

I Will Sing... I Will Praise!

I was fortunate enough to have known my grandfather (on my mother's side) as I was growing up. He died shortly after Dianna and I married. I frequently would make the trip in the summer from Deptford to Olney in north central Philadelphia, on a NJ Public Service bus, where I would meet my grandfather at the Wanamaker's Eagle. Later, when I was about 12 or 13, I was allowed to finish the trip myself – picking up the 47 Trolley at 5th and Market, carrying my little suitcase, up to W. Wellens Ave., and then walking a couple blocks to their corner row home at Third and Wellens, where the adventure would begin!

{pic on screen} This is actually the very house, courtesy of Google Street View.

I guess that my grandparents were simply doing what it says to do the grandparent manual whenever I was there – which was, basically anything I wanted to do. So a week at their place meant staying up late and sitting on the porch, chatting with the neighbors who would stop by, taking long walks around 'the neighborhood', watching the 11:00 PM news. It meant long days in the Philadelphia Public Library, borrowing my grandfather's library card (what can I say? I was a book geek even then!), trips up the Sears Tower on the Boulevard, (where my grandfather used to work, and still had access) and more. They were good days.

My fondest memory today, of my Grandfather, old school son of German immigrants, was something that, I'm embarrassed to say, annoyed me a bit as a typical grumpy 13 year old kid... It was his incessant *cheerfulness*. I can picture, still, coming down the stairs in the morning, through the Living Room, through the dining room of their shotgun row home, into the kitchen – no matter how late I decided to get up, or how early (not that *that* ever happened!) – into the kitchen, and there he would be, waiting for me. White shirt, neatly ironed, carefully knotted tie, kitchen towel over his forearm, *standing there*, waiting for *me*. Smiling, kind of bouncing on his toes. Like he was excited to see me!

And after all these years, I can actually still hear his voice in my memory – smiling and saying, "Good morning, Glory!" I hated that! And then he'd go through the litany of what he could offer me for breakfast, even though he knew that I was going to decide on toasted Jewish Rye bread (which he had likely purchased from Jerry's market on 5th Street at some ungodly hour earlier that morning) and tea with milk.

I Will Sing... I Will Praise!

Now, really, I think I actually liked the attention, and I'm sure I wasn't nasty to him, or anything, but I was quiet and maybe just the tiniest bit grumpy... (I know you find that hard to believe!) But you know what? *It didn't matter to him!*

As I think about that today, with my semi-adult mind, I know what was going on there... None of my extended family were demonstrative in our affection (i.e., we didn't do much hugging, and we didn't seem to be able to come right out and say, "I love you!"). But he did love me. Those morning greetings were his way of saying to me, "I am so happy to see you! I'm glad you are here! I hope this is a great day... and I'm going to do whatever I can to make it that way."

Now, another thing I've come to realize as an adult, in retrospect, is that my Grandfather's life wasn't all that 'rosy'. He had stuff he had to deal with – you know, every family has their issues, and he had his, too. Some of those issues were pretty heavy, too, but again – it didn't matter – he *chose* to be positive, even joyful, in my presence. It wasn't an act; it wasn't faked, it was real... he *chose* to focus on the joy in his life, I think, whenever he could... and *I* was part of that.

My grandfather was also a man of faith, and, although we didn't have an opportunity to talk about this as much as I wish now we had, I suspect that it was in the German Lutheran church that he learned how to prioritize his life... and he learned how to find, and appreciate the joy in his life.

I wonder today...is this how *we* live? I ask myself that, (and I'm asking you): do you choose to find the joy, and express your thanks to God as a *way of life*? Do you think that praising God is the best thing to do – first, before anything else? When you come into difficult situations in your life, times when you don't know what to do, times when you feel you are all alone, carrying that weight...is 'praise' your first response?

Praise can be something that we *choose* to do, not depending on our mood, our circumstances, our feelings, or anything else that might be going on around about us. We know that we need to look to God in times of testing, loneliness, and other difficult times. But do we think of *praising God* in those times?

I Will Sing... I Will Praise!

Think about the *good* times in life – like when you receive a raise from your boss or earn good marks at school? What do you usually do during these moments? Typically, as believers, we would praise/ thank God. That's because we understand that Praising God in those times just seems *right*, it makes those circumstances complete, full.

But doesn't *every* circumstance of our lives find its completeness in God's presence? Praise can transform even times of testing and trial as we discover an eternal context even in tough times. Maybe *especially* in those tough times! Praising God in hard circumstances changes our perspectives and helps us see things we may not otherwise see. Through praise we can realize that these times of testing are essential to our growth and development as believers.

The word *praise* means *to say good things about* someone or something, and it is synonymous with words such as admire, commend, honor, and worship. So a definition of Christian praise might be *the joyful thanking and adoring of God, the celebration of God's goodness and grace* in our lives and in the world.

Why is praising God important? The reasons are countless. First, God deserves to be praised because God is worthy to receive our praise. We find this in many places in Scripture:

- “*For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods*” (Psalm 96:4).
- “*Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom*” (Psalm 145:3).
- “*I call to the LORD, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies*” (2 Samuel 22:4).
- “*You are worthy, our LORD and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.*” (Revelation 4:11).

God does not *need* our praise, but someone who would be growing in Christ comes eventually to understand that *we* need to praise God. And that, for some reason, God delights in that.

There are a number of ‘events’ that take place, or fall into place when we have a mind of praise. I want to suggest three here today:

I Will Sing... I Will Praise!

1. Praising God Strengthens our Minds -

What we praise indicates what our minds are focused on; i.e., it reveals our mind-set. We've all seen chilling old films or recreations of the times when members of the Nazi party would gather in a huge parade to salute and praise Hitler. Doing that clarified their commitment to his program; it strengthened their vision of what life was about. (Tragically, they didn't realize that it was all a lie, and evil!) But it focused them.

There is nothing inherently wrong with us praising people - a great actor, or artist, or sports star, or even our own children. But if that is not balanced by the supreme praise of God (who after all, created all people, and their abilities, and all beauty and goodness) then our minor praise quickly takes our lives off center.

So, praising God focuses our minds, it strengthens us by centering us on the Rock that never changes. And it puts everything else – good and bad alike – in its proper perspective.

2. Praising God Lightens Our Hearts

I suspect this was true in my Grandfather's life. Did you ever notice that people whose hearts are full of praise find a serenity and peace in everything they do? I am not thinking of people who keep saying, "Praise the Lord" at inappropriate moments. But people who genuinely build their lives on a foundation of praise, have a noticeably different attitude about life in general – and I'm not sure whether praise is the cause or the effect, but I think it's the former!

People who cannot praise become sour, grumpy, anxious, constantly serious. And it is written all over their faces and in their body language. The 'secret' is to spend a few minutes praising God *every* day, and you can then enter into the worship of God in a service like this like a primed pump, ready to pour out your heart to God. The poison in our system begins to dissolve as praise sweetens and lightens our hearts, our being.

It will change your whole perspective!

If you picture yourself as an unattractive, unlovable person, try a praise diet for a few weeks and see what happens! Meditate every day on the unchangeable love that God has for you. Let it

I Will Sing... I Will Praise!

permeate your being. Everybody – and you yourself – will soon notice the change in you! Again, God does not *need* our praise, but he knows that *we* need it, and that's why he rejoices in it.

3. Praising God Strengthens our Will

Not to be critical, just honest: most of us are weak-minded. Especially when it comes to things that require sustained effort and self-discipline. Few people easily stick with what *we need* to do. We are easily turned aside to empty, unhelpful things. Its part of our human nature, as we're still living this side of eternal perfection. It's going to be a constant battle for us.

But when you join with others in praise, and when you find time to praise God as a daily discipline, you will find yourself renewed and strengthened to do what is worthwhile. Like when an artist has been discouraged but then is able to attend a great art exhibit, there is fresh inspiration to go back and paint again. Musicians need to hear other musicians so that we can be lifted up to do our best, preachers need to hear good preaching so we can steal the good ideas, I mean, so we can be inspired and motivated to do our best, too.

Praise strengthens our will, to honor God in all we do.

So, God does not need our praise, but to our astonishment he delights in it. He loves us, he loves to hear us making music to him in our hearts. Like a loving parent (or, grandparent) God wants only the best for us. God knows that without praise we will be inadequate, miserable, and shortsighted people.

To satisfy the furious longing of God's heart for us (as we talked about last week), God tries to encourage us to praise him. Which is another reason, I think, that I remember those mornings in my grandfather's kitchen so fondly: because God, my heavenly father, is waiting just as longingly, just as excitedly for me to come to him every minute of every day. So great is his love for us.