

The background of the entire cover is a light gray musical score. It features multiple staves with various musical notes, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. Dynamic markings such as 'mp' (mezzo-piano) and 'mf' (mezzo-forte) are interspersed throughout the score. The overall aesthetic is clean and artistic, evoking a sense of music and worship.

Sing!

How Worship Transforms
Your Life, Family, and Church

KEITH and KRISTYN GETTY

PRAISE FOR *SING!*

“The beauty of this book is how consistent it is with who and what the Gettys have been to the Church over the past decade. Their contribution is not significant because of the extraordinary but the ordinary. They are ordinary Christians who have made an extraordinary impact, not because of their musical or theological credentials, but because of their desire and willingness to devote themselves to the ordinary things. *Sing!* is an exposition of those ordinary things that have allowed the Gettys to be used by the Lord to bless, encourage, and provoke so many of us not only to ‘sing to the Lord a new song,’ but also to love and appreciate the old ones. May this practical, pastoral, theological, accessible, and delightful book help and bless many. May it encourage us all to *Sing!*”

Voddie Baucham Jr., dean of Theological Education,
African Christian University in Lusaka, Zambia

“Here is a book worth buying. Filled with biblical, practical insight that, understood and taken to heart, will revolutionize congregational singing.”

Alistair Begg, pastor of Truth for Life Radio and
general editor of the Spurgeon Study Bible

“*Sing!* is wonderful! It’s a treasury of lost principles discovered for a new generation of worshippers. *Sing!* reminds me and my family that God uses music and the Word to transform the world, and that our part in His process of renewing all things is to open our mouths.”

Kirk Cameron, film actor and producer

“With a rare combination of theological insight, the lessons shaped by years of practical experience, and remarkable readability, this book is simultaneously evocative, informative, and accessible.”

D. A. Carson, author, president, and founder
of The Gospel Coalition

“The Gettys have been helping us sing for years now by the songs they’ve written. Now they help us in a different way. This book encourages us to realize that singing is an important part of spiritual life. Each chapter is short and readable. Each one also ends with good questions. Useful for individuals, Bible studies, or Sunday school classes—read, enjoy, discuss—and sing!”

Mark Dever, senior pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington D.C.

“If there is an area in special need of reformation in the worship of evangelical churches, it is congregational singing. I am so thankful for the Gettys’ hearts for this vital aspect of our communion with God. One place for us to begin this recovery is to understand why singing together is so important. This book will help. People and pastors alike need to read it.”

Ligon Duncan, president of Reformed Theological Seminary

“This practical book has four outstanding characteristics: it is written by seasoned musicians and song writers; it challenges the whole body of Christ, including pastoral and worship leaders, and professional Christian musicians, to worship meaningfully; it touches personal, family and congregational worship; and, it provides useful discussion questions that give a framework for group study and reflection. This book will be used widely to promote singing and worship in the church.”

Matthew Ebenezzer, teaching elder of Reformed Presbyterian Church of India and author of *What the Apostles Believed: A Devotional Commentary*

“Keith and Kristyn’s music has always inspired my worship and deepened my faith at the same time. In an era when much contemporary Christian music is vapid, shallow, and theologically flimsy, they are a two-person reformation team whose songs will stand the test of time.”

Os Guinness, author of *The Call*

“Somewhere along the way, it seems the Western church began to believe that singing was for singers. With this book, the Gettys have brought us back to the essential truth that singing is for believers. Once we understand that, the question, ‘Do you have a voice?’ changes to, ‘Do you have a song?’ *Sing!* helps us discover all the reasons God put a new song in our hearts the moment we met Him. Thank you, Keith and Kristyn, for this vital message.”

Mike Harland, director of LifeWay Worship Resource

“This book sparkles with ideas. In this bedeviled world there’s no greater joy than profound truths of Jesus love borne by great text and tune, and carried from Sunday into life and life eternal. That’s what the Gettys do. Here’s ‘Why?’ and ‘How?’”

Matthew Harrison, president of LCMS

“Keith and Kristyn have served the church for years through their songs. Now they’ve gone one step further and served us with their book, *Sing!* It’s a treasure trove of biblical, practical, and gospel counsel for those who love to sing, want to sing, or don’t think they can sing.”

Bob Kauflin, director of Sovereign Grace Music

“This book reminds us that often the most effective means of catechizing our children will come as we teach them the great truths contained in the lyrics of the songs, hymns, and spiritual songs we sing together as a family. I’m hoping this book will motivate more moms and dads to make sure their children memorize the songs of Watts, Wesley, Toplady, and so many others.”

Bob Lepine, vice president of
FamilyLife Today, Radio Host

“Jonathan Edwards said that ‘no light in the understanding is good which does not produce holy affection in the heart.’ Both in their music and now in this book, Keith and Kristyn Getty demonstrate how God-centered singing creates ‘holy affection’ in the hearts of God’s people. I therefore urge any who are concerned to bring our

God the worship He deserves to read this book alongside Edwards' *Treatise on Religious Affections*."

Samuel Logan, president emeritus of Westminster Theological Seminary (PA) and associate international director of The World Reformed Fellowship

"I love Keith and Kristyn Getty! As friends. As songwriters. As worship leaders. They never fail to uplift and inspire my heart to sing! I pray that not only their music but this book will do the same for others."

Anne Graham Lotz, author, speaker,
and daughter of Billy Graham

"The Gettys are a precious benediction from heaven to enrich our praise. They have been used by the Lord to provide theologically rich, singable music for the church in this generation. More than anyone else they have led in the long awaited revival of hymns which have always been the true music of the church."

John McArthur, pastor-teacher of Grace Community Church

"As I've monitored trends in today's church music, I've longed for someone with insight and courage to write a book like this. It's not enough to recommend it to you. I also recommend you pass it along to your church, your small group, your choir, and even the friends on your Christmas list. We need to talk about what's happening to today's worship. We need to make sure we're singing to the Lord with all His truth flowing through our hearts and filling our lungs and pleasing our Lord. We're made for this, but we're missing this. Let Keith and Kristyn give you voice lessons for the soul with this book that rings with their convictions and experiences. Read it and sing!"

Robert Morgan, author of *Then Sings My Soul*

"I have read a lot about worship and about music in worship—but never before just about singing! What a wonderful subject,

and what a wonderful book. I did not think I needed yet another reason to be grateful to Keith and Kristyn Getty. But now I have one!"

Richard Mouw, president emeritus of
Fuller Theological Seminary

"One of Martin Luther's earliest books stressed two things essential to the church service: the sermon and congregational singing. This book by the Gettys makes an urgent call to Christians in our day not to forfeit our great privilege to sing the praise due to our Creator and Redeemer. Read it and, then, sing."

Stephen J. Nichols, president of Reformation
Bible College and chief academic officer,
Ligonier Ministries

"Keith and Kristyn Getty are good friends of mine and good gifts from God to His Church. They teach, help, and lead us to sing in a way that reveres the holiness of God, reflects the Word of God, edifies the Church of God, and compels us on mission for God in a world that desperately needs to know His glory."

David Platt, author of *Radical* and
president of the International Mission Board

"Keith and Kristyn have been an inspiration to me, as well as many others. This great book is a challenging treatise on Christian singing that every pastor and worship leader regardless of any culture, should put into practice along with the Bible in order that the church's singing becomes a major part of what the life-changing experience of worship is."

Yusin Pons, worship leader and songwriter,
Baptist Convention of Western Cuba

"*Sing!* is not just a book; it's a revolution. The music of Keith and Kristyn Getty has been a movement in our churches. Now this book will take the movement from the platform to the congregation."

What a gift the Gettys are to our churches. What a gift this book is for our churches' future."

Thom S. Rainer, author of *I Am a Church Member* and president of LifeWay Christian Resources

"There are many who sing 'out of love for the art' although this sounds very artistic. When we talk about singing to God, doing so 'out of love for the art' is not enough. Keith and Kristyn combine biblical precision and agile writing to show us the privilege and beauty of worshipping our Lord through song. This very easy-to-read book has already become a reference that will certainly aid me in the formation of a new generation of worshippers, in the personal as well as in the family and congregational context."

Otto Sanchez, author and pastor of Ozama Baptist Church in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

"I'm more than excited by Keith and Kristyn's new book: it's short, highly readable, while making a profoundly compelling case for singing as a key discipling tool in our personal lives, our families, the church, and even in reaching the 'millennials.' I particularly like the 'bonus track' for pastors as a catalyst for making sure I am being faithful in encouraging my congregation to sing to God's glory. This book is a real gift to the twenty-first-century Church. It literally makes you want to sing!"

Ronald Scates, senior pastor of First Presbyterian Church (ECO), San Antonio, Texas

"I absolutely loved this book. Why? Because it had a great tone, was deep and rich, biblical, practical, informative, insightful, and helpful. Excuse the pun, but they are singing my tune. It should be must reading for all contemporary song writers (other than Keith and Kristyn, of course!)."

Mike Sharrett, assistant pastor of Calvary Presbyterian Church (PCA), Willow Grove, PA

“We know and often gladly use the Gettys music in our local church. In our opinion it meets the biblical criteria for church music. They are wonderful songs, on all levels, and make a deep impact in the lives of worshippers.”

E.J. (Rassie) Smit, chairperson of
The Liturgical Commission of the General Synod
of the Reformed Churches, South Africa

“Congregational singing seems to be the biblical command that many have forgotten. Here in *Sing!* the Gettys tell us why it matters and how to bring it back. You and your church need this book.”

Ed Stetzer, Billy Graham
distinguished chair, Wheaton College

“Few capture the vision of the true purpose of congregational worship like my friend Keith Getty. In the same way his songs have blessed us for decades, this book is a gift to the church and inspiring to anyone who longs to understand how near our corporate song is to the heart of God.”

Laura Story, worship leader and songwriter
 (“Indescribable”, “Blessings”)

“It’s one thing to sing a praise song to God by yourself; it’s quite another when Christian friends join in with harmony. God designed and created us to sing together! Keith and Kristyn have a passion to get the church singing communally with voices blending in sweet accord, and their remarkable new book *Sing!* serves as a practical guide to reintroduce the church to classic and current hymns of the faith. You can help bring a fresh, Spirit-blessed ministry of music to your small group or congregation, just using the book you hold in your hands . . . so flip the page and get singing!”

Joni Eareckson Tada, Joni and Friends
International Disability Center

"I am thankful for the music of Keith and Kristyn Getty. Their music has been embraced globally, and Australian churches in particular have been encouraged to find their singing voice through their timeless hymns. I have seen diverse congregations around Australia, of every age group, find a common voice through Keith and Kristyn's excellent, singable, and deeply rich hymns. I couldn't be more thankful for this new book *Sing!* and look forward to Aussie churches finding yet another wonderful resource from the Gettys to encourage us to enjoy our singing and allow our singing to help shape our mission as a part of the global church.

"I've had the privilege of sitting in on many of Keith's training days as we have traveled around the United States, and now all of that insight and encouragement is in this new book *Sing!*. As someone who has seen younger generations in Australia engage with the beauty of the gospel through Keith and Kristyn's hymns, I am thankful for their passion to encourage the global church to sing, most obviously through their own timeless and excellent hymn writing, and now in their latest resource for churches everywhere, *Sing!*."

Nathan Tasker, award-winning Australian singer-songwriter, speaker, and director of Art House, Nashville, Tennessee

"As someone who seeks to communicate the Word of God I'm so aware that songs have great power to teach. They reach into the heart and mobilize the will in such a profound way, and I'm therefore deeply grateful for the faithfulness to Scripture that characterizes Keith and Kristyn's hymns. Songs bring us to the truth or cause us to sway from the truth and, therefore, we must celebrate those whose musical gifts are so wonderfully under the authority of Scripture."

Rico Tice, senior minister, All Souls Langham Place, founder, Christianity Explored Ministries, and author of *Honest Evangelism* and *Capturing God*

"In *Sing!* Keith and Kristyn describe some of the essential themes that have shaped and renewed our congregational singing here at

The Village Chapel. *Sing!* informs, inspires, and encourages church leaders to consider how they can lead their congregations to a more robust worship of the living God. An essential read, an essential call, at an essential time.

Jim Thomas, pastor of The Village Chapel,
Nashville, Tennessee

"I know of no book that does what the Gettys book on congregation singing does. It is informative, convicting, and motivating and every pastor and serious Christian should read it."

Paul Tripp, author and president of Paul Tripp Ministries

"One of the church's greatest treasures is congregational singing. When you join your voice to those of your brothers and sisters in praise of King Jesus, you are looking up to God as Redeemer and around to the people who have been redeemed. *Sing!* is a book of encouragement, warning, and guidance that will help ensure that the next generation does not lose the precious treasure of singing together."

Trevin Wax, author of *This Is Our Time*,
Counterfeit Gospels, and *Gospel-Centered Teaching*

"As a follower of Jesus, husband, father, grandfather, and pastor, *Sing!* hits a sphere of our life that is not addressed enough: singing and our spiritual formation as people and especially in community. As a pastor, the latter is particularly meaningful (and helpful) to me."

Dean Weaver, lead pastor of Memorial Park
and moderator of Evangelical Presbyterian Church

"Keith and Kristyn Getty have given their lives to demonstrate the power of doctrinally-faithful hymns old and new, inspiring a new generation of hymn-lovers. Now they have written a wonderful book to show us why and how this can be done. We enthusiastically commend it to you."

Robert and Nancy (DeMoss) Wolgemuth, authors/speakers
who love to sing to the Lord

Sing!

How Worship Transforms
Your Life, Family, and Church

KEITH and KRISTYN GETTY



NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is intended to be a straightforward and helpful read to individuals, but we have organized the book in such a way that it might inspire group discussion within whole churches. As it deals with a theme that depends on community, the ideal reading of this book is within a community of readers, or rather a community of singers (which we all are). To that end, here are a few thoughts on its use:

I. A 6-Week Churchwide Campaign

To help galvanize all church members in the call to be a singing church, culminating in an evening churchwide or citywide hymn sing

II. In a Book Club or Group

Multiple groups at a church, or perhaps just those that gather on a special night of the week

III. Among Leaders and Among Choirs and Music Groups

Pastors, staff, and lay leaders (at the end of this book, you will find “Bonus Tracks,” that are additional content geared toward leaders)

P R E L U D E

SING!

*Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD, let us
shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us
come before him with thanksgiving and extol
him with music and song. (Ps. 95:1–2)*

We need to talk about singing.

Singing is why, in 2006, we moved from the most beautiful little emerald isle on Earth to a new and wonderful home in America. We came over from Northern Ireland to tour and to steward our hymn-writing, both throughout the US and worldwide. While most of our work has been musical—singing and playing—over the years we have gradually found ourselves talking more and more about singing. Not about up-front singing, but whole-church singing—congregational singing. That’s a kind of singing that we never tire of talking about—not just because as Irish people we like to

talk, but because as Christians we think this is something about which we *need* to talk.

Early on in our time touring, we began to hold leadership lunches as part of our stay in a particular city. These were basically conversations over food about church music, for pastors and music leaders in that city. Over time, we noticed the attendees would ask thoughtful questions about song style, song choice, songwriting, production, relationships, training, sound, and so on—but there was one question we were rarely, if ever, hearing as they reflected on their own churches:

“How did the congregation sing?”

The congregation’s singing did not appear to be a key factor, let alone the primary one, in determining how well the music in a worship service had gone. Hardly anyone asked us to talk about it.

Maybe you don’t much want to talk about it either.

Perhaps for you, singing is always a painful part of church life, because someone who once stood beside you is not there anymore, or because your struggles in the week seem to tighten your vocal chords on a Sunday.

Perhaps you simply don’t have much time to think about it, because you are a parent tumbling in fresh from the battle of trying to get the whole family out to church; under-slept, overly caffeinated, and singing with one eye on the screen and one on your children, longing for these sung truths to be the air blowing through their souls (we know this feeling very well).

Perhaps, though, you are starting to think about it because you're a student, and the increasing complexities of life and study and faith don't always seem to connect with what you sing on a Sunday.

Or perhaps you long to talk confidently about it, because you are a leader or pastor yearning for people to sing to their core the things you are teaching, but you're not sure how to navigate the maze of church music, or where you want your church's music to get to anyway.

Yet whatever you think about singing, the truth is that we are all invited into the same musical home. For the Church has been, is, and always should be and can be a joyfully singing Church. In a sense, singing is part of what we exist to do. The apostle Peter wrote to local churches that each of them was part of "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the excellences of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pet. 2:9 ESV). Paul told the members of the church in Ephesus to be "speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit." He wanted them to "sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:19–20).

Though maybe misunderstood, regularly a bone of contention, and often under-practiced, congregational singing is one of the greatest and most beautiful tools we have been given to declare

God's "excellences," strengthening His Church and sharing His glory with the world.

The New Testament implies that our singing is important. It's been said that Christians are a singing people—but often, many of us are really more of a mouthing-along-with-the-words kind of people.

This book is about singing together as the church in a way that impacts all of your life. It is a conversation for the whole church, including you, whether your singing voice is a close friend to you or more of an awkward stranger. It explores something that is part of the worship life of every follower of Christ. There are many books helping us to grow and train in our Bible study and prayer and acts of service and evangelism, but not very many helping us to sing. Yet our singing deserves similar care, and is even (as we'll see) tied to the flourishing of these other things in our lives.

How did the congregation sing? Each of us is part of the answer to that in our own church, whether we are on stage or standing by our seat on the main floor. It's a harder and in some ways less comfortable question than all the other ones people tend to ask about the music in church. Yet Paul does not tell us to perform for one another, but to sing to one another. We need to ask, "How did the congregation sing?"

LUTHER THE SINGER

Five hundred years ago, in the autumn of 1517, a German monk named Martin Luther began what became known as the “reformation” of the church through the preaching and the singing of the Word. You might understandably think of Luther primarily as a theologian, or preacher, but he was also a focused and prolific hymn-writer, who reinvigorated singing in what became known as the Protestant church. How the congregation sang was a key question for Luther; he believed that a truly biblical church would be one where every believer was actively participating in every part of the service, including the singing, celebrating this incredible gospel together:

Let God speak directly to His people through the Scriptures, and let His people respond with grateful songs of praise.¹

Many of Luther’s enemies feared his hymns more than the man himself. Singing was at the heart of the Reformation—indeed, such was the conviction of the man who was in some ways Luther’s predecessor, the Bohemian Jan Huss, that he was martyred for (among other things) speaking the “heresy of congregational singing.”

Luther was passionate and serious about the art and practice of music and congregational singing—a passion that today in many churches has arguably lost its focus. The theologian Ligon Duncan has said, “There is no part of the worship life more in need

of reformation today than congregational singing.” But this reformation will not come by simply telling people to sing, any more than telling a child to eat something they don’t like makes much difference for very long. We need not only to know that we ought to sing as Christians, but to learn to love to sing as Christians.

THE FIVE GOALS OF THIS BOOK

This book has been years in the making (partly due to a promise we made to a good friend that we wouldn’t write a book until Keith passed his fortieth birthday). Grown from our passion for congregational singing, it’s been formed in our traveling and playing and listening and discussing and learning and teaching. And in writing it, we have five key aims:

1. To discover why we sing and the overwhelming joy and holy privilege that comes with singing
2. To consider how singing impacts our hearts and minds and all of our lives
3. To cultivate a culture of family singing in our daily home life
4. To equip our churches for wholeheartedly singing to the Lord and one another as an expression of unity
5. To inspire us to see congregational singing as a radical witness to the world

We have also added a few “bonus tracks” at the end with some more practical suggestions for different groups who are more deeply involved with church singing.

But just before we start, a health warning.

We want to be practical—but not prescriptive. We realize (and it is worth you realizing) that we are all limited by our own experiences. It is easy to assume that what we are used to or what we most enjoy is what God is most pleased by. Of course there are principles that transcend styles, but we naturally bring our own personality and bias to such an emotional subject as Christian singing. Yet in congregational singing, there is no one-style-fits-all template. We love singing at our home church in our community in Nashville. The Village Chapel uses acoustic musicians almost hidden in the corner of the room to accompany beautiful singing of three to four hundred on a Sunday, which often drops to a capella in rich harmony. And we also love to lead singing at Times Square Church in New York City, which has a diverse congregation from more than one hundred countries, a vibrant Pentecostal gospel choir, and high-energy music. We have sung praise with thousands, and with just a few; we have played with full orchestras, and without any musical accompaniment at all. And each has been engaging, sincere praise that is authentic to that particular community and tradition. The more we interact with churches around the world, the more we are amazed at the beauty and colors and splendor of God’s creativity reflected in people singing His praise.

And God intends for that people—a people joyfully joining together in song with brothers and sisters around the world and around His heavenly throne—to include you. He wants you, He wants us, to sing.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How has singing played a role in your spiritual development?
2. Can you recall an example of a memorable occasion where you enjoyed singing in church? What about that event made an impact on you?
3. Are you quick to assess the music in your church by style, performance, and stage, or by the quality of the congregation's singing?
4. What is your desire for the singing in your church?

C H A P T E R 1

CREATED TO . . . SING!

We are a singing people because it is how God has created us. It's what we do.

And when we do, we're simply joining in with what the rest of creation is doing.

DESIGNED TO SING

We are all singers. We may not all be very good singers, but we are all created to be singers nonetheless.

The psalmist sings, "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:13–14). We have three young daughters, and it has surprised us with each of them how early they could sing. Simple melodies with mumbled words grew into phrases like "O sing happylujah," or a bizarre mixture of "Holy,

Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty” and “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star.” To sing is written into our human DNA; it is part of God’s design. Our desire to make musical instruments to accompany our singing is as old as our desire to fashion tools to aid us in our daily work (Gen. 4:21–22). Throughout Scripture and through history, we see God’s people using this gift of song to praise Him, the Giver of it.

Your ability to sing is fearfully and wonderfully made. Around the twelve-week mark, the vocal cords of a baby growing in the womb are in place and have been shown to work long before the baby is born. We may sound different, but each of us has the same vocal apparatus (you, us, Bono, Pavarotti, Sinatra)—breath flowing up from our lungs, vibrating through vocal cords in our throat, and pushing sound out through the articulators of our mouths, tongues, and lips. Singing is not merely a happy by-product of God’s real intent of making us creatures who can speak. It is something we’re designed to be able to do.

But not only that, God designed our psyche for singing. When singing praise to God, so much more than just the vocal box is engaged. God has created our minds to judge pitch and lyric; to think through the concepts we sing; to engage the intellect, imagination, and memory; and to remember what is set to a tune (we are confident that, right now, 99 percent of this book’s readers can remember more lyrics set to music than can recite Scripture by rote). God has formed our hearts to be moved with depth of feeling and a whole range of emotion as the melody-carried truths of who God is and whose we are sink in.

WHAT IF I “CAN’T SING”?

Sometimes we meet people who say, “I can’t sing”—as in, “The sound that comes out of my mouth when I try to sing is not what I was hoping for.”

Perhaps this is you, and you can recall an awkward conversation as a child when you were asked to mouth the words, rather than sing them; or when it was suggested that being a member of your school or church choir might not be the best fit for your gifts.

But if you can speak, you can physically sing. The truth is that God designed you to sing and gave you everything you need to sing, as well as He wants you to. He’s far less concerned with your tunefulness than your integrity. Christian singing begins with the heart, not on the lips (Eph. 5:19).

Because they are very little and are at different stages of learning to sing, when our daughters sing together, the older is more confident than the middle one, who is in turn more fluent than the youngest. This may change as they all get older, but the point is this—to their parents’ ears, each voice is not only as important as the others but is as treasured as the others. Your heavenly Father cares whether and what you sing, but He does not mind how well you sing. While we may have choirs within our churches made up of voices who have expertise and ability, the congregation of a church is the ultimate choir, and it is without auditions—everyone can be in it and should be in it.

The true beauty of such a congregational choir is that our voices and our hearts are knit *together* in praise. It is exhilarating to be part of a body of believers singing truth *together*. We recently met with a missionary to China who was home on furlough in America. After the singing, he said how wonderful it was to be able to sing freely with other believers again, for the part of China he lived in imposed heavy restrictions on such a thing. “Oh, how my heart misses the singing,” he said. Your voice may not be of professional standard, but it is of confessional standard.

It is worth adding, though, that the more we practice something, the better we become at it—and we seek to improve in what we truly value. “As with almost everything worthwhile in life, there is rarely just one day to do it.”² To learn to walk takes time, and we first must learn to press down on our feet. To learn to speak takes time, and we must first open our mouths and make sounds. To praise God in tuneful song takes time, and we grow better at singing by singing. And once we’ve reached our peak, if it is still some way short of the tuneful heights, a sense of humor is a useful ally. Some people do have a special gift of singing absolutely every note slightly off pitch (which is, ironically, very hard to do). Since we sing to encourage and praise, not to impress and earn praise, we can smile about that and sing anyway.

One of our band members, Zach White, recently told us of the inspiration his dad has been to him and his siblings when it comes to singing in church. Mr. White is always the most passionate singer in the congregation, despite only having three notes he

can actually sing (all lower than his namesake, Barry), and none of them in tune. But it never holds him back. He has grasped what congregational singing is, and is not, about.

Kristyn's vocal coach for the last fourteen years, Kim Wood Sandusky, has several decades of experience in training professional singers across genres. She points out that "we are all singers. Some of us have talents that allow us to sing with beautiful tones and good pitch, while others have talents to sing with their soul. What a beautiful sound we all make as singers to our heavenly Father's ears."

There are those of us who may have vocal constrictions that come through health struggles or have been there since birth. If you cannot speak but sing by signing with your hands or through whatever means God has given you, you bless the community of believers as we join with one heart and one voice until the day all tongues will sing to Him. We are so grateful for the work of signers who enable the whole congregation to so meaningfully engage in the lyrics we sing.

SINGING IN HIS IMAGE

Since God is a creator who enjoys beauty, it follows that we, as those creatures uniquely made in His image (Gen. 1:26–28), will do so too. What God made has beauty as well as functionality: "The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye *and* good for food" (Gen. 2:9, our italics).

We have been created to *enjoy* beauty and enjoy creativity. You don't have to go to an art museum to understand this—but simply as far as the special occasion dinner date with your spouse, where you don't want the food just to be passable but irresistible to the eyes and the palate; and you don't just want a roof to keep the rain out, but a beautiful and meaningful place to make a memory of it. We can tell the difference between an orchestra tuning up and them then playing a coherent piece of music—suddenly, there is a “rightness” in how the notes sit together. We know that sense of throwing back your head or raising your hands to sing a great hymn with every ounce of your being and the feeling of losing interest in a mediocre one. This is why for a songwriter, it's worth striving day after day for months (or years) to compose that one melodic idea that is fresh, compelling, and might touch another person's soul.

We are designed to benefit from beauty in creativity. Have you ever wondered why we sing our national anthems and don't just recite their lyrics, or why as children we learn our alphabet in rhyming songs rather than simply as a series of monotone spoken sounds? It's because God made us to be powerfully engaged in our senses and memories by music. Songs have the power to prompt a memory or transport us back to some other time and place. Our sense of imagination is another aspect of the dignity we have been given as human beings by God. It should not be belittled but embraced and nurtured, especially by the artistic endeavors of every local church. They reach the inner corridors

of our soul in a way that other things cannot. This is part of why we tend to have such heated conversations about what we like in church music—because it moves us so deeply. We are designed as beauty-appreciators. It matters to us.

We have also been made to like making things ourselves. J. R. R. Tolkien wrote that “we are not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker.”³ We show our God-inspired creative spirit when we make music—not just in the songs themselves, but in the many different creative ways we arrange and express the songs together. Whether it is the rhythmic vibrancy of sung worship led by the African Children’s Choir, or the pristine beauty of a chorale echoing within the ancient walls of a European cathedral, or the blended accents in the increasing number of international churches in cities around the world, we seek to create beauty because that’s how we’re designed.

And as we create, we communicate—just as God does through His creation:

The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.
(Ps. 19:1–2)

Echoing through our congregational singing is the communication the divine Author has written into this world. Melodies matter. Words matter. Our songs always say something. We have

been created to use language, to reflect and meditate on His words, to remember over and over again His voice. Singing together organizes notes and words in beautiful ways to shine God's dazzling truths into the relativistic grays of our culture.

Equally wonderfully, we are designed not only to be able to create songs about God but to God. It is an incredible thing that we, the created ones, have been given a way to communicate with the One who made us. We sing knowing that our Lord's ears are open and listening as we lift our voices to Him with intelligent, sincere, and joy-filled words and notes. Our singing is not like prayer—it *is* prayer. And the great sixth-century church father St. Augustine is reputed to have said that we pray twice when we sing.

As we sing to God and about God together with the people of God, we reflect the truth that we were designed for community, both with God and with each other. It was never good for man to be alone, and singing together engenders and expresses that we are family. When we sing, we show the community that reflects our Creator, our triune God. When His Church sings together, voice upon voice like arms linked across a room, and indeed across all the gathering places of His followers around the globe, across history, we are doing what we were designed to enjoy—using our God-given voices to sing praises together to the One who gave us those voices. It expresses what unites us, and it reminds us of our interdependence.

SINGING WITH CREATION

Creation sings the Father's song. When we sing as God's people, it brings us into line with the whole of the rest of creation:

Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth,
 burst into jubilant song with music;
 make music to the LORD with the harp,
 with the harp and the sound of singing,
 with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn—
 shout for joy before the LORD, the King.
 Let the sea resound, and everything in it,
 the world, and all who live in it.
 Let the rivers clap their hands,
 let the mountains sing together for joy;
 let them sing before the LORD,
 for he comes to judge the earth.
 He will judge the world in righteousness
 and the peoples with equity. (Ps. 98:4–9)

“What is the chief end of man?” asks the Westminster Shorter Catechism. The answer: “To glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” To praise Him is the original desire sewn into every fiber of our God-designed humanity and into every aspect of our God-designed world. When we sing God's praise, we join with the tune of the cosmos. Just pause. Isn't this incredible?

In C. S. Lewis's *The Magician's Nephew*, the great lion Aslan creates Narnia by singing it into existence. The character and timbre of the song are seen in the shapes and colors of all that springs up out of the nothingness. Lewis delights to point out that the song could not be separated from the Singer and that when your eyes saw the Singer He eclipsed everything else.

We are created to sing because it leads us joyfully to the great Singer, Creator of the heavens and the earth. Paul Tripp writes, "God is the ultimate musician. His music transforms your life. The notes of redemption rearrange your heart and restore your life. His songs of forgiveness, grace, reconciliation, truth, hope, sovereignty, and love give you back your humanity and restore your identity."⁴

Our singing should sound like Him, look like Him, and lead our hearts to Him. When the psalmist sings, "I lift my eyes up to the hills, where does my help come from?" (Ps. 121 NIV 1984), his help does not come from those hills, but from He who made the hills. We do not worship the created art of singing; we worship Him. Don't sing primarily because you love singing, or keep quiet because you do not. Sing because you love who made you, and formed you, and enables you to sing:

*We sing to Him, whose wisdom form'd the ear,
our songs, let Him who gave us voices, hear;
we joy in God, who is the Spring of mirth,
who loves the harmony of Heav'n and Earth;*

*our humble sonnets shall that praise rehearse,
who is the music of the Universe.*

*And whilst we sing, we consecrate our art,
and offer up with ev'ry tongue a heart.*

(Nathaniel Ingelo, 1688)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Can you recall your earliest memory of singing? How did it make you feel?
2. What do you experience during congregational singing—feelings like joy, fear, self-consciousness, freedom, etc.?
3. What kind of “practice” might your church do to help members feel more confident, less self-aware, and more engaged in hymn singing?

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