



## Why does the Church sing?

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People love to sing. It is one of the most creative expressions our hearts can manage. Singing poetically articulates what we long to express. Since the majority of us are neither composers nor musicians, we search for songs that will express what we cannot on our own.

Singing plays a huge role in the life of a church. Most churches spend a great deal of their worship time singing. Singing also becomes a common source of disagreement in many churches. Since we love singing, we develop strong opinions about how and what to sing when we gather. Knowing why the church sings should recast our gaze and increase our joy

So why *does* the Church sing? Here are eight reasons; each reason includes a clear call to respond. Knowing why we sing should have an impact on how and what we sing.

### 1. We sing because God commands us. So sing obediently.

God's people are directly commanded to sing at least fifty times in the Bible. Here is one example: *"Sing praises to God, sing praises; Sing praises to our King, sing praises. For God is the King of all the earth; Sing praises with a skillful Psalm."* Psalm 47:6 It's right for God's people to acknowledge God with praise.

Since God commands us to sing, the Church should sing *obediently*. Some of us may not sing because we think we can't. Most of us won't be tapped for a solo, but our voices, however meager they may sound to us, are a joyful noise to God and to one another as we proclaim the praise due to Him. So sing with joyful obedience!

You may not sing because you don't want to sing. Perhaps you feel far from God, burdened by depression, discouraged by your circumstances, or despairing over sin. Singing with desperate honesty in the midst of that season is one of the hardest and most rewarding things we can do. When you can't find the words open the Psalms and cry them out to God. Consider Psalm 13:1-2, 5-6:

*1 How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will You hide your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart all the day? How long will my enemy be exalted over me?...5 But I have trusted in your loving-kindness; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the LORD because He has dealt bountifully with me.*

Our Father sees your grief. And He knows singing is vital to your comfort.

## **2. We sing to join creation's song. So sing resoundingly.**

1 Chronicles 16:31-34 is part of a song written for Israel as David prepares God's people to celebrate. Notice how creation is seen to praise God: *"Let the Heaven's rejoice, earth be glad, sea and all that is in them resound, fields and everything in them be jubilant, trees of the forest sing!"* In Psalm 65, *"the meadows and valleys shout for joy."* In Psalm 98: *"the seas and creatures roar, the rivers clap their hands, the mountains sing for joy."* Isaiah 49 says *"heavens shout, earth rejoice, mountains break forth in shouting."* The beauty, power, and complexity of nature sounds forth God's praiseworthiness.

We sing to join creation's song. So sing *resoundingly!* God's people have more cause to praise God than the rest of creation. We've been redeemed! The Church should drown out the song of creation. Let the mouths of angels, mountains, and oceans fall open as they hear the great song of the Redeemed.

## **3. We sing in response to God's character and saving acts. So sing joyfully!**

God's revelation evokes our praise. When we rightly consider the whole of who God is and what He's done we can't help but sing in response. Consider Psalm 98:1-3:

***1** O sing to the LORD a new song, for He has done wonderful things, His right hand and His holy arm have gained the victory for Him. **2**The LORD has made known His salvation; He has revealed His righteousness in the sight of the nations. **3**He has remembered His lovingkindness and His faithfulness to the house of Israel; All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.*

Singing is a natural response to God's faithfulness in saving His people. In Exodus 15, Israel stops to praise God for his rescue of them through the Red Sea. In 1 Samuel 2, Hannah bursts into song after God promises her a child. In Psalm 51, David, responding to God's mercy, sings joyfully to God over His faithfulness! Over and over again, we see this pattern.

In response to a victory, team and fans alike celebrate. In response to a birth announcement, the family sheds tears of joy. In response to God's character and saving acts, the Church should sing *joyfully!* We've been rescued! God is faithful to keep His promises. That's cause for joyful, exuberant praise. Yip Harburg wrote the songs for *The Wizard of Oz* (including *Over the Rainbow*). Here's what he said: "Words make you think a thought. Music helps you feel a feeling. A song makes you feel a thought."<sup>1</sup> Songs help us emotionally respond to God as He reveals Himself in the Bible.

While the goal of singing is not an emotional experience (but God's glory), singing should bring about an emotional response. Lots of things can do that: a melody, a minor key, the tempo, having people stand, transitioning to voices alone, even the lighting. These can all be helpful tools. But this is essential: the

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<sup>1</sup> PBS Newshour. (2015, October 7). Best music lesson ever: What makes "Over the Rainbow" work? [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/daily-videos/best-music-lesson-ever-what-makes-over-the-rainbow-work/>

Word of God must be the primary driver of our emotions or we are at risk of distracting ourselves from our main purpose to bring God glory.

So consider your own singing. What's really happening in the deep parts of your heart? Are you affected by God's character and saving acts to the point where you're moved – heart and mind – to joy? To the degree our hearts are affected by God's salvation, our singing will be joyful. The outward expressions of that joy will be wonderfully varied. As diverse as the people singing and the circumstances they find themselves in. What I'm referring to here is a deep, serious joy that resounds even amid trial. When we sing songs of our salvation our hearts long to proclaim what He's done. We sing in response to God's character and savings acts. So sing *joyfully*!

#### **4. We sing to align our hearts to the Word of God. So sing responsively.**

We want the Bible to shape the way we think, feel, and act. What has God said? Who has He said He is? What has He done? This should adjust and align our hearts. In Psalm 59, David pleads with God for deliverance from Saul. Amid this frustration and fear David sings to align his heart and mind to what he knows to be true about God:

*16But as for me, I shall sing of Your strength; Yes, I shall joyfully sing of Your lovingkindness in the morning For You have been my stronghold, And a refuge in the day of my distress. 17 O my strength, I will sing praises to You; For God is my stronghold, the God who shows me lovingkindness.*

Singing helps us transition from learning to action. Singing is meditation. The biblical words we sing wash over our hearts again and again.

Since we desire the Word of God to align our hearts, we want to sing *responsively*. As you sing let the words shape and conform your thoughts, emotions, and actions. Let your singing instruct your heart. Are you fearful? Take courage in God's mighty arms. Are you despairing of your sin? Remember that you are clothed in Christ's righteousness. Are you depressed? Find hope in your future rest! Instruct your heart in song. Sing responsively aligning your heart to the Word of God.

#### **5. We sing to encourage and instruct the Church. So sing discerningly.**

Colossians 3:16 is one of two New Testament commands for the church to sing to one another:

*16Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*

Notice the progression in this verse. Christians let Christ's Word, the Bible, dwell richly inside of us. From that place of strength we wisely teach and admonish fellow Christians. How are we to do this? Here, we are commanded to do it through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. We're instructing one another through song. Singing, therefore, is a kind of ministry of the Word alongside teaching and preaching. And notice our singing is infused with thankfulness. The genuineness of this singing Word ministry is demonstrated in thankfulness in our hearts toward God.

Since we sing to encourage and instruct the Church, we want to sing *discerningly*. Why discerningly? Because we sing to teach one another who God is and what He's done. This requires carefulness. New Testament scholar Gordon Fee once famously said at a conference, "show me a church's songs and I'll show you their theology." We ought to be as careful with our song choices as we would with the teaching and preaching with which we expose ourselves. To lack careful discernment is to undervalue the vital ministry of the Word that singing is meant to be.

Since singing is a ministry of the Word, we want to ensure that the congregational voices are given priority. We want to be mindful of how we organize our accompaniments so they assist the congregational voices lifted up together. This requires skill. The instruments used in worship must balance playing loud enough to encourage vigorous singing while not overpowering those same voices.

Why, then, do we have accompaniments? Because gripping melodies and engaging accompaniments greatly assist the Church in its ministry of the Word. They aide our memory and increase our enjoyment of God's good gift of music. Remember the Bible is not just prose. Its filled with poetry and song. It speaks to God's creative heart.

So, how well are we teaching one another through song? Do our songs reflect the story of the Bible which culminates in the saving work of Christ? Do our songs represent the broad range of human experience. Lament, confession, repentance, response, joyful celebration—all of these should be included in the song book of the Church. And as we sing, does our body language and vocal tones communicate that we are affected by the Words we sing? Since we sing to encourage and instruct the Church, we should sing discerningly.

## **6. We sing because the Spirit empower us. So sing dependently.**

Ephesians 5 is the second direct command for the Church to sing to one another.

*18And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, 19speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; 20always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;*

Do not get drunk with wine, but rather be filled with the Holy Spirit. As a drunk person is controlled by alcohol, a Christian ought to be controlled by the Spirit. And one result of being filled with the Spirit is

singing. Filled with the Spirit, speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart toward God. The genuineness of our singing is ensured by an attitude of thankfulness in our hearts.

Since the Spirit empowers our singing, we want to sing dependently. We don't sing in our own strength or for our own glory. We sing for God's glory with the strength and might the Spirit provides. As He refreshes our souls with the good news, we sound forth the overflow of our joyful hearts. We have seen that singing is a part of the ministry of the Word or Bible. And we know from 2 Timothy 3:16 that "all Scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness." Our singing, when it's grounded in and fed by the Word of God, is made effective when the Spirit gives it life. Without the Spirit's help, our singing is rendered meaningless and ineffective. We sing in Spirit (a heart dependent on Him) and in Truth (a mind that's active and grounded in the Bible). With the Spirit's help, our singing is useful for teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness. Just like any other ministry of the Word. We want the Spirit to work through the Bible to be the primary factor that enflames.

#### **7. We sing to evangelize non-Christians. So sing evangelistically.**

A recurring theme in the OT is singing that's intended for the nations, the gentiles, all peoples. God instructs His People to proclaim His goodness, faithfulness, and judgement. Notice Psalm 96:

*1Sing to the LORD a new song; Sing to the LORD, all the earth. 2Sing to the LORD, bless His name; Proclaim good tidings of His salvation from day to day. 3Tell of His glory among the nations, His wonderful deeds among all the peoples. 4For great is the LORD and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods. 5For all the gods of the peoples are idols, But the LORD made the heavens... 13Before the LORD, for He is coming, For He is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness And the peoples in His faithfulness.*

A former church planter in Turkey recounted that the joyful singing of his church family was a consistent factor God used to save Muslim background believers. In their experience, there was little joy in the mosque. It's one thing to proclaim the gospel. It's another thing for our lives, body language, and voices to make clear that we believe the things we sing about. When we sing we demonstrate our joyful acknowledgement of these truths. We announce the realities of God's coming judgment and the mercy He offers through the gospel. Would a non-Christian in our midst see and hear that we actually believe the things we sing? Let us sing with evangelistic fervor.

#### **8. We sing to join and anticipate the eternal song. So sing expectantly.**

The book of Revelation describes at least four times when the throne room of God is filled with singing. There is much mystery about our eternal home, but here's one thing we know: the Church will praise Him with endless song. Here's chapter 15:



*3And they sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty; Righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations! 4"Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy; For ALL THE NATIONS WILL COME AND WORSHIP BEFORE YOU, FOR YOUR RIGHTEOUS ACTS HAVE BEEN REVEALED."*

One of the great joys of singing as the Church is to anticipate what we'll spend our eternal rest doing! Jesus was slain, purchasing for the Father people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. One day they will all be gathered around His throne acknowledging His righteous acts.

Since we sing to join and anticipate the eternal song, we should sing expectantly. There are saints already worshipping around the throne. When we sing we join in that song. Singing with the Church is one of life's greatest experiences. And it's one we'll experience eternally. Let's join in and lift up our voices to the Lamb of God who has redeemed us with His blood—a church gathered from every tribe, tongue, and nation to praise Him in endless song!

So there you have it. Eight reasons why the Church sings. So Church, let's sing. Sing alone alongside your Bible reading or during your commute. Sing in your home. Help to make singing praise to our God feel normal and everyday. Fold singing into the rhythm of instruction and discipleship of your home. And sing with the Church. Prioritize gathering with your church family. Make it an immovable conviction in your soul.

*Praise God, for His eternal reign;  
Praise Him, who was for sinners slain;  
Let the Redeemed with voices raised; The  
Church resound with endless praise. Amen.*

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