

Why Do We Sing During Worship?

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by Ron Comoglio

This Sunday we will be examining how congregational singing is crucial to our worship. Many approach Sunday morning with an attitude that some portions of the service are optional, or that some elements are “best left to the professionals” or the “gifted”.

Last month, our Theology Thursday book club examined a book written by Keith and Kristyn Getty titled, “Sing! How Worship Transforms Your Life, Family, and Church.” And since a few of us just returned from their “Sing! 2019” conference this week, I reference (and recommend!) this book, which teaches three main reasons we are ALL to sing when we gather:

- We are *created* to sing. All of us with voices can sing, we just can’t all sing as well as we would like! Our Creator made us all to be creative. We can all sense when a note or chord is wrong when we hear it, we all appreciate the beauty of creation. This is designed into us for us to return to God in praise. Now go read Psalm 98!
- It is *commanded*. Maybe that should be number 1—end of discussion, right? Psalm 149:1 is not a suggestion or recommendation, it is an order. We are disobedient if we do not sing in the congregation.
- We are *compelled* to sing by the gospel of Jesus. Because we have been set free by the power of the cross, our desire is naturally to share that with our brothers and sisters, and whoever may be among us in our gatherings.

Given these healthy admonishments to rightly look at why we must sing, we should also manage our expectations. Conferences (like the Sing! Conference, where many of the finest musicians in the world provided excellent musical artistry) or professional concerts will often stand out as high points in worship, such that attendees will describe the events in a way that will often be elevated above the singing of a congregation.

Monique Ingalls’ book, “Singing the Congregation: How Contemporary Worship Music Forms Evangelical Community” includes firsthand interviews she conducted where concertgoers and conference attendees described the event in terms such as:

“Taste of heaven...”

“More meaningful/more powerful than when I am at my home church.”

“It is more than singing, it is a worship experience.”

Then we start to think we need to import this experience to our congregation—we think we need better songs, better musicians, better song leaders, better lighting, better effects, more watts of power through the speakers... to the point the sound overpowers the singing of the congregation, and we can’t see each other in the dimmed lighting and special FX.

Oh, but they didn't have electricity in Bible times, so you can't compare, right? Well, I would say the choirs described in both testaments would blow us away with their exuberant and unamplified sound:

- Exodus 15, Moses sang his song to the Lord, a song of victory, of deliverance from enslavement under a false god, verse 13: *You [YHWH] have led in your steadfast love the people whom You have redeemed; you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode.*
- In verse 20: *Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand, and **all the women** went out after her with tambourines and dancing. And Miriam sang..."*
- Psalm 47:1: *Clap your hands, all peoples! Shout to God with loud songs of joy!*

I am not saying to stop attending these events, but to recognize how special it is when God's people, with hearts of gratitude, holy reverence, and spiritual unity lift our voices together! That is the power of the gospel as we sing to each other and the Lord. On Sunday we will look more deeply at what occurs when we do this. I look forward to seeing you then, and exuberantly raising our voices together!

Ron