



# SCRIPTURE READING PRAISE CONCERT

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## **Scripture Reading Praise Concert (SRPC): How It Began**

In the early 1970s when I was just beginning my campus ministry, I stumbled across a simple, effective way to lead a group into a transcendent praise experience. At the time, I was working in New York City and the charismatic movement was spreading rapidly. A number of students in the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship groups that I staffed were Pentecostals and before long I too had become more "charismatic" in my view toward worship. But my newness in that world left me a bit uncomfortable in settings where we were led to "just praise the Lord." As those around me would begin speaking or shouting out praises, I would often cite Scripture or think about a song I could sing. Though I felt a bit out of place during those times of spontaneous praise, I appreciated the experience of witnessing and entering God's presence with such power. Over time, I grew more comfortable with this open, candid display of praise.

Not all of the NYC fellowships that I staffed had Pentecostal or charismatic students. One such fellowship at Columbia University consisted mostly of Chinese-American students from Chinatown who came from fairly conservative church backgrounds. One day when I was meeting with six of the fellowship leaders, I encouraged them to be more spontaneous in their praises to the Lord. Knowing that they would not be comfortable with openly sharing their praises, I suggested we read passages of

praise from Scripture. This resulted in a wonderful time of praise.

It has been over 30 years since I did this exercise with the Columbia University fellowship and I have done it many times since with different-sized groups and under various circumstances. Almost every time, it has proven to be effective in leading us into God's presence. On a number of occasions, the experience has been overwhelmingly powerful and has transitioned into meaningful and uplifting times of intercessory prayer. I began to call it "Scripture Reading Praise Concert" because as we read the Scripture aloud, we formed a symphony or concert of many voices blending together, praising God under the direction or guidance of the Holy Spirit.

## **Benefits of SRPC**

The exciting thing about this exercise is that it provides a way to praise God in spoken prayer. In my experience with leading prayer, I find there is a weakness among many when it comes to verbal, spontaneous praise of God. When instructed to praise God, the response usually becomes one of giving thanks to God. Thanksgiving is a directive for Christians, but it is not the same as praise. We are told to "Enter his (God's) gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise." (Psalm 100:3)

Secondly, this exercise can serve as a bridge to bring charismatic and non-

charismatic believers together. Charismatics who are familiar with spontaneous praise can expand their praise vocabulary by reading Scriptures of praise. Non-charismatics who are familiar with praying the Scriptures can learn spontaneous praise and move to a deeper level of oneness with the Spirit.



### **Group Experiences Using Scripture Reading Praise Concert**

As I mentioned earlier, I began using this exercise with a small group of Columbia University students. Many times since, I have done the praise reading with InterVarsity fellowship groups. I usually do it in conjunction with other teachings on prayer and within a large group setting of 30+ students or during a weekend conference. The largest gathering in which I introduced and facilitated a praise concert included over 300 participants.

Prayer is the ideal context for introducing a praise concert and for teaching about the Holy Spirit. It is very exciting to be in a group experience in which you can sense the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit. Two concerts that stand out in my memory took place at the 2008 InterVarsity National Spiritual Formation and Prayer Conference and the National Black Student Conference.

The SF & P Conference was held at a lovely Catholic Retreat Center. Since quiet is the mood at the center, I decided to change the instructions a bit during my time of leading the Scripture Reading

Praise Concert. Instead of reading the Scriptures out loud, I requested that they read in more subdued voices. As they did that, I prayed for guidance, since I was more accustomed to the Spirit's presence during times of spontaneous, overt praise. After a while, one person began reading praises out loud. Then another individual followed, and then another, until almost everyone had participated. Finally, in conclusion, I read my praise out loud as I circled the perimeter of the group. The whole experience was electrifying.

On the third morning of the National Black Student Conference, I led the guided prayer time for the entire conference of well over 300 attendees. The expositions were from the book of Jonah, and this group of student leaders had already been receiving significant faith walk challenges. As staff, we found this group of students to be spiritually open and exciting to work with. As I prepared to lead them in prayer, I knew that the morning's exposition would deal with the idols in our lives. To move them into God's presence, I walked them through the purpose of the Scripture Reading Praise Concert. The Spirit moved so powerfully among us that we had an extended time of praise. Following a brief time of quiet, I got their attention to give them guidance for our time of continued prayer. I shared my sense of needing to pray without words and proceeded to lead them in a guided session of moaning in prayer. Instead of beginning to moan, I began to cry aloud and engage in repentant prayer. Caught up by the Spirit's overwhelming presence, others also began to shout and cry out to God. For the next hour you could hear and feel the deep

mourning of souls that sought repentance for their sins. My scheduled 20 minutes lasted the remainder of the morning session.

## **How to Do Scripture Reading Praise Concert**



### **Leadership**

Spiritually sensitive leadership is the key. The leader needs to prepare the group for the session. This may include a time of praise and worship, a message or Scripture reading about the Holy Spirit, or a personal time of confession and repentance. After the praise concert, the leader needs to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's direction in how to proceed or follow up.

### **The Reading**

- Each person needs to have a Bible or a copy of a praise section from the Scriptures. Any Bible passage of praise can be used. Suggestions: Psalm 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149 or 150.
- Allow time for silent reading of the selected Scriptures.
- Stand. Pick several people, one at a time, to read aloud 3 or 4 verses from their Scripture selection.
- After the last person has read, encourage or direct everyone to begin reading the Scriptures out loud in their normal voices (or slightly louder), as acts of praise to God. Don't mind what others are reading, just praise God.
- The Holy Spirit is the conductor of this praise concert. The movement of the

Spirit will be felt. The reading will continue until the Holy Spirit signals it to end. That signal is what I have come to refer to as a "holy hush." The talking will slowly begin to decrease until you finally hear the "sound of silence."

The length of the reading passage is not important. If the praise is continuing after the passage has been read, read it over again or select another passage to read. If the group is starting to get quiet before you are done reading the passage, then just stop reading. At other times, someone may be led to read on, out loud, even when it gets quiet.

The group leader can give further instructions depending upon the leading of the Holy Spirit. This may include

- ✧ sitting quietly for a few minutes.
- ✧ spontaneous singing or reading praise Scriptures
- ✧ a time of intercessory prayer
- ✧ prayers of repentance