

Let's Sing!

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Preacher: Adrian Barnes

[0 : 00] Can you think of something that you really enjoy, but are actually really bad at? Well, actually, you're probably struggling, I don't know, because we tend to enjoy what we are good at, and if we are hopeless at something, we often don't enjoy it.

I can raise my hand and say golf. I'm hopeless at golf and I tend to not enjoy it. But I think there might be one fairly common exception. And that's singing.

Most of us enjoy to sing, regardless of whether we're particularly good at it. Now, if you don't believe me, what I challenge you to do is go turn on your TVs and watch a reality show like Pop Idols.

Now, if you don't know the premise, basically anybody can walk in off the street and they can perform before a panel of judges. And these judges are world-renowned producers and musicians. And if they like you, you move on to the next round and hopefully start them.

If they don't, it's cheers and goodbye. But if you watch particularly the first few episodes of every season, you will quickly realize that people love to sing, even if they can't.

[1 : 13] You will also realize people are tone-deaf and delusional, but that's beside the point. People love to sing, but have you ever wondered why? We love to sing in church as well, don't we?

Churches have always sung right from the beginning. The form and the style may have varied over the years, and it varies from church to church, but we've always sung.

And singing, if you think about it, takes up a good portion of our service. We sing four or five songs every week, but we never talk about singing. And like everything else that we do on a Sunday, we should not be doing it blindly.

We should be thinking and understanding how and why we're doing it and what we're doing. And so this morning, we are going to be looking at how we worship God in song.

And I'm going to be doing that by asking three questions. Why we worship, how we worship, and then sort of the benefits of worship, or what happens when we sing.

[2 : 14] Now, as I said, this came about because of a book. It was an excellent book that I read called Sing by Keith and Kristen Getty. If you don't know their names, you know their songs, because we've sung half of them already this morning.

And they've written many of the modern hymns and songs that we sing today. And it's a book I'd highly recommend. It's not just for a music team to read. It's something for somebody in the congregation can read it and enjoy it and will benefit from it.

And because we're going to be talking about singing, we're going to take a break, and you're going to get a break from my voice at certain points during the sermon. And we're going to respond in song.

So, the first question we need to ask is, why do we sing? And there are three main reasons. And the first goes back to my opening question about why most people like to sing.

And the reason we like to sing is because we were created to sing. We all like music, don't we? Hands up anybody who doesn't like any form of music.

[3 : 20] Music moves us. It creates emotions in us. It takes us back. It reminds us of a memory of a time and a place when a song was playing. And the reason that happens is because the Creator has programmed us to like music.

Genesis tells us that we've been created in God's image, in his likeness. In chapter 1 and verse 26 and 27, it says, Now, to be created in the image of God doesn't mean that we look like God, but it means that we've been given some of his attributes.

And so, we create. We appreciate beauty. And music is both creative and beautiful. Well, some of it. There's some stuff out there trying to pass itself off as music, and it's just terrible, but that's

another story.

But we were created with an ultimate purpose. And it summed up nicely in the first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

And those two things, glorifying God and enjoying him, are not separate. Not as though we do the one and then later on we do the other. They go together. As we glorify God, we enjoy him.

[4 : 48] And if we're enjoying him, we are glorifying him. And I can think of no more practical example of that when we sing. As our voices are raised in praise to God, and our hearts are lifted up by the words that we sing and are encouraged, we are fulfilling our very purpose that God has given us.

And when we sing, we join in with the rest of creation in praising its creator. As we saw from our reading from Psalm 98, verses 7 and 9, Let the sea resound and everything in it, the world and all who live in it.

Let the rivers clap their hands. Let the mountains sing together for joy. Let them sing before the Lord. So God created everything to give himself glory and praise, and he made us to sing.

But just in case we didn't get it, he also left us some instructions. And we've been commanded to sing. God's word very clearly tells us that we should sing.

Back to Psalm 98 that Alan read right at the beginning of the service. It gives us a very clear example of that. It says, sing to the Lord. And there are about 50 other similar instructions in scripture.

[5 : 59] Now many of those commands are in the Psalms. And have you noticed how the Psalms often have a title and an instruction, sort of a for the director of music or to the tune of?

And that's because the Psalms are songs. Basically like a Hebrew hymnal. And they contain songs that are appropriate for all occasions. Now that's something else that's important to remember.

It's easy to sing when you're in a good mood or when things are going well. But the command to sing is not conditional on you being happy and in a good space.

We are called to sing regardless of our circumstances. And I know that may not be easy. It would be unrealistic to be all smiley and happy at a funeral, for example.

Physically, we could be choked up. But the words just not coming out. Instead, tears are streaming down our cheeks. But that's okay, as you'll see when we get to the how we sing later on.

[6 : 57] But we can and we should sing in all circumstances. And maybe you're going, oh, come on, Adrian, cut me some slack. I've had a rough week. It's Monday, tomorrow. I know how much work I've got on my desk.

I just don't feel like singing. Well, consider the week that the reformer, Jan Hus, had in July 1415, when he was burnt at the stake. He died singing a hymn, as many of the other martyrs did.

Our greatest example we have, our Lord Jesus Christ, right after he had shared the Last Supper with his disciples, in Matthew 26, verse 30, it said, when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

And what happened on the Mount of Olives? He was arrested. And then in his most difficult hour, Jesus quotes lyrics from a song. Psalm 22, verse 1.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And I'm sure in his mind he was remembering the rest of it. Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer.

[8 : 00] By night, but I find no rest. Verse 3. Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One. You are the one Israel praises. And so God commands us to sing.

But like all his commands, they are not arbitrary. There's good reason, and therefore are good, and we'll look at that a little bit later as well. But it's not just a dutiful obedience that we are called to sing.

We should also sing because we are compelled to sing. The word compelled is a strong one, but given the magnitude of what God has done for his people, can there be any other logical response?

The apostle Paul had a passion for the gospel and for the church, and he explains why in 2 Corinthians 5, verse 14 and 15. And he says, For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.

And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised again. And so we call as Christians not to live for ourselves, but for him who died for us.

[9 : 11] We've just finished a sermon series on Ephesians, and we're reminded of how bad things were for us, just how dire our situation was. In Ephesians 2, verses 1 to 3, it says, As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

All of us lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

We were dead. We were walking around, but dead. You remember the zombie illustration? But praise God, it continues with this mind-blowing truth in verse 4.

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in our transgressions.

It is by grace you have been saved. And so we come to God, dead, deserving nothing but his wrath and his anger. But instead, we receive his love and his grace and are given new life as Christ died on the cross, bearing the very punishment that our sins deserved.

[10 : 35] And more than that, because Christ died for us, we've been given freedom. Listen to what Jesus says in John 8, verse 31. To the Jews who had believed, Jesus said, If you hold to my teachings, you are really my disciples.

Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. They answered him, We are Adam's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we will be set free?

Jesus replied, Very truly, I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

And the freedom that Jesus gives us is not just freedom from sin, but freedom to do what we couldn't do beforehand, and that is to properly praise and glorify him wholeheartedly.

So the question is less, why do we sing? But more, how can we not sing? How can we not burst forth in praise because Christ has freed us to do so?

[11 : 44] So let's stand and respond to that with our next song, Man of Sorrows, Lamb of God. So God wants us to sing, and he's given us good reason to sing. But how does God want us to sing?

Thankfully, what God wants has little to do with our vocal talents, which is good news for most of us, myself included. You may have noticed when I'm leading, I step back from the microphone when the song's on.

Have you ever thought why? It's for your own good, trust me. So regardless of whether you sing like a nightingale or a stray cat, here's both an encouragement and a challenge.

The encouragement is that God is concerned with our integrity, not our tunefulness. The challenge is that God is concerned with our integrity and not our tunefulness.

God cares that you sing and what you sing, as we'll see later, but not how well you sing. Although that doesn't give you a license to sing any less than to the very best of your ability, like anything else we do.

[12 : 55] So regardless of the style and the tunefulness, what God really wants from us is to sing from the heart and with thankfulness. We are reminded from the passage that Penny read to us earlier from Ephesians chapter 5, be filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms and hymns and songs from the Spirit.

Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. As we fill with the Holy Spirit, our hearts overflow with thanks and praise.

But at the same time, Jesus told us that out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks. Matthew chapter 12 and verse 34. And so the challenging thing for us is that how we sing reveals how we think and how we feel.

It betrays the true state of our hearts. And as Christians, saved by God's grace, we should overflow with praise from the heart. At the same time, maybe you sing beautifully or with great gusto.

Consider this, that if that's true, then the mute or deaf person who sings by signing, if they're doing it from the heart, are pleasing and glorifying to God.

[14 : 19] Whereas a world-famous pop star who may be singing technically perfectly offers God nothing if they're singing just with their mouths.

And we're also called not to make a purely intellectual or dutiful response. Our responses should be filled with emotion. As a bit of an aside, that emotion is going to show differently in different people. Some raise their hands, some want to clap. Us who grew up Presbyterian want to keep our arms firmly at our sides. But that's okay, as long as we're praising God from our hearts.

And the diversity is good. Music is subjective. And that's also why we need to bear with one another in patience and love, as we saw from Ephesians. And that may mean that we're singing songs that perhaps aren't our preferred style.

But when it comes back to emotions, we need to be careful not to go the other extreme and come out with a purely emotional response. And unfortunately, there is a lot of that that is happening in the church today, producing what you could call, I suppose, bubblegum Christianity.

[15:26] You know, it tastes good initially, but quickly loses its flavor and has no substance. In the last school holidays, our daughter Melissa went off to a kids' club with one of her school friends at one of the large churches in Rondebosch.

And the final session, they had an event where the parents could come along and see what had been taught. And the kids sang the songs that they learned.

And obviously, you were encouraged to sing along as well. And during one of the songs, I leaned across to Megan, and I said, what on earth do these words mean? The song was talking about jumping into the river and stirring deep, deep waters.

It had a great beat, and the kids were dancing like crazy. But theologically, it was meaningless. And so we need a balanced response, and we are to engage our brains.

Because when we sing, we need to consider and understand the words that we're singing. Because God is concerned about what we sing.

[16:31] The content of what we sing is important because we are to sing truth from Scripture. We should sing about God, who He is, and what He's like. He's great.

He's unfathomable. He's holy. He's pure. He's almighty. He's powerful. And so He deserves our praise simply because of who He is. He also deserves our praise because of what He's done.

He created all things. He sustains all things. He provides for our every need, and He loves us more than we can ever grasp. Now, it's relatively comfortable and easy to sing about God's love and the fact that God loves us, but what makes God's love all the more amazing is that it's poured out on people who didn't deserve His love.

And that's why our songs also need to remind us of our sin. We can only truly praise God and begin to grasp the wonders of His grace when we contrast our fallenness with God's holiness.

And as long as there is a shred of self-righteousness or a reliance on our own works, we'll never be giving God the honor and the glory He fully deserves.

[17:45] Our songs also shouldn't be creating some sort of sense of idealistic life. The truth is, our lives are all far from perfect, and we all deal with struggles and trials, and so our songs need to deal with the realities that we face.

If you sat here, week after week, singing about how good and wonderful life was, you'd be pretty disheartened after about week three because you'd realize that your life was contradicting what you were trying to sing.

But that's the beauty of Scripture, isn't it? It doesn't sugarcoat things for us. It tells us that life is not going to be easy. It tells us to expect hardship. It's not promising health, wealth, and prosperity.

And so our songs shouldn't be emotional height, giving us a false happiness. And if we look at Scripture, and particularly the Psalms, the songs of the Bible cover everything from praising God to confessing sin to even questioning God as to why things aren't going right.

And so our songs shouldn't be about selective, convenient truths, but should also include the uncomfortable, inconvenient truths, those of God's wrath, God's judgment, and our sin.

[18:59] And another aside, quickly, we need to understand what we're singing. So question what we sing. If you don't understand the words, go look them up.

Go search the Scriptures. See where they come from. Ask Nick. just don't sing blindly. Understand what we're singing. Because as we sing the truths of Scripture, as we sing of heaven and hell, of God's mercy, and wrath, of his love, and his judgment, we keep an eternal perspective that will encourage us and give us hope regardless of our circumstances.

Our next hymn encourages us, and it reminds us that even when Satan uses our guilt to cause doubt, that we have a perfect hope in Christ and that our eternity is secure.

So won't you stand and let's sing together before the throne of God above. Now you're probably going, well, obviously, Adrian, obviously content is important.

I mean, after all, we're a reformed and evangelical church, so we must have good theology based on God's word. Yes. But why is content so important?

[20 : 10] Earlier I said that God's commands are not arbitrary, and he commands us to sing because there is real benefit in singing, and certain things happen when we sing.

The first of those things is that we remember the words. For some reason, songs stick in our heads. It can be annoyingly so.

Any of you with small children can attest that when a Barney song gets stuck in your head, it's mind-numbing. But I bet most of you can probably recite more song lyrics than you can scripture. Somehow, we remember songs more easily, and so it's critical that we fill our minds with the truth. Because, come tomorrow, come Monday, when we're going about our lives, it's the words of the songs that we've sung that are going to stick in your heads and that you're going to find yourself singing under your breath.

And those words, as long as they're based on scripture, will encourage us when we face trials, will challenge us when we face temptations, and will help us to praise God with our hearts.

[21 : 22] Songs are also a fantastic way for us as parents to teach our children the Bible. If you were at the parenting course, you will have heard this, but as parents, teaching your children God's word is primarily your responsibility.

It's not Naomi's, it's not the Sunday school teachers or the kids club leaders, it's primarily yours. And songs are a great way to remind our children of God's word. And there's some fantastic stuff out there.

A personal favorite of our family is Colin Buchanan. And one of the reasons I love his music is that he covers the content. He covers God's love, but he also covers our sin. And he deals with all of those issues.

But we have his CDs in our car, our kids watch the DVDs, all the time reminding Melissa and Matthew of the truths of scripture. And as we travel, particularly if we go on a road trip somewhere, we have the CD playing and we sing along together as a family, praising God.

Now that's important. Because that leads us on to our next point, why it's important for us to sing. And particularly for your kids to see you singing.

[22 : 35] Because as we sing, we witness. Remember earlier how I said how you sing is going to show the true state of your heart? Well, if we're going to share the gospel with people, we need to first and foremost make sure that it is actually impacting our lives.

That we are showing that we are living out of this gospel. So if you're looking bored or singing half-heartedly when you're singing about the Savior who died for your sins, your heart has betrayed you.

And so parents, and particularly fathers, as the spiritual heads of your home, your kids see you sing week after week. And they need to see you singing your faith from the heart.

Otherwise they might start to believe it's not genuine. But singing together is also important because as we sing together we are encouraged. Even if we're singing out of key.

Singing is one of the few things that we all actively do together at the same time. It's also one of the reasons why as Anglicans we engage in corporate prayer but that would be a topic for another sermon.

[23 : 43] But that in and of itself, the fact that we sing together, that we even meet together, is amazing because we are all so different. This is an amazingly diverse church.

It's beautifully diverse, you could say. We have people who have originated from all over the globe. We have, to use a musical term, the full tonal range of ethnicities.

We have wealthy and poor. We have highly educated verses, not verses, but, and those who are educated at the school of hard knocks. We have young, we have old, we have strange, strange, we have normal, and yet we all meet together and fellowship because we have this common bond in Christ.

If not for that, we probably wouldn't give each other the time of day. And we, as this incredibly diverse group, can join together and praise the one who created us and saved us.

And that's important because it leads on to the fourth thing that happens when we sing. we glorify God. As the church is united in worshipping God, something amazing and quite incredible happens.

[24 : 57] Do you remember what Ephesians 3 and verse 10 said? His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms.

According to his eternal purpose that he accomplished, in Christ Jesus our Lord. It's through the church that God chooses to display his wisdom for all in the heavenly realms to see.

So as the musicians notes and our voices combine, a glorious sound rises towards heaven as an offering, praising the only true and living God.

The angels hear it and they're going to turn to God and marvel at his witness and glorify him. The devil also hears it and he shudders because he's reminded that it is finished. He is finished and there's nothing that he can do to defeat God or those God has chosen.

It's just a matter of time until God carries out his ultimate judgment on him. And so we may seem tiny and insignificant, yet as you and I sing together, even with our broken and sin-ravaged voices, God uses that to glorify himself on earth and right up into the heavenly realms.

[26 : 15] Can you imagine what's happening around the globe today? Starting in the east, when the church arose and started singing praises to God, that swept across like a tide and we've joined in this morning.

So we're going to do that now as we respond to God with we are a sea of voices. We are an ocean of your praise, gathered under one name. We are a tide that's rising and we cannot be contained.

Let's praise the Lord. So how do you sing? Out of a sense of good Anglican duty or because it's unthinkable not to? Do you sing with your lips or with your heart?

The more important question is, what is the state of your heart? If you're not moved by the truth of the gospel, that Christ came to earth and died for your sins and was raised to life, conquering sin and death, then, my brother and sister, you need to question your salvation.

Have you placed your faith wholly and completely in Christ for your salvation? If not, you need to do that today. Otherwise, the songs we've sung here today are completely meaningless. God's salvation is a free gift.

[27 : 27] Take it. Accept it. come and speak to Nick or Alan or myself or ladies, maybe prefer to speak to Naomi, but come to speak to somebody afterwards if that is your situation.

And if you are a Christian, have you grasped the magnitude of what God did for you on that cross? If you have, it should impact your life. You should be actively putting off the old self and putting on the new self that Ephesians talked about.

And you should be overflowing with praise in every aspect of your life. Not just your singing. Let's pray. Oh, Heavenly Father, we just thank you that you have created us to sing your praises.

And so we pray, Lord, that as we go out, Lord, that we would sing your praises from our hearts, Lord. May our hearts be moved and changed by the gospel.

May we glory and wonder what you've done for us. And may we go and share this news with those we meet. In your name we pray. Amen.