ

So every breath that we take can be a prayer of worshipping God, if we intentionally choose to focus on it.

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What is Christian worship?

As Christians, we believe that Jesus Christ is the Lord God who became man, the second person of the Trinity along with the Father and the Holy Spirit: so we worship the one God in all three persons. But how do we worship? Jesus himself pointed us in the right direction when he said:

The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.^{iv}

Worshipping in spirit and truth means that we must use both our hearts and our heads, not just one or the other. Worship 'in truth' consists of proclaiming the basic truths of our faith: we are sinners who have been redeemed by the death and resurrection of Jesus; we have been reconciled to the Father and are his beloved sons and daughters; we have been given eternal life and the gift of the Holy Spirit to help us live in line with the Father's will.

Worship 'in spirit' means recognising that we have the Holy Spirit of God living in us and asking him to help and guide our worship and prayer. We worship as we choose to love, adore and value the Lord above everything else in our lives. We commit ourselves to him, we surrender our thoughts, our trust and our whole being to him, knowing that he is with us and in us, guiding and helping us in all we do. So worship is not just something that we do for God..... as we surrender to him, God himself is at work in us, through the Holy Spirit, encouraging and enabling us to worship.

So, going back to **Praise** the catechism of the Catholic church explains that it is one of the ways we express our worship, one form of prayer:

Praise is the form of prayer which recognizes most immediately that God is God. It lauds God for his own sake and gives him glory, quite beyond what he does, but simply because HE IS... By praise, the (Holy) Spirit is joined to our spirits to bear witness that we are children of God.^v

I don't know about you but I find it's not easy to praise God simply because He is, separate from what He does. I think that is the ultimate aim, the purest form of praise and worship; loving and praising God unconditionally, just as He loves us unconditionally. But it's a bit of a journey getting to that point and thankfully we don't have to struggle on our own to praise God - we have been given the Holy Spirit to help us and I've personally found that the more I ask the Holy Spirit to help me to praise, the more He teaches and helps and grows me in praise. And the more you ask the Holy Spirit, the more he will help you. The Catechism says the second reason to praise Him is because we are His children and He is our loving Father.

The Catechism goes on to say that Praise embraces the other forms of prayer and carries them toward God. So praise is a very important and powerful form of prayer; but unfortunately even people who have been Christians, particularly Catholics, all their life may not be particularly comfortable with praise if they have been brought up with the somewhat misguided convention that prayer is mainly a private internal activity.

In fact Praise is mainly an external activity – a declaration of God's goodness and glory; our thankfulness that we are his children; and our thankfulness for all his blessings.

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How do we praise?

Praise can be expressed in the spoken word, in song, in an action or even in a shout. It is an outward declaration, so that others are aware of God working in us. But the important thing is that it should come from the heart. As St Paul says, without love we can be a booming gong or a clanging cymbal.

Whatever your current understanding and practice of praise, there is almost certainly another level that you can take it to, with the help of the Holy Spirit; and I will be looking at some more examples of HOW in a few minutes. But first....

Why is it necessary for us to praise?

I once heard of an atheist who said to a Christian: "Your God must have very low self-esteem if he always needs to be praised!" However, the reality is that we're not praising God because he needs it but because we need to do it. By turning away from ourselves and lifting our eyes and hearts and whole being to him, declaring his goodness and power and awesome majesty, we turn our attention to the one who made us, the one who is with us in all the circumstances of our life, the one who can help us in our need and the one who desires us to be with him in eternal peace and love.

And, speaking of eternity, we are told in the Bible that heaven is full of angels and saints praising God, so it would make sense to get used to it before we get there! That brings us on to the point of

Who should praise?

Psalm 148 makes it clear that the whole of creation should praise the Lord.

Praise the LORD. [Hallelu Yah]

Praise the LORD from the heavens;

praise him in the heights above.

² *Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his heavenly hosts.*

³ *Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars.*

⁴ *Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies.*

⁷ *Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths,*

⁸ *lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding,*

⁹ *you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars,*

¹⁰ *wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds,*

¹¹ *kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on earth,*

¹² *young men and women, old men and children.*

¹³ *Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his splendour is above the earth and the heavens.^{vi}*

All creation should praise God and we look forward to the time when this will happen, but meanwhile we know that in heaven the angels and saints are already praising him, and I am personally really inspired by the thought that when we praise and worship on earth, (and particularly in the Eucharist) we are spiritually united with everyone in heaven praising and together we make a way for God's glory to come down to earth. (your kingdom come...) It's like when the atmospheric conditions are just right for the clouds to release rain on the earth; when we praise God from the heart in the power of the Holy Spirit, the heavens open and God's mercy and love rain down.

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Listen to what it says in Revelation 7:9-12

I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."^{vii}

So that's covered what, why, and who – how about where and when? Well essentially, praise God anywhere and anytime; but a couple of more specific suggestions. You don't have to wait till the next Day of Renewal or celebrate conference: why not cultivate an attitude of gratitude and praise and get into the habit of praising and thanking God for everything; at the beginning and end of the day; at the start of your prayer time; whenever something good happens; listen to praise music on YouTube while doing something around the house; read the Psalms out loud

And how about during Mass? Listen to what Pope Francis says:

"Here is a good question for us to pose to ourselves today: 'how am I doing with prayer of praise? Do I know how to praise the Lord? Do I know how to praise the Lord when I pray the Gloria or the Sanctus? Is my whole heart really in it, or do I merely mouth the words'?.... That man or that woman who praises the Lord, who prays praising the Lord, who, when praying the Gloria is filled with joy at doing so, and who, when singing the Sanctus in the Mass rejoices in singing it, is a fruitful person."^{viii}

So, regardless of the general state of praise or spirituality in your parish, the Lord is saying to you: "Don't worry about what everyone else is doing – will YOU praise me from your heart? Will you be fruitful for me?"

There are numerous expressions of praise and thanksgiving in the Bible, but one of the best is Mary's Magnificat when, filled with the Holy Spirit, she proclaims to her cousin Elizabeth how magnificent God is, not only to her but to all people of all nations.

*My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name....*^{ix}

The mighty one has done great things for me. Think for a moment of something you are grateful for; (sunshine, loved ones, children, pets, a celebration a pay rise – just being alive!) and now, silently in your heart say thank you to God for it. Keep that sense of gratitude in your mind and heart as we praise God with these words from Mary's prayer:

*My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name....*^x

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I said just now praise and thank God whenever something good happens. But actually, as mature believers, we are also called to praise and thank God in ALL circumstances, not just the good times. This gets back to what we were saying right at the start, in the definition of praise in the Catechism: praising God for who He is, not just what He does. If we only love and praise God when everything is going well, that's not unconditional love. God loves us unconditionally, and He wants us to respond with unconditional love and praise.

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.^{xi}

A book I was encouraged to read in my early days in renewal was "Prison to Praise" by Merlin Carothers. It's his autobiography telling of his own very tough start in life – and of the transformation he found in coming to faith and learning the powerful practise of praising God in all circumstances – especially the difficult ones – showing how this releases the power of God into your life.

That principle of thanking and praising God even in difficult times took me some time to get to grips with. If something terrible happens, how can we thank God for it? If God is love, how can he permit terrible things? But it's not God who directly causes those things to happen. Paul tells us in Ephesians that our struggle is against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. But when we praise and thank God, He will be right there with us in the midst of the difficulty, to comfort and strengthen us.

Why do we find praise difficult?

I recently read that one reason is perhaps because we fear it will emphasise how insignificant and flawed we are in comparison with the greatness and perfection of God. But this fear is a deception, because in fact we humans are made to be part of something greater. There is a freedom in realising that we don't have to know everything, understand everything, achieve everything. In short, we are not the centre of the universe and we don't have to try to be God-like because there is only one God and He has everything under control. We can rejoice in all the amazing gifts and blessings that surround us; rejoice in playing our part in His plan knowing that, however small and flawed our contribution, it is of enormous value in His plan.

So, praise is difficult because it requires us to practise humility; yet that is also one of its principal benefits. The more we practise humility through praise, the easier we will find it to exercise humility when it comes to forgiving people and loving them.

Pope Francis gave a meditation on the prayer of praise in 2014, encouraging people to praise, even though it doesn't come easily:

Some might think that this kind of prayer is only for those who belong to the renewal in the spirit movement, not for all Christians. The prayer of praise is a Christian prayer for all of us..... You are able to shout out when your team scores a goal [but] you cannot sing the Lord's praises!^{xii}

Jesus himself pointed to the importance of praise in prayer: by placing praise before petition and forgiveness in the Lord's Prayer, (Our Father in heaven, holy is your name) he gave us a model for what should be our priorities in prayer.

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How to praise

According to the book *Holy Roar by Chris Tomlin and Darren Whitehead*^{xiii}, there are seven different Hebrew words used in the Bible which are translated as “praise”. I’m going to go through those seven words, plus another I have discovered, to illustrate and explain that there is a lot more to praise than perhaps we usually realise.... there is a rich variety of ways that we can express our appreciation of God and all He has done and is going to do.

Barak means to kneel, to bless God, to praise, salute or thank. It is apparently used 289 times in the Psalms and it indicates prostrating oneself, falling on one’s face before God or kneeling before him to adore and thank him.

The image that comes to my mind is of the magi who came to honour the newborn Jesus, kneeling before him in humble acknowledgement that he is a very special king, far more important than them. The fundamental sin – both of humans and of Lucifer and his fallen angels – is pride and wanting to place our will and importance ahead of God’s; so our attitude of submission to him is a vitally important element of our praise.

The book of Revelation tells us that heaven is full of angels and saints praising God on his throne day and night; they too prostrate themselves and offer him their honour by submitting their crowns (their power and authority) to him. If this is what happens in heaven, we better get in some practice before we get there!

Shabach means to shout, commend, glory and declare triumph. It is used in Psalm 117 where its power is magnified by the image of countless billions of people all over the world crying out in praise of our amazing God:

Praise the LORD, all you nations! Extol him, all you peoples!

For great is his steadfast love towards us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures for ever.

Praise the LORD!^{xiv}

Now there are clearly times when church services should be quiet and respectful. But I believe (and fortunately Pope Francis agrees with me!) that there should be room for real passion and excitement and a bit of noise! The central prayer in the Old Testament, the *shema*, says Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your might. Jesus confirms this as the first and most important commandment.^{xv}

But if we are to love the Lord with everything we are, that should surely include our emotions; and *all our might* (or strength) surely includes shouting out with a loud voice.

Pope Francis has said that Jesus does not want people to become numb to life’s problems and to extinguish or anaesthetise those things that make them human when they pray; he understands that having faith is being able to cry out:

We all need to be like Bartimaeus in the Gospel. He had so many good people around him telling him to keep quiet:.... ‘You are annoying with your cries. Do not disturb’. But he did not heed those suggestions:... he cried louder! ‘Jesus, have mercy on me!’ Jesus heals his sight and says: ‘your faith has made you well’, as if to explain that the decisive element of his healing was that prayer, that invocation shouted out with faith, stronger than the ‘common sense’ of many people who wanted him to keep quiet.^{xvi}

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Shouting out to the Lord, whether in praise or in petition, is clearly something that he responds to, so perhaps we need to make more occasions when we can be less inhibited. And indeed we will do this in a couple of minutes.

But first another word which carries this idea of a cry even further. *Teruah* means a long shout or trumpet blast of war, as was used to bring down the walls of Jericho. [Do you know that praise has the power to bring down the walls that we put up to keep God out? And it has power to bring down the strongholds of the enemy]

It is also used to mean shout of joy, or a 'festal' shout. In the Old Testament, this shout of joy is linked with the blast of the *shofar*, the ram's horn trumpet, which was used to announce the Jubilee, the coronation of kings, the coming redemption and even the resurrection of the dead.

This type of shout is clearly a powerful spiritual weapon, as Damian Stayne of *Cor et Lumen Christi*^{xvii} has discovered. At his miracle healing services, he organises a festal shout of "Jesus is Alive!" like a Mexican wave, with the audience divided into sections who take it in turns to stand and fling their arms in the air while shouting the phrase at the top of their voices.

Damian then asks people to indicate if they have experienced healing as a result, and many report that they have been instantly healed! A lady who came here a couple of years ago testified that she had been 95% deaf in one ear for almost 50 years and was completely healed through the "Jesus is Alive!" shout at the Miracle Rally.

Towdah means extending the hand in thanksgiving for what God has done, and also for things not yet received; praising God with expectation. This a real prayer of trust, for what could be more trusting than to thank God *before* he acts? In Psalm 56, written while David was a prisoner of the Philistines, he praises God in advance for what he knows God will do:

Then my enemies will retreat on the day when I call. This I know, that God is for me. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I am not afraid. What can a mere mortal do to me?^{xviii}

This is what Jesus was talking about when he said:

If you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you. So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.^{xix}

The challenge is to celebrate the victory as if it's already happened: consider what your response would be if the Lord had already answered your prayer in a miraculous way, then praise him and thank him accordingly.

Yadah means to revere, or worship with extended hands, and also to throw. Why is it that these movements of the body are a way of praising God? I think it's all to do with surrendering every part of ourselves to him. In England, we are generally not inclined to gesture with our hands, unlike other nationalities, so it's a much bigger sacrifice for us to do this sort of thing. But actually, that makes it even more valuable if we do let go of our inhibitions.

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When I started going to charismatic praise evenings at Cor et Lumen Christi in the 90s I gradually allowed my hands to raise while praising God, feeling very self conscious at first. But then after a while I realised that nobody was interested in what I was doing – the focus is all on the Lord. I was eventually able to let go of my inhibitions and extend one or both of my arms above my head, and wave my hands around just as the Spirit moved me.

Part of the problem is that, even if we quite naturally wave our hands around or punch the air when we get excited about, say, a dramatic sporting achievement, we don't usually think of God as something to get excited about! So the challenge is to have our thinking transformed, our mind renewed; and it is the Holy Spirit who can do that, if we let him:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, 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 renewing of your minds...^{xx}

For many years, when I came across that phrase *present your bodies as a living sacrifice* or the expression *a sacrifice of praise*, I really struggled to understand what they meant. Then it dawned on me that a sacrifice is essentially doing something we really don't want to do but deciding that, if God wants it, then we'll do it. It's far more important to do what God wants than to be intimidated by the so-called sensible people who don't want to be disturbed by our demonstrations of our faith.

Most of our difficulties in life are the result of selfishness. So, when we offer our lives to God, we tell Him we are willing to endure whatever he calls us to for his sake. We are placing God's purposes above our own temporary wants and comforts. So it is with praise: when we sacrifice our own comfortable, non-challenging form of praise and push ourselves to a different level, we experience a real breakthrough in our relationship with the Lord.

It's time for some more audience participation! Please stand (if it's convenient). Imagine a little child approaching you with his or her arms held out to you, wanting you to pick them up and embrace them. (if you have children, grandchildren nephews or nieces this may be easier to picture). Now close your eyes and picture yourself as a little child, reaching up to be picked up and embraced by your Abba, your loving heavenly Father, and hold up your arms in loving praise.

Tehillah means a song of praise, rather than just spoken words. Also a new or spontaneous song. It's not so much about having a talent for singing but it's about our heart overflowing with praise so much that we must sing it out. This could be just taking a phrase from God's word and singing spontaneously whatever notes come into our head, or it could be singing "in the Spirit" (in tongues) words, sounds and melodies that just come into our mouth. This is probably what Paul means when he says:

Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.^{xxi}

Let's look briefly at Singing in the Spirit or singing in tongues. This is not something recently invented by charismatic renewal – going back to the very early centuries of the church there has been a long history of "jubilation," namely, of wordless praying and singing aloud. This form of worship was described by Church Fathers from at least the fourth century as a kind of spontaneous overflowing joy that cannot be expressed in words.

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Continuing through the Middle Ages until approximately the sixteenth century, this way of expressing worship was manifest among many noted saints and mystics including St Teresa of Avila, St Francis of Assisi and St Bernard of Clairvaux. It was widely practiced – not just by mystics – but by ordinary people and was not considered controversial. (*More information available from “Sounds of Wonder”^{xxii} by Deacon Eddie Ensley PhD.*)

Jubilation was frequently seen to be a distinct breaking through into a deeper level of worship and spiritual reality ... generating an atmosphere of expectation of the miraculous, especially of extraordinary healings. Because, as we praise God in the power of the Holy Spirit, He is actually present. Psalm 22 puts it like this:

*You are holy, you who inhabit the praises of Israel.^{xxiii} Or:
you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.^{xxiv}*

The Hebrew word translated as *inhabit* or *enthroned* combines the idea of living in a place and having authority over it, so when God’s people praise him, he actually comes alive and reigns in their praises. So, when we sing heartfelt, spirit-filled praise, God’s supreme authority in heaven is brought down to the earth. We are in effect praying (as in the Lord’s prayer) that God’s kingdom will come to the earth, so that his will may be done as it is in heaven.

Halal means to boast, rave, shine, celebrate, be clamorously foolish. (The word is the root of *Halleluia*, which means praise the Lord). It’s what the party for the return of the prodigal son must have been like. It’s what heaven must be like every time someone accepts Jesus as their Lord:

I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance.^{xxv}

Imagine a wild celebration at a wedding or special birthday, with joyful dancing, singing, cheering. We usually have no difficulty joining in with such festivities, perhaps with the help of a few drinks. But what God seems to appreciate is for us to be equally excited and joyful about him, but intoxicated with the Holy Spirit rather than alcohol.

*Sing to the LORD a new song.... Let them praise his name with dancing,
making melody to him with tambourine and lyre.^{xxvi}*

King David danced before the Lord with all his might when the ark of the covenant was brought back to Jerusalem.^{xxvii} Pope Francis encourages us to praise God in this way, rather than imitate David’s wife Michal, who rebuked the king for dancing in front of everyone. Pope Francis says:

I wonder how many times in our hearts we hold in contempt good people who praise the Lord so spontaneously, as it comes to them?Let us think of and imagine David who dances with all his might before the Lord. Let us think about how beautiful it is to offer the prayer of praise.^{xxviii}

It’s wonderful to think that not only does God love it when we sing praises to him, he even sings over us! As this moving passage from Zephaniah tells us:

*The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory;
he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love;
he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival.^{xxix}*

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The Hebrew word translated as *rejoice* literally means to “spin around under violent emotion,” or basically to *dance*. This evokes a truly inspiring picture of our God who is not distant, but like an affectionate Father dancing and singing with delight over his children. It reminds us that God is intimately involved with us and our praising.

So, the final challenge! Let’s throw our inhibitions to the winds and during this next song I encourage you to clap, wave your hands in the air, jump up and down, dance – celebrate, rave, be clamorously foolish!!!

Song: Jesus put this song into our hearts

We’re almost at the end of the talk now, but there is one last word I need to cover before we move into the time of prayer ministry.

Zamar means to celebrate in song and music, or to touch the strings of a musical instrument. Even if you can’t play music, you can allow it to penetrate your heart and help you to raise it to the Lord in gratitude. As I play the guitar, I’m sometimes overwhelmed with wonder at the very nature of music and its power to communicate not just emotions but the presence of God himself. There is no doubt that music can heal, as King Saul discovered when David played the lyre for him when he was troubled in spirit. Several times after our healing services in Farnham or prayer ministry time here, people have told me that they have experienced healing, particularly from anxiety, through the music. I don’t have any special technique, I just offer back to God the gift of music he has given me, asking the Holy Spirit to bring it to life.

So, when we come to the ministry time in a minute or two, I encourage you to consciously offer yourself to the Lord, allowing feelings of gratitude, love and praise to rise up in your heart. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you release your burdens onto Jesus and just delight in his love, as he delights in you.

First I want to pray Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians which is one of my favourite new testament passages:

I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.^{xxx}

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This is the text of a talk given at [Alton Day of Renewal](#) 27th July 2019.

It will form part of a book on prayer which will hopefully be published in 2020. If you would like to receive details of the book please contact alastairembem@yahoo.co.uk

THE POWER OF PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

ⁱ ©2007 N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*. Published by SPCK

ⁱⁱ Matthew 6:19-21 The Bible, New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised Catholic Edition (NRSVACE) copyright © 1989, 1993, 1995 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Naked Now* ©2009 Richard Rohr. The Crossroad Publishing Company.

^{iv} John 4:23-24 The Bible, NRSVACE

^v Catechism of the Catholic Church #2639

^{vi} Psalm 148:1-13 The Bible, New International Version (NIV)

^{vii} Revelation 7:9-12 The Bible, NIV

^{viii} Pope Francis, *The prayer of praise*. Morning Meditation in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae, Tuesday, 28 January 2014

^{ix} Luke 1: 46-55 The Bible, NRSVACE

^x Luke 1: 46-55 The Bible, NRSVACE

^{xi} 1 Thessalonians 5:18 The Bible, NIV

^{xii} Pope Francis, *The prayer of praise*. Morning Meditation in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae, Tuesday, 28 January 2014

^{xiii} Chris Tomlin and Darren Whitehead *Holy Roar* ©2017 Bowyer & Bow LLC and Darren Whitehead. Published in Nashville Tennessee by Thomas Nelson.

^{xiv} Psalm 117: 1-2 The Bible, NRSVACE

^{xv} *One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.* Mark 12:28-30 The Bible, NRSVACE

^{xvi} Pope Francis *General Audience*. St Peter's Square Wednesday, 12 December 2018 quoting extracts from Mark 10:46-52

^{xvii} Cor et Lumen Christi Community website: <http://www.coretlumenchristi.org>

^{xviii} Psalm 56: 9-11 The Bible, NRSVACE

^{xix} Mark 11:23-24 The Bible, NRSVACE

^{xx} Romans 12:1-2 The Bible, NRSVACE

^{xxi} Ephesians 5:18-19 The Bible, New International Version

^{xxii} Deacon Eddie Ensley PhD *Sounds of Wonder*. ©2013 Published by Amor Deus Publishing Phoenix Arizona. www.AmorDeus.com

^{xxiii} Psalm 22:3 The World English Bible (a 1997 revision of the American Standard Version of the Holy Bible, first published in 1901. It is in the Public Domain.)

^{xxiv} Psalm 22:3 The Bible, NRSVACE

^{xxv} Luke 15:7 The Bible, NRSVACE

^{xxvi} Psalm 149: 1, 3 The Bible, NRSVACE

^{xxvii} 2 Samuel 6:4 The Bible, NRSVACE

^{xxviii} Pope Francis, *The Prayer of Praise*. Ibid

^{xxix} Zephaniah 3:17 The Bible, NRSVACE

^{xxx} Ephesians 3:14-21 The Bible, NIV