



IMITATING CHRIST — **Being Led by the Spirit**

by Sheila Lutz

Opening Prayer

Lord, I praise You for giving me this day. You work through those who praise You. You accept our praises. Your saints in heaven and on earth worship You with their praises. Some days it's hard to be in an attitude of praise, but when I praise You, I smile. When You hear my praise, You smile. What a life of love You have given us. Let my heart learn to praise You even when my attitude isn't where it should be, so that I can share Your salvation and Your wonder with others. Amen.

LIVING, LOVING, and PRAISING THE LORD

Sue had been a Christian all her life. She went to the same church her forefathers had helped establish when they first came to America ... but she stayed away from working on the missions committee because she didn't want to work with some of those people at the church. They seemed never to do anything the way she thought would be best.

Marisol was a Sunday School teacher. She knew all the Bible lessons backwards and forwards ... but she knew she hadn't been a good mom when her kids were little. She fretted over what damage she might have caused to their adult lives.

Aisha was a pray-er. She kept a prayer journal of things and people to pray for. It gave her great satisfaction to check off those prayers when they were answered ... but she couldn't understand why some of those prayers never were answered. Should she continue to pray for them? What was wrong? Although she had checked off that many prayers had been answered, some had just been on the list too long.

Hailey was working on a new committee at church. The committee prayed for God's will to be done with their project. Some in the church were excited at the presentation. Others wanted nothing to do with it and even wanted the committee to quit. The committee went again to the Lord in prayer ... but what should they pray now?

What Do I Think?

It has been said, "Praise makes you different." How does this work for me? (Answers will vary.) Possible answers: When I praise, I'm not angry. When I praise, I remember what God has done for me. When I praise, I know I am joined to the body of Christ. When I praise, I am joyful.

How could it make a difference for Sue? Marisol? Aisha? Hailey? _____

For what things do I praise God most? _____

When do I pray? Do I plan my praise daily? Even when I don't feel like it? _____

What Does God Say?

Romans 4:16–17 _____

Psalm 32:6–11 _____

Proverbs 17:22 _____

Ecclesiastes 7:14 _____

Romans 4:7 _____

Ephesians 4:32 _____

1 Thessalonians 5:11 _____

What Does This Mean for Me?

Do I praise God when things aren't going well? _____

Why should I? _____

Do I speak well of others who have hurt me? _____

Whom do I hurt most when I don't? _____

It is good to be humble, but some think that means to speak judgmentally about oneself. Do I speak in a demeaning way about myself? _____

How do I encourage others? _____

Does what I say rely on how I am feeling that day — sometimes praise, sometimes self-loathing, sometimes criticism, sometimes _____

How can that change? _____

I can make a list of passages that talk about how God feels about each of His children — how He feels about me. (There are hundreds.) I can read my list on a regular basis.

EXERCISING FAITH

What Do I Think?

How do I distinguish between discipline and punishment?

When faced with a task, what do I do to prepare?

When on a diet or exercise regimen, what problems arise?

How do I combat those problems?

What happens if I give up?

What happens if I don't?

What Does God Say?

Ephesians 6:10–20 _____

Proverbs 3:11–12 _____

Matthew 9:5–6 _____

Romans 15:1–2 _____

1 Corinthians 9:24–27 _____

Galatians 5:7–10 _____

Galatians 5:16, 22–26 _____

Philippians 4:11b–13 _____

Hebrews 12:7–11 _____

James 1:2–7 _____

1 Peter 5:8 _____

What Does This Mean for Me?

Running the race with armor? How is this done? _____

Why do I need the armor to run? From what do I need protection? _____

What is my plan for running the race? _____

What is the Holy Spirit's plan for my race? _____

If I don't think I can "run," how can I still "rise up and walk"? _____

How does running or walking joyfully free me to be forgiving? to live forgiven? _____

LIVING THE ABUNDANT LIFE — LIVING FORGIVEN

What Do I Think?

To me, living forgiven means _____

I know I can do this — even if I haven't in the past — because _____

What Does God Say?

Matthew 6:14–15 _____

Matthew 5:3–12 _____

John 14:16–18 _____

Romans 8:26–28 _____

1 Corinthians 3:16–17 _____

2 Corinthians 3:12–18 _____

Colossians 1:11 _____

Jude 1:24–25 _____

What Does This Mean for Me?

I can study Luther's Small Catechism — Third Article of the Creed: "I believe I cannot by my own reason or strength ..."

I can study the Scriptures: "I'll say what God says about me and refrain from negativity."

I can forgive quickly — pray immediately to forgive — even when I don't really want to. God can change my heart through His Spirit, through His Word, and through my listening to Him.

I can receive others with joy — even if they aren't my favorite people.

I can accept forgiveness: I won't let guilt or false humility eat away at me.

I can trust God to fulfill His promises. When I don't forgive and accept forgiveness, I'm not really trusting Him.

I can press on to win the race — in full armor!

I can realize the Devil will be there to fight me. I will pray to be prepared.

I can live the abundant life — no matter what my mood is: I can have joy in sorrow — in frustration — in thankfulness and blessings — joy in each day.

A joy-filled heart is what God desires for me. His joy leads to peace. His peace and joy lead to a forgiving heart. His forgiveness and a forgiving heart lead to a joy-filled life — a forgiving life. I can live forgiven!

Closing Prayer

O Lord, You have given me life. You have given me freedom to forgive as You have forgiven me. I praise You for teaching me that Your yoke is easy and that my burden is light. I praise You for letting me see the joy in people and things that may not seem appealing — at first. I praise You for teaching me to love, for You are love. I praise You for teaching me that You can always lead me to follow You better. I praise You that I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Let others see a hint of how You love them when they see me for, as Your child, I am to be Your reflection. What greater joy can there be? I praise You, O Lord, for never giving up on me and for being my wonderful, holy, and gracious God. Amen

Sing or say a hymn of praise together before you leave: "Where Charity and Love Prevail" (LSB #845) or "We Praise You, O God" (LSB #785, LW #494, TLH #568).

Sheila and Don are the parents of four, in-laws of two, and grandparents of two beautiful girls. A retired teacher, Sheila also spends time writing, reading, singing in two community groups, and teaching American dance. She has also been privileged to serve as a Bible study leader and to go on several of the church's mission trips.