

Q: Why do we sing in church?

Do we have to sing in church? Some grow up in church singing from the hymn book when the time comes for singing and probably don't even know why. I was like that. In fact I didn't even like to sing and wasn't very good at it (still am not). I even changed churches and still didn't sing. They sang some of the same glorious hymns I grew up hearing, but also some other songs where the words were shown up on a large screen, even with instruments other than a piano or organ. Then one day someone curiously asked me why I didn't sing. Of course, I stated I wasn't very good at it.

Shortly thereafter, I actually started singing. There were a lot of people and they were loud, so I figured I believed the words of these songs and thought I would go ahead and join in with hopes of being drowned out. The more I sang, the more I thought about the words and sometimes even caught myself humming or reciting them... when alone, of course.

At that time, little did I know that Colossians 3:16 says "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." (NKJV). Herein lies the what, the why, and to whom we should sing. The what, is anything that teaches us or admonishes us (Greek – to put in mind) with the Christian truth of God's Word (John 17:17). The why, is as was mentioned, to teach and remind one another of God's Word, usually inspiring gratitude, and also to glorify God. And as you might guess, we are to sing to "one another" and "to the Lord". This is further taught in Ephesians 5:16-20 stating "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your hearts to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." (NIV). Note the reoccurring phrase "in your hearts" – this is where the reality of God's grace should hit us and inspire all kinds of praise. At this point, it really doesn't matter how it sounds anymore. It matters if it's sincere.

To answer the 2nd introductory question: no, you don't *have* to sing in church. It is possible to have a church service without any music or singing and still even be Christian. However, it's usually at church where we find other Christians who know and share God's truths. And its at church where we usually intake a good portion of Christian teaching. Don't expect to go out in the world and hear Christian singing from your non-Christian neighbor or boss or family member. It is also possible not to participate in singing and still even be a Christian. One could do this, but they would still be hearing it, and after knowing the truth of God's Word, why wouldn't you want to sing?

This *may* be because that person's view of God's truth is distorted by either their pride, wrong assumptions and/or by legalistic standards implied by others. If it is pride, God has ways of dealing with that. If it is wrong assumptions, perhaps that person hasn't been immersed in truth or their mind is spiritually clouded. If it is legalistic standards, woe to those who legislate them (Matthew 23:2-4, 13-14). There are no rules for musical procedures spec'd out in Scripture, but it does instruct us with the what, the why, and to whom we should sing. It should also be noted, that apart from the aforementioned reasons, there may be some legitimate reasons why someone doesn't sing and it would further be legalistic to force them to sing which would negate the very reasons at the heart of Scripture.

To elaborate, one can then be free to use any form of singing, presentation, instrumentation, or lack thereof to achieve the Scriptural significance. One Christian said something along the lines of "There's no such thing as Christian music, only Christian lyrics". Sometimes the lyrics may come in the form of a hymnal, actual Bible verses (Psalms), tattered paper copies, high tech projections, or even memory! Some hold that the hymn book should be strictly used, but when it was first introduced it was not warmly welcomed as some ignorantly thought it as worldly or repetitious. Although the hymnal contains a great many wonderful classic Christian melodies, it is not the Bible. Therefore, as charged in Psalm 96 & 98, "Sing to the Lord a new song". The Hebrew word used here for new means fresh. Surely God has done something fresh in my life for me to sing about, maybe even shout about (Psalm 95 & 100)! As prescribed in the New Testament, the Psalms tell us a great many things about worshipping in song.

If you are fortunate enough to have been given by God the ability to play an instrument, let alone possess one, why not use it to worship Him! Colossians 3:23 tells “whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.” (KJV). This could be anything – the flute, the piano, the saw blade, the spoons, the drums, the xylophone, the electric guitar, or even tuned glasses of water! God’s pleasure is not limited to what man can produce externally. 1 Samuel 16:7 reveals “For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” (NKJV). Many of the instruments we know of today were not yet developed in Bible times, but some were in various forms. In Exodus 15:20-21, Aaron’s sister, Miriam sang and danced using a tambourine after escaping Egyptian captivity. Psalm 81:2-3 instructs “Begin the music, strike the tambourine, play the melodious harp and lyre. Sound the ram’s horn” (NIV). 1 Chronicles 13:8 15:16-28, & 16:4-6 tell us that the Ark of the Covenant was accompanied by the playing of the lyres, harps, tambourines, cymbals, and trumpets. This is the very Ark where God Himself resided with the Old Testament believers. Psalm 150 proclaims that nearly every type of instrument should be used to praise the Lord, including trumpets (horns), harp and lyre (small hand-held harp), tambourine and dancing, strings (including guitars & pianos) and flute (wind instruments including saxophones & organs), and multiple types of cymbals (percussion). Basically, if you’ve got it, play it for the Lord! It is God who gives us the ability to do anything, any skill, any trade, any function and as long as we are not using them sinfully, it is pleasing to the Lord. Indeed, we are fearfully & wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14) and by God’s grace and power we are enabled.

You may find yourself in the position where someone is worshipping God in a manner that you do not understand or even think is possible, but in keeping with God’s truth, restricting this would be restricting worship to God. The only one who appreciates that is Satan. He really wants all worship for himself (Matthew 4:8-10), but because our God is so great and draws the majority of it, Satan is also happy to try to minimize it in any way (2 Corinthians 11:3, 14-15). In 2 Samuel 6:16, 20-23, King David’s wife, Michal despised him for worshipping in a way that seemed unreasonable to her. As a result, she was childless until her death.

Some say certain music is unfit for church. To which I ask, what is the church? And also, if its unfit for church, is it fit for private listening? The Biblical answers are that the church is Christ’s body of believers (Ephesians 5:23, 29-30) and God does not live in temples built by hands (Acts 17:24-25). Therefore, we should always do what’s pleasing to God, all the time and everywhere. How we musically worship should not have to be different in public and private.

Furthermore, when gathered as Christ’s body, we should not focus on a type and format of music that only *we* prefer. And we should certainly not deliberately do something that would fail to include or admonish another believer. The verse following one of the opening passages about musical worship, Ephesians 5:21, instructs us to “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (NIV).

This harmonizes with that of Christ’s attitude mentioned in Philippians 2:1-5 stating “If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus” (NIV).

*Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart
and with all your soul and with all your mind.' - Matthew 22:37*