

Sing, Sing, Sing
The Why and What of Singing in Church
Colossians 3:15-17

So here we are at the final week of this three week series on worship. I can imagine that some of you are on brain overload from all the information that has been shared over the past two weeks.

However, realizing that this was a lot to give you, my hope is that God has challenged you in your definition of worship, and in your understanding of why we gather as a church.

As a reminder of what has already been said, in **week 1** we came up with the following definition of worship:

Worship is the joy-filled praise of and submission to a sovereign God in response to who He is, and His work on our behalf, in Christ, to make us His people, in accordance with His will.

We then talked about our corporate worship and said this:

Our reason for gathering is to encourage and equip each other for the work of the ministry as we remember and proclaim the gospel together.

We do this by walking through an order of service that reminds us of the gospel as we sit under the preaching of the Word, sing, pray, and take communion together.

Now, I think we all believe that all of these elements are important, but none of them is more debated and misunderstood than the role of singing in corporate worship.

And the hard truth, **that we each need to own**, is that most of us are musical snobs.

Our musical preferences often become the benchmark for what good worship music is, and although standards are good to have **they are often grounded in a wrong understanding of the purpose of singing in the church.**

This was my experience for a long time. Early on in my Christian walk I thought worship music was mainly about giving me an emotional experience that made me feel closer to God.

I would go to worship gatherings hoping that I could have an emotional experience only to be upset with the musical selections when they didn't do that for me.

In this way, I was lost when it came to the purpose of singing in the church, and my understanding of quality worship music was based on how each song made me feel. **In this way I missed God's great purposes for why we sing as a corporate body.**

Knowing that this could be you this morning, my hope is to start out this morning by giving you **3 reasons why we sing as a Church.**

Once we have established our reasons for singing, we can move on and talk about what we should sing. **What are the parameters we should use when picking our music for our corporate gathering? I will 3 parameters.**

With that said, let's open our Bible to Colossians 3:15-17. **This passage will give us a framework for our reasons for singing.** So let's stand in honor of God's Word as we read Colossians 3:15-17:

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Let's Pray.

Why Do We Sing:

1. We sing so that the Word would dwell in our hearts (Col. 3:15-16a)

Colossians 3:15-16a:

“And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...”

This is Paul writing to a Colossian church who has let false teachers and doctrines into their church, and like the Galatians, have started to stray from the gospel.

As a result, Paul spends most of this book reminding this church of the gospel (who Christ is, and what He has done on their behalf).

So it makes sense then that he would tell them to **“let the word of Christ dwell in them.”** Now the idea behind the word “dwell” is that the Word of God (the Bible) would live within us and affect the way we live.

But then the question is how do we get the Word of God to dwell within us? Paul, seemed to anticipate this question by giving the second half of verse 16 when it says.

“teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

So how does the word dwell in us? By singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. So the word dwells in our hearts and the hearts of the Colossians through singing.

Now understand I am not diminishing the role of teaching, reading scripture, or even memorization.

But it seems that God has set before us the reality that through singing we are able to sink the truths of God into our hearts in a deep, meaningful, and life-changing way.

So how does music do that? How does singing let the Word of God dwell in our hearts?

It does this by helping us to **remember** and **meditate** on the truths of scripture.

Remember:

Q. How many of us can remember whole paragraphs of sermons that we have listened too?

Q. How many of us can remember and sing off the top of our heads the words to “**Amazing Grace?**”

The reality is that we remember what we sing. God’s word even confirms this idea in Deuteronomy 31.

The Israelites are just about to go into the promise land, and God told Moses that Israel was going to reject Him and break the Covenant.

But instead of having Moses warn Israel, God has Moses teach them a song. As Deuteronomy 31:21 says:

And when many evils and troubles have come upon them, this song shall confront them as a witness (for it will live unforgotten in the mouths of their offspring).

Again, we don’t forget what we sing, and when we either sing scripture or truths derived from scripture they stick with us which allows God to use them to teach, correct, encourage, and comfort us as we sing and remember them again and again.

Meditate:

Psalm 1 calls us to meditate on the law of the Lord day and night. **The idea of meditate is not this sort of Zen/Yoga thing,** but biblically, it really means to think more deeply.

So we are to think deeply about the words and truths of scripture.

And singing, unlike normal speech, allows us to draw out the words, repeat phrases, or pause in between verses so that we have more time to think about and grasp the meaning of the truths we just sang.

Example:

When we sing the hymn “It Is Well,” We sing the chorus over and over again:

It is well

It is well, with my soul

It is well, it is well, with my soul.

As we do, we are able to grasp on a **heartfelt emotional level** the reality that regardless of the storms and trials that come our way, it is well with our soul because God is our refuge and strength. **A simple reading of the text does not generally have the same effect.**

So as we remember God’s word and His truths, and we meditate on them through song, they begin to dwell in our hearts and ultimately affect the way we live.

We sing so that the Word of Christ would dwell in our hearts.

2. We sing to teach and admonish one another (Col. 3:16)

Colossians 3:16:

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

Now it might seem a bit odd to you to think that your singing actually teaches and urges others to grow as a believer, but God is telling us in this verse that it does.

Let me give you an example from my own life.

When I first became a believer, life was hard. Shortly after confessing Christ I was at work one morning when I had a severe panic attack. I had never had one before in my life, so it hit me like a ton of bricks.

This was the beginning of what felt like the worst 8 months of my life. I remember writing prayer after prayer in a prayer journal just asking God to take these anxieties and panic attacks away, and trying to figure out why I was going through this.

But God didn’t take it away for 10 months, and to this day I still have no idea why that happened beyond the fact that it was part of God’s plan for my good and His glory.

However, during that time I was attending a campus ministry where we would sing the song “**Better is One Day.**”

Better is one day in your courts, Better is one day in Your house, Better is one day in Your courts, than thousands elsewhere.

And even though my situation was hard, God used His people, singing together, to teach me that even though today is hard, **one day** with Jesus is far better than a thousand elsewhere, and that **one day** I will be with Him in His eternal courts and house forever.

Even though it was hard, even though I wanted to give up, God taught me and reminded me through His people in song, that life with Him is better than any other, and that one day I will be in His presence forever.

Now I don't know your situation, but I can imagine that you all have songs that God uses, as we sing them together, to encourage you, teach you, and remind you to endure through the trials and tribulations in this life.

Likewise, God is using you, **as you sing**, to encourage and teach someone else the truths of scripture that they would also endure, with joy, the trials of this life.

3. We sing to respond to who God is and His work on our behalf (3:16b-17)

...singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

So we sing that the Word of God would dwell in our hearts, and we sing to teach and spur each other on in our faith. But all of this is done **“with thankfulness in our hearts to God...and we do it in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”**

This means that all of our singing is not just about God, **but is also to God.**

If we go back to our definition of Worship:

Worship is the joy-filled praise of and submission to a sovereign God in response to who He is, and His work on our behalf, in Christ, to make us His people, in accordance with His will.

We are reminded that we sing to God with thankfulness in our hearts in **response to who He is and what He has done for us in Christ.** We can also see this clearly in Colossians 3 if we back up to verses 3-4 of Colossians 3. They say:

For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

When we understand that verses 15-17 are in response to these truths we come away realizing that we are to sing with thankfulness in our hearts to God because our life is hidden with Christ, and we will one day appear with Him in glory.

However, this is not just meant to be a passing thank you, **but it is meant to be a heartfelt and emotional response to God's and His work.**

Puritan theologian and pastor Jonathan Edwards says it this way:

“The duty of singing praises to God seems to be given wholly to excite and express religious affections. There is no other reason why we should express ourselves to God in verse rather than in prose and with music, except that these things have a tendency to move our affections.”

Again, our singing should be a heartfelt and emotional response to God’s work. It should excite our affections.

Now, I realize that most of you will probably not raise your hands or get overly exuberant when you sing, but at least realize that an emotional response to God is a good thing.

As Psalm 100:1-2, 5 say:

*Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth!
Serve the LORD with gladness!
Come into his presence with singing!*

*For the LORD is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.*

It is joy in response to who God is.

So we sing so that the word would dwell in our hearts, we sing to teach and admonish one another, and we sing in response to God.

In light of these truths then what should we sing?

What Should We Sing:

1. We should sing songs that are diverse (Col. 3:16)

Colossians 3:16 tells us to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Now I am not going to try and tell you what all those mean because many really smart people disagree on this, but what I can generally say is that it is a **call to sing all kinds of songs.**

And for us as a church we take this to mean that we should sing songs that are old and new, hymns and choruses, stylistically varied, and cover all the themes that the Bible gives us.

Now, remember, I said at the beginning that we are all on some level musical snobs, and our preferences often become the benchmark for good worship music.

But when we sing songs that are both old and new, hymns, and choruses, and from a variety of styles we are not only worshipping together, we are joining in song with Christians all over the world and from ages past.

In this way we become connected to the global and historical church, and are given a picture of Christianity and worship music that is bigger than our own little body of believers.

This means that we can and should sing a great hymn like “**How Great Thou Art**” which connects us to our brothers and sisters from 1800’s while singing “**Forever (We Sing Hallelujah)**” by Kari Jobe which connects us to our own cultural context today.

And since they are both communicating heartfelt truth about God, we should sing them with all the passion and voice that we have in our being as we sing praise to our God, our Savior, and our King.

This keeps us from believing that the only good worship music is our personal preferred style. It keeps us from being snobs.

We also want to sing songs that are diverse in themes. The Bible is full of many different themes from praise and adoration, to confession and lament, to God’s goodness and love, and our sinfulness and need for Jesus.

The reality is that there are a lot of biblical themes.

And they are meant to give us an accurate picture of who God is, who we are, what He’s done for us in Christ, and how we are to respond.

And when we fail to sing of all of these themes we run the risk of becoming deficient in our understanding of who God is, and who we are.

So for example:

If we sang lots of songs about God’s love, but never sang songs about God’s justice, we might start to think that God is so full of love that He will never judge anyone or send them to hell.

In this way our music shapes our theology. So we must sing of all the varied themes and subjects in the Bible. This will give us a more complete picture and understanding of God Himself.

So singing diverse songs connects us to the global and historical church, and singing the diverse themes of scripture give us an accurate view of God, ourselves, and our response to Him.

2. We should sing songs that are theologically precise

If we want God’s word to dwell in our hearts and we are to teach one another, and respond rightly to God’s greatness, **then we must sing music that in accordance with God’s Word.**

This means that our music must be true and should not potentially blur things which are clear in scripture.

For Example:

The song “Above All” by Michael W. Smith has these words in the chorus:

**Crucified
Laid behind a stone
You lived to die
Rejected and alone
Like a rose
Trampled on the ground
You took the fall
And thought of me
Above all**

This is a great chorus up until the last line, “**You thought of me above all.**” Why you might ask? Because it is not theologically accurate to say that the main motivating factor in Jesus dying on the cross was our Salvation.

Look at Jesus words in John 7:18:

The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood.

Jesus is making it clear that He was sent to seek the glory of the Father.

Or Jeremiah 13:11 says:

For as the loincloth clings to the waist of a man, so I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, declares the LORD, that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory,

So God created people and draws a people to Himself not to make much of them, but to make much of Himself. **He does it for His own glory.**

So it is incorrect to say that “He thought of me above all” when scripture is clear that Jesus is thinking first and foremost about the glory of God in what He is doing.

If we are singing songs that are theologically deficient then we run the risk of creating Christians who are deficient in their walks with Christ because they are believing false things about God.

So our music must be theologically precise.

3. We should sing songs that are God-centered and Gospel-centered.

If our worship is in response to Who God is and His work on our behalf in Christ then these two categories should make up the vast majority of the music that we sing. So what does God-centered and gospel-centered mean?

God-centered:

This means that our songs should praise God and be directed toward Him and should not be focused on our subjective feelings or purely on the benefits that we get from Him.

Now there is a time and place where we can reflect upon ourselves, our state before God, and what we has given us, but it should always be connected with bringing God glory.

This takes the majority of our focus as a corporate body off of ourselves and puts it on the author and perfecter of our faith.

This is why we sing the song “Glory to God Forever” by the group FEE. It centers itself on who God is, His acts in creation as the sovereign King of Kings and Lord of Lords. **Then in response to this we say, “take my life and let it honor you that you might get the glory.”**

Gospel-centered:

Understand that we sing about God and submit to His will because of what he has done to redeem us both individually and corporately through the work of Christ. This means that our response to God is always set within the context of the grace that we have received in Christ.

Our music then, should focus on the grace that we have received in Christ and should point us away from the idea that our own merits can somehow earn us favor with God.

Now we can and should sing about our devotion to God, but we must make sure that it is always in response to His divine action on our behalf in Christ.

This is why we sing songs like **“Christ be all around me.”** It is a prayer to God that Christ would be seen in all that we do **because of the life, death, and shed blood of Christ.**

In this way our songs always point to something and someone greater than ourselves.

Conclusion:

Summary:

So we sing that the word would dwell in our hearts, teach and admonish one another, and allow us to respond to who God is and His work on our behalf in Christ, as we sing diverse, theologically precise, God and gospel-centered songs.

Does this mean that there will be songs that you love that we won't sing? Probably. Why?

Because we all love songs that maybe good for our own personal hearts, but may not fit the criteria of what is best for God's gathered people.

But my hope is that you will now be able to sing each song, even if it isn't your favorite, with an understanding that we sing them with a purpose.

And may you now be better equipped to respond to God's glory with a whole-hearted affection for Christ, as you make a joyful noise in song to our Lord and King.

Let's Pray.