

03-01-15

Prayer and Music

How many of you are into sports? Who is your favorite team? Is it a basketball team, or a football team, baseball, or maybe hockey? Do you absolutely love to see a great play? Do you get excited and shout when you see a touchdown, a home run, a goal, or a slam dunk? Do you love the excitement? Then again, do you like going in and sitting down in front of the TV and getting all psyched up for the "big event"? The rose bowl? Daytona 500? The World Series? Or the playoffs? Do you celebrate your team's victory? Do you praise the wonders of your pitcher, your goalie, your quarterback? Do you love talking about them?

There are different things that get us excited, that cause us to shout for joy. For me it's the Packers winning or getting a new book, shoes, or nativity scene. For others it could be new clothes, a new car, being with friends or family, or maybe seeing a great movie. Let me ask you, are you excited about God? Do you love Him? Do you know all about Him? Do you enjoy entering His gates with praise? Do you shout for joy and praise His name with joyful songs? I hope so.

Theologian Matt Slick says that, it isn't wrong to shout for a team, to support them, to talk about how great they are. But the question is, "Do you know that you are called to give the same, if not more, devotion and dedication to the Lord as you do to your favorite team?"

You are called to Worship the Lord, to spend the same kinds of energy on Him. In fact, did you know that you are called to Worship the Lord and that the Lord even tells you how to do it? Psalm 100 tells us to "shout joyfully to the Lord" and to "come into his presence with singing."

I sit up front on a Sunday morning and from where I sit, I can see almost everyone. I really like to look back and see you all. As I watch, I see some members of the congregation not singing at all. They just stand there and stare out into who-knows-where as if they are just waiting for the song to end. I even once had someone suggest to me that we try to have a service in which we would not sing at all!

I couldn't imagine coming to service and not singing. We have a wonderful piano and an great organ. To not use them would be like typing reports on a typewriter when you have a new laptop sitting on your desk.

We sing, not just for something to do, but because it is a means of worship. Each song has a meaning. Each song relates to the sermon or the theme of the day. Each song is HAND PICKED for worship each week. We don't just throw songs into the bulletin. NO! Either the musician for the day or I hand picks the songs. Many factors go into the decision. First and foremost: what do the words say? Do the words go with the theme of the sermon and the feel of the service? If the sermon is about joy and the service is supposed to give the congregation a feeling of happiness, hope, and joy... then the song too must talk about joy AND be upbeat. It wouldn't sound right if we had slow moving and sad songs in a service about joy. Also, if we are reading Matthew 5, I might look up what songs have the content of Matthew 5. Some of our hymns were written based on scripture texts. Next: we look at the music itself. Is it easy to sing? Have we ever sung the song? When did we last sing the song? We don't want to sing the same songs over and over again.

And finally: where in the service do we want to use the song? Some songs are great opening songs. They are upbeat and talk about praising God. Other songs have a lot of meat in them and may be better for the middle of the service. Then there are songs that talking about leaving the church, being servants, or being in service. These would be great closing hymns. So as you can see, a lot goes into choosing hymns. So when we sing a hymn... don't just absent mindedly sing the hymn. Look at the hymn and where it is the service to see what you should/could be getting from the hymn. See the message of the hymn. See the scripture in the hymn.

The Bible is filled with over 400 references to singing and more than 50 direct commands to sing; many of which command us not only to sing but to do so with joy and gladness. We should sing during worship because it is a means of worship. We should sing during worship because it expresses thanksgiving and joy. And we should sing during worship because it is a means of prayer. Singing is a praying. So when you sing about or to God at home you are praying! And God wants to hear you pray!

You may have a number of reasons you don't want to sing. But it doesn't matter if you don't have a good voice or not, God just wants to hear you sing joyfully and with gladness!

Psalms 98:4- Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises!

Psalms 100:2- Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!

Ephesians 5:19- Speak to one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord.

John Wesley's Directions for Singing in Worship:

Sing lustily and with good courage. Beware of singing as if you were half dead, or half asleep; but lift up your voice with strength. Be no more afraid of your voice now, nor more ashamed of its being heard, then when you sung the songs of Satan.

Above all sing spiritually. Have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim at pleasing him more than yourself, or any other creature. In order to do this attend strictly to the sense of what you sing, and see that your heart is not carried away with the sound, but offered to God continually; so shall your singing be such as the Lord will approve here, and reward you when he cometh in the clouds of heaven.

I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy, down in my heart! Let's sing! Sometimes I see people not singing, or mumbling the song. Other times they are singing heartily. Which do you think pleases God?

The other part of singing is that singing is prayer! Have you ever burst out in singing? In those times, you were probably happy. Maybe you didn't stop, bow your head, and pray. But in essence you did pray. You sang your prayer! For example, if you start singing How Great Thou Art... the refrain says: "Then sings my soul, my Savior God to thee; how great thou art, how great thou art! Then sings my soul, my Savior God to thee; how great thou art, how great thou art! ... That is a prayer! That is a prayer of thanksgiving! You are praying when you sing that song!

So go forth to sing! Go forth to praise God with song. Go forth to learn about God in song. Go forth to pray with song. So "Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises!" Amen.