

*I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth.
My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad.
Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!*

Psalms 34:1-3

Women of Praise

In a critical and often harsh world we can shine as lights by displaying a positive disposition that is eager to praise God and others. We all know that God is worthy of praise but in the effort not to appear charismatic, perhaps we are too quick to avoid enthusiastic worship and devotion. Expressions of praise are God's due. We can praise Him with our whole hearts and still be respectful. We can be vocal in our praise and yet not cross over the lines given in Scripture for how and when women are to speak. Be careful, but remember: We must not be so afraid of doing the wrong thing that we do nothing at all (Matthew 25:24-30).

God is great. God is good. We must thank Him for more than our food. The existence of nature is a testament to the greatness of God. You cannot see what He has made and not be awestruck by His power and goodness. That is why no person is without excuse if they refuse to honor Him (Romans 1 ;18-20). If you are ever feeling at a loss for encouragement and purpose start by looking around you. Nature praises God by its existence and shows many reasons for us to praise Him (Psalm 19:1-6;148 & 150). We praise God by telling others how wonderful He is and the good He has done for us (Psalm 9:1-2). One of the easiest ways to do this is in song (Psalm 69:30, 31; 95:1-5; Jeremiah 20:13; James 5:13). So many passages say, "Praise the Lord." We can use our own words to do this and also do it by our actions, but it doesn't hurt to practice just saying, "Praise God."

Praising God is not just an activity for men. Psalm 68:11 talks about the great host of women who proclaim the good tidings of the Lord. This is not a formal, pulpit-style activity. It is daily and as each occasion gives opportunities, but mostly it is a willingness to open your mouth and give credit where credit is due. Miriam led a group of women in singing something like a chorus in response to Moses' song after the Exodus (Exodus 15:20,21). That was a public show of support and agreement with strong praise from the leaders. Deborah and Barak sang a song after God gave them victory over Sisera. Judges 5:6-11 appears to be a segment Deborah sang, herself, and the praise element is quite strong. The neighbors of Naomi had a good deal to say after the birth of Ruth's son. They named him Obed and praised God for delivering Naomi from the hopeless state she had been in (Ruth 4:14-17). Here is an example of someone in desperate and bitter circumstances who is preserved by God. These women were not afraid to recognize the working of the Lord in this.

Probably the clearest example of womanly praise of the Father is from Mary, the mother of Jesus in the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke. Elizabeth had pronounced a blessing on Mary for believing the words of Gabriel (vv 42-45), and Mary, herself, humbly accepted the role God was giving her (v 38). The poem/song in Luke 1:46-55 is the longest quotation of speech by a woman in the New Testament.



Pause a moment and read it for yourself. The wording is in first person and seems to be the personal reflection of Mary. She recognizes that God has chosen her for great and amazing things and that He has always been gracious to the humble and dismissive of those who think themselves to be powerful. God cares and provides for the poor in spirit and will protect them - as Jesus would say later in Matthew 5:3-12. Jehovah helped Israel and Abraham and Mary implies He will help her. It is easy for us to say in hindsight that Mary was protected, secure and provided for, but from her perspective at this point in her life that was not so clear. She had to have this absolute level of faith to make it to Bethlehem, then to Egypt, and back again to Nazareth. God knew this and that must have been part of the reason He chose her as the mother of Our Lord. When Gabriel first came to see her he called her favored and in fellowship with God. That attitude is seen in the Magnificat. The term *magnificat* is Latin for magnify, and that is what Mary does here. She magnifies God for the good things He has done and will do for her.

This passage was one of the first hymns of the early Church and continues to be popularized in song today. While still included in the Catholic liturgy and read daily, it was banned in India, Guatemala, and Argentina for a time during revolutions because it was used to rally the common population against their governments. It is a universally accepted expression of faith through trial and hope for deliverance from oppression. The Holy Spirit saw fit to include it in our Bibles as a strong teaching tool. In this light it is the ultimate example of proper female guidance. Mary is not giving directions in any authoritative way. She is simply stating how she has seen the power and goodness of God and trusts Him to continue to care for His servants. I need to have the faith of Mary, to accept any role He places me in. I also need to have the courage to speak of that faith to others. I can encourage those around me by being open about my own faith. That is praise.

Women of God need to be prone to praise. We know God is good to us. Our many blessings are occasions to express praise (Psalm 30:10-12; Hebrews 13:15) . Perhaps we do not praise as freely as we should because we are not always focused on our blessings. It is easier to notice the negatives and what we would like to change, but we need to train ourselves to notice what is good, lovely, pure, and worthy of praise (Philippians 4:8). This is true in our personal lives, but it is also true in our dealings with others. We need to be women who look for good in others, not fault. Faults exist and must be corrected - not ignored, but they should not be what we think about constantly. People are more than their faults, and we must see through those to the potential they also possess. If we will praise others for their successes they will be more inclined to listen when we try to help them grow. This applies to both adults and children. Children do not need all positive and no negative input, but they do need to know that we see their accomplishments, growth, and potential so they will not be too discouraged to move forward. Praise God, because He is all good. Praise others when they do what would make God proud of them. Praise the germ of the image of God that all men possess that has the potential to be truly good.

*Therefore David blessed the Lord in the presence of all the assembly. And David said:
"Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name."*

1 Chronicles 29:10-13