

# Why Not Sing

by Jim Cymbala

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*Jim Cymbala emphasizes the vital role of singing in worship as a command from God that enriches our spiritual lives and community.*

**Duration:** 28:26

**Scripture:** Psalm 95:1

**Topics:** "Christian Life"

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## Description

In this sermon, the pastor emphasizes the importance of both teaching and worship in the church. He highlights the need for a balance between intellectual teaching and heartfelt worship, as both are necessary for a vibrant and healthy church. The pastor also mentions the power of music in connecting with God and encourages the congregation to sing praises and make music from their hearts. He reminds them that singing is not about showing off, but about expressing their love and devotion to God. The sermon concludes with a prayer for the church to be filled with singing and a reminder that God values the heart more than the quality of the music.

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## Transcript

The name of this message is Why Not Sing? I think you and I are gonna learn something right now. My text is found in James chapter five. Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray.

Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Read that with me, the verse, let's do it together. Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray.

Is anyone happy? Is anybody in trouble? Any kind of trouble, let them pray. Is anyone blessed and going through a time of answered prayer and God's supply and his grace, which is really all of us every day? The same God commands us, let them sing songs of praise. He doesn't say if you have a good voice.

He doesn't say if you're on pitch. He said let them sing. Singing praise to me means something to me and it'll help you is what God is implying.

Same God that gives us the injunction to pray in trouble also says I wanna hear your singing too. In fact, prayer and intercession must always be accompanied with some kind of thanksgiving and praise according to the scripture. Otherwise, it can get oppressive and heavy.

Sing songs of praise. Just the word sing is used more than 100 times, almost 120 times in the Old and New Testament. Not singing, not songs, not I sang, just sing is mentioned over and over as we're gonna see in both the Old Testament with Israel and in the New Testament in the era of the church, which is made up of Jew and Gentile.

Over and over again, we're commanded sing praises to God. Not optional, sing praises to God. God is worthy of our praise.

Sing praises. Now, you can say praises. You can say hallelujah.

Everyone say hallelujah. Hallelujah. You can say praise the Lord or God I thank you, but God says I don't want it to be just your mouth saying words.

I want you to put it with melodies. In many cases, I want it with instruments accompanying it and I want my people singing praises to me because it's not only glorifies me, it's a safeguard for them. One of the most important things about all those words about singing is something we could easily lose.

Sing to the Lord or the King James. Sing unto the Lord, not a sing-along. Not just sing because you're in church.

Be purposeful and sing to the Lord. When the choir is at its best, and I thank God for that, Carol's taught them don't sing to entertain the people. Don't say this is a gig and we want you to see what we put together this week.

Sing to the Lord. Sing to the Lord. Sing with your heart focused on him.

Don't sing along because we're doing a hymn. Sing, be purposeful. Sing to the Lord.

This was, of course, everywhere in Israel. Israel did not excel in any of the arts in terms of painting, sculpture, but they transcended almost every other culture around them in the realm of music. Israel stood out for instruments and singing music.

In their culture, singing, according to the Bible, was found everywhere. When they greeted each other, many times they would sing a song upon greeting. When they said goodbye to each other, they would sing a song of departure.

They would sing at weddings. They would sing at funerals. They would sing for all kinds of other occasions in their religious calendar.

They sang when they came out of Egypt, when God delivered them. They had a song, they were singing. When they went into the promised land, they had another song just for that, when it happened and then in remembrance of it.

They sang when the temple was dedicated. They sang when a king went to the throne. They had songs all the time.

You heard them singing. They were singing, singing, singing because God commanded them to sing their thanksgiving and their praise to him. Not only did the average person sing, but great people and little people all are found singing in the Bible.

King David may be the greatest name in the Old Testament. He was a singer par excellence. David could throw down and sing.

Let me say amen. Amen. So great people sang, small people sang.

Everyday people sang. And in God's sight, we're all the same. Not only that, but the Bible tells us that all the temple worship that God instituted was based in and around not just sacrifice, but singing.

If you came near that temple, you were gonna hear music and you were gonna hear singing. Israel excelled in the invention of different instruments. David invented a whole bunch, along with the other people like Asaph and Heman and the other great psalmists.

They invented instruments with only one thought in mind. I want this instrument to back up the people who are singing. They not only had singers, they had choirs.

They not only had choirs, they had multiple choirs connected to the temple. They not only had multiple choirs, they were huge choirs and they were paid and given lodging. Don't get any ideas.

Just get that out of your mind. It's the truth. Singing was so important that they had these huge choirs and they were singing, singing, singing.

When the Ark of the Covenant was recovered from foreign control after the death of Saul, they sang. They just, you're gonna hear singing. Not only that, we know before we get to the New Testament because that's what applies to us.

We always remember the rule. No command, no promise in the Old Testament pertains to us, not one, unless you see it repeated and illustrated in the New Testament. There's all kinds of commands in the Old Testament that have nothing to do with us.

We don't obey them, we're in disobedience to God if they do apply, but we're not under the law, we're not Israel, we're the church of the Lord Jesus Christ but we learn a lot from the history of Israel, God's chosen people at that time. When Jesus instituted the Last Supper and was heading out to the Garden of Gethsemane and then on to Calvary, before he went out, they sang a hymn. Wouldn't you have loved to be there, to hear his voice lifted up? Jesus, the Son of God, sang with the other disciples minus Judas.

Maybe he found strength through that singing. God knows he needed it, what he was about to face for you and I. But now let's go to what applies to us as the Christian church. The verse that kind of states it all and I think there's some good lessons in here to remind all of us about the importance of singing.

Remember, God wouldn't have all this mention of it in teaching if it didn't have some strong value to our lives. Colossians 3, verse 16. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

Listen again. Let the message of Christ, now the message of Christ usually pertains to the gospel, but let's make it a larger body of truth, the teaching of God, the word of God. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms and hymns and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your heart.

My goodness, there's a command from Paul that songs should not just be vertical. We're being inundated now in the Christian church by only vertical songs to God, and I love them, and we all love them, but that's not the only songs we're supposed to be singing. We're supposed to be singing horizontal songs, teaching one another, admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

Do you notice what Brandon and Karen were doing with the choir when they were singing, and they'll know us by our love? That wasn't to God. That was God's word, but that was to you and to me. That was a prophetic word from God from the scripture saying, come on now, let's love each other more.

All in favor say amen. This is how we're to be known. Notice they were teaching us.

Admonishing us with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. How did I get moved by the song? I couldn't make it one more day without you. It is to God, but it's also inspiring us, reminding us that we need him every day, amen? Notice this.

If it's a church or a person is all just teaching, it can get very dry, very intellectual, very north of the neck. It has to be balanced by a life of singing praises, glorifying God from your heart with the help of the Holy Spirit. Notice that capital S there found in the NIV.

So this is the balance that a pastor has to try to bring and churches have to have. If it's all just teaching and doctrine without free worship from your heart and praising God and noise and celebration, it can become very dry and desert-like. Now on the other side, if you don't have doctrine, you don't have proper teaching and it's all just music and riffing and everybody having a great time and the instruments creating an atmosphere, then you can fall into emotionalism and even fanaticism because it's not grounded on the word of God.

So we need God's word and we need God's spirit. How many say amen? We need intake from God and have the word of Christ dwell in us, but we also gotta be thanking him and singing to him. He commanded it.

He said, I want you to sing, but I don't have a good voice, past simple. Neither do I, but he says, sing anyway. Your neighbor might not like your voice, but God does for some reason.

So notice that combination. Study, yes, get the devotion down, get that word of God in you, but remember, don't stultify it by not praising God and singing to him. Let's go to another verse, very important about singing.

Look at Ephesians with me, chapter five. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. It's a good reminder for all of us.

Don't get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. I for myself, because my dad was an alcoholic, I won't go near it because I don't know what weakness is in me for any kind of alcoholic drink. I figure I can live without it because I don't need that to get me high or happy, not telling anyone else what to do.

But my dad started with just one drink, uno, solo uno. One drink and 22 years of hell followed in my house. And I saw my mother battered and a lot of other bad stuff.

So don't be filled with wine, which leads to debauchery and a lot of bad things, but be filled, instead, be filled with the Spirit, up. What happens when you're filled with the Spirit? You begin automatically speaking

to one another with psalms and hymns and songs from the Spirit. Sing, sing and make music from your heart to the Lord.

Notice we see both here, speaking to one another, not just speaking to God. There's a place for that and that's why we sing, praise God from whom all blessings flow. But then there's time to speak to one another.

There's a great lack of that today. I like a balance of both kind of music. Anybody here with me? I love when we praise God, but I love when someone can speak into my life through a song.

It's not to God, it's to me. Amazing Grace is like that. Amazing Grace is a testimony by a former guy that lived a debauch life and was involved with the slave trade.

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I'm fine, was blind, but now I see. He's telling us a testimony and look how it's blessed so many people.

We hear now about the Spirit and let me just bring this to a close. In the history of revivals, if you go up into my office here, I have a whole section from the floor up to the ceiling of nothing but books about revival, written during revivals, giving accounts of revival. What is a revival? There have been some historic revivals, the Great Awakening, the Second Great Awakening in this country, the Welsh Revival over in Great Britain and the revival in Hebrides, all kinds of revivals.

What is a revival? The church gets dead, the church gets lethargic, the people have no appetite for God, no prayer, converts are not being made, people are bored with the things of God, no obvious hunger for the things of God, tendons dwindling, nobody wants to sing in the choir, it's just bad and then somehow some leaders or something happens where people get provoked and say, you know what, I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired, this isn't glorifying God, this is not what the church should be, we're more lukewarm than we are hot or cold. You know what, oh God, open the heavens and come down. That's how revivals begin, always.

They have different manifestations, different stories but it's basically, oh God, come back to your church in a strong way and then the spirit begins to work and it comes in stronger ways, people repent of their sins, they repent of their anger and their bitterness and resentment, of their immorality, of pornography, of racial prejudice, they don't justify it anymore because God now is shining the light and they start humbling themselves and they start saying, it's me, oh Lord, standing in the need of prayer. Not my brother, not my sister, it's me, oh Lord, let me say amen, then you know a revival's gonna happen when we're not casting blame on others and then God comes and through all the revivals that we know in the history of the Christian church, revivals are always associated with new songs, new singing, new hymns, vibrant praise. It used to be everybody was just singing and now they're singing hallelujah, oh God, we love you.

You see it on their faces, you hear it in their voices. Associated with the moving of the Holy Spirit is always this thing of music, singing. One revival in Wales was characterized not by preaching at all.

In fact, there was very little preaching. The leader, Evan Roberts, a young man who kind of exhorted the people but it was just prayer and they would gather and then meet for four hours and do nothing but sing three of the hours and one hour they'd be praying and confessing and loving each other, a few exhortations mixed in. That was a different kind of revival but it was, and the Welsh are famous for singing, it was harmonies and beautiful things like they were singing in the choir and just people lifting their voices

to God because when God draws near, you wanna sing praise to him.

How many say amen? I'll tell you what, when God really gets a hold of you and you're walking close with the Lord, you don't even need to go to church. You'll sing in your shower, you'll sing on the number three train, you'll sing in the street. Do I get a witness here? You just start singing.

Martin Luther was the one who said I never trust any Christian who says he's close to God who doesn't love music because when you get close to God, you wanna sing praises to him. It's like an instinct. It's like a baby's vital signs.

How do you know the baby's alive? It's screaming, it's crying, it's squirming, it wants mama, it wants food, it's hungry. Then you know the baby's healthy. How do you know when someone's healthy spiritually? They're singing, they're praising God, they're full of thanksgiving.

How do you know when there's problems? They're depressed, they're negative, they're complaining, they're blaming everyone for their problems. They're someone in need of real help. So don't be filled with wine wearing as excess but be filled with the spirit, speaking to one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

In fact, I didn't give you the verse, in 1 Corinthians chapter 14 verses 14 and 15, the apostle Paul says this. What should I do then in a public meeting because the whole context of chapter 14 is how to behave properly in public meetings. What they were doing in that church in Corinth is they were abusing the gift of tongues and Paul tells them, look, speaking in tongues, praying in unknown tongue, very powerful and it edifies the person who prays that way but if you just have rampant speaking in tongues which no one understands, let's say non-English words here, he says it doesn't edify anyone and don't let anything go on that doesn't edify.

If it doesn't build up the church, don't do it. I know but it's in the Bible. He says, yeah, then do it at home but don't do it unless it's interpreted into English because the rule is that people have to be built up.

They come in here with problems and difficulties. If you don't lift them up and help them, then what's the sense of having church? Are you with me? But listen what he says. So what shall I do, he says, because things of the spirit were dear to him.

He's the one who said, I thank God I speak in tongues more than all of you and in Greek, that means all of you put together. He said, okay, I will sing with my understanding. I'll sing a song that I know but I'll also sing with my spirit, small s, activated by capital S, the Holy Spirit.

This is very weird to the Western mind and American mentality of what we think church should be like since we grow up in church. We know, no, that's what you do in church. Maybe not, maybe so, maybe not.

So Paul said, what should I do? He said, I'll sing with my understanding and I'll sing in the spirit, songs the spirit gives me. And I'll be singing in words I don't even know. Now to another person who doesn't know what they're doing, it's like, that is really flipping me out.

Don't go there. No, but to them it was no. I'll be blessing God and I'll be edified even though I don't know what I'm doing at that moment.

Don't know what I'm saying. I'll pray with my understanding. Dear God, help Richie and Timoney as they go on this trip.

I'll pray with my understanding but I'll also pray in the spirit. I'll just yield myself to God and if he comes and helps me pray, he comes and helps me sing, praise God. But I'm gonna sing both ways.

Now, you can't sing in an unknown tongue on the platform with the microphone because no one will know what you're singing and then it would be totally inappropriate. But there are moments, are there not, when we're all praising God and there's a lot of noise in the building, when anybody can do anything. And remember, you can do these things at home.

Most people only sing in church and that's plagued me in my life. Most Christians reserve their praising of God in music only to the church because that's what we do. But look at Acts and I close.

About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying, look at that, in prison. Beat up, scourged, they took off their clothes, opened up their back, persecuting them for preaching the gospel. And about midnight, in the prison, they were praying and singing hymns to God and the other prisoners were listening to them.

I bet that left a testimony, what do you think? Everybody's in the prison, everyone's complaining, but only two guys are going, hallelujah, praise God. Come on, Silas, you remember that song we learned a few weeks ago. ■ I'll sing your praises forever ■ And as they're praising God, the people are going, what is that about? Guys just got beat half to death, why are they singing? They sang and they weren't in church.

They sang in a prison. I wish I could take all of you with me that trip when Rabbi Zacharias, my friend and I, went to teach and work in Hong Kong with 600, 700 underground pastors and leaders from China, half of whom, I was told, had been in prison for Christ. God is my witness.

I was sitting on the side with my translator, interpreter, and when I heard them singing keyboard, you know, praise and worship like we do, but much more simple. They're not into show, they're into let's get to God. No smoke and mirrors and camels and cannons.

It's simple, but oh my goodness. And as they sang, I said to God, it was so precious. Listen, I saw that, I can see him now, that guy, Chinese, Christian, with his hands up.

It looked like Jesus was about 10 feet above his head and he was singing, but the expression in his face was, you know, I couldn't take it and I prayed, God, if there's a way out that I don't have to preach, just let him keep singing, praising God. Oh, by the way, definitely you can pray in prison. You can pray and you're gonna sing in heaven.

Did you know in heaven, someone says, no, that was the old time Israel. We learned it's also for the church. But did you know in heaven, there's gonna be some heavy duty music there? Look just at one verse, I could give you a couple, but look at just Revelation five, verse nine, I believe.

Yeah, and they sang a new song. Didn't recite it, they sang it. Saying, you are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals.

This is of the risen Christ, the glorified Christ. Because you were slain and with your blood, you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. They're gonna sing in heaven.

So even if I can't shake you today and get you to sing, if you're a Christian, you're gonna be singing in heaven. And they have instruments there. Sounded like all kinds of harps, John says.

Harp upon harp, it was all that kind of music, arrangements, I bet chords. God invented harmonies. You know what the clincher of this all is? It seems as if certain problems aren't solved until Christians begin to sing.

It seems that way. We know now from scripture that we're supposed to be singing all the time. We can't emphasize prayer and intercession and get depressed without singing also.

We can't emphasize intellectual gathering of facts about God, doctrine, attributes without that outlet of singing praises, keeping it personal. But King Jehoshaphat once was attacked when he served in Israel. Now, let's rightly divide the scripture.

He was attacked by a vast army and they were gonna confront him and it looked like Israel would be defeated. So 2 Chronicles 20, let's look at, I think, verse 17. The word of the Lord came to them and said, you will not have to fight this battle, God said.

Take up your position, stand firm, and see that the deliverance the Lord will give you, Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid, do not be discouraged. Those are two things that singing will attack.

If you're bothered by fear today and you start to sing, God will help lift that fear off of your life. If you're discouraged and down and depressed and people are doing evil things towards you and you get down and discouraged, singing will help lift that. So go out to face them tomorrow and the Lord will be with you.

Jumping to verse 20, I believe. After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat anointed men to sing to the Lord and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness. As they went out at the head of the army, they led the army.

Before the shields and the spears, there was a choir, saying, give thanks to the Lord, for his love endures forever. Now watch, as they began to sing, the Lord set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir, who were invading Judah, and they were defeated. Come on, let's put our hands together.

I've heard that preached in a way that I didn't think was biblical, so I don't wanna be unbiblical with you. Every battle is won just by singing. I don't see that in scripture.

Some battles are won by intercessory prayer, with singing added on. Other victories are won by standing on the word of God. When Satan came at Jesus, Jesus didn't sing.

He said, Satan, get thee behind me. So some victories are not won by singing alone. But it seems to me, that's the only battle where that happened in the Old Testament, so don't try to make a rule out of something that we shouldn't do that.

But it does seem that certain battles are won when God says, I got it for you. I got it. The battle is mine.

I see that you trust me. Now, the Bible says, when they began to sing, that's when the Lord set the ambushes against the enemy. It seems like certain, I've had it happen in my life.

Has it ever happened in yours? When you start praising God, the oppression lifts. The enemy is somehow driven away. The negativity and the heaviness of spirit.

What was that verse that Carol read to me? You know, I'll exchange your garments of, for the garments of praise. What's the other part of that? Spirit of heaviness, I'll give you the garments of praise. I'll make an exchange.

As you start singing, last word, you don't have to feel like singing to start. You sing. The feelings will come later.

If you go by feelings and sing when you wanna sing, then you'll read the Bible when you feel like reading the Bible, and you'll pray when you feel like praying. Lots of luck. It won't work for any of us.

God says, start it with no feelings. Just sing. Just sing.

And as you sing and lift me up, I'll begin to move on your behalf. Lord, bless us as we go home. Let your face shine upon your people.

Keep us singing all day long. For those of us who aren't gifted in music, remind us that you're not looking for quality. You're looking for the heart that is lifted singing to you.

Make this a singing church. Yes, a doctrinal church, Bible-loving church, house of prayer church, but oh God, fill it with singing. Singing to you, not singing to show off, but singing to you.

Thank you for my brothers and sisters. Bless them the rest of the day and all of us. We dismiss now into your care.

In Jesus' name, and everyone said. Amen. Turn around and hug somebody.

Maybe sing a solo for them.

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