

Thank God for Song

Introduction. Kathy Troccoli, a longtime Christian artist, said in 2001, “Being single at forty-two, I’m realizing I may never have a child. But God has repeatedly brought me stories from women who have chosen life over an abortion as a result of hearing a song I wrote.”

Troccoli had just finished singing at a concert in Dallas when a young woman’s voice came over the loudspeaker. She said when she was pregnant with her second child, people told her to abort the baby. She went to one of Troccoli’s concerts and heard the song “A Baby’s Prayer,” which says, “But if I should die before I wake, I pray her soul you’ll keep. ‘Forgive her, Lord; she doesn’t know that you gave life to me.’”

“God has shown me that more children have been born through that song than I could ever bear,” Troccoli said. That shows the power of music.

When Paul and Silas were unjustly beaten and jailed in Philippi, they responded by praying and singing hymns to God (Acts 16:25). They offered up the fruit of their lips, a sacrifice of praise to God (Hebrews 13:15). The prisoners were listening to Paul and Silas. Can you imagine the effect it had on them? That shows the power of music.

Colossians 3:16 teaches that the word of Christ dwells in us richly when we sing. We sing with thankfulness to God. We sing to encourage each other. The content and purpose of biblically-authorized singing stands in sharp contrast to the practice of the denominational world. We’re going to devote some time to examine those terms and then talk about four of our most-loved hymns.

I. What Do We Sing?

A. Colossians 3:16 (and Ephesians 5:19) use the same specific terms to describe what we’re authorized to sing when we worship God. This is a good time to mention that when we sing these three types of songs, we’re respecting the authority of God in our singing.

1. Psalms.

- a) The Old Testament records psalms revealed by inspiration to be sung in worship of God. While some of the psalms recount physical Israel’s history and the Old Covenant law, most express thoughts of praise, glory, honor, and devotion to God in words that proclaim the deepest thoughts of man’s worship from the heart in a timeless fashion.
- b) It’s evident that Christians in New Testament times used psalms appropriate to express the reverence always due to God. Our song books contain numerous examples of such psalms. Who will ever forget the various compositions of Psalm 23?

2. Hymns.

- a) Sometimes we’ve used “hymn” as a word to denote everything that we sing, and that’s not a bad practice, but the word does have its own usage.
- b) “Hymn” denotes a song offering praise to God. The song “Praise Him! Praise Him!,” “Amazing Grace,” and “Holy, Holy, Holy” are examples of hymns. Numerous other examples of hymns leading us to lift our voices

in praise to God can be found. These would've been composed by Christians from the very earliest times. Several passages in the New Testament were considered as hymns after the first century:

- (1) The Magnificat, sung by Mary at her visit to Elizabeth (Luke 1:46-55).
- (2) The Benedictus, sung by Zachariah at the dedication of John the Baptist (Luke 1:68-79).
- (3) The Gloria in Excelsis, sung by the angels at the birth of Christ (Luke 2:13-14).
- (4) The Nunc Dimittis, sung by Simeon at the circumcision of Christ (Luke 2:29-32).
- (5) The exaltation of Jesus (Philippians 2:6-11).
- (6) The blessed and only Potentate (1 Timothy 6:15-16).
- (7) Dying and living with Him (2 Timothy 2:11-13).
- (8) Jesus who bore our sins in His own body (1 Peter 2:22-25).
- (9) The One who is worthy to take the book and open the seals (Revelation 5:9-10, 12-14; 7:12; 15:3-4; 19:6).

3. Spiritual songs.

a) What distinguishes a spiritual song is its focus on spiritual themes and reverence to God.

- (1) Such songs stand in contrast to secular songs we might stream or hear in a commercial or show.
- (2) The focus of secular songs may be on anything from ungodly lusts to a patriotic ballad to a humorous twist of words. Whether the words are inherently evil in nature or merely convey a harmless story of human interest, the focus isn't spiritual.

b) Spiritual songs are intended to deal with spiritual matters in a spiritual manner. They convey a sense of reverence befitting their purpose to aid in the worship of God. Most of the songs in our books fit into this category. Songs like "Did You Think to Pray?," "Love One Another," "A Soul Winner for Jesus," "Count Your Blessings," and "Take Time to Be Holy" are all examples of spiritual songs.

B. We "teach and admonish" one another. This demands that we think about the message of the song ourselves and that we attempt to convey that message to those with whom we worship.

1. Proper songs voice a spiritual truth that teach us and those around us. Songs which are constructed in a manner that may be pleasing musically, but the words are unintelligible, have no place in worship.

2. The word "admonish" means "to warn, exhort" and may include urging someone to take corrective action necessary. As we sing the type of songs authorized by God, we warn our brethren of the tragic consequences of disobedience and exhort them to live acceptably before God.

C. We're not in a singing competition with one another. We're not trying to yell out the words louder than everyone else. That creates distraction and fails in the objective of teaching and admonishing. Some of us probably need to sing out while others remember the thought of "voices blending, so rich and rare" in "The New Song."

II. Some Hymns That Stir Our Hearts

A. "It Is Well With My Soul" (626).

1. Life is unpredictable and challenging. I have to find a way to overcome hardship and tragedy.
 - a) Horatio Spafford knew something about life's unexpected challenges. He was a successful attorney and real estate investor who lost a fortune in the great Chicago fire of 1871. Around the same time, his beloved four-year-old son died of scarlet fever.
 - b) Thinking a vacation would do his family some good, he sent his wife and four daughters on a ship to England, planning to join them after he finished some pressing business at home. However, while crossing the Atlantic Ocean, the ship was involved in a terrible collision and sunk. More than 200 people lost their lives, including all four of Horatio Spafford's precious daughters. His wife, Anna, survived the tragedy. Upon arriving in England, she sent a telegram to her husband that began: "Saved alone. What shall I do?"
 - c) Horatio immediately set sail for England. At one point during his voyage, the captain of the ship, aware of the tragedy that had struck the Spafford family, summoned Horatio to tell him that they were now passing over the spot where the shipwreck had occurred. As Horatio thought about his daughters, words of comfort and hope filled his heart and mind. And he wrote this beloved hymn.
2. Come what may, let it be well with my soul. God wants me to lead a peaceful life (1 Timothy 2:2-3), and He's given me the tools to do so (Psalm 49:15; John 14:27; Philippians 4:6-7).

B. "Jesus Loves Me" (267).

1. There's so many people who've been frustrated at organized religion. In many cases, it's been justified.
2. But I tell people to keep in the forefront of their mind that Jesus loves them (John 14:21). There's a lot of power in that statement, power to overcome the faults and failures of mankind.
3. The New Testament asserts the love of Jesus for us a number of times (Mark 10:21; John 11:3, 36; 20:2; Romans 8:37; Revelation 1:5).

C. "In the Desert of Sorrow and Sin" (115)

1. Water is refreshing and indispensable to human life. It therefore is an apt metaphor for the importance of the gospel.
2. There's always something refreshing when you drink the water of life (John 4:13-14; 7:37). John continues the application of water in Revelation (21:6; 22:1, 17).

D. "'Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus" (423).

1. Paul told Timothy that we trust in God, who is the Savior of all men (1 Timothy 4:10). This is an unusual reference, but one that shows the Father and the Son as united in essence and purpose.
2. Jesus Christ is our constant. No matter what bothers us, we can always turn to Him. It doesn't matter if it's grief, loss, discouragement, or loneliness, we

can turn to Him (Isaiah 26:3-4; John 14:1; Hebrews 4:14-16). I'm so glad I learned to trust in Him!

Conclusion. Whether it's the wars in Gaza and Ukraine, gang violence in Haiti, or random earthquakes, wildfires, and floods in the U.S., it's incredibly easy to get our fill of bad news. And this bad news has an extremely discouraging effect.

The correct response is definitely to pray (1 Peter 5:6-7). But another one is to recall the words of these beautiful songs which will lift your spirit and make you concentrate on the living God, who will one day set everything right again.

Whatever problem I face, I know that God can help. No matter how bad anything could ever get, I know my God is greater. If your "cup runs over," don't let the commotion of what's going on out there make you lose your great confidence in God and His Son Jesus.

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