

Unveiled—Week Two: Unveiling Why We Sing

Music is powerful.

Let me show you what I mean... (Play clips of iconic songs from various decades)

Music is powerful. It stirs us. It moves us. Music taps into the parts of our brains connected to emotions. But I don't think we needed a neuroscientist to tell us this. We use music to reflect our feelings, and even drive them. We connect music to some of the most important parts of our lives. There is the class song when we graduate. Every couple has "their" song. There's the favorite song we sing to our children as they fall asleep. And of course, we sing at church. Do you every wonder why? Of all the places we sing, birthdays, ballgames, bars, the bathrooms, why does singing play such a big role in worship?

Singing has always been an important part of worship. The apostle Paul tells the early church in Ephesus:

Ephesians 5:18b-20

Be filled with the Spirit, 19speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, 20always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So, singing has always been a part of the church. Last week we looked at the tabernacle and all the different items used in worship, but did you know that singing was an important part of worship in the tabernacle? They even had worship ministers to help oversee the music ministry.

1 Chronicles 6:31-32

These are the men whom David put in charge of the service of song in the house of the Lord after the ark rested there. They ministered with song before the tabernacle of the tent of meeting until Solomon built the house of the Lord in Jerusalem, and they performed their service according to their order.

So, not only has singing always been a part of the church, it's always been a part of God's people. We started a brand new series last week on worship. We're calling it *Unveiled*, is to see God in all his glory, and to make that glory known. The fact is we cannot talk about worship without talking about why we sing. The first song of worship in the Bible is known as "The Song of Moses" and it comes in Exodus 15 after Israel escapes Pharaoh's army through the Red Sea. This song forms the foundation of congregational singing in worship in the Bible. So, today, we're going to read through this song, and I want to unveil three important reasons why we sing.

I. We sing to express our Unity

The first reason is this— we sing to express our unity. You won't find the word unity or oneness anywhere in the text. But it is implied throughout. It may be called "The Song of Moses," but who is

singing the song? 15:1 says, “*Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord.*” Moses wasn’t singing this by himself. Moses probably wrote song and then led Israel in this collective song of praise. It’s all of them. It’s the whole nation. Biblical historians estimate the number of those who fled in the Exodus to be anywhere from 6,000 to 2 million people total. It’s a huge range, and a lot of hinges on questions of proper Hebrew translation and understanding. Most English translations put the number of adult males to just over 600,000. Whatever the number, this is one big worship service.

Just imagine 600,000 people singing the same song on the shores of the Red Sea even as the bubbles from the horses and chariots and soldiers still churn the surface of the water. I’ve been in a stadium of 50,000 men all singing “Amazing Grace.” Spine tingling. I’ve been to conferences where there are 3, 4, or 5 thousand people all lifting their voices together to exalt the name of Jesus.

There is something about singing that binds us together. Singing together resonates with our emotions on the deepest level. When we sing together we spend an extended period of time communicating the same thoughts, the same passions, and the same dreams. Congregational singing puts us all on the same level. It doesn’t matter where you work, how much money you have, how much education. It doesn’t matter whether you’ve had a good week or a bad week when you are standing as one, singing as one, exalting the praise of our God and Savior who saved us all just the same, it unites us.

Singing together can actually have a physical effect on our bodies. It can create this transcendent feeling of hyper-connectedness that produces in us the experience of belonging.

Scientists have found that corporate singing produces a chemical change in our bodies that creates a sense of bonding. It causes your brain to release the hormone oxytocin, this is the same chemical that makes us feel good during sex, this is the same hormone that is released that helps create the mother-infant bond between a new mom and her baby. It has been called the love hormone and the bonding hormone. I like what Wendell Kimbrough calls it, “a neurochemical soul glue.”

God designed us to sing together. Otherwise, why make us so that corporate singing releases this extremely powerful, bonding, pleasure chemical. This is what made girls pass out at Elvis and Beatles concerts. This is how U2 can hold an entire stadium in the palm of their hand and it feels like a transcendent experience. But the highest level of this experience is when we lift our voices together in worship.

And I’ll tell you why I think God made us this way. It’s a taste of heaven. Listen to what the apostle John says he saw in his vision of heaven in Revelation 5:

11 Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. 12 In a loud voice they were saying:

*“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and praise!”*

13 Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying:

*“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honor and glory and power,
for ever and ever!”*

What a worship service that will be! Let’s not wait until heaven to worship as one. Let’s praise him as a body now.

II. We sing to Celebrate Victory

Secondly, we sing to celebrate victory. God created us to express emotions. When we’re sad, tears fall from our eyes. When we like something, we applaud. When we meet someone we love, we hug them. When we’re excited, we dance. And, when we win, we sing! Help me out here...

“Na, na, na, na.”

“Na, na, na, na.”

(Let congregation finish) “Hey, hey, hey...goodbye!”

Exodus 15 is Israel’s version of “We are the champions.” The Children of Israel were singing to celebrate the victory God gave them. Look at verses 1-3

Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord:

*“I will sing to the Lord,
for he is highly exalted.*

*Both horse and driver
he has hurled into the sea.*

*2 “The Lord is my strength and my defense[a];
he has become my salvation.*

*He is my God, and I will praise him,
my father’s God, and I will exalt him.*

*3 The Lord is a warrior;
the Lord is his name.*

This is a victory song. Sometimes in the course of a difficult week we forget that we’ve won. We forget that we are on the winning side of this whole thing called life. The devil loves to get you down. Satan wants you to think that you’re defeated, that you can’t win.

If he gets you thinking that way enough, you won’t even want to come to church. You’ll think, “What’s the use. It won’t help. It doesn’t make any difference.” But it does make a difference.

We might lose a battle here or a battle there, but we need to remember that the war has already been won. There is no reason to wallow in defeat when we can walk in victory.

When we come and sing together as a body, we are reminded of our victory. We are reminded that Satan, who has been trying to get us down all week long, has already gotten his butt kicked.

When we know Jesus has already won the victory, it becomes a little easier to let him fight our battles now. He won for us then. He can win for us now. Notice what verse 3 calls God— “a warrior.” We may think of Him as “the God of all comfort” or as “the God of peace,” but if there is a battle to fight, you want God on your side. The only reason there can be peace, real peace, true peace, lasting peace, is if God wins.

This is why Paul writes in Romans 16:20, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.” Crushing under feet doesn’t sound very peaceful, but it is that defeat of Satan that brings peace. And under whose feet is He going to do it? Our feet. Do you have battles to fight? You want God fighting your battles. Singing together is part of that, because singing together gears us up for the fight.

Do you ever listen to music to pump you up? Maybe for a tough workout, or you have a big presentation at work? Or how about the finding the right music for a big date? You have nice romantic evening planned. You’re hoping for a little intimacy. You pick out the music carefully, don’t you? You want to set the right mood. It may be the only time the smooth jazz comes out, but if that’s what it takes...

Music doesn’t just reflect our mood. It creates the mood. That’s why we sing together, and we need to do it every week. Corporate worship gives us a direct injection of victory right where we need it.

That’s why we sing. That’s why Israel was singing. I love how specific this song gets.

*4 Pharaoh’s chariots and his army
he has hurled into the sea.
The best of Pharaoh’s officers
are drowned in the Red Sea.[b]*

*5 The deep waters have covered them;
they sank to the depths like a stone.*

*6 Your right hand, Lord, was majestic in power.
Your right hand, Lord, shattered the enemy.*

*7 “In the greatness of your majesty you threw down those who opposed you.
You unleashed your burning anger; it consumed them like stubble.*

*8 By the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up.
The surging waters stood up like a wall; the deep waters congealed in the heart of the sea.*

*9 The enemy boasted, ‘I will pursue, I will overtake them.
I will divide the spoils; I will gorge myself on them.
I will draw my sword and my hand will destroy them.’*

*10 But you blew with your breath, and the sea covered them.
They sank like lead in the mighty waters.*

*11 Who among the gods is like you, Lord?
Who is like you—majestic in holiness,
awesome in glory, working wonders?*

We sing to celebrate victory and to remind ourselves, that our great and awesome God still fights our battles.

III. We sing to... Declare our Destiny

We sing, number one, to express our unity. We sing, number 2 to celebrate our victory. Thirdly, we sing to declare our destiny. In verse 15, the song shifts from singing about the past to singing about the future. First, they sing about what God did, and now they sing about what God is going to do.

*12 "You stretch out your right hand,
and the earth swallows your enemies.
13 In your unfailing love you will lead
the people you have redeemed.
In your strength you will guide them
to your holy dwelling.
14 The nations will hear and tremble;
anguish will grip the people of Philistia.
15 The chiefs of Edom will be terrified,
the leaders of Moab will be seized with trembling,
the people of Canaan will melt away;
16 terror and dread will fall on them.
By the power of your arm
they will be as still as a stone—
until your people pass by, Lord,
until the people you bought[d] pass by.
17 You will bring them in and plant them
on the mountain of your inheritance—
the place, Lord, you made for your dwelling,
the sanctuary, Lord, your hands established.
18 "The Lord reigns
for ever and ever."*

Did you hear it? *"You will lead. You will guide. The nations will hear and tremble. You will bring them in and plant them."* Singing together reminds them that because of what God HAS done, we can rest assured of what God WILL do. Corporate singing declares our destiny.

When the song says the nations will hear, and it mentions Philistia, Edom, Moab, the people of Canaan, these are all the nations they will have to go through to get to the promised land. Every one of them is a potential enemy. So this song declares their destiny to be victorious.

But this isn't just about their short term future, but also their eternal destiny. It ends singing about their forever inheritance. It declares that God will reign forever and ever.

In the tabernacle, God came to dwell with His people temporarily, but one day, He will bring His people to dwell with Him forever. This song reminds them no matter what happens now, here's our future. This is our destiny. If God can wipe out the Egyptians and deliver us from captivity, He can also deliver us to our eternal destiny.

When we worship in song together, it has the power to pull us out of the present. It can set our vision on the future. It can anchor our hearts and our hope in eternity. Our momentary troubles on earth become so much smaller when we can look at them from the perspective of heaven.

Not only is “The Song of Moses” the first worship song in the Bible. It’s one of the last. In Revelation 15, John sees a vision of the victorious saints in heaven. Here’s what John describes:

2 And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. 3 And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.

The song of the Lamb is like a whole new stanza added to the Song of Moses. It completes the song.

Here are the lyrics to “The Song of the Lamb” from Revelation 15. This is our song. The song of the saints. This is what we will one day sing in heaven. (Put on screen and do as responsive reading.)

*“Great and amazing are your deeds,
O Lord God the Almighty!
Just and true are your ways,
O King of the nations
4 Who will not fear, O Lord,
and glorify your name?
For you alone are holy.
All nations will come and worship you,
for your righteous acts have been revealed.”*

We will sing together in heaven. Congregational singing won’t end here on earth. Those of you who don’t want to sing here, what are you going to do in heaven? In eternity, in the new heavens and the new earth, we’ll forever lift up undistracted, passionate, unified, songs of worship to God on the throne and to Jesus who sits at His right hand.

As we begin to see Jesus with unveiled eyes; as we begin to comprehend the immensity of the grace that is ours, as we understand that there is nothing that can keep us from the God who created us, and loves us enough to save us, then we can never again be satisfied with worship as usual. Let us strive to make our worship fit for glory.

What will we experience in eternity, in the new heavens and new earth? While we won’t be singing all the time, I can tell you this: when we do sing, it will be like nothing we’ve ever experienced. We’ll have clearer minds to take in the glories of God. We’ll have new strength to give him the glory He deserves. And we’ll have an unlimited time in which to do it, free from any and every influence of sin. Singing will fully and finally serve the purpose for which it was intended.

And until that day, we continue to sing — thanking God for old songs that join us with the saints of old, singing new songs because we will always have the need to express eternal truth in new and fresh

ways, anticipating the worship that is yet to come.

The Savior has rescued us that we might sing the song of the redeemed. May we sing it well. May we sing it constantly. May we sing it passionately. May we sing it for his glory and the advancing of his gospel until the time comes when our songs will never end.ⁱ

ⁱ <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/words-of-wonder-what-happens-when-we-sing>