

# **WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT WORSHIP THROUGH SINGING?**

**What is worship?** *Worship is a truth-based, spiritual relationship with God that responds to God's greatness by a daily dying to oneself, internalization of His truths, and practice of faith-filled actions in Christ.* Romans 12:1-2 "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." 1 Corinthians 10:32 "whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

**Why does God want us to sing?** *Singing is one aspect by which we worship God, publicly proclaiming His glory and holiness and our gratitude to Him for who He is and for the gift of Son for our salvation.* Hebrews 12:28-29 "Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire."

**What does God want us to sing?** *Scripture-Focused Songs:* 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 sorts of methods & instruments should we use for worship in song?** (Ps 150:3-6)

- *All Sorts of Passionately-Played Instruments:* Psalm 150:3-5 "Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! Praise him with sounding cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals!"
- *Dance:* Psalm 150:4 "Praise him with...dance"
- *Human Singing:* Psalm 150:6 "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!"

**How does God want us to sing?** (Ephesians 5:18-21, 1 Chronicles 15:16, 2 Chronicles 30:21)

- *Spirit-Filled:* Ephesians 5:18 "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit"
- *Congregationally-Sung:* Ephesians 5:19 "addressing one another"
- *All Sorts of God-Focused Songs:* Ephesians 5:19 "in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs"
- *Singing with your heart to God:* Ephesians 5:19 "singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart"
- *Thanks-Filled:* Ephesians 5:20 "giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father"
- *Focused on Jesus' Name:* Ephesians 5:21 "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"
  - Hebrews 13:15 "Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name."
- *Self-less:* Ephesians 5:21 "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ."
- *Loudly to Raise Joyous Sounds:* 1 Chronicles 15:16 "David also commanded the chiefs of the Levites to appoint their brothers as the singers who should play loudly on musical instruments, on harps and lyres and cymbals, to raise sounds of joy."
- *Mightily & Passionately:* 2 Chronicles 30:21 "...praised the Lord day by day, singing with all their might to the Lord"

**Do we need to sing in tune?** *Our hearts need to be in tune with God,* for "those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24) as we make our "joyful noises" (Psalm 98:4).

**How does singing happen in the Bible?**

- **Are there solos/special music?** *Almost exclusively in Scripture, all singing seems to be led by large groups and sung congregationally.* An exceptions may be seen in Mary’s “Magnificat” (Luke 1:46-55), but that seems to be a more private song that she sings devotionally to God. Miriam’s song in Exodus 15:21 is another possible example, but it is only one verse that follows 20 verses of congregational singing and is accompanied by all of the women playing tambourines and dancing. Deborah, a judge of Israel, and Barak, a military leader, sing a song together after defeating a foreign army (Judges 5). David is spoken of playing music (not singing) with his lyre as Saul is attacked by demons (1 Samuel 16:14-23). Solos seem to be a rare exception in biblical examples of singing.
- **Are there choirs?** *The Levites were commanded by their spiritual leaders to function as a band, choir, with leaders who organized and led the nation of Israel to worship God.* 2 Chronicles 29:28-30 “The whole assembly worshiped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded. ...And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed down and worshiped.”
- **Who picks the songs?** *God’s appointed leaders are responsible for the praying, reading, teaching, and singing of God’s Word.* (Judges, Kings and priests in Old Testament, pastors/shepherds/elders in New Testament) 2 Chronicles 29:30 “Hezekiah the king and the officials commanded the Levites to sing praises to the Lord with the words of David and of Asaph the seer.”
- **Are there bands/praise teams?** *Yes, Israel was led in worship by a group of skilled musicians and singers.* 1 Chronicles 16:4-7 “Then he appointed some of the Levites as ministers before the ark of the Lord, to invoke, to thank, and to praise the Lord, the God of Israel. Asaph was the chief, and second to him were Zechariah, Jeiel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, Obed-edom, and Jeiel, who were to play harps and lyres; Asaph was to sound the cymbals, and Benaiah and Jahaziel the priests were to blow trumpets regularly before the ark of the covenant of God. Then on that day David first appointed that thanksgiving be sung to the Lord by Asaph and his brothers.”
  - 2 Chronicles 34:12 “The Levites, all who were skillful with instruments of music”
- **What instruments are used?** *Every sort available.* 1 Chronicles 16:42 “Heman and Jeduthun had trumpets and cymbals for the music and instruments for sacred song. The sons of Jeduthun were appointed to the gate.” (see also Psalm 150 and many other passages)
  - 1 Chronicles 23:5 “4,000 shall offer praises to the Lord with the instruments that I have made for praise.”
  - Genesis 4:21 – Jubal, the great-x-6-grandson of Adam was “the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe”
- **How does Jesus sing?** *Jesus sings congregationally:* Hebrews 2:12 “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.”
  - Matthew 26:30 “And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.”
- **Do we stand or sit?** *Worship in song involves active participation, not passive listening.* 2 Chronicles 7:6 “The priests stood at their posts; the Levites also, with the instruments for music to the Lord that King David had made for giving thanks to the Lord—for his steadfast love endures forever—whenever David offered praises by their ministry; opposite them the priests sounded trumpets, and all Israel stood.”
- **Do we need worship leaders?** *Biblical worship in song involves leadership over the congregation.* 2 Chronicles 23:5 “all the people of the land rejoicing and blowing trumpets, and the singers with their musical instruments leading in the celebration.”
  - Multiple references to “the choirmaster” who selects songs and leads the singers and musicians. Habakkuk 3:19, multiple introductions to Psalms.
- **Do we sing new songs or old songs?** *We sing both unfamiliar (new) and familiar (old) songs.* ‘New songs’ (Psalm 40, 149, Isaiah 42:10, Revelation 14) and ‘Hymns, psalms, and spiritual songs’ (Colossians 3:16, Ephesians 5:19) are biblical phrases used to describe what we sing.

**How important are lyrics?** *Lyrics are the most essential aspect of singing; they must be rooted in God’s truths and wisdom.* David, (2 Samuel 23:1) “the sweet psalmist of Israel”, wrote over half of the 150 psalms,

but King Solomon, known for his God-given wisdom, wrote the most songs of any biblical author (1 Kings 4:32), “He also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005.”

**Can singing be spontaneous in worship? Can just anyone “bring a song” as they feel led?** *God commands orderly worship with the leadership and execution of both music and teaching.* Since leading worship has the inescapable elements and focus of teaching and authority, it is wise and biblical to have godly male leaders that both plan and lead worship in song, along the other elements of a congregational service (1 Timothy 2:12-14). According to the service expectations of teaching and leadership, worship leaders should fit the qualifications of overseers/elders/pastors/shepherds (1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9). Likewise, in an era full of heretical teachings, lyrics, and songs, it is wise to have an equipped and prepared leader to shepherd by ensuring that false teachings are not introduced or supported in song or statement. These steps help ensure that God’s people are properly built up through the teaching, prayer, and singing of the Word of God. 1 Corinthians 14:26-40 “v.40 But all things should be done decently and in order.”

**What is the role of our minds in singing?** *Spiritual singing cannot be only with spiritual passion and emotions, but must be rooted in truth and processed through our minds.* 1 Corinthians 14:15 “What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also.”

**Is singing dangerous?** *We are warned of the danger of self-centered and self-entertaining singing.* Amos 6:4-5 “Woe to those who...stretch themselves out on their couches...who sing idle songs”

**What will we sing in Heaven?** *Worshiping God in song is one of our joyous responses to experiencing God’s greatness in heaven.* Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8 depict angelic, living creatures unceasingly singing “Holy, Holy, Holy.” Revelation 5:2 and 16:8 reference the angelic and human use of harps in worship. Angels are described as singing a “new song” (Rev 5:9-10) and the people of God are described as singing a “new song” to God (Rev 14:3) as well as the song of Moses (Rev 15:3).

**What songs are shallow?** *Any song that emphasizes our subjective personal experience and emotions over God’s objective truths and biblical responses to those truths are extremely shallow and potentially heretical.*

**What songs are heretical?** *Songs that fail to present a biblical understanding of God and His work in salvation are heretical and dangerous.* They often are written in a mystical or romantic manner to focus on an emotional understanding of who God is (a diminished view of God’s majesty and greatness, more emphasis on us than on God), an imbalance emphasis on hope for Heaven (rather than a biblical focus on a hope in and for God as our central desire), or how “we achieve” salvation (rather than God’s work in saving us).

- Early Church History Examples: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/messenger/earlyhymns.c5.html>
- More Recent Church Examples: <http://www.modernreformation.org/default.php?page=articledisplay&var2=698>