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Why We Sing



Individual Topics - Steve Gregg

In "Why We Sing," Steve Gregg discusses the significance of singing in worship for Christians and Jews. Singing not only expresses joy, but it also lifts one's spirits, reminds us of the joy of salvation, and invokes God's presence. Through singing, Christians can praise God and acknowledge His attributes, and it can even serve as a form of warfare against the enemy. Ultimately, singing is an important form of worship that should be done with intention and understanding.

Transcript

The last few times we've gotten together, we've been going through psalms. We're not going to do that today, but we're going to look at a lot of psalms. I wanted to talk about why we sing.

It's a major doctrine of scripture, and of course, we give probably almost half of the time that we meet together here to our worshiping and song. What's this all about? What's singing about? Christianity is one of the very few religions that really sing as part of their worship. There are religions that chant, of course, in the East, but when it comes to singing, this is a very Christian or very Jewish, very Judeo-Christian thing to do.

The Jews sang in their worship, and Christians have always sung in their worship as well. It says in Psalm 147, verse 1, praise the Lord, for it is good to sing praises to our God, for it is pleasant and praise is beautiful. It's good to sing praises to God.

There's different reasons for this, and I want to talk about that. Why is it that it's good to sing and praise God that way? I'm just going to go through several points and look at some scriptures on them. This is not going to be very sophisticated.

Here's why, here's why, here's why, here's why. The first reason is we sing to express and also to arouse joy. Now, I say arouse joy because sometimes when you're not happy, singing can make you happy.

Worship can arouse joy when you're forgetting to be joyful. There's always something to be joyful about when you have God, but we don't always have those things in the

forefront of our minds. The singing in the Bible usually is an expression of joy already there, but there's also the expectation to rejoice, which means to arouse joy within yourself in singing and in worship.

So, first of all, we want to realize that we take for granted an awful lot of things, things that people who don't have what we have would think they died and went to heaven if they had them, including, frankly, having God. I mean, we've got all kinds of material things that we should be thankful for, but we even take those for granted. I mean, anyone living in the kind of luxury, freedom, you know, comfort and so forth that Americans have ought to wake up every morning and say, wow, I don't deserve any of this.

This is awesome. Thank you, God. But then, of course, the privilege of knowing God.

And I know this when I was going through deep trials some years ago, about the worst I could imagine. At the time, I remember just thinking, how do people do this without God? I mean, I was strengthened by the presence of God. I, you know, I turned to God in my trials and received grace to help, as the Bible says we do.

But I thought, what if people didn't have grace to help? What would they do? I mean, I guess a lot of them, frankly, commit suicide because they just, there's nothing they can do. They've got no resources. But we have them, and we have, so we rejoice in God.

We rejoice in knowing God. It says in Psalm, or we'll start first of all in James, James chapter 5 and verse 13, it says, is any among you merry, meaning cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Now, here we have, of course, a rationale for singing.

We sing because we're happy. We sing because we're merry. Now, it's also interesting that we're told to sing the psalms.

That's not the only songs we're exhorted to sing, but it certainly is the main psalter, was the main hymnal of Israel. These psalms that we sing are meant to be solemn. They weren't meant to just be read as poetry, but as music.

We don't know what the original tunes were, so people, modern people have written tunes to them, but singing them is what they are for. In fact, well, three times in the New Testament, we were told to sing the psalms. We're also told to sing hymns and spiritual songs as well, but James in particular says, if you're merry, if you're cheerful, sing psalms.

And that means that singing is an expression of joy. Now, since there's so much singing exhorted in Scripture, there's assumed to be a great deal of joy, and there should be. The joy of salvation is a great thing that Christians should never take for granted.

If you've been raised a Christian or you've been a Christian for a long time, you might

just think, well, you know, yeah, of course Jesus died for our sins. Of course I have a relationship with God. Of course God's with me.

What else is new, you know? I know being raised a Christian, it's so easy to just take those things for granted, and yet when I meet somebody who isn't a believer and talk to them about where they're at and where their mind is at and stuff, I think I remember, oh yeah, there's people out there who don't know God, who don't have all the things we take for granted. And I remember when I was younger thinking one of the best things I could do to get out of a slump, spiritually, emotionally, would be to go out and witness, because it always happened. When I talked to an unbeliever very much, I thought, wow, they are so in the dark.

I took for granted how much light I have, how much grace I have, how much knowing God transforms everything. But we shouldn't forget that. That's something to celebrate.

That's something we sing because of, because of that. It says in Psalm 9, verse 2, I will be glad and rejoice in you. I will sing praise to your name almost high.

So I'm going to rejoice and be glad and sing praise. I praise because I'm happy, because I'm glad. I'm rejoicing.

Again, rejoicing is an act, is a choice. We're commanded to rejoice. Rejoice in the Lord always.

Again, I say rejoice, Paul says in Philippians, and many times we're told to rejoice. That means be happy. That means be joyful.

That's something you choose. You choose to be joyful. Happiness is a choice.

Now, emotional happiness isn't always a choice. A lot of times we have reasons to be unhappy because someone we love is hurt or died or something like that. I mean, certainly Christians have every reason to be sad about things that are truly sad.

But even when those passing circumstances that are saddening are there, there's still a deeper joy that we have because we see everything in an eternal perspective and realize, well, yeah, but I mean, there's still God. You know, whatever else is there, there's still God. As long as there's God, there's hope.

As long as there's God, there's a benefit to mankind and to me, personally, because I know him. And there's always something we can rejoice in, even when there are things not to rejoice in, too. There's plenty of things that we don't find conducive to happiness or inspiring of happiness.

But those things are always passing things. They're never permanent things for the Christian. Now, unless, of course, you believe that hell is a place of eternal torment and

you have loved ones who go there and you think, well, they're suffering forever and ever, I could never be happy.

That's one of the reasons that I've heard it speculated that one of the reasons that the early church was known for being so joyful, and they are described that way in the book of Acts, they're rejoicing, they're joyful people, happy people. Some suggest that means that they didn't at that time have the traditional view of hell, you know, because it does take the damper off if you have friends that you suspect are being tormented forever and ever and ever. It's awfully hard to be happy.

Nonetheless, that's the only, I mean, if you have doubts about that particular doctrine of hell, then there's nothing eternal that God can't make right. And trust in God gives you reason to rejoice in his good intentions and his good plan and what he's going to do. There's always, no matter what the temporary downturn is, no matter what's depressing at the moment, there's always the fact of God's eternal plan.

I mean, whatever's going on right now, that's going to pass. And that doesn't matter what it is, whatever it is, if it isn't God, it's going to pass. And God's will will always be the same.

So there's always this underlying eternal perspective that gives the Christian occasion of rejoicing, no matter what emotions, immediate circumstances may tend to inspire. We can feel sad about things, but even sad, we have a peace and a joy that underlies that, that changes our whole perspective. And that's why we sing.

We should sing. And if we're not happy, we should sing. Bible doesn't tell us to sing when we're not happy, it tells us to sing when we're happy.

But you'll find that singing lifts you out of yourself too, especially if you're singing about God. The Psalms, I will say this, while I didn't sing them, they were written to be sung. When I went through the deepest trial of my life about 20 years ago, I was so, I had the wind knocked out of me so much that I could hardly even pray.

And I would just, I'd wake up in the middle of the night and couldn't get back to sleep every night. And I'd just open the Psalms and I would read them out loud as prayers. And they, they, they reorient you.

I mean, David's Psalms, many of them begin with complaints. Oh God, how have they increased to trouble me? Those who want to kill me are more than the hairs of my head. You know, why do the wicked prosper and all this stuff? He starts complaining.

And at the end of the Psalm, almost every time, there's maybe one or two exceptions, he's praising God. He's saying positive things about God. You know, God is going to win.

You know, this is, you know, God has victory over his enemies and, you know,

righteousness prevails. I mean, the Psalms, they start out low sometimes, but they almost always end with a reminder of who God is and of the reasons to be actually encouraged to be happy. And so those, those reasons always exist.

We don't always remember them, but singing Psalms calls them to mind, because the Psalms, in many cases, are written to do that very thing. But it not only is that we sing because we're happy, we sing because it makes us happy. If we're listening to what we're saying.

Now, of course, we can sing Christian songs and even memorize Psalms and things like that and, and forget while we're singing what it is we're saying. You know, we're getting caught up in the tune. We know the words we wrote, you know, and we can just kind of, we've got to memorize, but we don't remember what they are at the time we're singing them.

Just like praying, you know, so many times if you pray the Lord's Prayer. How many times do you pray the Lord's Prayer and catch yourself, wait a minute, I just said three lines I didn't even think about, you know. I didn't even think about what that was, you know.

I've got to go back over those ones. I've got to return to those lines and say them again, meaning them and, you know, expanding on them in my mind and so forth. But that's how singing is too.

We can, we can sing by rote and, and of course, Jesus said, the people of his time, these people draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. It's entirely possible to sing and not have your heart in it, but, but it's a natural expression of joy. It's also a natural inspirer of joy to sing and joy is a very important Christian attribute, a very noticeable one in the early church, according to the book of Acts, and of course, it's a fruit of the Spirit.

So there's every reason that Christians should be singers and they are. In Psalm 68 verse 4, it says, sing to God, sing praises to his name and rejoice before him. That's Psalm 68 4. And then in Psalm 98 4, it says, break forth in song, rejoice and sing praises.

So there's rejoicing, taking joy, seizing joy, being joyful. These are exhortations and they're connected to singing. Sing and rejoice or rejoice and sing.

So the first reason we sing is because of joy. It's an expression of joy. It also tends to inspire or arouse joy when it's needed.

So that's the first reason that we sing biblically. Another is because it's a natural way to celebrate victory. Of course, that's part of joy too, but it's natural when people have seen victory over their enemies that they break in a song.

Sophie mentioned, you know, today Exodus 15. Well, Exodus 15 is the song that the Israelites sang when they had come through the Red Sea. They'd been in bondage for hundreds of years, slaves.

But for the first time, they realized, I'm never going to be a slave again. You know, those Egyptians that kept us enslaved, beat us and abused us, we're never going to see them again. They're down in the bottom of the Red Sea right now.

And we're over here safe on the other side. And we're a free people. And they they said, you know, I will sing unto the Lord because he has triumphed gloriously.

The horse and the rider is thrown into the sea and they sang on. From that point, it's the triumph of God. They're rejoicing.

And again, that is no doubt, I suppose, maybe one of the main reasons, the main rational reasons for being joyful for a Christian is that we see the world going down the tubes. We see people going the wrong way. We see people's lives being ruined, which is not happy.

Those are not happy things. But we know that God is the one who will triumph. God, who wants all things reconciled to himself, is the one who's got a plan in motion and no one can thwart his plan.

And so, you know, he's the he's the victor. Christ is the victor. I mean, that's that's not a biblical phrase, but it's certainly a true phrase.

The Bible certainly describes Jesus as having conquered the enemies and so forth. He's a victor. The lamb, it says the lion of the tribe of Judah has overcome, that means conquered, to open the book and break the seals and so forth.

It says Jesus is the victor. This is something to celebrate at all times. Victory is always something to celebrate.

We all, we're always looking for things to celebrate. And one thing we naturally would celebrate is if, for example, you know, Twitter, you know, ceased to be controlled by the left or something like that, you know, things like that. That's a victory if you've been praying for that kind of thing.

You know, if the war in the Ukraine ends in a favorable way for all parties concerned and, you know, it's not a horrible thing and victory, God's justice is victorious. If that happens, if it doesn't happen in this particular world, it's going to happen eventually. God's going to bring about justice, the Bible says.

Eventually Christ will reign in justice here. So his victory, his triumph is something to celebrate. In 1 Samuel chapter 18, when David had killed Goliath, it says when David was returning from the slaughter of the Philistine, the women had come out of all the

cities of Israel singing and dancing to meet King Saul with tambourines and joy and musical instruments.

So they came out because David had just conquered the Philistine. The nation had been under threat of the Philistines from this gigantic champion who no Israelite could confront, and David finally did it and defeated him, and now they were at liberty again. Truth is conquered.

Righteousness has won the day. And, of course, we recognize that as having happened when Jesus raised from the dead. He said, now is the judgment of this world.

Now shall the prince of this world be cast out. That is the devil being cast out. Christ's victory over Satan is on the cross.

It says in Colossians 2, 15 that he disarmed the principalities and powers through the cross, making a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it. He triumphed over them. And so Christ is the victor, and in the way that Christians understand that, that's something to be celebrated.

Our whole life is a celebration. You know, I have to say that I don't really do anything special on Easter usually. I mean, I sometimes go to church, but some Sundays I don't go to church.

And if I'm not planning to go to church on a given Sunday, it happens to be Easter Sunday, I'm not more likely to go because it's Easter than any other day, because I don't see anything that celebrating the resurrection of Jesus. That's what I do every day. My whole life, I intend to be a celebration of that victory.

The very fact that I wake up in the morning as a Christian means that Christ has conquered the enemy, and he did so in his resurrection and ascension. So every day of the Christian life is a celebration of that. I mean, there's nothing wrong with going to church and celebrating it specially, of course.

Do anything you want to celebrate. It's kind of that way with Christmas too. I don't do much usually with Christmas, and some years I haven't done anything special at all with Christmas.

But my whole life celebrates the fact that Jesus was born. You know, I really can't see anything I could do on December 25th that would be a more meaningful celebration of that than living for God every single day because Jesus was born. Because Jesus was born, because he's risen, he's triumphed over the enemy.

That's a celebration. That's a cause for celebration. Now, of course, we sing also, as we say in the Psalms, to praise God.

Now, not all of our singing is made up of praise per se, though much of it is, and much of it should be, to praise and thank God. Now, there's thanksgiving and praise are mentioned together a great deal in the Psalms and elsewhere in Scripture, and in our singing. We thank God.

We praise God. What's the difference between those two things? Well, you thank somebody for something they did. You praise someone for something they are.

In other words, if you give me a gift, I thank you for the gift. I say, oh, thank you, Ernest. That's a great gift.

Thank you so much. But if I say, you amaze me how generous you are, then I'm praising you. I'm saying something about you, not about your gift.

Now, when we talk to God, we should thank him for everything. The Bible says that we should forget not all his benefits, and we should always be thankful, and everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you, the Bible says. Thanking God is, of course, absolutely necessary, because to not do so is to be an ingrate.

There's nothing that will cure a miserable attitude of entitlement, which most people seem to develop. They feel like everyone should be looking out for me. I should get what I want.

Nothing cures entitlement so much as developing a grateful attitude. In fact, there's very little that will make you happier or more loving towards somebody than being grateful to them. If you want to love God more, be grateful to him.

That is, bear in mind every good gift and every perfect gift, which is from above. It comes down from the Father of lights. If you wake up and say, wow, the fact that I opened my eyes and my heart is still beating is a gift.

God, it says in Daniel, holds my breath in his hand. He could have just snuffed it, and no doubt many thousands of people the world over did get snuffed last night, and every night. People die all the time.

I didn't. Maybe I should be thankful, you know. Many people wake up and they can't see a thing because they've been blind all their life or more recently.

I'm not blind. I got something to be thankful there. Never is there any reason to complain.

Not that things aren't bad. There are some bad things, but there's always so many more things to be thankful for. That if you bear in mind all the things God gives you, it inspires love and joy, love toward him, and joy in your own circumstances that your inheritance has fallen out to you in good places.

God has done so much. To be thankful then is absolutely necessary. When Jesus cured the 10 lepers, when I was a kid, my heart was warmed by the fact that one of them went back to thank him.

Oh, how nice. That guy went back. Jesus didn't say, oh, I'm so thankful you came back.

That warms my heart. He said, oh, where's the other nine? How come they didn't? You know, I mean, I remember thinking when I was a child reading that thing. Oh, yeah.

You know, I mean, when you read, oh, one came all the way back to thank him and was so thankful. I think that's so cool. Someone came back to thank him.

But when he said, yeah, but where's the other nine? I thought, oh, yeah, that's really true. All 10 of them should have done it, and nine of them didn't. And the Bible indicates that it's, you know, something we owe is thanksgiving to God.

And it's a, it's an ingratitude is an ugly thing. So we should always be thanking him in our songs and otherwise. But then also praising him and praising him requires that we know him, not just that we're aware of gifts that he gives, but we know what kind of God he is.

When we speak about how faithful he is, how loving he is, how just he is, how compassionate he is, how good he is. I mean, when speaking, we're speaking about his character, that's praising him. That's acknowledging who he is, what he is like.

We're speaking of his attributes. We're praising him. And to thank and praise is what our singing is intended to do.

David said in 2 Samuel 22:50, in 2 Samuel 22:50, David said, therefore, I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the Gentiles and sing praises to your name. Among the Gentiles. It's like he's, he's singing praises among the heathen.

I don't know how that worked out. I don't know if he just where the heathen pulled out his harp and started playing, you know, street musician, you know, just get out there and start singing praises to God or what. I don't know exactly what setting that was, but he expressed that resolve in a number of the songs.

I'm going to sing praise to you among the nations. I'm going to speak of your wondrous works. I'm going to praise your goodness.

And, and that's what our singing is to do too. We do it not so much among the nations. Well, I guess Gentiles, Gentile nations, we're Gentiles, most of us, but we do sing it in the congregation.

We sing his praises. We thank God, verbalizing praise and verbalizing thanks is apparently important more than just feeling it. I feel thankful, but I don't have to say anything.

God knows what I think. Well, he likes to hear it. It's sort of like when I, you know, I have somebody who, an old friend who betrayed me and injured me.

I think he's changed his mind now. I don't think he feels that way anymore, but he's never said so. You know, it's kind of like, I'd kind of like to hear him say it.

I'd kind of like to hear him admit that he did the wrong thing. I mean, I'll treat him with friendship when I see him, but, but you know, I'd kind of like to hear that he acknowledges that he did the wrong thing. It's sort of that way too.

I mean, I'm thankful. Would God like to hear me say so? The Bible says, let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from the hand of the enemy. In Psalm 7, 17, David says, I will praise the Lord according to his righteousness.

And I will sing praise to the name of the most high. I'm going to sing praise and I'm going to praise him according to his righteousness. That's his character.

I'm going to speak about his righteous, how just he is, how righteous he is, how good he is. That's going to be my, you know, the theme of my song. Psalm 7, 17, another Psalm, Psalm 89, 1. And there's certainly, these could be multiplied.

I want to get a few samples, but Psalm 89, 1, David said, or the sons of Atha, someone said, I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever. With my mouth, I will make known your faithfulness to all generations. I'm singing of what? I'm singing of the mercies of the Lord.

And I'm making known his faithfulness with my mouth. That is with the things I'm saying, with the things I'm singing. My singing is about his faithfulness.

My singing is actually encouraging all generations to know that he's faithful. So again, it's praising his attributes of faithfulness and mercy. One other example, this is Psalm 92, 1. Psalm 92, 1 says, it is good to give thanks to the Lord and to sing praises to your name.

It's a good thing to do. It's the right thing to do. It's not just neutral.

It's good. It's, it's what we're supposed to do. There's, in a sense, an obligation to do so, to praise God.

And, uh, you know, words of affirmation. Most people like to hear words of affirmation from people, uh, from your spouse, from your kids. Of course, when you're young, from your parents, uh, and especially from the people in your circle that you'd like to think they like you, for them to affirm you just makes you feel good.

Now you might be an arrogant person who just thrives on flattery. That's not good. But even if you're not arrogant, even if you don't, even if it makes you uncomfortable to be

flattered, and you might know what that's like when someone's flattering you, just saying, oh, come on, that's not real.

That's not true. Flattery is not a good thing, but to affirm somebody truthfully, honestly, to express true appreciation for them. That's what praise is.

And that's what, it's a good thing to praise the Lord, to sing praises. That's what singing is for. Now, there's another aspect of why we sing and praise God.

It's because by doing so, we invoke his presence or enter into his presence, actually. In Psalm 100, 6, Psalm 100, 6, it says, therefore, I will offer sacrifices of joy in his tabernacle. I will sing.

Yes, I will sing praises to the Lord. Now my singing praise the Lord is offering sacrifices of joy in his tabernacle. Now David actually did go into the tabernacle because it was in Jerusalem at the time, some kind of a tabernacle.

It wasn't the one Moses built, but David had one built there too for the ark. And he'd go in there and he'd sing praises and he'd approach God with his praises. We also enter into the presence of God into his tabernacle.

It's not a physical building anymore, but we approach God with sacrifices of praise. It says that in Hebrews 13, 15, it says, let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, the fruit of our lips. So singing and praising God is offering an actual sacrifice.

One of the songs we sing is taken from a psalm that says, let our praise to you be as incense. It's like offering incense of worship to God. It's what the priests did when they entered into God's house to come near to God.

You approach him. In Psalm 100, which many of you may have learned when you're children, I did, and a lot of other people do. Psalm 100 says, make a joyful noise to the Lord all you lands, serve the Lord with gladness, come before his presence with singing.

Know that the Lord, he is God. It's he who has made us, not we ourselves. We're his people, the sheep of his pasture, enter into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise.

Now you come before him with singing. You enter his outer courts with thanksgiving and or his gates with thanksgiving and in the courts you offer praise. So it's an approach to God.

You're in a sense coming to God, bringing your heart near to God when you offer thanksgiving. You're actually getting closer into his courts when you offer praise because it takes more intimacy to be able to praise somebody than to thank them. You can thank somebody for a gift even if you don't know them.

You don't know if they're even a good person or a bad person necessarily, but you kind of owe them thanks for some favor they did you. But when you know them and you can praise them sincerely for who they are, that's a more intimate approach. This is offering the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, the fruit of our lips, the Bible says.

This is how we enter into his presence. Now of course we know that God is present everywhere, but the Bible still tells people to approach his presence, to come before his face, things like that. That is obviously talking about something other than just his general universal presence throughout the universe.

You're never going to escape his presence, David said elsewhere. David said, if I ascend into heaven, you're there. If I make my bed and shale, you're there.

If I take the wings in the morning and fly to the uttermost parts of the islands of the sea, even there your hand guides me. So David's saying God is everywhere, his presence is everywhere, but that's not what he's talking about when he says come before his presence. Come before his presence is more like consciously approaching God, like a penitent or somebody who's going to ask for a favor from a king.

You come into his presence, we live in his presence in a certain sense, but coming before God is more like consciously approaching him. It's putting yourself in a position to be in communion with him, which doesn't happen all the time. It's something you do consciously, and we enter his presence with singing, his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise.

It says in Psalm 22 and verse 3 that Yahweh is the one who inhabits the praises of Israel. When Israel's praising, he apparently likes to come near and be among them. In fact, in that same psalm, which is by the way a messianic psalm, you know that Jesus quoted it from the cross.

He quoted the first verse of Psalm 22. And as you read on through, you see it talks about him being crucified and things like that. So this is a psalm about the Messiah, and he, apparently the Messiah, says in verse 22, I will declare your name to my brethren in the midst of the congregation.

I will praise you. Now when it says I will declare your name to my brethren, this verse is actually quoted in Hebrews and specifically said to be Jesus speaking in Hebrews 2.12. It mentions how Jesus, because he became a man like us, is not ashamed to call us his brethren. And it quotes this verse, I will declare your name among my brethren.

So the writer of Hebrews sees this as Jesus speaking about us his brethren. And the next line says in the midst of the congregation, I, the same speaker, Jesus, will praise you. So Jesus is praising God in the midst of the congregation.

That's when the congregation is praising God. He's there too. He inhabits our praises.

Praising God brings us into his immediate presence, or brings him into ours, or both. He inhabits the praises of Israel, but Jesus himself is among the congregation, in the midst of the congregation, praising his Father. So, you know, we are experiencing the presence of God in our worship in a different way.

You know, there's a time when the kings of Israel and Judah, Jehoshaphat, and I forget who the king of Israel was, I think it may have been Ahab, or some other bad king, I think it was Ahab. But they were going out to war, and they're out in the desert, and there's no water. And their troops were, and their horses and stuff were dying of thirst.

And they were despairing that they're going to all die out there. And someone said, is there a prophet of the Lord we can consult? And they called, actually, Elisha. Elisha came, and Elisha rebuked the king of Israel, who was a wicked man.

But then he said to Jehoshaphat, who was a good king of Judah, you know, if you weren't here, I wouldn't be paying attention. But since you're here, I'm going to, I'll seek the Lord for you. And he says, call a musician.

It's kind of interesting. It's in 2 Kings chapter 13, verse 15. He says, call a musician.

And while the musician played, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Elisha. It's like when David played in the presence of demon-possessed Saul, the demons went away. When a musician played, when songs, no doubt of praise to God, were played in the presence of Elisha, the Spirit came upon him.

In fact, Paul suggests that our being filled with the Spirit is facilitated by our singing. That is, it brings the presence of the Spirit in fullness to sing. The presence of God is experienced differently when Christians are singing than at other times, apparently.

Because it says in Ephesians 5, 18 and 19, it says, do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. So by singing and making melody in your heart, singing psalms and hymns, spiritual songs, this is how he says you need to be being filled with the Spirit. Be, as he states it in the Greek, be being filled with the Spirit, speaking in psalms and hymns and making melody in your heart and singing.

This is how you be being filled with the Holy Spirit. Just like Elisha, through the musician, you know, had the Spirit of God come upon him while he was influenced by the music. And Paul has a very similar statement in Colossians 3, verse 16.

There's many similar statements in Colossians and Ephesians that have a lot of similarities, but this is a little different. In Colossians 3, 16, Paul says, let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. Now, the

main difference between this and Ephesians 5, 18 and 19, was in Ephesians it said, be filled with the Spirit, singing psalms and hymns, spiritual songs.

He says, let the word of God, Jesus, dwell richly in your heart, singing. So by singing and making melody in your heart, Paul is saying you're allowing yourself to be filled with the Spirit and to have Christ the word dwell richly in your heart. So this certainly has got to be one of the most important reasons that Christians sing, is because we approach God and he approaches us.

Remember it says in James, draw near to God and he will draw near to you. As we approach God with the sacrifices of praise, he draws near to us and is in our midst. And Christ himself sings praises and worships God in the midst of the congregation.

And we remain filled with the Holy Spirit and Christ dwells in us richly. Those are certainly, that's an aspect of singing that could only be true in Christianity. The earlier parts about singing because you're happy and you're celebrating a victory and so on, pagans can do that too.

Pagans can be happy and sing songs, go to any tavern and see. Even a bar where they have karaoke, you know, if they're having a good time, they want to sing. But I mean we sing that way too, to the Lord, but we have something else too.

Our singing actually brings us into communion with God more. At least it's supposed to. Again, if we're not simply drawing near to him with our lips, but our heart remaining far from him.

This is, of course, if it's sincere. Our singing in the Bible is to be accompanied. I have three things that are to accompany our singing in the Bible.

One is instruments. Now, not that I'm ever singing a cappella. I love singing a cappella.

I love being in churches that sing a cappella. I love the sound of human voices not drowned out by electric guitars and drums and things like that. But nonetheless, musical instruments are a part of the singing and worship in Scripture.

Not that they have to be a part of it every time, but they certainly can't be ruled out. And so there's a number of places, especially in the Psalms, where we're exhorted to use musical instruments and accompany our singing with them. By the way, the word psalm, psalmas in the Greek, is a word that means a song to be accompanied by stringed instruments.

That's the literal meaning of psalmas in the Greek, a song to be accompanied by stringed instruments. So, in a sense, musical instruments are inherent in the word psalm. But in Psalm 33, in verse 3, it says, sing to him a new song, play skillfully with a shout of joy.

Play skillfully means on an instrument, obviously. In fact, yeah, the previous verse says, praise the Lord at the harp, make melody to him with an instrument of ten strings. I've used an instrument of 12 strings.

I don't know, I don't have one that has 10, but, and there's, of course, we have six string guitars. Of course, the piano has, you know, hundreds of strings. Stringed instruments, we are to accompany our singing with them.

Not necessarily all the time, but apparently God is pleased with such. Again, I will say this. Musical, there are churches and Christians that have been opposed to using musical instruments.

The Non-Instrumental Church of Christ is famous for this. They don't believe in musical instruments in the church. But even some of the older churches, mainstream churches, used to not have instruments in them.

There were a lot of older churches that felt that singing, chanting, and things like that without instruments was somehow more spiritual. Now, one thing I will say this, as a person who does play an instrument in worship myself, is that I can see an argument against it in the sense that playing an instrument can be distracting. And I know that when I visit a church and listen to worship and part of worship where there's a band or a musician up there playing, there's two ways it can go wrong.

One is the leader can hit all the wrong chords, which is distracting, you know. I mean, if he's got a different chord progression than is right, it's like dissonant. But more often these days, they're like highly professional musicians, and you're almost distracted by how well they play.

You know, wow, that's really a good guitar lick there. You know, man, oh, that drummer really is great, man, and that bass player is into it really good. You know, I mean, it's almost like, unfortunately, we have people my age who come in a culture where rock bands and concerts and stuff like that were a major form of entertainment.

I guess that's still true in the world. I haven't been to one for ages. But, you know, hearing a band play kind of, in a sense, shifts our mentality into the entertainment mode, especially if the band is really good.

And so, I mean, to me the sweet spot is to find, you know, a song leader who doesn't play so well that you're all impressed and distracted, but also doesn't play badly enough that you're distracted by all the wrong notes they're hitting. But it is the case, as a musician, that it's hard, especially in a context where you used to perform as a musician in worship, when you're playing, it's hard not to be thinking about the fact that you're playing an instrument and that people are listening and so forth. I always try to put that out of my mind when I'm playing an instrument, but I know that a lot of worship teams

and stuff like that, it seems to me like sometimes the musicians are kind of into their instrument.

I know in the Jesus Movement, they had meetings every night and they'd just sing a cappella at Calvary Chapel. You know, Chuck Smith would come out, sit on a stool, he'd start singing a song, he didn't play an instrument, no one else was playing, and everyone would join him, and they'd make all these a cappella harmonies and stuff, it was beautiful, and they'd sing for an hour and a half before the teaching. But they would have instrumentalists come up and do a song to share, you know, to share a song.

But when people were singing worship there, they were essentially doing it without instruments, it was a beautiful thing. And then, of course, it got to be more common to have the guitar players and a band up there leading the worship. We didn't have worship bands back in the early 70s, we had worship that was a cappella, then we had bands that were like evangelistic bands.

Their songs were preaching, not, they weren't worshipping, God, they were preaching about Christ to audiences. But now, then, of course, came, I guess it was in probably the mid-70s or beyond, it became common to have a whole band leading the worship. And I remember once going up to visit a church my friend was pastoring, and I'd never been to it before, and I was so surprised because all the, there was a worship leader up there singing, and there was a full band behind him just playing, and they weren't singing.

And I was surprised, these guys just, I guess, I guess it's not a bad thing, you can play your musical instrument unto the Lord. But it was strange for me that people were musicians merely, and not even singing with the songs. I don't even, you know, I wonder, are they, are they seeing themselves just as musicians, or are they worshipers? I mean, I didn't have an instrument there in the congregation, but I was singing.

Why couldn't they sing? You know, I remember saying to the pastor, I'd imagine the pastor, do these guys have like a union or something? They're not allowed to sing, they can only play, you know. But, of course, I think the culture of worship bands has gone through a lot of stages. But to play skillfully with a loud noise is something the Bible says to do, to accompany with instruments.

Psalm 98 5 says, sing to the Lord with the harp, with the harp and the sound of a song. And, of course, the very last song has a lot to say about this. Psalm 150 verse 3 says, praise him with the sound of the trumpet, praise him with the lute and the harp, praise him with the timbrel and the dance, praise him with stringed instruments and flutes, praise him with loud cymbals, praise him with the high-sounding cymbals.

So that's a drum set right there and a band. And David actually, you know, brought the ark into Jerusalem and put a little tent over it, and he assigned priests who were musicians to play music around the ark 24-7. So, I mean, worship of God was

accompanied by music, musicians, not just, they sang also.

Now, another thing that should be accompanied by besides instrument is it should be accompanied by exuberance. It shouldn't be lackluster. If you've got something to worship, you've got something to be excited about.

If you aren't excited, then you may not be grasping what it is you're even talking about when you're singing. You need to remind yourself when you're singing, what are these words about? What is the truth behind this? Why am I even here singing, you know? And if you get an answer to that from yourself, you'll say, hey, there's a reason to be excited about this. And that's why, as we've already seen so many times in psalmist, shout, you know, rejoice with a loud voice, play loud music and dance, you know, this is just exuberance, lackluster, half-hearted singing.

To my mind, I think it dishonors God. It's almost taking his name in vain, in a way, when you're singing about him, but you're hardly even thinking about it, you know, and you're, it's not doing anything for you. So in psalm 81.1, it says, sing aloud to God our strength, make a joyful shout to the God of Jacob.

We've already seen some of these kinds of exhortations in the verses we've looked at before. In psalm 98, verse 6, it says, well, 5 and 6, sing to the Lord at the harp with the psalm and the sound of a harp, a psalm with trumpets and the sound of a horn, shout joyfully, shout joyfully before the Lord, the King. I don't, you know, we don't do a lot of shouting, frankly, in our worship.

And maybe Middle Eastern people just in general are more expressive, you know, of their emotions and stuff, but it's possible to be so unexpressive that we're lukewarm. Psalm 95.1 says, O Lord, let us, or it says, O come, let us sing to the Lord, let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation. So there's exuberance there.

David, when he brought the ark into Jerusalem in 2 Samuel 6, it says he danced and played his instrument before the Lord, so much so that his wife was embarrassed. His wife, Michael, was looking out the window and she's, when he came, he said, oh, you were really dignified out there dancing around like that. And he said, well, shame on you for not being as excited as I am.

Basically, I'm going to continue to dance. I'm going to continue to, you know, rejoice in God. So, I mean, David was a man after God's own heart and no doubt a very emotional man too, but he danced, he exhorted dancing.

So actually exuberance, excitement is definitely appropriate. And then, of course, there's this other thing too. And this is mentioned in Psalm 47 and verse 7. It says, For God is the king of all the earth.

Sing praises with understanding. That is, you're singing should be accompanied with

understanding what you're talking about. Your mind is involved.

You don't just go off into a trance and try to empty your mind and just feel the vibes. You're saying things that mean something. At least they should.

And I have to say, Dana probably anticipates me saying this, when I go to modern churches sometimes, I don't understand what the worship songs are saying. I'm not sure the person who almost sounds like somebody had like a list of religious phrases that they could draw randomly from and put them together in different ways and put good music to it. And you've got a worship song.

And I can't follow the thought. I can't. To me, when I sing, I want to know what I'm saying.

I want to understand what I'm talking about. And Paul said that in 1 Corinthians 14, he's actually talking about tongues, but he's saying that when I speak in tongues, my understanding is unfruitful. He says, what then? I'll pray with the understanding and I'll pray with the spirit.

I'll sing with the understanding and I'll sing with the spirit. Apparently, if he sings in tongues, his understanding is not involved. But he's not just going to do that.

When he's not singing in tongues, he's going to be singing something he understands. To praise God with the understanding. Very, very important.

Because it's crazy to be saying things about God that you haven't really processed. You're not even sure what they mean. And yet that's not too uncommon.

That's certainly classically drawing near to God with your lips, but your heart and your mind being far from you, you don't even know what you're talking about when you're singing. Now, there's one other thing about singing I want to bring up and will be done. And that is, there's some strong indication in scripture that our singing and our praising God, our worship, has an adverse effect on the devil or on the enemy.

The devil, by the way, has a lot of reasons to be nervous. James says, the demons believe and they tremble. And James also said, resist the devil and he'll flee from you.

The devil's a scary cat. You know, I remember there's a Psalm, Psalm 47, it says, clap your hands, O you people. Shout unto God with the voice of triumph.

I heard someone teach about that, about clapping your hands. He says, if you could just picture the devil is like a house cat. And you come home and he's sitting on your chair where he knows he's not supposed to be.

He's nervous. He's all nerves. And when you clap your hands, he springs away and runs away because he's so terrified.

He says, I picture the devil that way. You know, he's operating where he shouldn't be too. You know, he's got no authority here and he knows it.

And when we come and we praise God, we're challenging Satan's hegemony. We're challenging his authority. We're saying God is the king.

We're saying God's in charge. And declaring those things scares an illegitimate tyrant. When David died, or just before he died, it was determined that he needed to have a successor.

And he had a lot of sons. He had one named Adonijah, who secretly tried to make himself king. He got some of the military leaders and some of the statesmen and stuff that had been with David and had a secret gathering without telling David or Solomon, because Solomon was his rival for the throne.

Adonijah got all these people together at a feast in order to proclaim him king. Well, Nathan the prophet heard about this and he told David and David got Solomon and he gathered up a group of people and had a big parade through the streets of Jerusalem proclaiming Solomon is king. And the people shouted and proclaimed Solomon king so loud it says that at Rehoboam's meeting, which was a few miles away outside the city, they could hear the roar of the city proclaiming Solomon is king.

And it terrified Adonijah, who was the imposter king, you know. And all those fled away different directions. I think of that like when we sing Jesus is king, all hail King Jesus, you know, the Lord reigns, Christ is king.

That declaration has got to make the devil uncomfortable because he is the pretender and he knows he's the pretender and he knows Jesus is the king and he's kind of hoping no one will say so. He's kind of hoping no one will realize it. But when Christians proclaim that, that really undermines Satan's courage to a great deal.

I think it really unnerves him. In Psalm 8, there's something about this, I think. A lot of times in the Psalms, the enemy is not, in David's mind, necessarily the devil, but some other enemy.

But for us, obviously, the enemy is the devil. And it says in Psalm 8, verse two, out of the mouths of babes and infants, you have ordained strength because of your enemies, that you may silence the enemy and the avenger. Now, out of the mouth of babes and infants, you have ordained strength.

Jesus quoted this in Matthew 21 and verse 16. And he quoted it, out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, you have perfected praise. God perfected praise from out of the mouths of babes.

The reason Jesus said that is because he was, it was the triumphal entry and all these

peasants and ordinary people, not the leaders, not the educated, but they're out there for him. Blessed is he who comes in praising Jesus as the Messiah. And when the Pharisees told him, make them stop, he said, well, first of all, if they stop, the stones are going to cry out.

But haven't you read what it says in the Psalms that out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, you have perfected praise. But he didn't quote the other part, but he could have. The next line is because of the enemy, that you may silence the enemy and the avenger.

This, the praises of God's people have an effect of silencing or defeating the enemy of God. And we see a great story about this in 2 Chronicles 20. And Jehoshaphat was the king of Jerusalem at that time, a good king, one of the few good ones.

And he was surrounded by like a million enemies around him. It was just like an overwhelming force. And so he went to prayer.

He prayed and asked God to deliver him because he said, we have no power over such a great force coming against us, but our eyes are on you, he said. And a prophet came to him and said, here's what the Lord says. You won't have to fight in this battle.

The battle is the Lord's. And so it was consulted with the king that he would send out the musicians and the singers. These were priests.

The priests were the singers and musicians, you know, Levites at least. And they would go out among the enemy, outside the protective walls of Jerusalem. And they'd just go out there without weapons.

They'd just go out there without an army. They'd just go out and sing and worship God. And it says when they did so, it's like God caused the enemy to start killing each other off.

It's not the only time that happened. That happened once when the Midianites had, in the book of Judges, were confronted by Gideon's army, 300 men, and there were 30,000 Midianites. And when Gideon obeyed God about that, it says God made the Midianites all turn on each other and kill each other until there wasn't one left.

I mean, that's confusion. Throw the enemy into confusion. Sing and worship God and let the enemy panic.

Let them destroy themselves. So our singing, we should see our singing, our worship as part of our actual warfare. You may have heard this great line from Psalm 68.1. It says, let God arise and his enemies be scattered.

Well, that Psalm goes on to talk about singing as involved in scattering those areas. It

says, Psalm 68.1-4, let God arise, let his enemies be scattered, but those who hate him flee before him. As smoke is driven away, so drive them away.

As wax melts before the fire, so let the wicked perish in the presence of God. But let the righteous be glad. Let them rejoice before God.

Yes, let them rejoice exceedingly. Sing to God. Sing praises to his name.

Extol him who rides on the clouds by his name, Yah, and rejoice before him. So, you know, singing to God and their song is, let God arise, resulting in his enemies to be scattered. This is actually what they sang every time the cloud moved.

We're told in the book of Numbers that when the cloud would move in the wilderness and they'd have to pick up tents and follow the cloud till it stopped again, the watchman would sound the trumpet when he saw the and they'd shout, let God arise and his enemies be scattered. So this is their forward marching cry. It is thought very possibly that Psalm 68 was the Psalm David wrote to be sung when they were bringing the ark into Jerusalem.

We don't know for sure, but that's possible that they sang that same kind of rejoicing over God's triumph and moving forward, scattering his enemies. There's one other psalm I want to bring up and we're done. And this one is a little peculiar because it's not entirely clear to me what the writer of the psalm had in mind.

I know what it speaks to me as a Christian looking at this through a Christian lens, and I believe the Holy Spirit inspired this. So I'm going to have to assume that God inspired it to be seen through a Christian lens, although I'm not sure exactly what the mentality was of the writer. But in Psalm 149, it says in verse five and following, let the, let the saints be joyful in glory.

Let them sing aloud on their beds. Let the high praises of God be in their mouth and a two edged sword in their hand to execute vengeance on the nations and punishments upon the peoples to bind their kings with chains and their nobles with fetters of iron to execute on them the written judgment. This honor have all his saints praise the Lord.

Now, obviously this is a battle motif and I don't know exactly what the setting was that they were going out with the praises of God and the sword in their hand and binding the enemy's princes with chains and executing on them the written judgment. But from a Christian point of view, the two edged sword that we have is the word of God and our weaponry is to go and bind the demonic powers as it were and execute on them the judgment written. It's written that Christ has conquered them.

It's written that Jesus has bound the strong man. It's written that he has disarmed the principalities and powers. It's written that through death he destroyed him that has the power of death.

That is the devil. That judgment written is enforced only by the church. Christ has won the victory.

The church enforces that victory. I've compared it many times with David killing Goliath. Well, that was the end of the war, sort of.

The idea was if David kills Goliath, then the Philistines are the servants of Israel. Those were the terms Goliath himself set forth. If I kill your champion, you people are our servants.

If he kills me, we're your servants. Well, he killed Goliath. The Philistines were now the servants of Israel.

So was it all over? Well, kind of. There was no question how it was going to end, but it wasn't over till the end of the day because when the Philistines saw their champion was dead, they turned and fled. And the Israelites, suddenly courageous for the first time, pursued them and spoiled their tents and defeated them.

But they were simply enforcing a victory that David had already won. The Philistines had no spirit in them to fight. They knew they'd lost.

They were the losers already. They were just hoping to prolong their captivity, you know, forestall their captivity as long as they could by fleeing, but they were pursued and captured. And that's how it is.

Christ conquered Satan at the cross. Christ is now the ruler of everything. All authority in heaven and earth belongs to him.

The devil has no authority, but the church has got to go out and enforce the victory of Christ by preaching the gospel, by informing the world that there's another king, and that Satan is not the one that they can serve or should serve anymore. And that's our great commission. And so it says, let the saints be joyful in glory.

Let them sing loud in their beds. Let the high praises of God be there with a two-edged sword in their hand. That's the gospel.

That's the word of God. To execute vengeance on the nations, that'd be the pagans, and punishments on the peoples, to bind their kings, the demonic kings, I think of the principalities, with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron, to execute on them the judgment written. This honor have all his saints.

Every Christian has the honor of participating in the route of the demonic powers in this world. And we have the word of God. We also have the high praises of God, apparently, as part of our equipment to do so.

So we sing. It has an effect on God when we sing. We draw near to God.

He draws near to us. It has an effect on us. It elevates our spirits.

It arouses joy within us. But also, it has an effect on the devil, on the enemy of God, I believe. And so, singing isn't just something that's just a ritual that Christians do.

Well, it may be. It may be in some churches. Maybe for some Christians, it's just a ritual they do.

They don't know why they're doing it. But there are reasons, there's biblical reasons, to be, to give much attention to song. And not just when we meet together and sing together.

To be singing, making melody in your heart to the Lord all the time. I remember traveling in Germany with a couple of Christian brothers. Actually, one of them was John Wickham.

And I was 19. I think he was 18. But it was during the Jesus movement.

And we decided to, we were doing some ministry up in northern Germany. And we decided to go to Munich for the Olympics. It was 1972.

So we're going to go down and do some outreach at the Olympics. And on the way there, we stopped just to sleep by the side of the road. And there was nothing, there were cornfields.

So, you know, everyone got out in their sleeping bags and they were sleeping out in the cornfields. And I remember distinctly, waking up in the morning, just before the sun was up, or just as the sun was rising, I just heard coming through the cornfields. It was John Wickham.

I don't think he'd even opened his eyes yet. He's just singing, Alleluia, Alleluia. And I just think, that guy's, that guy's always making melody in his heart to the Lord.

He's just coming, first thing, he comes out of his mouth in the morning, all day long. And that's really normative. You can't literally be singing every moment of the day.

But in a sense, you should be disposed to do so. That should be making melody in your heart to the Lord, at least, as Paul said. But also speaking these psalms out and songs and spiritual songs and singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.

So, music is an important spiritual thing. That's why the devil makes so much of it. That's why the devil has used music to bring generations into drug abuse and immorality and idolatry and even Satan worship.

You know, I mean, music is a powerful thing that we barely understand. But God understands it. And God has given it to the church to become adept in it.

Not necessarily adept singers, like we have to become good singers. Not everyone can do that, I suppose. But we can be faithful at it.

You don't have to be good. You can be faithful and to exploit this advantage that we have in so many ways.