

INTRODUCTION

I’m excited about sharing this message about singing with you, because I love music. One of my favorite movies of all time is the “Sound of Music” with Julie Andrews twirling in a mountain pasture singing, “The hills are alive with the sound of music!” That’s hard to beat!

It wouldn’t be a stretch to change those words to say, “The Bible is alive with the sound of music!” The first reference to singing is in Exodus 15 where God’s children sang praises to God after the miracle of crossing the Red Sea. Music permeates the entire Bible. There is even a song book in the middle of your Bible. Jesus sang with His disciples before He went to the Garden of Gethsemane. And in the climax of the Book of Revelation, God’s redeemed people are gathered around His throne singing a new song of praise to the Lord. The Bible is alive with the sound of music!

These pages are filled with God’s instructions for His children to sing. The verb “confess” appears 21 times in the Bible. The word “repent” appears 38 times in the Bible. The word “pray” appears 117 times in the Bible. The word “teach” appears 118 times in the Bible. It’s a good thing to repent, pray, and teach—but the word “sing” appears 145 times! God tells us to sing more times than He tells us to pray.

Music is a powerful force. Almost everyone alive enjoys some kind of music. God created music.

As we talk about the kind of music of God loves let’s read two almost-identical passages of scripture and then peruse some singing passages from the book of Psalms. Colossians 3:16 says, “Let 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 [grace] in your hearts to God.” This verse doesn’t stand alone, because a few pages earlier in Paul’s letter to the church at Ephesus he wrote, “Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord.” (Ephesians 5:19) God loves music. He created it. In this message I want to impress upon you both the wonderful privilege and the blessed responsibility of we have to sing praises to God. There are three exciting truths I want to share with you about God’s love of music.

1. GOD LOVES DIFFERENT KINDS OF MUSIC

You can learn a lot about a person by the kind of music they listen to. If you gave me the keys to your vehicle, I could go out in the parking lot and start your car or truck and turn on your radio or CD player. By checking your CD titles and pushing your preset radio buttons, I could learn your preferences. Some of you prefer Christian music, others country music, pop, rock, or maybe talk radio. (I might even learn of some of you still haven’t figured out how to preset your favorite stations!)

If you looked in my car you’d find I have XM radio and my presets are on music from the 1960s and 1970s, love songs, The Blend, Nashville and Fox News. I have a CD player and there are three praise CDs of music from the Passion Worship gatherings by guys like Chris Tomlin and

Matt Redman. There’s also a Nora Jones CD, one by Rascal Flatts, and one is an audio recording of the only recording of C.S. Lewis lecturing on “The Four Loves.” I like variety as you can see, and within our congregation, I’m sure there is a wide variety of tastes.

If God had a car, what kind would it be? The early disciples in the book of Acts preferred Hondas because the Bible says in Acts 2:1 on the Day of Pentecost all the disciples were gathered in one Accord. Of course, God doesn’t need a car or a car stereo—but if He did have one, what songs would make him want to turn it up? What kinds of stations would He have preset? Christian? Gospel? Country? Rock? The Bible gives us a hint when it lists three different kinds of music of God loves. The first preset on God’s car stereo would be:

(1) Psalms

The Greek word in Colossians is *psalmos*, which comes from the same Hebrew word. A psalm is a song sung which accompanied by a psaltery, a type of stringed instrument. When we sing a psalm, we are simply singing God’s Word. Right in the middle of our Bible God placed a song book with 150 different songs. I love reading the Psalms, but they were never written to be read, they were designed to be sung. The interesting thing about singing the psalms is the lyrics are often explicit—they are explicitly praise. In fact, God Himself wrote them, so you know they are G-rated. All scripture is God-breathed. That’s where we get our word “inspired.”

Likewise, today’s message is not meant for you to just hear; we’re going to “sing” it, too. Let’s look at a couple of psalms, and then sing them to God together. The Bible says, “This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” (Psalm 118:24) Another psalm says, “I will sing of Lord’s great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations.” (Psalm 89:1) Now that we’ve learned what it is, let’s sing it! “This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it; this is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it! This is the day that the Lord has made!” “I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever, I will sing; I will sing. I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever; I will sing of the mercies of the Lord. With my mouth will I make known; Thy faithfulness, Thy faithfulness. With my mouth will I make known; Thy faithfulness to all generations. I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever; I will sing of the mercies of the Lord!”

Another great thing about singing the psalms is there is an appropriate psalm for whatever situation you may find yourself. Are you happy? There are happy psalms to sing. Are you afraid? There are psalms expressing our fear and encourage us to trust God. Is your heart broken? There are psalms expressing the agony of sadness. For any emotion you face, you can find a psalm to match your need. So sing psalms! The second preset on God’s radio is set to:

(2) Hymns

Our English word for hymns is simply a transliteration of the Greek word *humnos*. Hymns may be defined as composed songs for worship/teaching. The obvious difference between a psalm and a hymn is of the words of the psalms are inspired by God; they are God’s inerrant, infallible Word. Hymns may be inspiring, but they aren’t inspired like the scripture. Hymns are written by

men and women who sat down with the intention of creating a song to honor God or to teach believers.

Those who compose hymns usually take time to pick just the right word or phrase. Like a poem set to music, hymns often rhyme and have a certain order that may include several verses and a chorus. Of course if you grew up in Baptist church, you seldom ever sang anything except the first, second, and last verses!

According to a website called hymnlyrics.org the top ten most popular hymns are:

10. In the Garden
9. It is Well with My Soul
8. Rock of Ages
7. I'll Fly Away
6. What a Friend We Have in Jesus
5. Blessed Assurance
4. Because He Lives
3. Great is Thy Faithfulness
2. Amazing Grace
1. How Great Thou Art

There may be only one type of music you love, and maybe it is hymns. My response to those who wonder why we don't sing exclusively hymns anymore is that when we used to sing *only* hymns, we were only singing one-third of the kind of music of God loves. It's not a matter of new or old or your preference or my preference, it's all about obeying God's Word—and His Word describes a variety of music. That's one reason why we will never stop singing hymns at Green Acres. It's not a matter of new or old or your preference or my preference, it's all about obeying God's Word.

We've learned the second kind of music God loves, now let's sing it. We're going to sing my favorite hymn. This song wasn't even in the top 50 most popular hymns. (but that's pretty typical for my tastes) It was written by Phillip Bliss and combines the theological truth of the death, resurrection, and return of Christ with an exclamation of praise.

“Man of sorrows! What a name for the Son of God who came; ruined sinners to reclaim!
Hallelujah, what a Savior! Bearing sin and scoffing rude, in my place condemned He stood,
sealed my pardon with His blood; Hallelujah, what a Savior! Guilty vile and helpless we,
spotless Lamb of God was He; full atonement can it be? Hallelujah, what a Savior! Lifted up was
He to die, ‘It is finished’ was His cry; now in heav’n exalted high, Hallelujah, what a Savior!
When He comes, our glorious King, all His ransomed home to bring, then anew this song we’ll
sing, Hallelujah, what a Savior!” So, God loves psalms. He loves Hymns. Let's consider the
third preset on His favorite kind of music. God also loves:

(3) Spiritual songs

A good definition of these would be simple songs of praise. The actual Greek words help us understand what these are. The phrase in the Bible is *ode pneumatikos*. We get our word “ode” from the first word, and the second word means “the activity of the Spirit.” The Greek word for Spirit is *pneuma*, which means spirit, wind, or breath, where we get our word “pneumatic.”

An ode of the spirit is a simple, spontaneous song of praise of someone sings to the Lord. Today, we usually call these praise choruses. The obvious difference between a hymn and a spiritual song is of the composer of a hymn sits down and works deliberately to structure a song. But the person who creates a praise chorus usually doesn’t have a pencil and paper—more often they’re just humming along, or sitting at a keyboard or strumming a guitar, and the Holy Spirit gives them a simple song of worship. Some of the best praise choruses were unpremeditated and unplanned.

Let me give you an example of the difference between a hymn and a spiritual song. I don’t believe of Martin Luther was just sitting at an organ and spontaneously began to sing: “A mighty fortress is our God; a bulwark never failing; our helper He amid the flood; of mortal ills prevailing...” In contrast, an unknown singer sat down at a piano years ago and began to sing and play, “God is so good; God is so good; God is so good; He’s so good to me.”

We’ve sung psalms, we’ve sung a hymn; now let’s sing a spiritual song. Last week I asked Tim Nipp to come up with a spiritual song. He can give you the whole story, but one night last week God woke him up at three in the morning and gave him the first half of the song, and then He woke up again at five and gave him the last part. Then Tim sat down at the piano, and the tune came to him. The Bible says to sing a new song to the Lord. That’s what we’re going to do. This is the first time in history of this song has been sung by a congregation to God. I believe God is paying close attention, so let’s sing it to Him! “We Worship You! Our voices raise and offer up to You our praise. Holy, Holy, Holy King, a Sacrifice of Thanks we sing.” (Words by Tim Nipp)

So, God loves different kinds of music. If you wonder why we sing the songs we do at Green Acres, it’s because we try to follow the Biblical pattern of singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Let’s learn a couple of other things about God’s taste in music:

2. GOD LOVES TO HEAR YOUR VOICE

When our television cameras pan the congregation during our praise time, the footage reveals some people standing there silently. The majority are men who look bored, and may even have their arms crossed in frustration. Fortunately, our Broadcast Director, Tibby Wright, edits most of the sour-faced, silent standers out for the television broadcast.

I never notice who sings and who doesn’t, because I’m concentrating on the Lord, not on you. But I think of the line from an old hymn that says, “Let those refuse to sing who never knew our God.”

You may be thinking, “I just can’t sing.” Really? I think what you mean to say is you think you don’t sing *well*. Everyone who can make a noise with their vocal cords can sing. What you may

be saying is of you don't sing well enough to keep from embarrassing yourself—and in order to protect your dignity, you just won't sing.

So, you say you can't sing. Is that true? Imagine someone came to you and said, “This is your lucky day! We're from a television show called ‘Sing for a Million.’ All you have to do to earn one million dollars tax free is to sing the first verse of ‘Mary had a Little Lamb.’” Would you say, “Sorry. Try someone else. I can't sing.”? I don't think so. I'll be willing to guess of you would manage to warble, “Mary had a little lamb, little lamb, little lamb, Mary had a little lamb whose fleece was white as snow.” It's all a matter of motivation. You might be motivated by a million dollars. What motivates us to sing, even if we think we don't have a great voice? It's the grace of God. Colossians 3:16 says of we should be singing with grace in our hearts.

TRUTH: When you sing from a grace-filled heart, it always sounds beautiful to God

Some of you have heard me talk about my mother before. She was a terrible singer. She was what you could call a “prisoner singer”—she was always behind a few bars and couldn't find the right key! She wasn't a monotone, because you have to have at least *one* tone to be a monotone! But that didn't stop her from singing. She would smile and make a joyful noise to the Lord. I remember standing beside her in church as a child and tugging on her skirt and saying, “Sssh! Mamma, be quiet.” When I became a mature, brilliant middle-school student, I remember telling her I wish she just wouldn't sing since it sounded so bad. I can still remember the hurt in her eyes. After that, she sang, but not as loud as before. She's in heaven now, and I since learned how stupid I was in my understanding of praise. She wasn't singing for my sake, or for the sake of the person standing in front of her, she was singing because her heart was full of grace, and it was beautiful to the Lord. I'd give anything I have if I could stand beside her right now and hear her sing again—I'd say, “Go for it, Mom! That sounds beautiful to God!”

John McArthur said it well: “The Spirit's music is not hindered by monotone, nor is it enhanced by a musical degree or a magnificent voice. Spiritual joy will shine through a song sung with a raspy off-pitch voice of a saint rejoicing in the Lord. But the joy of the Lord will be absent from a song sung with skill with a voice that rejoices only in self. Whether we sing alone in our home or car, sing with a few friends around a piano, or sing in a congregation of thousands, we should do it from a spirit-filled heart that seeks no glory but God's. God looks beyond the voice, beyond the vocal chords, into the heart.” (*Ephesians Commentary*, p. 259)

3. GOD LOVES IT WHEN YOU SING TO HIM

The key to being set free to really worship is to understand of you aren't singing to me, and I'm not singing to you. Colossians 3:16 ends by saying of we sing with grace in our hearts to God!

Let's be honest, don't we enjoy it when someone sings to us? We may act embarrassed, but when someone sings “happy birthday” to us, it makes us feel good because they care enough about us to sing to us. When someone sings, “For he's a jolly good fellow” or “We love you Conrad, oh yes we do...” it fills us with good feelings. God is the same way—He created us in His image and He has instructed us to sing praises to Him.

TRUTH: Worship is always for an audience of One

Because we are so used to being entertained, it is easy to make the mistake of thinking a worship service is to entertain the audience. If you think it is like an opera, or a play where this is the stage and we’re the performers—you’ve got it all wrong. Here’s an important spiritual truth about worship: Worship is always for an audience of One. Every song, every prayer, every offering is to be directed to God Almighty. So, instead of thinking of we’re the performers and you are the audience; think of this entire room as the stage. My job, and Mike’s job and the choir’s job is simply to prompt you to do your part in offering the sacrifice of praise to God. When we applaud, we really aren’t applauding the talents or efforts of the person or group singing. Our applause is to show appreciation to the audience of One who has filled our hearts with grace and made all this possible. That’s another reason why you need to sing praises—you are singing to Him, not to anyone else in this room.

When you sing praises to God, it does at least three things. First, it blesses the Lord. The Psalmist wrote, “Praise the Lord, O my soul; and all my inmost being, praise his holy name.” (Psalm 103:1) But singing praise also lifts you up. The Psalmist once sang a song that said, “Why are you downcast O my soul?” (Psalm 42:5). Then he goes on to sing, “Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.” (Psalm 42:11) When you sing praises to God, you will find of it changes your entire attitude.

Jack Taylor said, “Praise is at once the most powerful tonic for a tired soul and the greatest therapy for a heavy spirit. Praise is the church’s secret weapon against which the enemy has no defense and before which his ranks fall into confusion and disarray. Praise douses doubt and waters faith at the same time.” (*Hallelujah Factor*, p. 172)

The third thing singing praises does is to communicate a positive message to other people. That’s why Paul could write that we are teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Psalm 34:1-2 says, “I will extol the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips.” Then it says, “let the afflicted hear and rejoice.” Through the years people have told me when they came to Green Acres they weren’t believers, but as they stood there listening to us sing praises to God, they found their eyes filling with tears as they came to understand of we really do believe what we teach. So, when we sing praises to God three good things happen—God is blessed. We are lifted up, and those who are afflicted are encouraged as well.

CONCLUSION

Can you sing from the heart to the Lord? You can’t sing from your heart if you don’t have a song in your heart, and the only way to have a song in your heart is to have Jesus in your heart. The first part of Colossians 3:16 says, “Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.” When Jesus lives in your heart, He brings a song and puts it there. Your greatest need today may be to say, “Lord Jesus, please come into my life. Please dwell in my heart and give me a song.” That’s a prayer of God would love to answer!

During the first week in August I had the opportunity to escort our Chinese delegation of students and professors back to China. When we were in Beijing riding in a bus from our hotel to

the airport for them to get the flights to their various home cities, the students started singing songs of praise—and I wasn’t even prompting them! I confess there were tears in my eyes as they sang, “Evermore I’ll adore you; evermore bow before you; I will bless your name for evermore.” They returned to China with a new song in their hearts.

I stayed over a few days after they left to visit some missionaries and to do a little shopping. I scheduled my return trip on Monday, because that flight was about \$800 cheaper than flying on the weekend. But when Sunday morning rolled around, I regretted that decision, because I was homesick for all the people I love here in Tyler. I was walking down a main street in Beijing on Sunday morning feeling a little lonely and walked by a large church. I went in and discovered it was full of Chinese people. Every seat was filled and hundreds of people were standing around the sides and in the back. The pastor was preaching in Chinese, so I couldn’t understand what he was saying. But the people were paying close attention and taking notes. As far as I could see, I was the only Anglo there, and I felt a little out of place. I was starting to leave when the pastor finished his message and all the people stood and began to sing. The song they sang is the only song where the lyrics are the same in every language: Chinese, English, Russian, or Spanish. So I began to sing with them, “Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia...” And in that moment, I was no longer homesick. I felt at home with these brothers and sisters who were connected with God and connecting with me.

As I stood there, with tears again, I thought about that passage in Revelation where the Bible says one day in heaven people from every tribe, every tongue, and every nation will gather around the throne of God and sing praises to the Lamb. It was a foretaste of Glory Divine!

Are you a singing Christian? You’d better be. Of everything we do here, singing is about the only thing we’ll still do in heaven. There won’t be any need for preaching. (thank the Lord) You won’t need to read the Bible, because you’ll know even as you are known. You won’t need to pray, because you won’t have any needs. The only thing we’ll do in heaven that we get to practice here is to sing God’s praises. Don’t wait until then! God loves psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs—so if there is grace in your heart, then sing to Him with all your heart!

OUTLINE

TWIN PASSAGE: Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord. *Ephesians 5:19*

1. GOD LOVES DIFFERENT KINDS OF MUSIC

- (1) Psalms (*psalmos*): Singing God's Word
- (2) Hymns (*hymnos*): Composed songs for worship/teaching
- (3) Spiritual songs (*ode pneumatikos*): Simple songs of praise

2. GOD LOVES TO HEAR YOUR VOICE

TRUTH: When you sing from a grace-filled heart, it always sounds beautiful to God

3. GOD LOVES IT WHEN YOU SING TO HIM

TRUTH: Worship is always for an audience of One



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes