

# Why do we sing together?

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[0:00] Pray again for God's help. Why do we sing is what we're looking at this time.

We're going to look at why do we pray next week, God willing. Why do we give money? Why do we listen to sermons and men and women in the church? Two sessions on that, I believe, are planned. So that's the subject that we're looking at. So today, why do we sing when we gather as a church? And there's somebody singing. So I'm not just talking about singing at football matches. I'm talking about why, particularly when we meet as Christians, as the body of Christ, as we do on Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and prayer time, mostly prayer, Wednesday midweek, why do we sing?

And I'm going to give two answers to that. The first answer is we sing because music and singing is a gift from God to all human beings.

[1:23] We sing, it's my first reason, we sing because music and singing is a gift from God to all human beings, to all humankind.

It doesn't necessarily mean we're all opera singers, but even if we can't necessarily hold a note, we can join in and appreciate other people singing.

Let me just say that at this point. Second reason, we sing because singing is a special way to worship God from the heart that builds up others.

First reason, music is a gift to all human beings. Second reason, singing is a special way to worship God from the heart, and it's the thing that builds up other people.

So those are the two things I'm going to speak about, and they'll both take a little bit of explaining. Are you okay with that? Right. Oh, and I can also say we'll be singing in heaven.

[2:25] And if there's anybody here who is Welsh from Wales, they would no doubt say that the language we're going to be singing in heaven is Welsh because Welsh singing is the best.

That is contestable, but I can understand if you're Welsh. You might well maintain that to be true. So why sing? It's a good question because there's a lot of singing in the Bible.

I can't think of any singing in the Garden of Eden. Correct me if I'm wrong. But not long after the Garden of Eden, there was Jubal, who was the father of those who play strings and pipes.

So that goes way back in the history of the human race. I can't think of any singing with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Am I right or wrong? I don't think there's any singing in the story of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

And in the ten words or the ten commandments, they're said and written. They're not sung. But in Exodus, is there any singing? Where is the singing?

[3:26] Miriam. Yeah. Yeah. When they cross the Red Sea, Miriam sings, and there's the Song of Moses. So they're singing back there in Exodus.

And the time of, if we move on, the time of King David. What did David, is David quite famous for musically? Psalms. Psalms, yeah.

And what instrument did he play? Harp. Yeah, the harp. I wonder what sort of harp it was. I wonder if it was like a guitar. I don't know. Don't play a harp. Welsh people do, though.

The harp. And so the book of which Mark just said, any boys and girls like to tell us what book is it that's got lots of singing in it? Yeah. Yeah. Psalms.

Yes, the book of Psalms. And it's interesting, the range of singing material in the book of Psalms. There's devotion. There's history. There's a recounting of history.

[4:24] There's lamentation. So not all singing is happy. There's songs that are sad. My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? There's songs of

dejection.

There's songs that are prayers. There's songs that are theology. There's songs that are really joyful exaltation. So interesting, the book of Psalms covers all sorts of singing.

There's definitely a lot of singing. It's a whole hymn book, isn't it? Isaiah. In the prophet Isaiah. Anybody think of things that are said to be songs in the prophet Isaiah? Yes, there's some songs that are said to be songs.

I don't know whether they were sung songs, but the idea of calling them songs makes you think that, doesn't it? The servant songs. The servant in Isaiah. Songs of the servant. In the exile. Any songs from the exile? By the rivers of Babylon. We sat down. Here we were. Exactly what I was thinking.

[5:30] Yes. And definitely in the New Testament churches, as we read, and there's a number of other texts about that, I presume Jesus sang because it says when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives?

Or was it the Garden of Gethsemane? So Jesus would have been a psalm singer. And definitely in heaven, there is singing. Although I would like to suggest that angels cannot sing.

That's a little bit controversial. I'm not going to get bogged down in that. But anyway. So singing in the Bible is a thing. Yes? Yes. Yeah. So my first point.

Music is a gift to all humankind. And it's worth thinking about this. It isn't just Christians who sing, is it? In the same way that food is a gift to all humankind.

And it isn't just Christians who eat. Marriage is a great gift of God to all humankind. And it isn't only Christians who get married.

[6:34] So singing and music is a great gift of God's grace to human beings. It's what theologians have called common grace.

It doesn't sound very attractive, does it? Common grace. It means God's generosity spread across all human beings, no matter how they respond or what situation they're in.

So like Jesus said, the Father causes his Son to rise on the evil and the good and sends his rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. God is just lavish in his gifts to everybody.

This is, if you want to give it a name, you'd say it's his common grace. And that extends in all sorts of things. God gives skill to do medical treatment to all sorts of people, whether they're Christians or non-Christians.

God gives a degree of order in society, whether the society is Christian or not Christian. It's his common grace. And there's another text here which says, he gives us all things richly to enjoy.

[7:41] So there's a sense in which Christians are free to enjoy football. Free to enjoy cricket. The Indian people are very happy about that.

Free to enjoy lasagna. Free to enjoy biryani. Free to enjoy all things that he has given us richly to enjoy.

Free to enjoy mountains. Free to enjoy swimming. Free to enjoy the sunshine. Free to enjoy trees. Free to enjoy grandchildren. These are God's good, rich gifts.

And there's also a sense in which if we are so picky that we don't enjoy them, we're sort of not being very grateful to God.

The rabbis used to say there was a judgment for people who refused to enjoy God's good gifts. I mean, let's be grateful for the gifts that God has given us and not turn up our noses.

[8:40] Let's think about music. Now, music occurs in many different cultures and there are many different cultural backgrounds reflected on our meeting this morning. A little bit like there are many different languages in our meeting this morning.

So some of you speak multiple languages and absolute respect. I'm struggling to speak one, actually, but some of you speak multiple languages, which I think is fantastic.

Each language has its meaning. Each way of forming a sound will have a meaning depending on what language you're speaking. And, of course, language isn't only spoken by Christians.

In fact, Christians use language that was invented by, well, who knows what. English is a language that's got French in it.

It's got German in it. It's probably got Scandinavian in it. So somebody invented those things and, as Christians, we can use Germanic words, French words to praise God and to conduct ordinary life.

[9:47] And when we say music, well, what is music? For one thing, it nearly always, or perhaps we should say always, has rhythm in it.

So today we had some very skillful cajon playing which emphasises rhythm. I would find it difficult to understand how you could have music without rhythm. Some rhythms are simple.

So we can clap quite a simple rhythm. Some rhythms are extremely complex. So by reaching the outskirts of my ignorance, I would imagine that some African rhythms are extremely complex.

I've got a record of sitar music at home with tabla playing, which is extremely complex in its rhythm. This is a rhythm of 17.

It is divided 4, 4, 4, 3, 2, 1, 2, or something like that. It adds up to 17. Very complicated. Rhythms can be mournful. They can be joyful.

[10:55] They can be exciting. Or they could even be threatening. So rhythm is part of music. Melody is part of music. I can't think you would have music unless you had melody.

So that is different notes. But there are many different ways of doing this. We shouldn't just think that the Western scale that we're using with 12 notes to an octave is the only way of doing melody. We're used to it. And those of us who have been brought up in Western music have learned that language. But there's other languages which use microtones.

And blues uses a note somewhere. If you're in C, it uses a note somewhere between E and E flat, which again is a microtone. And so melody, scales and pitches.

And let's, seeing as we're being international this morning, let's not think that the European way of doing melody is the only way of doing it. Because it certainly isn't. And melody can be pleasing.

[12:04] It can be beautiful. It can be skillful. It can be sad. It can be wistful. And there's a way of using scales like a major scale is nearly always happy.

And a minor scale is nearly always sad or reflective. Harmony. My understanding is that harmony is something that has been progressively invented and refined.

So, if you're just singing a tune, jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle all the way, that's just one voice. But you could harmonize it and put another voice along with it, not necessarily singing the same notes.

And then you get some sort of harmony. In terms of Christian music, certainly in Western culture, there was something called plain song, which the monks used to sing.

And it was just one note that went like this. And then they put another note exactly at a certain distance above it. And this went like that.

[13:14] And it has a certain sound to it. But then the harmony that we have nowadays can be very much more complicated. You can have four-part harmony. And that, too, adds to the richness and the beauty of the music.

So, harmony can be stirring. It can be wonderful. It can be almost magical. If you hear a choir singing something that's been set with wonderful harmonies, it almost lifts you into heaven.

There's a sort of out-of-this-world possibility with harmony. And that's why I'm saying music is a gift from God to the human race. There's something about music which can only be adequately described relating to heaven.

And certainly not relating to evolution or science or mathematics. You say there's something there which is, wow, I can't hardly describe it. So, it's something to be grateful to God for.

Let's be thankful to God for the wonderful gift of music. And when we come to singing, this is a very, very human thing.

[14:30] Now, birds Twitter, but they don't really sing, do they? Animals growl or bark or meow, but they don't sing.

It's human beings who sing. And when you're singing, you use your physical body, your lungs. And I can see that some of you, when you're singing, feel inclined to raise your hands.

And some of you like to sway. I guess Europeans aren't particularly good at that. But music invites swaying and movement. And it's something that people with bodies do.

It's a thing. It's a very human thing to sing. But it is also transcendent.

When I say transcendent, I mean it can only be really understood by relating it to something much higher. And I would say as a Christian, it comes from the God of heaven. So if you think about it, it's a powerful gift.

[15:35] It's a powerful gift. Singing and music is a powerful thing. And we need wisdom from that. We can have, if you think about across all the world of music, which are CDs you might have or the things you might listen to on the radio or Spotify or YouTube.

There can be beautiful music which celebrates human life. You know, there are songs about boyfriend and girlfriend, aren't there? There are songs about getting married.

There are songs about beautiful things. And there's beautiful music which can echo human sadness. So part of the way blues music is structured is echoing sadness.

You know, the blues singer who gets up and says, I suffered for my music. Now it's your turn. That was a joke.

So some forms of music are sort of tuned up to convey some particular atmosphere. There's skillful music which means nothing.

[16:48] I think Bob Dylan's music is quite like that. It creates an atmosphere but it doesn't actually say anything real. It's just a composite of different ideas that strike off one another.

There's music that's developed in a pagan world system but is still a gift from God. So I was talking to Ashwin about sitar music which I think is really wonderful.

The way the sitar, the Indian, skillful Indian musician plays along with the tabla player who's playing these little drums and they bounce off each other. It's really, really clever and really beautiful.

But he said that is born in the caste system and it's a music which comes from the higher caste which in some cultural settings would be restricted in terms of caste.

Well, so there's something sinful about that, isn't there? But it's also mixed up with something extremely beautiful. That's the way the world is, isn't it? That's the way the world is. You can have ugly music made by people who are in the image of the holy God.

[17:59] So when we think about music, we need wisdom because it has all sorts of things going for it. Does that make sense? Yeah. Okay. Here's what Martin Luther, not Martin Luther King, Martin Luther, 1483 to 1546.

I think he was right. I quote this with approval. The riches of music are so excellent and so precious that words fail me whenever I attempt to discuss and describe them.

In summa, in wrapping it all up, next to the word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world.

It controls our thoughts, minds, hearts and spirits. That's what Martin Luther thought about music and that's what he said except he said it in German.

So we're looking at the translation of it. It's a great, great gift from God and something we can use in God's service. It's something which touches the heart.

[19:00] It's something which can be intense. It's something which can stir the soul. It's something that can move us. It's something that can convey not just content but emotion.

And it allows humans on earth to express things that belong to heaven. Such a great gift from God. To humankind. Here's Dr. Francis Schaeffer with his thoughts on art in general.

He was an evangelist, came from America to Switzerland. Evangelist, philosopher, 1912 to 18...

No, that must be the wrong way around, wasn't it? He wasn't born in 1912.

I think he must have been born in 1884 and died in 1912. I think this is a helpful statement from him.

I heard it on the tape and he was rather high-pitched in his voice when he said it. And he said, the artistic form enhances the didactic statement.

Does he really speak like that or was it something to do with the tape? The artistic form enhances the didactic statement. Didactic means it teaches something.

[20:10] And the artistic form, whatever artistic form it is, visually spoken, poetic, musical, enhances the didactic statement.

So, for example, just to give you an example. Here's some art which serves the statement to make it more intense.

So, my didactic statement, here is a scary monster. My didactic statement, here is a scary monster.

The artistic form enhances the didactic statement.

Because there's a picture of the Gruffalo. That's a scary too. I scared myself saying that. The Gruffalo had a...

What did the Gruffalo have? A wart on the end of his nose? And fearful... Somebody help me. Fearful something and fearful toes and... Claws.

[21:09] Claws. Horns. Okay. Well, that's the Gruffalo. So, there's an artistic expression which enhances the didactic statement. Do you get when you see it?

Yes. It's scarier. Put it... This is a scary monster. Okay. Now, the... With...

The power of music can be used by the Holy Spirit for humans to express truth with intensity.

Yeah? So, Christians have got plenty of truth. Plenty of didactic statement. And music can enhance the didactic statement. Can make it stronger.

More deeply felt. And therein, for Christian people, is the subtlety. Because the power of music can be mistaken for the power of the Holy Spirit or substituted for the power of the Holy Spirit.

[22:13] Because it's very difficult to tell them apart. They should work together. But, just saying that again, music has its own power. And musicians know that you can use technique to stir people up.

And it might not be anything to do with the Holy Spirit at all. It's just the power of music. So, that's why musicians have to be really careful the way they frame their music. Because you use music to work with the Holy Spirit, if I can put it that way, rather than just creating an atmosphere in which the Holy Spirit may be...

to which the Holy Spirit may be indifferent. Do you get the point of that? Some... You know, the power of being at a pop festival. Well, let me put that another way.

You have probably heard of the power of being at a pop festival. Looking at... I doubt whether you all go to... What's the word beginning with G? Glastonbury. Yeah. My son played at Glastonbury, but that's the nearest I've ever been to Glastonbury.

But there's a huge power, isn't there? You get people together, you get the music going, and everybody's... You know, like that. There's a theory that says that modern Christianity is taking that form and Christianising it.

[23:28] So if you can go to a pop festival and you've been carried along just by the music, it's possible to set up church in such a way that what you're actually being carried away on is just the music.

And therein, of course, lies the problem or the thing to avoid. And I would suggest that the thing to realise is what is the didactic statement and is the music enhancing the didactic statement or has the music gone off on its own and the didactic statement is way over there doing something completely different?

That's a musical question. Let's give an example. Psalm 95 says this, The Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods.

That's Psalm 95, verse 3. That's a didactic statement. The Lord is a great God, the great King above all gods. Verse 1 says, Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord.

Let us shout aloud to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. And verse, beginning of verse 3 says, For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods.

[24:51] So the didactic statement is being taken and used as the reason why we should sing. Do you see that there's a sort of logical flow and the two things are married together?

The didactic statement, the reasoning and the singing. They're all working together. For example, in Psalm 95, there's logic and reason. So it's not just the singing and it's not just a didactic statement. They're coupled together. Let's sing, For the Lord is a great God. So when it comes to music, one question to ask is, what about what is the didactic statement?

Is it a true statement? Is there a statement at all? Is it being used as it should be used? Are we saying, Sing for the Lord is a great God.

Is it a helpful didactic statement? So that's a sort of theological question. So you can think through, what did I just sing?

[25:59] Did it make sense? Was it true? Was it helpful? That's question one. And question two, is it suitably enhanced?

Did the music enhance it or did the music work against it? So if I was singing something like confessing sin, was the music sensitive to that or was the music joyful, in which case it's sort of

working against the confession of sin?

If there's something ecstatic to say, is the music helping that or has the music left it behind?

Do you see what I mean? Now that is a musical question. And in the past, the trouble is that musicians get involved in the theology and theologians get involved in the music.

You need both those approaches. Is it true? And is the music working with it? Do you see the point I'm trying to make there? Right. So that was thinking about music as a gift to humankind.

[27:07] And I thought about the way music works and thinking about that and coming towards the way Christian music works. So second thing now, why do we sing?

We sing because it's a gift of God so that we can sing worshipping in the assembly. When we gather together, we can sing. Let's think more definitely about that part of it.

So sometimes Christians say, now we're going to have, we've been together as a church doing various things and now we're going to have a time of worship. And what they mean is now we're going to have a time of singing.

So my question is, is that a right and helpful thing to say? And I'm going to say no. Because, let me try and persuade you of this. First thing, the Bible sees the whole of the Christian life as worship. So not just church and not just singing. The Bible sees the whole of the Christian life as worship. So not just church.

[28:13] So I only, it isn't that we just worship one day a week. And not just singing. It isn't only the singing part of church that is the worshipping. So let me bring a text which I think supports that.

It's Romans 12 verse 1. And he says, I urge you brothers in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.

This is your true and proper worship. Romans 12 verse 1. And what he says is true and proper worship is, is offering our whole selves to the Lord, isn't it?

It's saying, take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee. Take my studies, take my home life, take my married life, take my family life, take my work life.

It's all worship. We offer our whole selves to God. Here's another text. It's Hebrews 13, 16.

[29:15] To do good and to share with others for with such sacrifices God is pleased. The writers of the Hebrews were thinking of the Old Testament worship system where you offered burnt offerings and peace offerings and blah, blah, blah offerings.

And he says, in the New Testament, we don't kill animals and we don't offer vegetables, but we do good and we share with others in our general lives and with such sacrifices God is well pleased. That's an act of worship. So we're thinking about worshipping God. That's a, from me to heaven, a vertical activity.

And my daily life can be offered to the Lord. Washing the dishes is, can be done as an act of worship. Doing essays is done as an act of worship.

Caring for loved ones is done as an act of worship. Vacuuming the carpet is done as an act of worship. Doing the gardening as an act of worship. And if you're a juggler, hands up.

[30:25] No. If you're a juggler, be a juggler for the Lord. There's a juggler juggling and he's doing it for the Lord. I read a story when I was little about a juggler who wanted to worship God and he came into church and brought his juggling into church as an act of worship.

And I'm going to try and explain why he didn't do that. There he is being a juggler to the Lord. That's worship any time of day, any day of the week.

The witness of our life and of our speech is worship as we pray our prayers and read our Bible, etc. Now then, what's special about what goes on in the assembly?

So if the whole life is worship, if you were a juggler, should we have a time of open juggling? And I'm going to say not. Or if you're doing washing up to the Lord, should we all bring our washing up and we'll have a time of washing up?

So there's something particular about what we do together. And what I want to say is this. It needs to communicate to other people for their edification, for their encouragement, so that they can understand and they can be built up by it.

[31:57] That's the whole argument of 1 Corinthians 14. And I hesitated to go into that because there's so much in there.

But I think I can demonstrate this from some other texts as well. So there's a vertical. I'm honouring God but it also affects the people around me.

They can understand what I'm saying and I can say to them, let us sing to the Lord for the Lord is a great God. Let us sing to the Lord for the Lord is a great God.

And that has a horizontal component as well. So there's the horizontal component. Wourshipping to the Lord but communicating meaning to my neighbour. So let's look at this text.

Colossians 3.16. This is what happens in the assembly. Would you like to turn it up? Just make sure I'm not pulling the wool over your eyes.

[32:54] Colossians 3.16. So verse 15 says let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts since as members of one body we're called to peace and be thankful.

And then he was talking about the gathering of Christians together. Let, what it literally says is let the word of Christ dwell among you richly.

So there's a didactic statement. As you, what's the next bit? The next two words? Or the next three words? Teach and admonish.

Who do we teach and admonish? One another. One another. With all wisdom through what? Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

So let's just see what that's saying. We're teaching and admonishing one another. So as we're singing we are teaching one another. The Lord is a great God. Let us sing together.

[34:12] We're teaching and admonishing one another. His name and honour is at stake to save me from the burning lake. that's teaching one another isn't it? And we can inwardly say yeah, amen to that.

We teach and admonish one another through our psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. There's a vertical component and there's a horizontal component.

And it is an emotional thing in the sense that it says what does the next phrase say? After singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

So it says singing to God we're teaching and admonishing one another. We're singing to God and we mean it. With gratitude in our hearts there's that emotional component there too.

We're thanking God and teaching motivating and encouraging my neighbour in an understandable way. And I would humbly submit that juggling doesn't do that.

[35:23] Juggling if we came and did juggling it is honouring God amen to that be a be a juggler for the Lord but it doesn't communicate a single thing to anybody else.

It doesn't convey any truth to anybody else and therefore that's why we don't do it when we meet on Sunday. Does that make sense? Let's look at another text.

Ephesians 5 18. Would you like to turn that one up? Ephesians 5 18 says this Do not get drunk on wine which leads to debauchery instead be filled with the spirit so we're talking about a spirit ministry be filled with the spirit speaking to who do we speak to?

One another and what do we use to speak to one another with? Psalms hymns songs from the spirit Psalms and hymns it says songs from the spirit in the original it just says spiritual songs the Presbyterians say ah that's simply psalms and you should translate it as psalms psalms but I think it's actually saying we can sing psalms we can sing hymns we can sing spiritual songs they don't have to be a hundred years old we can have new songs they're not necessarily it's the word I'm looking for infallible but they can be edifying so he says let's do that that's what we do isn't it be filled with the spirit speaking to one another with psalms hymns and spiritual songs sing and make music from what part of us from the heart to whom to the lord and with what sort of attitude thankfulness always giving thanks to god the father for everything in the name of our lord jesus christ that's the pattern of it isn't it it's a great thing and a valuable thing to teach and admonish one another to speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs from the heart to the lord in an atmosphere of gratitude gratitude there's the work of the spirit there there's mutual encouragement there's heartfelt personal gratitude and there's a trinitarian intimacy because if you notice it says giving thanks to the father in the name of our lord jesus christ being filled with the spirit so there's something trinitarian going on as we sing so i think i've said everything i wanted to

say let's summarize it we sing because music and singing is a gift from god to all humankind and let's appreciate the breadth and the wonder of all sorts of different music that people enjoy and create the power of music is to stir mind and soul and emotion and it's a powerful gift so we'll be thankful but also be wise and discerning we sing because singing is a special way to worship god in a moving way that builds others up it's a one another ministry it's a word ministry let's value singing not just because it moves us but because we learn something about god and we can express something to god honoring god in a way that teaches and moves souls that's all i wanted to say but let me just give you a reminder we'll be singing in heaven so probably good idea to get used to it now this is from the authorised version they sang as it were a new song before the throne before the four beasts and the elders that no man could learn that song but the 144,000 which were redeemed from the earth i would say that only human beings can sing but there are some songs that only the redeemed can sing some songs of redemption that only christians can say and mean thank you jesus thank you lord for loving me my mind's gone completely blank think of another one that only a christian could sing shout something out that saved a wretch like me i once was lost but now i'm found

was blind but now i see only christians can sing that and in heaven there's a song that only the redeemed can sing we used to have a book it might be in the cover there redemption hymnal redemption hymnal that's christian isn't it that we sing the songs of the redeemed we sing the saviour who saved us we sing the precious blood that brought us we sing the heaven that is in store for us we sing the grace of god towards us we think we sing the sheer kindness and mercy of god that he saved us the songs of the redeemed the great theme of our song is that the lord jesus christ and redemption he has received the angels can't sing that song but we can then sings my soul my saviour god to thee how great thou art how great thou art and that's the song we're going to sing now