

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs

Ephesians 5:15-20; Colossians 3:15-17 NIV

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: these are not just for praise and worship on Sunday morning, but they are part of our daily spiritual maintenance. And not just for us. Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs not only minister to us, they can change the lives of the people around us. They can even change attitudes towards circumstances.

Paul wrote what is known as the Prison Epistles while under house arrest in Rome. Two of these letters are Ephesians and Colossians. In these two letters are similar encouragements concerning psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

To the Ephesians he writes, “¹⁵Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. ¹⁸Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. ¹⁹Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Eph. 5:15-20)

To the Colossians he writes, “¹⁵Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and

as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. ¹⁷And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” (Col. 3:15-17)

There is an illustration of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs from Paul’s life. In Acts, chapter 16, Luke records the account of the Philippian jailer.

Paul and Silas had encountered a slave girl who by the power of a demon could predict the future. Her owner made profit from her ability. She followed Paul and Silas and shouted, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.” (Acts 16:17)

Paul finally cast the demon out of her, which also ended a lucrative business. This got them arrested, beaten, and put in the inner part of the jail, their feet in stocks.

²⁵About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody’s chains came loose. ²⁷The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸But Paul

shouted, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!”

²⁹The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

You know the rest of the story. Paul and Silas taught the jailers family about the Lord and his family was baptized.

That’s quite a story. You wouldn’t expect to hear singing from someone who had been beaten and put in leg chains. Prayer maybe. But singing?

I would expect some whining and complaining. But not from these two. Why? What made them different from other prisoners the jailer had encountered?

Look again at some of the phrases from the Ephesian and Colossian passages:

- making the most of every opportunity,
- be filled with the Spirit,
- Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord,
- always giving thanks to God the Father for everything,
- Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,
- teach and admonish one another with all wisdom,

- sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude...

Even when you have been beaten and put in chains, falsely accused of doing evil, when you know that you were doing good.

Something that Luke recorded about the jailer answers our question. **“He was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family.” (Acts 16:34)** What made Paul and Silas different and now what the jailer had? Joy.

Paul and Silas had joy: they had joy in making the most of every opportunity; joy of being filled with the Holy Spirit; they had joy singing songs, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude even in a difficult circumstance.

Have you ever been in a situation where you said, “I give up?” Has life ever enticed you to the point of turning in your resignation? Do you know why that happens? That is part of the work of the “accuser of the brethren.” (Rev. 12:10) If the devil can steal your joy, he not only steals your witness, he steals your heart song. Don’t let him steal your joy.

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Cor. 5:17) but, to make this passage a reality, a fact of life rather than a theory, it takes maintenance on our part.

It isn’t a suit and tie that makes one a Christian, nor going to church, nor even carrying a Bible. It’s the Holy Spirit living on the inside that produces a new life. Being a Christian must become more than just something we are sometimes when we feel like it; it must become what we do, who we are, and esp. what people see anytime we are seen

The word Christian means, “Christ-like.” If we are to become more Christ-like, we must do what we are taught even when we don’t feel like it. WWJD is more than a fad wristband. WWJD is to surrender our lives to the God as “living sacrifices.” (Romans 12:1-2) We are commanded by God to be filled with the Holy Spirit, or to be controlled by the Holy Spirit. However, this is not an automatic one-time event. The reality is that there are going to be days that we just don’t feel like it. So, what do we do?

On the day of Pentecost, when the disciples were filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, they were falsely accused of being drunk (Acts 2: 15). The residents of Jerusalem saw a change in these men. They changed from men who were hiding to men filled with Joy and Spirit boldness. Therefore, observers assumed they had been drinking. The Holy Spirit does produce joy and boldness in the lives of those who are filled with His power. The Holy Spirit longs to do His work in your life. However you must first present your life to Him. In essence, you must give up your ways for His ways, and your will for

His will. There are six areas of life the Holy Spirit wants to control.

The first area, and maybe the most critical the Holy Spirit wants to control our lips; our tongue.

More damage is done to the work of God by uncontrolled lips than by any other single tool of the devil! Pastors, evangelists, missionaries and laymen have been destroyed by the words of people whose tongues were not yielded to the Spirit’s complete control. And they, (the pastors, evangelists, etc.), have done some destroying too.

Wrong words have great destructive ability. **Proverbs 18:8 states “...The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man’s inmost parts.”**

Some words inflict mortal wounds. Listen to what Job asked his friends in **Job 19:1-2. “...How long will you torment me and crush me with words?”**

God’s Word clearly admonishes us to speak only words that are “Spirit-controlled.” Ephesians 4:29, Paul writes, **“...Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” (Eph.4:29)**

Any communication that is curt, cutting, cruel, cold, caustic or critical is corrupt!

Matthew 12:36 warns us that someday we will answer to the Lord for our words.

Area number two: the Holy Spirit wants to control our heart.

The “heart” refers to the inner spirit each of us possesses. Many Christians today could be summed up in the word of **Matthew 15:8: “...These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.**

Luke 16: 15 says that God knows your heart. God has the ability to look beyond the exterior to the inside. He knows the attitudes and feelings hidden away inside.

The Holy Spirit wants us to give Him our hearts so He can help us control our thoughts, desires and attitudes.

Paul’s prayer for the Ephesian Christians was that they might be strengthened in the inner man (that is their heart and spirit) by the power of the Holy Spirit. **I (Paul) pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. (Ephesians 3:16-17)** The Holy Spirit is able to strengthen our inner man with His power.

1 Corinthians 6:20 commands that we glorify God both in body and in spirit. That means that our attitude and temperaments are to bring God glory, but many Christians don’t glorify God by the spirit they display before others.

Not one attitude, one emotion or even one feeling should be harbored in our hearts that would grieve God’s Holy Spirit and give ground to the devil.

Area three: the Holy Spirit wants control of our mind.

Most sin begins as a thought. The devil cannot make anyone sin. He can only plant little thoughts about sinning in our minds. If one thinks hateful thoughts, he will be a hateful person; bitter thoughts, a bitter person; proud thoughts, a proud person, discouraging thoughts, a discouraged person. If the Holy Spirit can help you control your mind and lead you to think Christ-like thoughts, He’ll produce more “Christ-Likeness” in your life.

2 Corinthians 10:5 states that, “...We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

Very simply put, the principle teaches us to control what we think. With the Spirit’s help this is possible. But, it takes effort on our part.

Area four: the Holy Spirit wants control of our desires.

There is an internal battle for control of desires that goes on in the life of every Christian. The Spirit battles against the flesh, or the old nature. The flesh battles against the Spirit, or the new nature given to us when we were saved.

1 Peter 2: 11 tells us we are to “abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.”

Uncontrolled desires have put many men in trouble in the past.

- a. King David desired another man’s wife
- b. Achan desired the gold and silver of Jericho.
- c. Gehazi desired the wealth of Naaman.
- d. Judas desired the silver of the Pharisees.

Fleshly lusts war against the soul. There are no exceptions! We must learn to pray for the Holy Spirit’s control over our desires.

Area five: the Holy Spirit wants to control our body.

Who is living in God’s house?

Don’t you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19). The body of the believer is where the Holy Spirit dwells.

It’s only natural that He wants to control His own dwelling. Many Christians struggle with controlling the flesh when, according to the Bible, it is more a matter of yielding the body to the Lord, seeking His help and

power, rather than trying to control the flesh by our own strength.

We become servants to whom we yield ourselves-whether to sin or to the Savior. For example: What does the yield sign mean when you are getting the highway? Now to some it means to accelerate as hard as you can. And others think it's the same as a stop sign. I'm not sure which group is more dangerous. It means to proceed with caution because you don't have the right of way. In **Galatians 2:20, Paul says that he had been, "...crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."**

If you are on the highway to heaven, remember the yield sign. You're on the highway because the one who had the right of way let you on! Ask God to help you continue to yield your right of way to the Spirit's control so you, too, may be able to say, "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.

Area six: the Holy Spirit wants to help take back ground that we have given to the devil.

We live in a war zone. And no one is exempt from the war. You either become a victorious warrior or a casualty. This depends on you yielding your right of way and proceeding with caution in Holy Spirit power.

Here is the story of a young man who realized that he was in a war: a battle for his mind, even his life. His story illustrates how he put into practice what Paul and Silas were teaching and living.

Listen as he tells us his story. Back when I first went to Purdue University, I decided I would live life my own way. I didn't shave. If I didn't feel like it, I didn't even brush my teeth. And I intended to listen to MY music as much as possible.

After about 3 months I seriously began to entertain thoughts of suicide. This so shocked me that I began to take stock of what I'd been doing with my life. I began to take more pride in personal hygiene and in my appearance... and I took a close look at the type of music I surrounded myself with. My favorite group at the time was the singing group "Simon and Garfunkle". I'd listen to them for hours.

But as I examined the messages of their songs, I discovered a pattern of despair and hopelessness. One song compared man's life to that of a rat in a maze. Another declared: "I am a rock, I am an island. I touch no one and no one touches me". I realized I needed to remove that influence from my life and replace it with more upbeat and hopeful music.

By contrast, when I was in Bible College I had a part time job in the back room of a furniture store as a "furniture stripper". My job was to take old chairs and tables and dip them in a horse tank filled with

Methylene Chloride – which would strip off old paint and varnish - and then take the treated furniture over to a shower stall where I would spray the item off and set it aside to be refinished.

It was a lonely, smelly, unpleasant job that nobody liked.

The worst part was that the Methylene Chloride was like Acetone ... with an attitude. If it touched your skin it would burn like crazy. And so, I was forced to wear eye protection and huge rubber gloves. One day, in a Bible class I encountered Ephesians 5:19-20 which spoke of ways that we could be "filled with the Spirit". It said: "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

So, I thought I'd try that at work. I was alone for 3 to 4 hours at a time, and I could do any crazy thing I wanted to. I'd sing and pray and just worship God in my little cathedral. After a couple of weeks, my boss pulled me aside and asked me what I had been doing back there.

A little confused, I asked what he meant. He said "I don't know what you're doing back there, but I have never seen anyone come out of that room before with a smile on their face. What are you doing back there?"

What I'd been doing was obeying the command from Ephesians 5. I had changed my attitude. By singing and praying and praising God I had risen above my

circumstances and allowed God's Spirit to work IN me.

In conclusion: make psalms, hymns and spiritual songs part of your daily maintenance right along with your devotions, daily Bible reading, and prayer. There is a war going on. We live in the battle zone. We are in the battle whether we like it or not. Don't allow yourself to be a casualty.

In the heat of the battle, cause someone to ask, "I know what you are going through, and I have never seen anyone smile about it. Why are you so happy?" Then tell them about the joy of the Lord.

finally:

...whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.