

PART ONE:

THE DISCIPLINE OF CHRISTIAN SINGING

Humor: An old farmer went to the city one weekend and attended the big city church. He came home and his wife asked him how it was.

“Well,” said the farmer. “It was good. They did something different, however. They sang praise choruses instead of hymns.”

“Praise choruses?” asked the wife. “What are those?”

“Oh, they’re okay. They’re sort of like hymns, only different,” said the farmer.

“Well, what’s the difference?” asked the wife.

The farmer said, “Well it’s like this ... If I were to say to you, ‘Martha, the cows are in the corn,’ well that would be a hymn. If, on the other hand, I were to say to you, ‘Martha, Martha, Martha, Oh, Martha, MARTHA, MARTHA, the cows, the big cows, the brown cows, the black cows, the white cows, the black and white cows, the COWS, COWS, COWS are in the corn, are in the corn, are in the corn, in the CORN, CORN, CORN, COOOOORRRRRNNNNN,’ then, if I were to repeat the whole thing two or three times, well that would be a praise chorus.”

Introduction: We hear about the disciplines such as prayer, Bible study, fellowship, evangelism, fasting...etc. But the discipline of Christian singing has somehow been neglected?

Three things to understand about singing:

- i. Singing is a form of *praise* to God
 - ❖ **Psalm 18:49**, “For this I will praise you, O LORD, among the nations, and sing to your name.”
- ii. Singing is a form of *prayer* to God
 - ❖ **Psalm 64:1**, “Hear my voice, O God, in my complaint; preserve my life from dread of the enemy.”

- iii. Singing is a form of *proclamation* to others (about God or His works or His exhortation) for their encouragement.
 - ❖ **Psalm 91:9-10**, “Because you have made the LORD your dwelling place—the Most High, who is my refuge— no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent.”

Why the Discipline of Christian singing is so important?

I. God is a Singing God:

Zephaniah 3:17, “The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.”

Matthew 26:30, “And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.”

Hebrews 2:11-12, For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.” (cf. Ps. 22:22)

John Piper: On a topic “Why Is Singing So Important for Christians?” Piper says “Christianity is a singing religion.” He further says, “a God who is one day, according to Zephaniah 3:17, going to sing over us. He is going to lead a choir and celebrate the fact that we are his. And we're going to join in singing that he is ours.”

2. God’s Word Commands us to Sing

- ❖ **Psalm 47:6-7**, Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises! For God is the King of all the earth; sing praises with a psalm!
- ❖ **Psalm 107:22**, “Let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, and tell of his deeds in songs of joy!”
- ❖ **James 5:13**, “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.”

God’s Word also commands us to sing in the assembly of God’s people:

- ❖ **Psalm 149:1**, “Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the godly!”

Bob Kauflin, author of “Worship Matters”: The Bible contains over four hundred references to singing and fifty direct commands to sing. The longest book of the Bible, the Psalms, is a book of songs.

3. God’s great men had the practice of singing

i. David, a man after God’s own heart, loved singing to the Lord. Out of the 150 Psalms, David sang about 75 Psalms. He appointed several singers in the house of the Lord to praise the Lord.

? Can you be a man after God’s own heart without a heart to sing unto the Lord?

ii. Moses sang in Exodus 15 (the first song to the Lord) and Deuteronomy 32. Psalm 90 is written by Moses.

iii. Psalm 72 by **Solomon**. And I Kings 4:32 records, “He also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005.”

iv. The Lord Jesus

v. Paul

4. Singing is an expression of our joy in the Lord

- ❖ **Psalm 100:2**, “Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!”

- ❖ **Isaiah 49:13**, “Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion on his afflicted.”

- ❖ **James 5:13**, “Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.”

Martin Luther saw that the great occasion for song is the work of Christ in justifying guilty sinners: “For God has cheered our hearts and minds through his dear Son, whom he gave for us to redeem us from sin, death, and the devil. He who believes this earnestly cannot be quiet about it... If any would not sing and talk of what Christ has wrought for us, he shows thereby

that he does not really believe and that he belongs not into the New Testament, which is an era of joy.”

- He was not only a theologian but also a hymn writer (wrote some 36 hymns; A Mighty Fortress is Our God is popular)

Comment: One of the themes we must constantly keep singing is the GOSPEL, for we are saved by it for eternity.

5. Singing expresses our trust in the Lord in difficulties

- ❖ **Acts 16:25**, After Paul and Silas were beaten with rods, “About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them,”

If Paul could sing in great difficulties, what does this speak about his lifestyle?

The Lord Jesus sang a hymn before He went to the cross:

- ❖ **Matthew 26:30**, “And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.”

On January 8, 1956, Jim Elliot and four other young missionaries, before they were killed by the Auca Indians in the jungle edge in the afternoon, this is the hymn they sang together:

We go in faith, our own great weakness feeling,
And needing more each day thy grace to know,
Yet from our hearts a song of triumph pealing,
We rest on thee, and in thy name we go.

What do you do in difficulties?

In an article “Why Singing Matters?” I read a testimony, “Hi! I am a worship leader in our local church here in Australia. I was diagnosed with a paralysed right diaphragm last June as a complication of a rare neurological condition called transverse myelitis (*inflames spinal cord and damages nerve fibers*). With that, I am always out of breath to the point I am slurring (*cannot speak clearly*). When I started my speech therapy, I can only vocalise for 7 seconds- normal should be 15-25 seconds. Singing again seems impossible but I feel in my heart that I MUST continue to sing for God in any capacity and that's what I did. Four months down the track, I still have a paralysed diaphragm, but the miracle part is, my lung capacity has improved to normal. Doctors are amazed as to how I can sing with a normal lung capacity

when my right side is paralysed. I encourage everyone to not tire of singing praises to our God! Thank you. To God be the glory!"

Additionally, the Lord may give great victory when we sing and worship the Lord in difficulties.

- i. The Lord brought earthquake and delivered Paul and Silas from prison, and brought the Jailor to the cross.
- ii. **2 Chronicles 20:22**, "And when they began to sing and praise, the Lord set an ambush against the men of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah, so that they were routed."
 - When Moabites, Ammonites, and some Meunites came against Jehoshaphat for battle, he sought the face of the Lord and the above is what they had done.
 - **Caution:** Don't make singing songs and worshipping God just an act of deliverance from your personal problems. Do this primarily because of who God is and what He had done for us on the Cross through His Son Jesus Christ.

6. Singing makes our personal devotions inspirational.

- ❖ **Psalm 59:16-17**, "But I will sing of your strength; I will sing aloud of your steadfast love in the morning. For you have been to me a fortress and a refuge in the day of my distress. O my Strength, I will sing praises to you, for you, O God, are my fortress, the God who shows me steadfast love."

Joseph S. Carroll, author of "How to Worship Jesus Christ?" : Once a woman came to him and shared:

"Brother Carroll, I love my Lord. I never miss my quiet time. I have a consistent prayer life, but the Lord Jesus is not real to me. I want to love Him more devotedly and serve Him more effectively, but I cannot unless He becomes a reality to me. I read of the great giants of the faith, how they were conscious of His presence; and I want that experience. Tell me, what shall I do?" We chatted for a considerable time. A few days later I met this young lady again. "Mr. Carroll," she exclaimed, "for the first time in my Christian life I am experiencing the conscious presence of my Lord!"

What was the message I gave to the young lady in the Philippines? It was a simple message on worship, the worship of Jesus Christ.

William Law in his spiritual classic, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, encourages us to chant the psalms in our private devotions. He says,

- Just as singing is a natural effect of joy in the heart so it has also a natural power of rendering the heart joyful . . . There is nothing that so clears a way for your prayers, nothing that so disperses dullness of heart, nothing that so purifies the soul from poor and little passions, nothing that so opens heaven, or carries your heart so near it, as these songs of praise.
- They create a sense and delight in God, they awaken holy desires, they teach you how to ask, and they prevail with God to give. They kindle a holy flame, they turn your heart into an altar, your prayers into incense, and carry them as a sweet-smelling savor to the throne of grace. (pp. 168, 164)

7. Singing helps us to treasure the Word of God in heart (literal words or the intent)

The songs of Moses and some of the Psalms is a reflection of the deliverance of Israel by God from the bondage of Egypt.

- ❖ **Psalm 114:1-4**, When Israel went out from Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language, Judah became his sanctuary, Israel his dominion. The sea looked and fled; Jordan turned back. The mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambs.

Researchers found that remembering words in a song is the best way to remember words.

It is said that **Alzheimer's patients** who can't tell you the name of their spouse or children but can instantly sing songs they learned as a child.

Examples:

- Literally, "Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness" (Matt. 6:33; ; "As the Deer Panteth for the water so my soul longs after you" (Ps. 42:1); "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever" (Ps. 89:1); In Telugu, "Devuni Sthuthiyunchi Yellapudu Devuni Sthuthiyunchidi" (Ps. 150)
- Intent, "Nothing in my hands I bring, Simply to the Cross I cling..."

8. Singing is an evidence of Spirit-filled life

Note: *Command* is an act we have to do and *participle* is the process of doing that act.

❖ **Ephesians 5:18-21**, And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

- What are the ways or the process of living a Spirit-filled life? Observe the words, they are mostly related to singing.

John Piper: You see how singing flows out of being filled with the Holy Spirit. This means that Christian singing is not natural, but supernatural. The Holy Spirit is God. He is supernatural. He comes and he fills his people and moves them to act in certain ways.

9. Singing is an evidence of Word-filled life

❖ **Colossians 3:16**, Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

- What are the ways or the process of letting the word of Christ dwell in us richly?
- A great theologian is a great singer and worshipper of the Lord.

10. Singing provokes and casts away Satan

❖ **Matthew 4:8-10**, Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he (Satan) said to him (Jesus), “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.”

Lesson: Satan craves worship. The way to offend and dispel him is by worshipping and singing songs to God.

Mary Slosser who worked in China for many years. She used to say, “I sing the Doxology and dismiss the devil.”

Amy Carmichael said, “I believe truly that Satan cannot endure it and so slips out of the room — more or less — when there is a true song.”

Martin Luther: Music drives away the Devil and makes people gay (happy) . . . Next after theology I give to music the highest place and the greatest honor.

John Piper: Four years ago (1985) I was called late one night to come to an apartment where supposedly there was a demon-possessed woman. I called Tom Steller and we went together while our wives prayed at home. What we found was a woman held in a room by some young Christian women who were intent on seeing the demon driven out of this woman. For about two hours I talked to her and read her Scriptures and prayed prayers of deliverance.

She became increasingly violent, knocking the Bible out of my hand and grabbing the prayer sheets and shoving me. At one point, about one in the morning, when the conflict rose to a fever pitch between the Word of God and the satanic force in this woman, someone in the group began to sing. It was one of our familiar worship songs. We sang it again and again and the Lord gave us new words for it each time. The effect on her was dramatic. She began to tremble and threaten us if we didn't stop. Then she threw herself on the floor and screamed for Satan not to leave her. She went into convulsions and then went limp. When she came to, she remembered nothing of what happened and was willing to read Scripture and pray.

So Tom Steller and I know from experience that singing to God is not a nice little emotional trip to spice up a worship service. For us it felt more like a matter of life and death.

11. Singing is a preparation for heaven

One of the things we would be doing in heaven is singing and worshipping the Lord of the heavens and the earth. Shouldn't we practice well on earth?

Revelation 5:8-14, And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying,

“Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”

Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud

voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”

And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”

And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

- **A. W. Tozer:** “I can safely say, on the authority of all that is revealed in the Word of God, that any man or woman on this earth who is bored and turned off by worship is not ready for heaven.”
- You are not ready for heaven if you are not excited to sing and worship God here on earth.
- Jesus died so that He would redeem a singing choir for His Father and Himself in heaven.

Summary: “Why the Discipline of Christian singing is so important?”

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2. God’s Word Commands us to Sing
3. God’s great men had the practice of singing
4. Singing is an expression of our joy in the Lord
5. Singing expresses our trust in the Lord in difficulties
6. Singing makes our personal devotions inspirational
7. Singing helps us to treasure the Word of God in heart (literal words or the intent)
8. Singing is an evidence of Spirit-filled life
9. Singing is an evidence of Word-filled life
10. Singing provokes and casts away Satan
11. Singing is a preparation for heaven