

“What Are You Seeking (in / through / by singing)?”

Have ever pulled up beside someone at a stop light, or been behind someone in traffic, who was obviously singing along with the radio (or satellite, or iPad, or iPhone, or iWhatever) “to beat the band” so to speak? By contrast, have you ever heard or sang a song that brought tears to your eyes though you tried as hard as you could not to cry? Music moves us; it touches us in ways that nothing else seemingly does. But music also allows us to express our emotions in ways that nothing else seemingly does! This is the power of music.

As we studied in the previous lesson (“Singing as Worship”), a cappella singing is music- it is just vocal music. “A cappella” is an Italian word that literally means “in the style (or in the manner) of the chapel; without instrumental accompaniment.” This is the music prescribed and exemplified in the New Testament for Christian worship. However, there is a danger of getting so “caught up” in the *truth* aspect of worshipping God in song without musical accompaniment, that we fail to emphasize as much as we should the *in spirit* aspects of praising God, cf. John 4:23-24! Case in point: we can look at all the passages in the New Testament that mention *singing* and note that none of them mention any *mechanical instruments* being used (this is *in truth*), but fail to note and emphasize the *emotions* and *purposes* involved in those occasions (this is the *in spirit* part). With God, attitude always counts, Matt.15:8-9!

Purposes of singing in the New Testament:

- Expression of *emotion-filled hearts*, Matt.26:30 (cf. John 13-16 wherein Jesus *washed their feet* in a lesson of service, told the disciples one of them would *betray Him*, urged them to *love one another as He had loved them*, told them He was *leaving them* but that He would *return for them*, urged their *belief in Him*, *promised them the Holy Spirit to guide and comfort them*, warned them of the *dangers that awaited them*, basically said *good-bye*, and *instituted the Lord’s Supper*). It’s hard to even imagine the *emotions* He and the 12 must have felt when they “*sang a hymn*” and then “*went out to the Mount of Olives*” to face what lay ahead!
- Expression of *praise* and an *appreciation of being worthy to suffering for His name*, Acts 16:23-25; cf. Acts 5:40-41. What kind of song would you sing in similar circumstances?
- Expression of *glorification of God* for His *mercy* (for the Gentiles) that *sing praise* to His name *in hope* for inclusion in salvation, Rom15:7-12; cf. Eph.2:11-13.
- Expression of understanding *spirits* and *minds*, 1Cor.14:15. This passage is found in the midst of a larger treatise on *spiritual gifts*, cf. 1Cor.14:1-14. The point of emphasis has been the need for *understanding* so that *edification* can take place. When praying or singing *by the Spirit* (miraculous spiritual gifts) without a *gifted interpreter*, there was no *understanding*- and therefore no *edification benefit* gained by the speaker/singer. Thus, Paul emphasizes the necessity of being able to *pray* or *praise* (in song) *with the spirit AND with the mind*. Both are necessary! Are our minds occupied with the “right” key signature, notes, timing, and syncopation, or with the right *spirit* of praise based on the right *understanding* of the words being expressed?
- Expression of *spirit-filled hearts*; we *speak to one another* with *psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs* words of education and encouragement, Eph.5:19. Not *drunk with wine*, but being *filled with Spirit* has at least three expressions that are given in this text: 1) *singing* in the right ways and for the right reasons, v.19; 2) *always giving thanks for all things*, v.20; and, 3) *subjecting self to one another*, v.21. Don’t miss the two-fold *direction* of this *Spirit-filled singing*- to **one another** and to **the Lord**. We can’t, or at least shouldn’t, ignore either of these purposes if our singing is to be *Spirit-filled*.
- Expression of *word-filled* and *thankful hearts*; we *teach* and *admonish* (educate and encourage) *one another* with *psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs*, Col.3:16. Unfortunately, we often overlook the first part of this verse. The kind of singing under consideration is the result of *word-filled* and *wise hearts* that want to *teach and admonish one another AND express thankfulness to God*. This kind of *teaching/singing* only happens *intentionally*- we have to be paying attention to what we’re *singing* and *listening* to what we’re *hearing*, cf. Acts 16:25!
- Expression of *praise to God*, Heb.2:12; and a *sacrifice of praise* and *lips that give thanks to God*, Heb.13:15. There are songs in our hymnals that are tremendous anthems of praise that enable us

to express true worship to Jehovah, the Almighty God. He deserves our praise and adoration, but we need to continually reminded why this is so!

- Expression of *cheerful/happy hearts* that *praise* God, James 5:13. There is probably no truer expression of pure joy and happiness than singing. And when our joy and happiness is *spiritually motivated*, there is no better way to express it than to sing praises!

These are the purposes of singing in the New Testament. What are your purposes in singing?

- To be *entertained*?
- To *fulfill a commandment* of worship?
- Or, to fulfill these purposes and express these emotions? Singing *in spirit* and *in truth* is a vital part of our worship to God. But as usual, what God requires of us is also beneficial to us....if we do it in the right way(s) and for the right reason(s)!

Practical tips for improving our singing (for both *leaders* and the *congregation*)

Leaders:

- Announce the hymn number clearly, distinctly, and at least a couple of times in different ways (“2-9-7; two-hundred, ninety-seven, 2-9-7; ‘Prepare to Meet Thy God’”). Putting the numbers on the boards is great, but not everyone sees that well. Announce the numbers clearly, and give people time to find the selection.
- Select songs (and their order) thoughtfully. “It Won’t Be Very Long” is not the song to lead before the sermon! Nor, is “Ready to Suffer”!
- Be aware of the sentiment of the song, and match the pace to it. “Sing and Be Happy” doesn’t need the pace of funeral dirge, and “Tis Midnight; And On Olive’s Brow” doesn’t benefit from the upbeat tempo of Happy Birthday.
- Tell the audience which verses they are to sing, and any other special instructions that a non-music major might not be able to discern from the notations, before starting the song.
- Lead the song- don’t just sing it. Non-music majors may not be able to know that they are a ½ beat slow by your arm movement, but they can hear it and speed up if they can hear your voice. Use the microphone if needed- it’s what it’s there for!
- Try to be *inclusive* rather than *exclusive* with your song selections. Choose songs that as many as possible are able to sing. We want to encourage, rather than discourage, participation.
- It doesn’t hurt to be expressive when you’re leading. Use you face, not just your mouth and arm!
- Finally, pitch and pace are important. Pitch is “movable”- so pitch the song where you and the congregation can best sing it. As mentioned above, pace is also important. Try to match the pace of the song with its sentiment and meaning.

Congregation:

- Watch and listen to the song leader- he’s trying to help us praise God and teach and encourage one another in the best way possible. Give him your full attention and follow his lead!
- Hold your head and your hymnal up! You can’t see the song leader if you’re looking at your lap. Holding your book and head up also helps others (and yourself) to hear you. God may be able to hear your heart, but the rest of us need to hear your voice to be *taught, admonished, and encouraged* by your singing.
- Remember: this is *praise*, not a *performance*. We’re *praising* the Creator of the Universe, not *performing* for applause. Always keep the purpose of the activity in mind- to worship.
- The songs are posted on the boards before we begin. Prepare yourself to sing by looking at the songs ahead of time, and familiarizing yourself with their words before worship begins.
- Sing! This isn’t a *spectator event* to watch, or a *concert* to which we only listen. Open your minds to the words, your hearts to the sentiment, and your voice to both! It doesn’t have to be *angelic* to be *inspiring*. Singing is like giving- it starts with the heart, cp. 2Cor.8:1-5.