

TODAY IN THE WORD®

A ministry of Moody Bible Institute

SING TO THE LORD

Music in the Bible

MAY 2024

EXPERIENCE JESUS CONFERENCE

XJ24

THE XJ CONFERENCE
EMPOWERS TEENS TO:

- Know Jesus more deeply
- Love Him more passionately
- Share Him more generously with their peers

Youth pastors, church leaders, parents, and grandparents—sign up your high schoolers or middle schoolers for XJ and help them get equipped to transform their world for Christ!

Register at
moody.regfox.com/youthconference

The cost is \$555 per person (housing and meals included).

JULY 8–13, 2024
MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE, CHICAGO

Sponsored by SonLife and Moody Bible Institute

The Privilege and Power of Praise

From the President of Moody Bible Institute

“We sing as an expression of hope, trust, and faith, praising God for what He has done in the past and proclaiming our faith for what He will do in the future.”



Music is closely woven into our relationship with God. When we sing, our mind and emotions connect in a powerful way. Even our physical

body is involved as we lift our hands to God. Psalm 96:1–2 expresses this well: “Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day.”

From Scripture, we learn that singing is more than an emotional outlet. We don’t just sing to the Lord because we’re happy, we worship Him even in our darkest moments. We sing as an expression of hope, trust, and faith, praising Him for what He has done in the past and proclaiming our faith for what He will do in the future.

In Acts 16, we meet the Apostle Paul and Silas. The pair had been preaching about Jesus when they were attacked by an angry mob. Severely beaten, stripped, and shackled, they were thrown into a cell. They did not know what the morning would bring. But around midnight, Paul and Silas began to sing (v. 25). I can imagine that the sound of their voices—praising

God—cut through the darkness and roused other prisoners.

As Paul and Silas continued to praise God, there was an earthquake. It was so violent the foundation of the prison was shaken (v. 26). Prison doors opened and chains fell off. The spiritual changed the physical. Acts tells us that the “jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. Paul shouted, ‘Don’t harm yourself!’” (vv. 27–28). The jailer, astounded by what had happened, asked Paul: “What must I do to be saved?” That very evening, the jailer and his entire household believed in God and were baptized.

Music is a powerful expression of faith that cuts to our emotional center. As we lift our hands in worship, we feel the Holy Spirit work in our hearts and minds. And, our worship can point others to God, testifying to what He has done. In the darkest moments in our lives, the most powerful sound is the voice of praise. Not only does our praise redirect our attention from our circumstances back to God, but it also sets in motion God-activity that can open doors and manifest His power. ■

God's Music

by Dr. John Koessler

"While the capacity to make and enjoy music is universal, the kinds of music we enjoy are far from uniform. The same sounds that express joy in one culture may communicate sorrow in another."

Genesis 4:21 tells us that Jubal, the son of Lamech, was "the father of all who play stringed instruments and pipes." The phrase "the father of all" means that he was the first person to master the art of making music in this way. But Jubal did not invent music. Job 38:7 reveals that at Creation, "the morning stars sang together, and all the angels shouted for joy." In other words, music ultimately had its origin in heaven. This explains why it has always played an important role in our worship of God.

The connection between music and creation is echoed throughout Scripture. Not only do the heavens "declare the glory of God" (Ps. 19:1) but also the trees of the forest will "sing for joy" when the Lord "comes to judge the earth" (1 Chron. 16:33).

Theologian Jeremy Begbie observes that music is "a matter not only of human making but also of engaging with the given integrities of what Christians believe is a God-created world." Music engages the whole person in worship. The apostle Paul urges Christians: "Let the message

of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts" (Col. 3:16). Music helps us to both know the truth and feel its importance. Music moves us to thankfulness and enables us to respond with our heart as well as our mind.

While the ability to make and enjoy music is universal, the kinds of music we enjoy are far from uniform. The same sounds that express joy in one culture may communicate sorrow in another. What one thinks is too loud, another perceives as too soft. The church's music is diverse. It incorporates as many styles and genres as there are cultures. Some music that is new to us will move us deeply. But there may also be styles that do not resonate with us. We are not required to appreciate all the music we hear, but we are obligated to love those whose preferences differ from ours. Worship often demands patience from us as well as enthusiasm. ■

For Further Study

To learn more, read *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music* by Jeremy Begbie (InterVarsity).

TODAY IN THE WORD®

Sing to the Lord

*Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.
Praise the LORD.—Psalm 150:6*

God's Word has much to say about music. In the Bible you'll find songs, lyrics, song writers, voices, and instruments. We are told to sing and address one another with melody and to direct our voices to the Lord in worship.

Music in the Bible calls God's people to live and posture themselves a certain way. It calls for the music and song of the church to be rooted in lives of purity and holiness, abiding in Christ and His Word, while praising Him in all circumstances. It is my prayer that through this study, we will:

- See how songs of the Bible point us to the gospel of Christ
- Think about our future eternal song when Christ will reign
- Be stirred by the Spirit to sing, praise, and worship God

Your devotional author,



Brian Lee

Dr. Brian Lee is a professor of Music at Moody Bible Institute. He serves in music ministry at Maranatha Bible Church in Chicago and is an active classical pianist as a soloist and chamber musician. He earned a doctorate from The Juilliard School and has been invited as a guest artist, adjudicator, masterclass teacher at many institutions, competitions, and festivals. He and his wife, Helen, are the parents of three sons.

VOLUME 37 • ISSUE 5

Managing Editor: Jamie Janosz Senior Editor: Elena Mafter Contributing Editor: John Koessler Writer: Brian Lee
Art Director: Lynn Gabalec Graphic Designer: Rachel Hutcheson Marketing: JD Hamby Production: Rhonda AuYeung

Moody Bible Institute is the sole publisher of *Today in the Word*, copyright © 2024 by Moody Bible Institute. All rights reserved. Please direct all *Today in the Word* inquiries to Donor Resource Management, 820 N. LaSalle Blvd., Chicago, IL 60610. Scripture taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®, copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Scripture taken from the New American Standard Bible®, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. Printed in the U.S.A. *Today in the Word* is published monthly. Printed on 30% recycled paper.

God's Design for Music

Read Job 38:1–7

*The morning stars sang together
and all the angels shouted for joy.—Job 38:7*

Music is often linked with our emotions. But the word *music* calls us to use our minds. It comes from the Greek *mousa* where we get the term “muse”—to meditate, think carefully and thoroughly. For us as Christians, this also means to think biblically. Not doing so would lead to music being merely for our amusement, negating the very meaning of the word. Paul said, “I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding” (1 Cor. 14:15).

In Job 38, God spoke to Job out of a storm: “Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge?” “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand” (vv. 2, 4). We can ask ourselves a related question: *Do we sing on Sundays only with emotion or with knowledge and understanding?*

In Job 38, we discover that there was musical worship when the Lord laid the earth’s foundation, when “the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy” (v. 7). A faithful pastor once said that “singing

is as old as creation. Singing was there before the creation of the very world you and I inhabit . . . the DNA of singing is worship to God. It was there in the heavens before we ever enjoyed it here on earth.” Apart from God—from whom comes all knowledge, understanding, and truth—music and our singing in praise and worship is meaningless.

Whether we sing in public or private, work or leisure, church or home, it is important to understand the divine design and purpose of music (and our entire lives): to worship and to give glory and honor to the living God. We worship Christ, the chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:20) who laid the cornerstone (Job 38:6). “Let everything that has breath praise the LORD” (Ps. 150:6)!

Go Deeper

What has been your personal experience with music and worship? Have you ever experienced music in a way that made you both feel and think?

Pray with Us

Lord Jesus, how incredible to realize that even the stars sing, and the angels shout Your praises. What a privilege to join this eternal choir! As we study, may our hearts understand Your divine design for music in our lives.

Music and Prayer

Read Genesis 4:17–26

At that time people began to call on the name of the LORD.—Genesis 4:26

“To sing is to pray twice.” This quote, often attributed to St. Augustine, implies that prayer and singing for the Christian are deeply connected. And this is true throughout the Bible from the very first mention of a musician. Do you know who that was?

In Genesis 4, Jubal is mentioned as the father of everyone who plays stringed instruments and pipes (v. 21). But apart from correctly answering a Bible trivia question, what is the deeper significance of this passage? It is important to look at the context. Genesis chapter 3 records a time of great despair for the people of God. Sin had entered the world, and Adam and Eve were sent away from the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:24). We also see the first recorded murders in history (Gen. 4:8, 23).

But in Genesis 4:17–26, when Jubal and music are first mentioned, we also read that it was the first time people began to call on the name of the Lord. They prayed. Perhaps these first prayers were giving thanks for

the birth of Seth (v. 25) and his son in the aftermath of Cain killing Abel. Or maybe they were prayers of lament to the Creator for all that had transpired in the lives of the people. Either way, the closing verses of Genesis 4 contain one of numerous examples throughout the Bible, showing that true worship and singing to the Lord are always connected to our intimate fellowship with the Lord. Our music in worship must be rooted in a life of prayer where we give thanks and ask God for His power and presence.

We are called to believe and live the words we sing in daily worship to the King. And we have a God who can enable us through the Holy Spirit to do so. May our music in worship be rooted in our daily walk with Him!

Go Deeper

What events led up to the first prayers mentioned in Genesis 4:26? Why do you think prayer and singing are interwoven?

Pray with Us

Almighty God, thank You for the gift of music! This precious gift helps us in our daily walk with You, teaches us to pray more faithfully, and enables us to proclaim to others the mystery of faith.

“Song of the Sea”

Read Exodus 15:1–18

*Then they believed his promises
and sang his praise.—Psalm 106:12*

It has been said that if you want to learn how to pray, study the prayers in Scripture. Similarly, if we want to learn how to sing in worship, we can meditate on the songs of Scripture.

Dr. James Coakley, a professor at Moody Bible Institute, outlines four songs in the Pentateuch that follow a similar pattern. In each song, a central character calls an audience and proclaims a message of salvation. In Exodus 15, that central character is Moses, who leads the Israelites in singing to the Lord a message of salvation (v. 1). And although we are to give God praise in any circumstances, it is right to sing because He has saved us through Jesus. It is in the songs of the Pentateuch and throughout the Word that we see Christ and His salvation at the center. Notice that “LORD” is repeated in the first several verses of Exodus 15, “for He has become my salvation” (v. 2).

While these songs of the Pentateuch point to the Messiah,

Coakley explains that these songs also point to our future hope. The end of this song points to Christ’s future millennial reign when He will bring those He saves and plant them on the mountain of our inheritance, the place He has made for His dwelling when His kingdom will be established on earth (v. 17). Indeed, we have a “delightful inheritance” (Ps. 16:6)!

It all points to Jesus the Messiah, our Savior and King—who He is, what He has done, and what He will do when He returns to judge and reign on earth, for the “LORD reigns for ever and ever” (v. 18). May our songs reflect and follow this Pentateuchal pattern, and may we believe in His present and future promises in our songs of praise.

Go Deeper

What does the “Song of the Sea” teach us about singing in worship? What are some of the reasons we should sing to the Lord?

Pray with Us

From the songs of the five books of Moses in today’s study to Christian hymns to modern church music—“Let everything that has breath praise the LORD” (Ps. 150:6). Nothing can silence the music of worship and praise!

The Song of Moses

Read Deuteronomy 31:14–32:47

*They are not just idle words for you—
they are your life.—Deuteronomy 32:47*

Many of us can easily think of a song that is meaningful to us. It may contain a powerful message or a personal connection to a time, place, memory. But what makes a song of faith powerful in the life of the believer?

In the Song of Moses, two things give this eternal song power: the presence of God and the purposes of God (Rev. 15:3). Moses is in his final days when God commands him to write the words of a song. We see God's presence with Moses: "Then the LORD appeared at the tent in a pillar of cloud" (Deut. 31:15). While Moses was blessed by God's presence as he neared death, he had been a person of prayer throughout his life (Psalm 90). Perhaps that is why this song is so rooted in God's presence and power. It is no wonder that being Spirit-filled while making music to the Lord is commanded for believers (Eph. 5:19).

But a hymn or worship song is also powerful when it is rooted in the

purposes of God. The purpose of this song was to teach (Deut. 31:19) and warn the people (Deut. 32:46). This song is powerful because its lyrics are the purposes of God; words to remind the people of His commands from generation to generation. And much like the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15), the lyrics of the Song of Moses are both Messianic and millennial: Christ the Rock (vv. 4, 15, 18, 30, 31) and His future judgment and kingdom reign (v. 43).

May the songs we sing also be rooted in the truths found in the Song of Moses, lyrics rooted in God's eternal purposes that teach, remind, and call His people to obedience. Words that are not just idle words but are our very life (v. 47).

Go Deeper

What two things are woven into the very fabric of the Song of Moses? Can you think of a worship song or hymn today that reflects these things?

Pray with Us

God, You are the ultimate musician, and we only give back to You the music You've created. "Crown him with many crowns, the Lamb upon his throne /Hark! How the heavenly anthem drowns all music but its own." (Bridges, 1851)

The Music of Jericho

Read Joshua 6:1–21

By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the army had marched around them for seven days.—Hebrews 11:30

What is your favorite day of the week? Studies show that Friday and Saturday are the favorite days for most. But how many of us would say Sunday?

In the battle of Jericho, a story that some Christians have known since Sunday School, we get a glimpse of how a particular day can be the most jubilant day of a week, filled with music, trumpets, shouts, and victory. But before that joyous moment, when the walls came down, we observe that the people of God fully obeyed each of His commands for six full days.

They were to march around Jericho each day with all the armed men (v. 3) and seven priests carrying trumpets in front of the ark of the covenant (v. 4). There were further instructions given by God through Joshua for the people. They were not to give a war cry or raise their voices; not to say a word until they were told which day to shout (v. 10).

What a picture of faith and daily obedience to the Lord! It was faith in the Lord that brought down the walls

of Jericho (Heb. 11:30). From morning to night (vv. 11–12), the people had to trust in God's Word before the outcome, knowing that the Lord had something greater in store for the final day. Indeed, God had something greater. On the seventh day, the Israelites saw victory through Joshua (Yeshua) over the enemy in Jericho in the Promised Land.

We too have something greater in our future! That's why gathering with God's faithful people on the Lord's day can be the most exciting day of the week. It is filled with jubilant worship as we remind ourselves of the victory we have in and through Jesus (Yeshua).

Go Deeper

What do you think went through the minds of the Israelites as they followed God's puzzling instructions? How does being mindful of our future hope (Heb. 4:9) influence the way we walk in obedience today?

Pray with Us

Lord Jesus, thank You for the freedom we have to come together with fellow believers in our churches today. Thank You for the joy of joining Your people on earth and all the company of heaven in the unending hymn.

Deborah and Barak's Song

Read Judges 5

*I will praise the LORD,
the God of Israel, in song.—Judges 5:3*

Since biblical times, God's people have been a singing people. But when we sing in worship, who is our audience? Apart from giving honor and worship to God, for what purpose do we sing?

Much like today, Deborah and Barak lived in a time of great evil (Judg. 4:1). And it was only when the rebellious people of God were oppressed by the Canaanites for 20 years that they cried out to God for help (4:3). God answered their cries and delivered them from the hand of Sisera by the hands of Barak and Jael (4:16, 21), after which a song of salvation (like in Exodus 15) was sung.

In Judges 5, Deborah and Barak sang to four different audiences. First, they sang to the Lord and praised Him in song (5:3). When we sing, our audience first and foremost is the One who created our voices and gave us eternal life through Jesus Christ. In that same verse, Deborah and Barak also

addressed kings and rulers in a time when Israel had no king. They declared to the world, to foreign kings and rulers that they were giving praise to the one true God, the God of Israel (v. 3).

But they also sang to fellow believers. As we saw in the Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32), a song of faith can teach, warn, and even rebuke the people of God. Different tribes of Israel were addressed with specific questions, truths, and exhortations (Judg. 5:14–18). Lastly, a hymn or worship song can stir the heart of the individual worshiper: Deborah is encouraged to wake up and break out in song; Barak to arise (v. 12).

Go Deeper

In these days when God's Word is often twisted and compromised, what is the power of song? Can you think of ways that the church can use music to speak God's truth both within and outside the family of God?

Pray with Us

Your Word teaches us to sing to and praise our Creator in all circumstances. Help us, Lord, we pray, to trust You and to have faith not to lose heart. Glory to Your powerful and merciful name!

David's Unique Talent

Read 1 Samuel 16:11–23

*You are my LORD; apart from you
I have no good thing.—Psalm 16:2*

It goes without saying that to be hired for a job, you must have the skills the position requires. But apart from abilities, education, or experience, what kind of character does an employer look for?

When God's presence departed from King Saul, who was tormented by an evil spirit (v. 14), he asked his servants to find someone with musical skill on the lyre. But rather than asking his servants to find someone with good character, this fallen leader simply asked them to "find someone who plays well" (v. 17). One of his servants went above and beyond, listing the qualifications of a certain son of Jesse. Yes, this young man knew how to play the lyre, but he was also "a brave man and a warrior. He speaks well and is a fine-looking man. And the LORD is with him" (v. 18).

While skills and abilities are important in any position, the final attribute that this wise, nameless servant listed stands apart from the others. "And the LORD is with him"

is a phrase you will probably not find on any resume or LinkedIn bio. Nevertheless, what qualification for a job, especially for a position in ministry, is more important than this one? David himself knew this, for this future king writes later in Psalm 16:2 "You are my LORD; apart from you I have no good thing."

The contrast in 1 Samuel between David and Saul is striking. It is simply the difference between someone who fears the Lord and walks in His presence and the one who doesn't. How true for any employee, employer, parent, friend, leader, or pastor! No matter what our calling is, may our lives reflect the qualifications of David and the likeness of the Son of David—Jesus, our Lord and King.

Go Deeper

What about you? Would the phrase "and the Lord is with this person" appear on your list of qualifications? Ask God to walk before you and beside you in all things.

Pray with Us

We may not have King David's musical talent, but we want to sing to You, God, from our hearts like David did. Give us courage and confidence to step out boldly, remembering that You delight in our praise to You.

Dangers of a New Cart

Read 2 Samuel 6:1–15

This is what the LORD says: “Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths.”—Jeremiah 6:16

Most of us are attracted to anything new: a new house or car, the latest smartphone, perhaps even a modern thought or practice. And while there can be value in a new idea or method, there can also be a danger if it is in opposition to the Word of God.

Upon recovering the ark of God from the Philistines, David and some young, able men (v. 1) set the ark on a new cart to transport it back to Jerusalem (v. 3). But while worshiping the Lord with music (v. 5), the people forgot something: the Law of God. In generations past, God had instructed His people through Moses to transport the ark on their shoulders (Num. 7:9; 1 Chron. 15:15). And even before the oxen stumbled and Uzzah made the fatal decision to put his hand in the ark (v. 6), David and his young men used a new idea and method instead of honoring God and His Word.

It took Uzzah’s death and the blessing of God on the household of

Obed-Edom for three months (v. 11) for David to come to his senses. This time, we are told that they carried the ark, and with rejoicing (v. 12). Joyful obedience caused David to worship in spirit and truth through sacrificial offerings and dancing before the Lord with all his might, with sounds of trumpets and praise (vv. 12–14).

For “who may ascend the mountain of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god” (Ps. 24:3–4). As we sing to the Lord, pray the Psalmist’s words: “Create in me a pure heart and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Ps. 51:10).

Go Deeper

Are you easily enticed by anything, merely because it is new or modern? What are the dangers of our desire to always have the latest thing? A new cart is nothing compared to a pure heart!

Pray with Us

Almighty God, today we cry out to You together with the Psalmist: “Create in me a pure heart” (Ps. 51:10)! Give us eyes to see Your faithfulness, Your patience, and Your love for us.

A Decree to Remember

Read 1 Chronicles 16

*Extol, thank, and praise the LORD,
the God of Israel.—1 Chronicles 16:4*

Whether with a card, email, or text, remembering the birthday of a loved one often leads us to write words of gratitude and praise to that person. But have you ever thought about doing the same thing for the Lord?

After the ark of God had been recovered from the Philistines, King David prepared for worship by appointing specific musicians among the Levites (1 Chron. 15:16–24). When the ark was finally placed inside the tent, David made offerings and called the music ministers to a threefold command for worship. They were to extol, thank, and praise God (16:4).

It is important to remind ourselves that when we enter a time for worship, the desire of our hearts ought to be of gratitude and praise toward the One we are to love above all else (Deut. 6:5). He is the One who is love (1 John 4:16). But this desire of our hearts to love God is not possible without a conscious choice in our minds. Like the musicians in 1 Chronicles 16, we are

to extol, remember, and be mindful. In the Bible, the sin of God's people often begins with a forgetfulness, which leads to forsaking God and His commands.

Are we any different? In the busyness and distractions of life, it is easy not to remember God and not to be mindful of His Word. We cannot thank or praise God unless we extol Him, not just in a worship service but amid our day-to-day, hour-to-hour activities. On the day when David decreed that praise (same Hebrew word for *thanksgiving*) be sung to the Lord (v. 7), God gave us the lyrics to a song of thanksgiving and praise, one that reminds us to “seek his face always” (v. 11) and to “remember the wonders he has done” (v. 12).

Go Deeper

Does God and His Word dwell daily in your thoughts? Write a “song” of gratitude and praise to Him today, using both your mind and your heart.

Pray with Us

Father, thank You for the legacy of the great classical composers—Bach, Handel, Mendelssohn, and many others—who wrote their music for You. They help us, in the busyness of our lives, to be mindful of You and Your Word.

Elisha and a Musician

Read 2 Kings 3

While the harpist was playing, the hand of the LORD came on Elisha and he said, "This is what the LORD says."—2 Kings 3:15–16

One of the joys I have serving at my church is playing the prelude music for weekly Friday night gatherings. And while people may be just arriving or still in a conversation, I strive to prayerfully consider those few minutes as an invitation to pray, to focus our minds and hearts before hearing from the Lord.

In 2 Kings 3, we see the desperate circumstances of Jehoshaphat, one of the more righteous kings in Judah's history. As the Moabites were preparing to attack Judah, Jehoshaphat joined forces with the kings of Israel and Edom. At this critical moment, they found themselves stuck in the desert with no water for their armies and animals (v. 9).

They called for a prophet in the land named Elisha. Notice Jehoshaphat's first words concerning this prophet: "The word of the LORD is with him" (v. 12). We are told that before meeting Elisha or music being played, the word of the Lord, the presence of God was with Elisha. This

reminds us that when we worship with God's people or even in our private moments, it is Christ and His Word in which we are called to abide.

Instead of offering immediate counsel, Elisha called for a harpist (or musician). Why? Perhaps it allowed the prophet time to inquire of the Lord. Scripture tells us he was a man of prayer (2 Kings 4:33). But perhaps it was because Elisha knew that music, when directed to the Lord and used for His purposes, could help prepare his mind and heart to hear from God. As the harpist played, the Lord's hand came upon Elisha, and God spoke to him with a message of hope and salvation for His people.

Go Deeper

Has God used music to prepare your heart for worship? Why is music, directed to the Lord, so powerful in refocusing our attention? Maybe for the remainder of this devotional study you can listen to worshipful music, preparing to receive God's Word.

Pray with Us

Our Savior, show us how to prepare our hearts and minds to hear from You. Teach us, like You taught Elisha, to become people of prayer. May the presence of Your Spirit fill us with life and music.

Praise Before Deliverance

Read 2 Chronicles 20

*I will extol the LORD at all times;
his praise will always be on my lips.—Psalm 34:1*

When trouble arises, is our first reflex to look to God, to worship and praise Him before anything else? If we are honest, our tendency is to make plans first on how to “fix” the problem or take action. But how often do we worship and praise God before He has answered our prayers?

King Jehoshaphat did! Before facing the enemy, he appointed singers to the front of the army, headed for battle, to “sing to the Lord and to praise him” (v. 21). Any reasonable person would say this is a foolish strategy. Why did this leader do that? Earlier in the chapter, we see that Jehoshaphat’s first response to trouble, like so many of the righteous in Scripture, was to humble himself and pray. He was “alarmed” and “resolved to inquire of the LORD” (v. 3). His private prayer then led to a public one before the assembly in the Temple courtyard. Here we read the prayer of a man who acknowledged that true power does not come from within us but from the One to whom our eyes look (v. 12).

Only then did Jehoshaphat exhort his people to action: “Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you” (v. 17). In other words, be faithful in what God has given you and be steadfast, knowing that the victory has been won. Is it possible to have a bad day if we truly live like this?!

Even in uncertainty, they continued to worship and praise the Lord and build one another up for the battle ahead (vv. 18–20), with the choir and worship team leading praise at the head of the army. While it is easy to praise after answered prayer, may we extol the Lord at all times, for “his praise will always be on my lips” (Ps. 34:1).

Go Deeper

When a crisis arrives, what is your natural response? What do we learn from Jehoshaphat’s example? What do you need to bring before the Lord today?

Pray with Us

God, we are grateful for the wonderful examples of the heroes of faith we’re reading about this month! May we be inspired by their faithfulness! Give us endurance to join them and in one voice glorify You.

Music in the Temple

Read 2 Chronicles 29

They sang praises with gladness and bowed down and worshiped.—2 Chronicles 29:30

What do you do to get ready for worship? Put on your Sunday clothes? Scramble to get the whole family out the door on time? The Bible tells us that we are to “guard [our] steps when [we] go to the house of God” (Eccl. 5:1). What does it mean to guard our hearts and minds for worship?

Second Chronicles 29 gives us a vivid description of just that. Musical worship abounds with a variety of instruments, singers, trumpets, all in praise and worship (vv. 25–30). But what is striking is that the musical worship itself occurs at the end of the chapter.

You see, King Hezekiah first guarded his steps as he entered the house of God. One of his first acts as king was to open the doors of the Temple of the Lord—not to worship, but to repair (v. 1). Second Kings 18:5 says that “there was no one like him among all the kings of Judah.” Hezekiah called those leading in worship (the Levites) to first consecrate themselves and “remove

all defilement” (v. 5) from the Temple before any worship could take place.

This is a picture of God’s call for us to remove sin and worldliness within us, for “what agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God” (2 Cor. 6:16). We are to guard our steps as we worship the Lord in public or private, for His church and our very bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:21; 1 Cor. 6:19). Much like King Hezekiah cleansed the Temple, we have a greater King who not only overturned tables and cleansed the Temple while He walked this earth (told in all four Gospel accounts), but who can cleanse and sanctify us now through His blood, His Word, and His Spirit.

Go Deeper

On this Lord’s Day, take time to guard your heart. What do you need to get rid of in your life? What might be hindering your relationship with God?

Pray with Us

As we go to church this Sunday, we ask You, Father, to prepare our hearts and minds to come to You with songs of praise. Teach us how to pray and how to worship You in Spirit and in truth.

Walls Around the Temple

Read Nehemiah 12:22–43

*The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem
could be heard far away.—Nehemiah 12:43*

From ancient times to modern history, walls were often built around a city to mark and enclose a settlement of people. These thick stone structures protected those who lived inside from invaders and outside threats.

How true that is for our own lives? Do we have God as our fortress (Ps. 18:2)? We need Him to protect the walls of our minds and hearts against Satan's schemes (1 Peter 5:8) and our own evil desires (James 1:14). Without this, we are vulnerable to spiritual threats which can hinder or even paralyze true praise and worship.

Nehemiah grieved when he heard that the walls and gates of Jerusalem had been destroyed (Neh. 1:4). But more than the welfare of the city, he grieved the potential destruction of spiritual lives. Remember, it was the decree of Cyrus to rebuild the Temple that brought exiles back to Jerusalem (Ezra 1:3). And although the Temple in Jerusalem had been finished (Ezra 6:14–15), the broken city walls made it vulnerable. Nehemiah prayed continually not just for defense against

an army but also for repentance (Neh. 1:6–7). His primary concern was for God's glory: compromised walls could destroy the Temple where God's glory and presence were meant to dwell among His people. And after many trials, Nehemiah saw to the completion of Jerusalem's walls (Neh. 6:15).

At the dedication of the wall, we see God's people protected. The Levitical musicians were brought to Jerusalem (Neh. 12:27), a picture of drawing near to the presence and protection of the Lord. They purified themselves (v. 30). We too are to purify ourselves before worship. And it was Ezra, the priest and teacher of the Law who read the Book to all the people (Nehemiah 8) who led the musical procession (v. 36). God's Word should lead and go before us!

Go Deeper

What were the threats to God's people? What did Nehemiah do to restore order and ensure their protection? How does that apply to our spiritual life?

Pray with Us

Lord, how do we draw near to Your presence and protection? Today's passage from Nehemiah teaches us it's building walls (being mindful of You) and purity in worship. Give us wisdom to take this teaching to heart!

Sing the Word

Read Psalm 1

*That person is like a tree planted by streams of water
which yields its fruit in season.—Psalm 1:3*

You would be hard-pressed to find an entire book of the Bible completely about one topic. But did you notice that God’s Word has an entire book devoted to music?

The Book of Psalms not only contains the most chapters of any book in Scripture, but it also has the longest chapter recorded (Ps. 119). And, we are given 150 examples of songs and prayers set to instrumental music. In fact, the original Greek word *psalmoi*, from which we derive “psalms,” implies words accompanied by musical instruments.

At the head of this songbook for the saints is a psalm that reminds us that before we worship through music, we are to do something far more vital: “Blessed is the one . . . whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night” (Ps. 1:1–2). This calls for the worshiper to direct their thoughts, be mindful of (“full of mind”) and abide in the Word of God in their daily lives, which is not possible without rejecting the things of

the world (v. 1). Therefore, the psalms are a call for God’s people and the local church to sing the Scriptures—song lyrics that are deeply rooted in God’s commands and His Word. Even the structure of the songbook of Psalms points to this. Notice that the five sections (Books 1–5) of the Psalms are a picture of the Torah (Pentateuch) and the laws of God.

The Psalms teach us that “decrees are the theme of my song wherever I lodge” (Ps. 119:54). If that is true, we are called to sing Christ wherever we are. He is the Word that became flesh (John 1:14) and whose name is the Word of God (Rev. 19:13). May we sing the Word, sing psalms (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), sing Christ!

Go Deeper

Does your local church ever sing songs directly taken from God’s Word? What is the benefit of setting the Bible to song? If you have musical talent, try setting one of your favorite psalms to music!

Pray with Us

Father, help those of us with musical gifts not to be shy or hesitant to use them for Your glory and for the good of the church. We long to be “like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season” (Ps. 1:3).

Songs for the Journey

Read Psalm 121

The LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.—Psalm 121:8

We often play our favorite songs in the car while taking a road trip with family or friends, or we listen with our headphones or earbuds on while flying from one airport to another.

There is a collection of songs in the Psalms that were a sort of playlist for travelers. It is believed that the Songs of Ascents (Psalms 120–134) were sung by God’s people as they journeyed to Jerusalem to observe the pilgrimage feasts as commanded by God (Leviticus 23). For many, this road was long, arduous, and even dangerous with threats from both man and beast. But despite these challenges, we see God’s people praising and thanking Him, crying out to their Maker with an immovable faith and a clear direction of where they are heading.

What an insight for us today! Do we praise and petition the Lord as we journey from place to place each day, hour, or even through each stage of life? Do we have a clear awareness of where we are headed

and where our strength comes from? The Psalmist writes, “I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from?” (Ps. 121:1). Lifting our eyes upward to the mountains that surround Jerusalem (Ps. 125:2) is a picture of praying, asking for God’s help and strength now, while focused on our final destination. In Christ, our present help and destination is in Him and His presence, where we will dwell with Him forever (Ps. 23:6).

While we travel the bumpy road of this earthly life, may Christ be the soundtrack of our lives, for He is the One who made heaven and earth (v. 2). May we lift up our eyes to Calvary and Zion—the hills around Jerusalem—knowing it is the cross and crown of Christ on which we stand and journey.

Go Deeper

What is a Song of Ascent? Why did people sing while on their journeys? What application does this have for our lives today?

Pray with Us

Lord Jesus, may we follow the Psalmist’s example to trust You and seek our protection only in You. May we remember that our help comes from You, “the Maker of heaven and earth” (Ps. 121:2). We lift our eyes to You!

Psalms: Songs of Zion

Read Psalm 132

*Those the LORD has rescued will return.
They will enter Zion with singing.—Isaiah 51:11*

There is a worship song that blesses me each time my church sings it. It's called "We Will Feast in the House of Zion." It speaks of a day when those in Christ will feast with Him and weep no more (Rev. 21:4), and when "we will sing with our hearts restored."

We will indeed! Not only will the saints be singing into eternity, but there is a specific place where we will sing, called Zion. Zion is often used as another name for Jerusalem. Psalm 132 says that the LORD has both chosen Zion and desired it for His dwelling forever (vv. 13–14). It is where the nations will be gathered during His millennial reign in the age to come (Jer. 3:17; Zech. 2:10–12). And we will be singing before Him in Zion one day through the psalms, songs, and prayers from His Word.

God's voice is heard loud and clear about His future dwelling place. Along with Psalm 132, another psalm proclaims that God has "installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain"

(Ps. 2:6). The most quoted psalm in the New Testament is Psalm 110, which declares that the Lord will extend Christ's "mighty scepter from Zion, saying, 'Rule in the midst of your enemies!'" (Ps. 110:2).

Based on the psalms alone, this is a call for us as well. While we sing songs about the cross of Christ, we are also called to sing about the crown of Christ, songs that proclaim and declare the future reign of Christ and His kingdom from Zion. Those the Lord has saved "will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads" (Isa. 51:11). Ask God to give you this eternal perspective as you prepare to sing in worship this coming weekend.

Go Deeper

When we worship what is on our minds and hearts? Why did God's people sing about Zion? What significance did it hold for them and what does it mean to us today?

Pray with Us

Dear God, today we thank You for the eternal perspective You reveal to us in Your Word. Thank You for the promise that one day we will sing before You in Zion—songs and psalms from Your Word. What a glorious future!

The Ultimate Love Song

Read Song of Songs 5:10–16

He is altogether lovely.

This is my beloved, this is my friend.—Song of Songs 5:16

Love songs have always been popular. Songs that express love between a man and a woman are virtually as old as human civilization.

God has given us an entire book of the Bible devoted to love songs, perhaps in order that we know of a greater love than the one we often hear about in our culture. Song of Songs, written by King Solomon, is a collection of poems set to music that celebrates the affection, longing, and physical beauty between a man (He) and a woman (She), pronouns written in the book itself.

Perhaps the most striking song is found at the end of chapter 5, where the bride talks about the beauty and physical attributes of her beloved in descriptive language. Notice the order in which she does that. The first line begins with an expression of his beauty and her declaration that there is no one like him: “My beloved is radiant and ruddy, outstanding among ten thousand” (v. 10). From there, she describes the one she

loves literally from head to toe. We read affectionate descriptions of his head, hair, eyes, cheeks, and lips all the way to his arms, body, and legs. Observe how virtually every verse, every line of this love song begins with the word “His”, as if to tell us that the song is also about Him, about Christ!

Our songs of worship should proclaim Christ alone from head to toe, from Creation to the Cross, and to His coming again, for He is the Alpha and Omega (Rev. 22:13). But more than that, they call for us as His people, His bride, to love Him in the same way: to adore every part of Him and His Word, for He is our bridegroom (Isa. 54:5; Eph. 5:32). May we sing of His love forever (Ps. 89:1)!

Go Deeper

How do love songs reflect the deep need of our hearts? How does this reading make you think differently about the way we can express our love for our Savior?

Pray with Us

So many things in today’s world distract us from God’s love! Let us learn about true love from the book that is one beautiful love song—Song of Songs. Lord, thank you for Your love!

Uncompromised Worship

Read Daniel 3

*You shall have no other gods
before me.—Exodus 20:3*

At the start of our study, we learned that the word *music* comes from the Greek *mousa*, which is where we get the word *muse*, meaning to become absorbed in thought and to think carefully, even biblically. But in ancient mythology, a muse was also a pagan goddess, an idol who presided over the arts and sciences. The root of the word *music* reminds us that if we do not think well, music can become an idol or even a means to worship a pagan god.

In the book of Daniel, Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar created a golden image and decreed for people from every language and nation to fall down and worship as soon as they heard musical instruments. The phrase "all kinds of music" (v. 5) is repeated no less than four times in this chapter and represented all nations, peoples, and languages (v. 4). Even today music is used to glorify and worship images that are attractive, made of "gold", but also idols "made by human hands" (Ps. 115:4). This music exalts idols that cannot speak, hear, smell, or walk.

This passage also contains a message for the church. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego risked their own lives by being thrown into the fire because they were faithful to their Maker, rejecting the values and teachings of Babylon. As followers of Christ, it is our call to live and worship with the same faithfulness to the true King.

Uncompromised worship may cause even an earthly king to acknowledge a higher power (v. 28). We look forward to that day when a multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language will stand before the true King and the Lamb. Perhaps with all kinds of music, we will declare "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb" (Rev. 7:10).

Go Deeper

Consider the music you listen to outside of church. What does it "worship"? What values are central to that music? How might this change your listening habits?

Pray with Us

Heavenly Father, keep us from listening to ungodly music and looking at ungodly things. May we reject compromises even in small matters. Make us faithful followers of the true King.

A God Who Sings

Read Zephaniah 3:14–20

*The LORD your God is with you,
the Mighty Warrior who saves.—Zephaniah 3:17*

One of the joys I experienced as a dad was holding my very young children and singing over them, whether it was to make them smile or help them sleep. The Bible speaks of a future time when our heavenly Father will sing over us, His children. In Zephaniah 3, we have what some might consider a peculiar passage that indicates we have a God who sings (v. 17). But it is the context of this passage that gives us a clearer picture. The book of Zephaniah, like many of the Old Testament prophetic books, points to a future time. “On that day” or similar statements are repeated throughout Zephaniah (v. 16).

Notice, however, that we are first called to sing now—“Sing, Daughter Zion; shout aloud, Israel!” (v. 14)—because we have been saved from the enemy, and the Lord has taken away our punishment (v. 15). While we look forward to that day when our Father will sing over us with rejoicing, it is our joy now to sing to Him. We

sing praises that declare to Him, to the church, to the world, and even to ourselves, that through Christ we have been rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought into His kingdom where we have redemption and forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:13–14).

Some might argue that the language of God singing is not literal but figurative. The Son of God sang with His disciples the night before He was crucified (Matt. 26:30). And, Christ sings praises in the congregation (Heb. 2:12; Ps. 22:22). Do you look forward to the day when we will be face to face with our Father (1 Cor. 13:12) and hear Him rejoice over us with singing (Zeph. 3:17)? Amazing grace! How sweet that sound will be that saved a wretch like me!

Go Deeper

What can we look forward to “on that day” we are united with God? What does Zephaniah tell us to do now?

Pray with Us

Loving God, Creator of heaven and earth, You are making all things new. Teach us to sing a new song of love to You, to make music in our hearts to the Lord. We celebrate You today!

Supper and a Song

Read Matthew 26:17–35

When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.—Matthew 26:30

Have you been to a festival or reception where the occasion was marked by both food and joyful music? Weddings are one example of a time where we use music as an important part of the celebration.

One night, Jesus and His disciples did just that. But it was no ordinary night. It was the same night that Judas dipped his hand into a bowl at the table as the one who betrayed the Son of Man (v. 23). It was the same night that Peter, another of the twelve, would deny Jesus three times (v. 34). And it was the same night that Christ knew what He would endure: being spat on, slapped, and struck with fists (Matt. 26:67), tortured, and beaten, suffering a criminal's death on a cross the very next day.

Earlier that night, Jesus told His disciples to find a certain man in the city to make preparations “to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house” (v. 18). Even knowing what was ahead, Jesus chose to celebrate and obey

His Father in observing the Feast of Passover. On that night, our Savior washed the feet and sang in worship with the same people who would soon betray and abandon Him. When they were done, they went out to the Mount of Olives” (v. 30), the very place the Bible tells us Jesus will set his feet on when He returns (Zech. 14:4). Oh, how marvelous, how wonderful is His love!

Some believe that what Jesus and the disciples sang that night were psalms of praise (*Hallel*), typical during Passover: texts such as “the LORD has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad” (Ps. 118:24) or “Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever” (Ps. 118:29).

Go Deeper

What circumstances are you facing today? Are you looking toward a difficult season ahead? What can we learn from our Savior's example?

Pray with Us

Lord Jesus, we want to be more like You! Change us, Lord, continue to mold us in Your image. Make us faithful people, consistent in prayer, joyful in worship, selfless in serving others.

A Night Song

Read Acts 16:16–40

*By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me—
a prayer to the God of my life.—Psalm 42:8*

There is no musical instrument like the human voice. Scientists still grapple with fully comprehending the physiology of the human body. Indeed, we are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps. 139:14). The human voice goes with us wherever we are and is not bound by transport or location like other instruments.

One night in a city called Philippi, Paul and Silas made musical sounds in a prison cell because they had their voices. But this was no ordinary music: They sang “hymns to God” (Acts 16:25). Paul and Silas sang to the Lord even after they had been stripped, beaten, and “severely flogged” (vv. 22–23). What a testimony of faith for us today to praise the Lord in any location or circumstance!

But while Paul and Silas were side by side both in ministry and in suffering, the Bible tells us once again that true praise is always side by side with prayer. We are told that Paul and Silas were singing and praying about midnight in prison (v. 25). And it was

on the way to a prayer meeting that they had been beaten and arrested (v. 16). God not only calls us to praise Him in times of trouble, but it is in seeking prayer and full dependency on Him that He gives us a true heart of praise and worship even in the midst of hardships, let alone delivering us out of any trial.

And deliver God did! After a sudden earthquake and chains being loosed (v. 26), God did even more—He worked out salvation for the jailer and his household (vv. 31–34). Even more, Paul received an apology from the Roman officials (v. 39). True prayer and praise can be a witness to those around us. As God’s love leads us by day, may His night song be “a prayer to the God of my life” (Ps. 42:8).

Go Deeper

How did God work during Paul’s hardship? What can we learn from the apostle about walking through times of suffering?

Pray with Us

Father, aid us in pursuing joyful worship and prayer even during trials and suffering, described in Acts 16. This story of miraculous deliverance from jail inspires us to trust You and sing to You no matter what.

Psalms, Hymns, Spiritual Songs

Read Ephesians 5:19

Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit.—Ephesians 5:18–19

Over the history of the church, there have been many different types of songs of faith. From chant and organum, where one or more voices are added to a plainchant melody, to chorales, from hymns to modern songs, the church has different genres to identify styles and eras of songs.

Today, we will focus on one verse in which Paul designates three types of songs for God's people: psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (also in Col. 3:16). Much has been made about what these mean and what they meant for the early church. In short, no one knows for sure. But one thing is for certain: the psalms are psalms. Meaning, the early Christians (including Paul) knew that the psalms were part of God's Word along with the writings of Moses (the Torah), the prophets, and other books in our Old Testament today.

When we see a call to sing and address one another with psalms, we can be sure that it is indeed a call for our local churches to sing lyrics

straight from or based on the psalms. And when we do, what a blessing it can be! The resurrected Jesus told His disciples that "everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms" (Luke 24:44). When we sing the psalms, we sing Christ and the Word.

What about hymns and spiritual songs? The Greek word for hymns refers to a song of praise or ode to a god. If so, hymns can be seen as song lyrics that give praise and honor to God, honor to Christ. Spiritual songs may imply more personal songs of the human spirit connecting to a divine power. And the psalms contain both: songs praising who God is and giving Him honor with personal emotions and language directed to Him.

Go Deeper

What are the three types of music Paul identifies? Can you think of any examples of these that we use in modern-day worship?

Pray with Us

What a joy it is to trace ways and patterns of worship in both Old and New Testaments this month! It's a privilege, Lord, to lift up Your name with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

Spirit-Filled Singing

Read Ephesians 5:1–21

*Be very careful, then, how you live—
not as unwise but as wise.—Ephesians 5:15*

Some Christians get uncomfortable when the topic of the Holy Spirit comes up. But there is nothing to fear because the Bible speaks about the Spirit in both the Old Testament and the New. The Spirit is the One who helps us in our weakness (Rom. 8:26)! Born-again Christians are marked and sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13–14). We have all of Him. But there is a difference between the Spirit’s indwelling and infilling.

In today’s passage, the filling of the Spirit is connected to psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (vv. 18–19). In verse 18 we read: “Do not get drunk on wine.” We are to avoid drunkenness and refrain from being controlled by the values of this world. Whether from Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 1:5) or from Babylon the great prostitute (Rev. 17:2), wine in the Bible has often represented ideologies that are wicked and worldly.

From “blessed is the one who does not . . .” (Ps. 1:1) to “do not conform to the pattern of this world” (Rom. 12:2), the Bible repeatedly tells us that one of the first signs of a Spirit-filled and godly person is what that person rejects. We are not to have “even a hint” of sexual immorality (5:3) or any obscene talk (v. 4). “Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise” (v. 15).

To be filled with the Spirit, we are called to live carefully in wisdom and fear of the Lord, for “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 9:10). When we do, Spirit-filled singing and praise can be a natural response (v. 19).

Go Deeper

What or who is controlling or influencing your life and choices? Why can this be compared to drunkenness? What should we do instead?

Pray with Us

Dear God, we ask for wisdom to live “carefully.” Holy Spirit, help us in our weaknesses, fill our lives and actions, so that Spirit-filled singing and praise is our natural response to Your presence in our lives.

Worship and Peace

Read Colossians 3:1–17

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly.—Colossians 3:16

Quiet music can have such a soothing effect on us, that many people use it to fall asleep. It can calm our heart rate and still our minds, leaving us with a feeling of peace. In our final look at psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, not only does Paul encourage the Christians in Colossae to sing, but he also explains the benefits of worship for the believer.

Colossians 3 gives clear instruction on how we should prepare ourselves for worship. There are no less than seven active commands for the people of God, such as “set” your hearts *and* minds on things above (vv. 1–2), “put to death” anything that belongs to our earthly nature (v. 5), “rid yourselves” and “do not lie” (vv. 8–9). And then more commands that culminate with love: “clothe yourselves” (v. 12), “bear with each other” (v. 13), and above all “put on love” (v. 14). As we saw in Ephesians 5, there is a posture before God and others that prepares us not only to be Spirit-filled worshippers, but that also invites Christ to rule in us.

But look how the language changes after these seven active commands—“let” the peace of Christ rule in our hearts (v. 15) and “let” the message of Christ (or, according to some translations, “the word of Christ”) dwell richly (v. 16). When we obey God’s commands, setting our hearts and minds on seeking the eternal things and loving Him and others, Christ’s peace and His Word can effortlessly rule in us. And when it does, God puts a song in us. We naturally sing songs in worship that help us both lovingly teach and admonish one another (v. 16). We see these two purposes in the songs throughout Scripture, and we ought to strive for fulfilling these purposes in our churches today.

Go Deeper

Do we seek the things above (v. 1) and set our minds and hearts on Christ and His Word? How does preparing correctly for worship allow the peace of Christ to rule our hearts (v. 15)?

Pray with Us

Can we find peace in our turbulent world? Your Word says yes—and surprisingly, one of the ways is in singing to You. Teach us Your ways, so that the peace of Christ will rule in our hearts.

The Hymn of Christ

Read Colossians 1:1–20

*The Son is the image of the invisible God,
the firstborn over all creation.—Colossians 1:15*

Did you know that there are possibly two hymns embedded in Apostle Paul's letters to the churches? One of these texts is found in Colossians 1:15–20. Although it may have been a creed recited by early Christians, others believe they were truths set to a melody.

In Paul's letter to the Colossians, we see statements that both affirm important doctrines and have elements of an ode or song. Notice how virtually each statement begins with Christ: "The Son", "in Him", or "He is." Paul is showing that Christ is not only the head of each statement, but the head of the church (v. 18). Jesus Christ is acknowledged and proclaimed as God, Creator, Sustainer, the firstborn among the dead and supreme over all.

But what precedes this hymn? Paul writes with a heart of thanksgiving, faith, and love for God and His people (vv. 3–4). He testifies to a continual prayer for this church, a prayer of intercession that the saints in Colossae would be filled with God's knowledge,

wisdom, and understanding through the Spirit (v. 9). He prayed that God would allow them to bear fruit while growing, being strengthened, and having endurance, patience, and joy (vv. 10–12). More than that, he reminds them of the gospel: that through Christ, they had been rescued from darkness and were now a kingdom people, having redemption and forgiveness of sins (v. 14).

Only then is the hymn quoted. Paul says that our songs of faith in worship should flow out of a heart of thanksgiving, faith, and love for God, a love that flows to other believers. None of this would be possible without the gospel. For that reason, the honor, the praise in the songs of our churches must be focused on Christ alone.

Go Deeper

Why is it so important that Christ is the focus of our worship and the subject of our worship songs? Can you think of songs or hymns where He is the clear focus?

Pray with Us

Jesus, all our music is for You! "Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart/ Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art—/ Thou my best thought, by day or by night,/ Walking or sleeping, Thy presence my light." (Traditional Irish hymn)

The Mind of Christ

Read Philippians 2:1–11

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.—Philippians 2:5

When people think like us, we sometimes say we are like-minded. We believe similar things and act a lot like one another. As believers, we are told to “have the same mindset as Christ” (Phil. 2:5). In Paul’s letter to the Philippians, we find another embedded hymn (vv. 5–11), calling us to have the mind of Christ (v. 5).

Throughout the Bible, we are commanded to think well, remember God, and be sober-minded. The believer is called to have a sound mind and not to be deceived by the intoxicating influences and ideologies of the world. In Philippians 2, Paul calls the Christians in Philippi to unity, urging them to be “like-minded” (v. 2). But this unity is different from how the world, or even some in the church today, might define it. This is true unity defined by an uncompromising truth and love.

To have the mind of Christ means to have a love for God and others where we do nothing out of selfish

ambition but “in humility value others above” ourselves (v. 3). It means we have the seed of truth embedded in us, for if we are truly born again, we have a truth “not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God” (1 Peter 1:23). We cannot have true unity or love without the truth from One whose name is Faithful and True (Rev. 19:11). “Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth” (1 Cor. 13:6).

With true unity, we are able to sing with one mind, one heart, one voice, and one message, proclaiming the gospel until the day we see “every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil. 2:11; Rom. 14:11; Isa. 45:23). May we always sing with the mind of Christ.

Go Deeper

Do you have the mind of Christ, rooted in His truth and His love? How does being “like-minded” change the way we think, act, and even worship?

Pray with Us

This world is full of counterfeits, but You, Lord, are Faithful and True. Guide us into all truth and unity among believers, so that we may sing to You with one heart, one mind, one voice. Amen!

Words to Bless

Read James 5:13–20

*Is anyone happy?
Let them sing songs of praise.—James 5:13*

The average person speaks several thousand words daily, not to mention the words in texts, emails, social media posts. Multiply that in a given week, month, year, and the volume is daunting to consider. Jesus says that “everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken” (Matt. 12:36).

Does that cause us to fear the Lord? It should. And in the book of James, God lovingly warns us about our words. The tongue is capable of singing songs of praise (James 5:13), but also like a small rudder of a ship steers an entire vessel or like a small spark starts a great forest fire (3:4–5). “No human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison” (3:8). Our words are capable to curse others (3:9), fight and quarrel (4:1), slander brothers and sisters (4:11), speak arrogant boasts that God calls evil (4:16), even make false promises or oaths (5:12).

But James ends with words of hope. While our words are capable of evil, they are also capable of blessing: prayer, praise, truth. This is meant both for one’s own blessing and to bless others. Notice how in today’s passage we are called to use words to pray and praise in trouble or happiness (5:13). But while church elders are called to pray over those troubled (v. 14), we are all called to use words that bless others through confession of sins and prayers for others, for “the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” (v. 16).

Go Deeper

How have you used your words in good or bad ways? Are you willing to speak words of truth, especially when a loved one has wandered away? (James 5:19). We are called to be both hearers and doers of the word (1:22). May God use our words to bless His name and bless others.

Pray with Us

Lord Jesus Christ, save us from our tongues that so often can wound, cut, and even destroy. We, as Your people, want our words to be a blessing that flows in prayer, praise, and truth.

The Beginning and the End

Read Revelation 1

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”—Revelation 1:8

If there is one book of the Bible that has the reputation of being difficult to understand, it may be Revelation. But we should not avoid it, for God promises blessing if we read it aloud, hear it, and take it to heart (Rev. 1:3).

Did you know that no other book in the New Testament has more specific references to music: song lyrics and titles, trumpets, harps, declarations of praise? The music in Revelation is embedded in a call to repent and reveal Christ.

The book is addressed to the seven churches (Rev. 1:4) to whom Jesus is speaking. Each letter (Revelation 2–3) begins with “These are the words of him” and ends with “Let them hear what the Spirit says.” In the same way, the song of the church begins and ends with Christ. We are to be entrenched in His Word and by listening to the Spirit, rooted in the life of repentance.

Chapter one begins with God’s revelation of His Son, to show us “what soon must take place” (Rev. 1:1).

We sing lyrics that reveal all of Christ, the Alpha and Omega (Rev. 1:8). This includes singing that He truly was the Son of David, the Jewish Messiah “who holds the key of David” (Rev. 3:7; Isa. 22:22), the Root and Offspring of David (Rev. 22:16), and the Lion of Judah (Rev. 5:5). We sing the gospel: who He is, what He has done, and what He will do. This song includes the eternal gospel: to “fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come” (Rev. 14:7).

As believers, we “worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water” (Rev. 14:7). We are blessed by reading, hearing, singing, and living out the words of Revelation (Rev. 22:7).

Go Deeper

Do a bit of investigation on the background of the book of Revelation. What is significant about music being a focus at both Creation (see Day 1) and the very end of the age?

Pray with Us

It’s a joy to know there was music at Creation and, as today’s passage points out, music will be at the end. As we near the end of our study, we ask You, God, to show us what purpose You have for music in our life.

Worthy Is the Lamb

Read Revelation 5

*Worthy is the Lamb,
who was slain.—Revelation 5:12*

Jesus is given many names in Revelation, including one that is written on Him “that no one knows but himself” (Rev. 19:12). But one name is repeated more than any other: Jesus is called the “Lamb.”

In Revelation 5, the Lamb causes the four living creatures and the 24 elders to sing a new song while holding harps in their hands (vv. 8–9). Once again, prayer is at the center of true worship. Besides musical instruments, they also hold golden bowls of incense that are the prayers of God’s people (v. 8). Our prayers today can set our hearts and prepare the way for a new song of praise.

Notice what precipitates this new song. John repeatedly says, “I saw.” He details all the things he saw in heaven: a scroll with seven seals (v. 1), a mighty angel (v. 2), and the Lion of Judah, the Root of David who is the Lamb looking as if slain (v. 5–6). We too are to truly see Christ and to seek “the

things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God” (Col. 3:1). When we behold Christ, we sing a new song. This song describes a future day when the Lamb alone will take the scroll from His Father’s hand and open its seals (v. 9). Each seal will initiate future global events (Rev. 6–8) before Christ’s return.

We sing the gospel message of a Lamb who was slain, who redeems those who repent and believe in Him out of all nations (v. 9). As the song of the Lamb declares, “all nations will come and worship before you” (Rev. 15:4). Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

Go Deeper

What is the significance of Jesus’ name as the Lamb of God? Why do you think this name is given such importance in Revelation?

Pray with Us

Thank You, holy Lamb of God, for your eternal sacrifice! May we never see Your cross as merely a symbol. May we never take it for granted. We long for the time when we will see You and hear the song of the Lamb.

Sing Hallelujah!

Read Revelation 19:1–9

*Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.
Praise the LORD.—Psalm 150:6*

We often sing and say “hallelujah” (or “praise the Lord”) as Christians. But where is this found in the Bible? In the New Testament, *hallelujah* is used in only one place, Revelation 19. The four separate times it occurs there give us insight into why we ought to use “hallelujah,” not just in conversations but also in our songs.

In Revelation 19, a great multitude roars “hallelujah,” giving praise and glory to God (v. 1). We are given the reason why: “for true and just are his judgments” (v. 2). We sing hallelujah not only because our God judges with truth and justice, but also because He is coming again to judge the earth and bring vengeance for the blood of His servants (v. 2). This is in reference to the “great prostitute” Babylon, with whom the kings of the earth commit adultery (Rev. 18:9), the one who is drunk with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus (Rev. 17:6). God will judge her, and the nations and smoke will go up from her forever (Rev. 19:3, Isa. 34:10).

At that time the multitude will cry “hallelujah” the second time. As the elders and living creatures proclaim “amen” we hear the third “hallelujah” (v. 4). A voice from the throne calls all those who fear the Lord to praise Him, a call to praise and worship Him in reverence and awe.

The final “hallelujah” culminates with a marriage. We sing hallelujah because our God reigns (v. 6) and we, the church, are His bride (Eph. 5:23). On that day we will be made ready (v. 7). This is also our call to get ready now, asking God to continually purify us, His church, as we worship in longing for that glorious wedding day when we will be singing an eternal song. May we make ourselves ready, for Jesus says, “Yes, I am coming soon” (Rev. 22:20).

Go Deeper

What is the significance of “hallelujah” in Revelation 19? Why is this word so closely connected to Christ’s return?

Pray with Us

Today, as we study Revelation 19, we join with the great multitude singing “Hallelujah!” Worthy is the Lamb that was slain! Thank you for the cross, Lord!

Listen, Obey, Sing

Read Deuteronomy 6:4–9

“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.’” —Mark 12:29

When we listen to music, we think of hearing something after it has made a sound. But any act of music-making requires listening *before* any note is heard. To listen is to hear the true pitch and rhythm in our minds before playing, singing, or even writing music.

How true that should be as we live for Christ! We are to know and hear His voice and the leading of the Spirit as we live in obedience to Him. When asked which commandment was the most important, the first word Jesus said was “hear” (Mark 12:29). Jesus quoted a passage from Deuteronomy 6:4 known as the *Shema* Prayer. *Shema* appears over 1,000 times in the Old Testament, and it means to hear, to listen, and to obey. This makes sense: when we tell our kids to “listen to mom or dad,” we are essentially telling them to obey. In the same way, our heavenly Father lovingly calls us to obey Him.

Shema is also used in a musical context. In Psalm 150, it means to make a loud musical sound in praising

God (Ps. 150:5). To offer true praise in our music and songs, to worship with impact on the church and the watching world, we must first *shema* to Jesus. We must have no other gods, for “hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Mark 12:29). Hear, listen, obey the Lord and no other. *Then* shall we love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. *Then* shall we love our neighbor as ourselves. *Then* shall we offer true and pleasing worship in our song, for we are to worship the only One worthy with our very lives. *Shema*, O Church! May we trust and obey Him and sing to the Lord a new song (Ps. 33:3; 96:1; Isa. 42:10).

Go Deeper

What has God been teaching you through this study? How has it deepened your understanding of music in the Bible? If you are in our Facebook group, we invite you to share one of your takeaways with your fellow readers!

Pray with Us

Jesus, we desire to listen to You better, the way we learn to listen to music. You told Your people in the *Shema* to “hear,” which means *hear, listen, obey*. Indeed, this is our prayer today: teach us Your *Shema*, Lord!

Questions & Answers

by Dr. Steven Sanchez,
Professor of Bible, Moody Bible Institute

Q When the Israelites needed water and Moses struck the rock to provide it, what did he do that was so wrong (Num. 20:1–13)?

A We can best understand this passage in the context of the rest of the rebellion narratives in Numbers 11–20. Those stories detail Israel’s difficult journey in the wilderness after leaving Mt. Sinai. During this time, they encountered a variety of challenges, complained bitterly about them, and sometimes even rebelled!

In most cases their complaint was about a situation of which they disapproved. Although these needs may have been frustrating, in every case except the last, God had already provided what they needed to endure. But the people were dissatisfied with His solutions and complained. Because their complaints were illegitimate, God disciplined them.

However, in the situation you mention (Num. 20:1–13), they had a legitimate need for water. Although they complained, God intended to provide for them. He was not angry with His people, for we notice that the signals of His anger which were present in the other rebellions are not present here! In this case God

instructed Moses and Aaron to provide water.

But Moses became frustrated and vented his anger at the people by shouting at them and then striking the rock instead of speaking to it! God told Moses what his sin was: “You did not believe in me to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people” (Num. 13:12). Moses did not believe God was making the right decision here. He believed the people needed more judgment. But God understood Israel had a real need. He wanted to meet that need, not punish them. Instead, by his reaction, by his angry outburst, Moses communicated that God was angry too. But this was not true. God was aware of their legitimate need and intended to provide for them.

Remember, Israel did not interact with God directly; that was Moses’ role. He was the one who spoke with God (Num. 12:6–8). Moses had a unique job as God’s direct representative (Ex. 34:34). Given that reality, it was critical for Moses to represent God well. This meant communicating exactly what God said and nothing more. In this case he misrepresented God. Moses’ behavior led the people astray. As a result, God punished him by not allowing him to enter the Promised Land. ■

A Family Study from Today in the Word

Let's Sing to the Lord Together!

This Family Study is a companion to the *Today in the Word* devotional *Sing to the Lord: Music in the Bible* (May 2024). The whole family can learn from God's Word together. In each of the four lessons, you will:



Read

Read a passage
in the Bible



Understand

Understand the biblical
text in a deeper way



Imagine

Imagine the lesson
with hands-on activities

About Music in the Bible

Music is an important way that we, as Christians, can joyfully worship and praise the Lord. Throughout Scripture, we will learn that God created music. It is mentioned at Creation and also at the end of the Bible. In God's Word we learn about the many ways songs and music are used to worship Him. In the Psalms, we find songs of lament (sadness) and songs of joy. Music in the Bible is used to praise the Lord for who He is and what He has done. When we sing to the Lord we bring Him glory! Singing directs our minds and hearts to God.



Download the complete Family Study for free at todayintheword.org

This *Today in the Word* family study was written by Moody Bible Institute students Haylee Grindal, Ashleigh Hiderandt, and Annie Cornette under the direction of Elizabeth Smith, Program Head and Associate Professor of Moody's Children and Family Ministry program. Please visit moody.edu/academics/programs/children-family-ministry for more information.



Read Psalm 98

Have you ever wondered why we sing songs in church? We sing songs because music is one of the ways we can worship God! Our memory verse today says to “burst into jubilant song with music” (Ps. 98:4). The word “jubilant” means joyful. As Christians, we can sing songs of worship to the Lord as a joyful response to all the amazing things He has done!



Understand

1. What does the word “jubilant” mean?
2. Verse 1 tells us why we sing to the Lord. What are the reasons the Psalmist was singing to Him?
3. What instruments are mentioned in Psalm 98?
4. Verse 8 tells us that even the rivers and mountains joined in! How did they participate?
5. Why do we sing songs in church?
6. What are we giving to God when we sing with joy?



Imagine

Parents, help your children learn the memory verse by creating a jubilant, joyful song! Have your child make up a tune that fits the memory verse. They can use a piano or musical instrument to make a melody or even just hum some tunes. When you decide on one melody, have them create their own hand motions or even a dance to go with it.

They can use items around the house as musical instruments to play along (pots and pans as a drum, a container of salt as a shaker). Have them practice this “new song” until they are confident, and then perform it for other friends and family (or capture a video and share it on social media—tag #todayintheword).



Worship the Lord in Song!

Our gift to you this month is a CD of beautiful and uplifting worship music, recorded by the Moody Chorale. *O Come Let Us Worship* will be the perfect backdrop to your time with the Lord. Songs include “Praise to the Lord,” “Jesus I Am Resting, Resting,” “Abide with Me,” and “Lamb of God.”



This worship CD is our thank-you for your generous support of *Today in the Word*.

Request your CD today using the enclosed reply card.

Please note that limited quantities are available.

Visit us online to request resources and view past issues.

todayintheword.org



Today in the Word



TodayintheWord



TodayintheWord



TodayInTheWordDevotional



MOODY
BIBLE INSTITUTE™

Moody helps equip you with the truth of God's Word as you impact your community and the world for Christ. We believe that understanding and sharing God's Word is a lifelong journey. Let us help you take the next step in your relationship with Christ.

Learn more at MOODYBIBLE.ORG or call **(800) DL MOODY** today.

MOODY
Bible Institute™

moody.edu

MOODY
Theological
Seminary™

MOODY
Publishers®

moodypublishers.com

MOODY
Radio®

moodyradio.org