

Church Music – Why We Sing

Wartrace Baptist Church, March 15, 2026

Music is one of the universal human activities given to us for pleasure, utility, and most importantly...

Worship

[Music can name the unnamable and communicate the unknowable.](#) – Leonard Bernstein, *Leonard Bernstein (1976). “The Unanswered Question: Six Talks at Harvard”, p.140, Harvard University Press*

This mysterious power has made some people mistrust music:

"...music is like a drug, whoever acquires the habit can no longer devote himself to important activities. We must completely eliminate it."^[36] Ayatollah Khomeini

I'm so thankful that as Christians we are a singing people.

So, why do we sing?

REASON #1 Singing (and music) is written into the history of the bible, starting from Creation. Music comes from creation itself and is woven through both New Testament and Old Testament.

- Gen. 2:23 The first love song:

“This one finally is bone of my bones,
And flesh of my flesh;
This one shall be called ^[w]Woman,
Because this one was taken out of ^[m]Man.”

- Genesis 4:21 the invention of musical instruments

- The Bible talks about music in daily life: work, weddings and feasts, love songs (Song of Songs), decadent songs (Amos 6:4-5), futility songs (Ecclesiastes), military songs (Num. 21:14, the Book of Wars of YHWH – the Shofar!), and laments (2 Sam. 1:17 – 27, David lamenting Saul and Jonathan’s death)
- Different kinds of songs
- The Psalms, David the great composer
- Music of the temples
- Music of Jesus and the New Testament
- Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs

Music, like everything else, has become corrupted by the fall.

2 examples

Amos 6:4-5 – music of decadent luxury

Those who lay down on beds of ivory
 And sprawl on their couches
 And eat lambs from the flock
 And calves from the midst of the stall,
⁵Who improvise to the ^[b]sound of the harp,
 And like David have ^[c]composed songs for themselves,
⁶Who drink wine from ^[d]sacrificial bowls
 While they anoint themselves with the first *pick* of the oils,
 Yet they have not grieved over the destruction of Joseph.

Exodus 32:17 - 20

Then Joshua heard the sound of the people ^[f]as they shouted. And he said to Moses, “There is a sound of war in the camp.” ¹⁸ But he said,

“It is not the sound of the cry of triumph,
 Nor is it the sound of the cry of defeat;
 But the sound of singing I hear.”

¹⁹ Now it happened, as soon as ^[g]Moses came near the camp, that he saw the calf and *the* dancing; and Moses’ anger burned, and he threw the tablets from his hands and shattered them ^[h]at the foot of the mountain. ²⁰ Then he took the calf which they had made and burned *it* with fire and ground it to powder and scattered it over the surface of the water and made the sons of Israel drink *it*.

Probably similar to the revelry of the priests of Baal in 1 Kings 18 – combined with piercing their own skin to make blood flow.

2 ways of departing from worshipful music:

- Music to satisfy the flesh/desires/entertainment
- Music of rebellion, idolatry

The types of worship music/singing in the bible:

- Song, Heb. sir (Song of the Sea, and Israel’s “National Anthem”) thanksgiving for God’s work, historical accounts

Song of the Sea

15 Then Moses and the sons of Israel sang this song to Yahweh ^[a]and said,

“^[b]I will sing to Yahweh, for He ^[a]is highly exalted;
The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea.

² ^[a]Yah is my strength and song,
And He has become my salvation;
This is my God, and I will praise Him;
My father’s God, and I will extol Him.

³ Yahweh is a warrior;
Yahweh is His name.

Then at the end:

20 And Miriam the prophetess, Aaron’s sister, took the tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with ^[c]dancing. **21** And Miriam answered them,

“Sing to Yahweh, for He ^[c]is highly exalted;
The horse and his rider He has hurled into the sea.

Use of musical form and the truth of real history!!!!

REASON #2 Music unites the people of God

Israel's "National Anthem" Deuteronomy 32:

⁷ Remember the ancient days,
Consider the years from generation to generation.
Ask your father, and he will declare to you,
Your elders, and they will speak to you.
⁸ When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance,
When He separated the sons of ^[d]man,
He set the boundaries of the peoples
According to the number of the ^[e]sons of Israel.
⁹ **For Yahweh's portion is His people;
Jacob is the allotment of His inheritance.**

Our last verse of our national anthem:

O thus be it ever when freemen shall stand
Between their lov'd home and the war's desolation!
Blest with vict'ry and peace may the heav'n rescued land
Praise the power that hath made and preserv'd us a nation!
Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,
And this be our motto—"In God is our trust,"
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

Lyrics, Francis Scott Key

Music brings the people of God together, uniting the nation across generations –
Moses dying on the mountain, passing charge onto Joshua and younger generation.
Deuteronomy 32.

Other types of words for music:

- praise (hallel, Heb., to be directed to God for who He is)
- hymn (Tehilla, Heb. related to last point, more communal) Ps. 145, 113, 135, 145-147)
- thanksgiving (hoda/toda, Heb.) Aid in crisis, lament that becomes praise
- play an instrument, strings or percussion (zimra, Heb.)

REASON #3 In worship **BEAUTY** is joined to and controlled by **TRUTH** and **AMPLIFIES** truth to help it speak to our **HEARTS** as the Church.

The **EXPERIENCE** of music can cloud, confuse judgement, ignore truth, accept falsehoods because it is aesthetically pleasing.

The **TRUTH** of scripture can be so jealously guarded that we mistrust the emotional nature of music.

The right balance:

The Psalms: Our God is worthy to be praised beautifully for his character and attributes

- His majesty Ps 145:3 **“Great is Yahweh, and highly to be praised, And His greatness is unsearchable”.**
- His grace Ps 107 **Oh give thanks to Yahweh, for He is good, For His lovingkindness endures forever.**
- His kingship Ps 99:4 **Enter His gates with ^[e]thanksgiving And His courts with praise.**
- His creation Ps 33:2-9 **By the word of Yahweh the heavens were made, And by the breath of His mouth all their host.**
- Giving Israel the promised land Ps 105:8 **He has remembered His covenant forever, The word which He commanded for a thousand generations**
- Judgement of enemies Pss. 75:10 **And all the horns of the wicked I will cut off, But the horns of the righteous will be raised up.**
- Sovereignty, Ps 92:10 **But You have raised up my horn like *that of the wild ox*; I have ^[e]been anointed with fresh oil.**

Psalms are musically arranged and used as a model for responsive praise.

Psalms keep attention squarely focused on the work of the Lord, minimizing the personal perspective of the Psalmist to a humble servant, one in need of saving, strengthening, or confessing sin and weakness.

Responsive and antiphonal singing was an Old Testament idea that made its way into the church.

Sing, “I Have Decided To Follow Jesus” #434 attributed possibly to an Indian Missionary, traditional Assam melody

1. I have decided to follow Jesus;
I have decided to follow Jesus;
I have decided to follow Jesus;
No turning back; no turning back.
2. If no one joins me, still I will follow;
If no one joins me, still I will follow;
If no one joins me, still I will follow;
No turning back; no turning back.
3. The cross before me, the world behind me;
The cross before me, the world behind me;
The cross before me, the world behind me;
No turning back, no turning back.

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I Have Decided to follow Jesus.

- ১। যীচুৰেই পাছত যাবলৈ ললোঁ, (৩)
ঘুৰি নাযাওঁ, ঘুৰি নাযাওঁ ।
- ২। সংসাৰখন ত্যাগি, ক্ৰুচকাঠ তুলি (৩)
তেওঁৰ পাছ ললোঁ, তেওঁৰ পাছ ললোঁ ।
- ৩। যদিও কোনো মোৰ লগত নাহে, (৩)
ঘুৰি নাযাওঁ, ঘুৰি নাযাওঁ ।
- ৪। তেওঁক আঁসে নকৰি মই চলিলে, (৩)
কিৰীটি পাম, কিৰীটি পাম ।

চিয়োন মাৰাক

David, soldier, general, king, poet, composer

- Saul hired as a court musician
- Inspired by the Spirit of God
- Music for bringing up the Ark to Jerusalem

1 Chronicles 15

¹⁶Then David said to the chiefs of the Levites to appoint their relatives **the singers**, with instruments of music, **harps, lyres, loud-sounding cymbals**, to raise a **sound of gladness**. ¹⁷So the Levites appointed Heman the son of Joel, and from his relatives, Asaph

the son of Berechiah; and from the sons of Merari their relatives, Ethan the son of Kushaiah, ¹⁸ and with them their relatives of the second rank, Zechariah, ^[c]Ben, Jaaziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattithiah, Eliphelehu, Mikneiah, Obed-edom, and Jeiel, the gatekeepers. ¹⁹ So the singers, Heman, Asaph and Ethan *were appointed* to sound **aloud cymbals of bronze**; ²⁰ and Zechariah, Aziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab, Maaseiah, and Benaiah, with ^[d]**harps set according to alamoth**; ²¹ and Mattithiah, Eliphelehu, Mikneiah, Obed-edom, Jeiel, and Azariah, to lead with ^[e]**lyres set according to the sheminith**. ²² Chenaniah, chief of the Levites, was *in charge of* the ^[f]singing; he gave instruction in singing because he had understanding. ²³ Berechiah and Elkanah were gatekeepers for the ark. ²⁴ Shebaniah, Joshaphat, Nethanel, Amasai, Zechariah, Benaiah, and Eliezer, **the priests, blew the trumpets before the ark of God**. Obed-edom and Jehiah also *were* gatekeepers for the ark.

²⁵ So *it was* David, with the elders of Israel and the commanders over thousands, who went to bring up the ark of the covenant of Yahweh from the house of Obed-edom with gladness. ²⁶ Now this happened because God was helping the Levites who were carrying the ark of the covenant of Yahweh. And they sacrificed seven bulls and seven rams. ²⁷ Now David was clothed with a robe of fine linen with all the Levites who were carrying the ark, as well as the **singers and Chenaniah the leader of the singing *with* the singers**. David also wore a linen ephod. ²⁸ Thus all Israel was bringing up the ark of the covenant of Yahweh with shouting, and with sound of **the ^[g]horn, with trumpets, with loud-sounding cymbals, with harps, and lyres**.



Kinnor – Harp

Source: Armstrong Museum of Biblical Archeology

<https://armstronginstitute.org/905-the-instruments-of-the-bible>



Lute

Like mandolin, archeological find from the area of Dan, 15 B.C.

Trumpets – Shofar

Trumpets – Silver trumpets – Numbers 10:8-10

The priestly sons of Aaron, moreover, shall blow the trumpets; and ^[b]this shall be for you a perpetual statute throughout your generations. ⁹Now when you go to war in your land against the adversary who attacks you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, that you may be remembered before Yahweh your God and be saved from your enemies. ¹⁰Also in the day of your gladness and in your appointed ^[c]feasts, and on the first *days* of your months, you shall blow the trumpets over your burnt offerings and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; and they shall be as a remembrance of you before your God. I am Yahweh your God.”

- David trained musicians for worship in the temple for his son Solomon 1 Chron. 25 by designating families for service. *These men came from the army!*
- Music continued in the temple, but kings started wavering in commitment.

What does this have to do with our modern worship?

- The early church doesn't have many records of instruments used in worship, possibly because they spent a good amount of time meeting secretly.
- Instrumental music may have been associated with pagan idolatrous worship, but over time instruments became a part of worship. Not described in New Testament, but not prohibited.
- A few mentions of music in the book of Acts.

After a long time of the institutionalization of music-making in the church (choirs of monks, priests, chant, the mass) corporate worship became the practice mostly after the Reformation. John Calvin, Martin Luther and others conceived of **Psalters** (transliterations

of the Psalms into native tongues) that put them in meters that allowed multiple verses to be sung to the same melody.

Listen to this performance of Psalm 100, from the Genevan Psalter

Make a loud shout to Yahweh, all the earth.

² Serve Yahweh with gladness;

Come before Him with joyful songs.

³ Know that Yahweh, He is God;

It is He who has made us, and ^[b]not we ourselves;

We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

⁴ Enter His gates with ^[c]thanksgiving

And His courts with praise.

Give thanks to Him, bless His name.

⁵ For Yahweh is good;

His lovingkindness endures forever

And His faithfulness, generation unto generation.

Hymns are “a song of praise. In ancient Greek culture, a *hymnos* was musical praise directed to gods or heroes of the day. In Christianity, hymns are directed to the one true God, of course.”

Source, Got Questions.org, “What are Hymns”

Technically, hymns had regular meters similar to ballads in lyrical poetry, and organized in stanzas. A common organization of hymns is to take lines of 8 beats and contrast them with lines of 6 beats. Look for what composers call “tone painting” at high points in the melody at strategic words.

656 Ein Feste Burg is Unser Gott, Martin Luther

1 A mighty fortress is our God,
a bulwark never failing;
our helper he, amid the flood
of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe
does seek to work us woe;
his craft and power are great,
and armed with cruel hate,
on earth is not his equal.

2 Did we in our own strength confide,
our striving would be losing,
were not the right Man on our side,
the Man of God's own choosing.
You ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is he;
Lord Sabaoth his name,
from age to age the same;
and he must win the battle.

3 And though this world, with devils filled,
should threaten to undo us,
we will not fear, for God has willed
his truth to triumph through us.
The prince of darkness grim,
we tremble not for him;
his rage we can endure,
for lo! his doom is sure;
one little word shall fell him.

4 That Word above all earthly powers
no thanks to them abideth;
the Spirit and the gifts are ours
through him who with us sideth.
Let goods and kindred go,
this mortal life also;
the body they may kill:

God's truth abideth still;
his kingdom is forever!

A Mighty Fortress vs. 2, John Piper translation

With our power nothing is accomplished.
We are very soon lost.
The right man fights for us
Whom God himself has chosen.
Do you ask who that is?
His name is Jesus Christ,
The Lord of hosts,
And there is no other God.
The battlefield he must hold.

To whom are we singing? Does the song/hymn make it clear?

Father, Man of God, Lord Sabaoth, Christ Jesus, Spirit

Is what the song/hymn says correct about God's character? Theology?

A Mighty Fortress tells us about....

Chorus to "Reckless Love" by Cory Asbury

Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God
Oh, it chases me down, fights 'til I'm found, leaves the ninety-nine
I couldn't earn it, and I don't deserve it, still, you give yourself away
Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God, yeah

"Is it accurate to describe God's love as 'overwhelming, never-ending, and reckless?'"

Is the hymn/song describing the lyricist's experience more than the works of God?

Consider this quote:

"Glenn Packiam, a former worship leader and songwriter turned pastor, said understanding how songs get written — or how they get chosen for worship — is a

complicated task. And it often starts by trying to figure out what song, or what message, works best in a local congregation.

"Our No. 1 priority was to write songs for the people in our church," said Packiam, who led worship for years at New Life Church in Colorado Springs. "We wanted to write songs that helped the church find language for the various experiences that we're going through."

Source: Christianity Today , "Few worship leaders avoid Hillsong, Bethel songs despite controversies and scandal" July 13, 2023.

Does the song stand on its own, proclaiming the truth of God's Word without explanation? (Source: Should We Use Bethel Songs in Worship? 4 Diagnostic Questions, Todd Wagner, The Gospel Coalition, June 2019.)

You Say

Lauren Daigle

I keep fighting voices in my mind that say I'm not enough
Every single lie that tells me I will never measure up
Am I more than just the sum of every high and every low?
Remind me once again just who I am because I need to know
Ooh-oh

You say I am loved when I can't feel a thing
You say I am strong when I think I am weak
And you say I am held when I am falling short
And when I don't belong, oh, You say I am Yours
And I believe, oh, I believe
What You say of me
I believe

The only thing that matters now is everything You think of me
In You, I find my worth, in You, I find my identity
Ooh-oh

You say I am loved when I can't feel a thing
You say I am strong when I think I am weak
And you say I am held when I am falling short
When I don't belong, oh, You say I am Yours
And I believe, oh, I believe
What You say of me

Oh, I believe

Taking all I have, and now I'm laying it at Your feet
You have every failure, God, You have every victory
Ooh-oh

You say I am loved when I can't feel a thing
You say I am strong when I think I am weak
You say I am held when I am falling short
When I don't belong, oh, You say I am Yours
And I believe, oh, I believe
What You say of me
I believe

Oh, I believe
Yes, I believe
What You say of me
I believe

58 uses of the personal pronouns I, me, my, I'm

22 uses of You, you, your

1 God

We can do better than this, and go deeper in our singing, letting the Word of God richly teach our hearts and minds to glorify Him.

REASON #4 “Christians must sing, not out of a sense of duty, but as a natural and spontaneous response to the exhibition of divine glory in creation (Rom. 1:19-21) and their own experience of salvation”. Source: For the Glory of God, Daniel I. Block, p. 237

Psalm 98 Sing to Yahweh a new song,
For He has done wondrous deeds

We need to remember that new songs coming from His people are important alongside of the long and varied tradition of hymns.

New Testament Music

Jesus sang (probably) the Hallel (Ps. 118, Passover Psalm) with his disciples in the upper room:

²⁶ And after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Psalm 118

The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief corner *stone*.

²³ This is from Yahweh;

It is marvelous in our eyes.

²⁴ This is the day which Yahweh has made;

Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

²⁵ O Yahweh, save!

O Yahweh, succeed!

Paul to the New Testament church at Ephesus:

Ephesians 15

¹⁵ Therefore look carefully how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ redeeming the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ On account of this, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, ^[1] for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ **speaking to ^[1] one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;** ²⁰ always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to ^[k] God, even the Father; ²¹ ^[1] and being subject to one another in the ^[m] fear of Christ.

- Singing and making music shows that we are filled with the Spirit
- Music promotes community of believers
- We thank God through music, in all circumstances

Sing #98 Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing

Dear Lord Jesus, even as we pray for the music ministry, Christi, the choir and instrumentalists, I pray that we all joyfully glorify Jesus as a body and as individuals, making melody in our hearts. Help join truth and beauty together in the perfect balance, and give us the heart of David, a musician and man after God's own heart. Help us express in song who you are and what you've done for us through Jesus, truly, richly, and beautifully. Thanks be to God, Amen

Questions?