

Why Do We Sing?

Bob Kauflin¹

Part 1

Whether it's a praise chorus or a hymn, an anthem or an amen, whenever God's people gather for a meeting, they nearly always sing.

Have you ever wondered why?

For the past few months, I've been pondering that very question. Does it really matter to God whether we sing or not? Are there other ways he wants us to praise him when we gather? Does he even like the sound of our voices?

We live in a world filled with song and singers. It doesn't seem to matter what culture, class, or generation we're from—we love to sing. Did you ever notice how children are naturally drawn to singing? All my children, when they were infants, instinctively listened more intently to our songs than our words. (Maybe we should have sung our rules to them.)

Singing affects us in ways we can't always explain. I remember in the late 1970s hearing the song "I Love You Lord" by Laurie Klein for the first time. I had said the words, "I love you, Lord," hundreds of times before that moment. But as I sang them to that simple tune, my heart was drawn to love God in a way I hadn't experienced before.

Think of how different life would be without singing! There would be no Christmas carols, no lullabies, no opera, no country music. By now, some of you are probably starting to think it wouldn't be all bad....

Now, I know there are some people who don't like to sing. A few years ago, a family visited our church service. When I asked how they liked it, the wife responded, "My husband won't come back."

"Why?" I asked.

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“You sing too much, and he doesn’t like to sing.”

Maybe that’s you. Maybe you don’t enjoy singing. Maybe you have a “loud, squeaky voice” or a “low, rumbly voice.” Maybe someone told you that you can’t sing, and you believed them. Maybe you really can’t sing!

None of these reasons should keep us from singing *to God*. Not only does he command our singing, but I believe the Bible teaches that God gave us singing to develop and deepen our relationship with him.

Ronald Allen, in the book *Worship: Rediscovering the Missing Jewel*, writes: “When a non-singer becomes a Christian, he or she becomes a singer. Not all are blessed with a finely tuned ear and a well modulated voice; so the sound may not be superb—it may even be out-of-tune and off-key. Remember: worship is a state of heart; musical sound is a state of art. Let’s not confuse them.”

The critical question is not “Do you have a voice?” but “Do you have a song?”

Part 2

The conference worship team was on stage preparing for a sound check. The sound man hovered over the mixing board, eager to begin testing the microphones. He called a request out across the empty hall to the worship leader. “Can you sing?”

The worship leader leaned into the mic, and his voice boomed deeply out of the speakers in an honest (if not particularly helpful) response. “Well, that depends on who you ask.”

Whether or not you think you have a “quality” singing voice, all Christians are called to sing to God. And in our church services, most of us do a fair amount of it. Last week, we began to explore why.

A quick word study on variations of the word *sing* in the Bible reveals that there are more than 500 favorable references to singing. Fifty of them are direct commands to sing to God, including this rather emphatic one:

“Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises” (Ps 47:6).

Obviously, God is not only concerned that we praise him, but that we sing our praises *to* him.

The longest book of the Bible is not primarily a book of history, teaching, or prophecy, but a book of poems set to music.

After Israel's deliverance from Egypt, Moses doesn't give an eloquent speech. He sings a song. In fact, there in Exodus 15 we find the first worship song recorded in Scripture.

Later on, David assigns Levite musicians to sing God's praises *day and night* at the Temple as part of Temple worship (1Ch 9:33; 15:19–22). This was all part of God's design to surround his presence with singing.

In the New Testament, there are more than 20 references to music, and almost all of them have to do with singing. We see Jesus and the disciples singing after their last Passover meal together. In Acts 16 we read of Paul and Silas, bound in prison, exhausted after being stripped and beaten. Nevertheless, they are praying and singing hymns to God while the other prisoners listen. Singing was obviously more than a legalistic, lifeless duty for them.

In the book of Revelation, John treats us to inconceivable pictures of the continuous singing that takes place around the throne—a song with such power, such persuasive beauty, that it is eventually taken up by all creation (Rev 5).

One theologian summed it up when he said the early church was birthed in song.

However, after a few hundred years, things changed. As the church became more organized, there arose an unfortunate concern that untrained lay people would distort or abuse the practice of singing. So, from about the year 600 to 1500, singing was primarily the responsibility of professional choirs. The congregation was allowed to participate only occasionally, and many times not at all!

Things remained that way until the sixteenth century, when God raised up a man named Martin Luther. Many of us know Martin Luther as the man who helped restore to the church the truths of justification by faith and the sufficiency of Scripture.

Part 3

The Bible is filled with praises sung to God. Yet, from about the year 600 to 1500 (900 years!) the organized church had little or no congregational voice. Then, God raised up a man named Martin Luther to play a significant part in restoring congregational singing.

Luther is best known for being the theological spearhead of the Reformation. But he also worked hard to make sure God's people had songs in their own language, and ample

opportunity to sing them. He organized choirs, translated songs into his native German, and wrote some 37 hymns, including the timeless “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” He once said, “Let God speak directly to his people through the Scriptures and let his people respond with grateful songs of praise.”

Since Luther’s time, with a few exceptions, every major revival has been accompanied by outpourings of new songs that have enabled the church to sing God’s truth in fresh ways. The Reformers sang the songs of Luther and the Genevan Psalter. The first Great Awakening (eighteenth century) produced the rich hymns of Watts and Wesley. During the same period, the Pietist movement in Germany provided songs that focused on personal experience and edification. Later on, additional musical expressions emerged from the second Great Awakening (nineteenth century), various evangelistic campaigns, and the charismatic renewal of the 1970s.

But this only begs the question: Why do we sing? Instead, why not recite sonnets? Or wave banners with Scripture verses written on them?

The question is an important one. If we sing without really understanding God’s purpose for it, we won’t derive the full benefit God intends for us. Even worse, God won’t be glorified by our singing.

Colossians 3:12–17 gives some helpful insights:

Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Right away see that we are no longer who we used to be. We are chosen, holy, and dearly loved. We are new creations—born..again!—and everything about us, even our singing, has been affected by this fundamental change. However we felt about singing before we were Christians, our perspective should now, in some ways, be different. Did we dislike singing? Now we have a song. Did we sing with enjoyment? Now we have a better reason! Did we sing alone? Now, we are commanded to teach and admonish one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

Sing to Remember, Remember to Sing

Have you ever played a game called Encore? It goes like this. A word is read out loud to two opposing teams. Let's say the word is *moon*. The first team has 30 seconds to sing a line from a song that has *moon* in it.

...*Shine on, shine on harvest moon up in the sky...*

As soon as someone in the group sings at least eight consecutive words from the song, the other team faces the same challenge, using the same word, from a different song.

...*Moon River, wider than a mile, I'm crossing you in style someday...*

The game continues until one team fails to come up with an appropriate song line in the allotted time. It's a lot of fun, partly because players often launch into heartfelt performances of songs they haven't sung or heard in years. Older players may dredge up songs from several decades earlier. It's surprising, and sometimes embarrassing, the odd lyrics that lurk in the recesses of our minds.

Encore demonstrates the first reason God has given us singing: to help deepen and develop our relationship with him. How does singing do that? By helping us to *remember* and *meditate on* truths about God.

Colossians 3:16 commands us to "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs." It seems there is a connection between singing and letting God's Word dwell in us. Or any words, for that matter.

Before written language was common, poems and music were often used during and after significant events—such as treaties, blessings, covenant promises, and prophecies—to help people remember what had taken place. It's difficult for us to imagine a president singing his inaugural vows, but it wouldn't have been out of place in many ancient cultures.

As Moses and the Israelites were about to enter the Promised Land, God told Moses that Israel was going to reject him and break his covenant. But God didn't just tell Moses. He had Moses teach Israel a song, so that "when many disasters and difficulties come upon them, this song will testify against them, because it will not be forgotten by their descendants" (Dt 31:21).

We don't forget what we sing.

In the fourth century, a heretic named Arius promoted false doctrines concerning the deity of Christ by setting his theology to tunes that were easy to pick up. Fortunately, Ambrose of Milan countered with his own compositions that reflected truth. Much later on, one of Martin Luther's unsympathetic contemporaries complained that Luther's followers were "singing themselves into his doctrines."

Here's a test. How many people can quote (or even name) one of John Wesley's sermons? Very few.

But how many can sing some of the words to "Hark the Herald Angels Sing"? or "Jesus Christ Is Ris'n Today"? or "O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing"? Millions.

John's brother, Charles, wrote those hymns, and about 6,500 others, *to help people remember what he and his brother taught*. I'd say that approach was pretty effective. Singing helps the word of Christ dwell in us richly by helping us remember it.

Sing It Over, Think It Over

Before the throne of God above
I have a strong and perfect plea
A great High Priest whose name is love
Who ever lives and pleads for me
My name is graven on His hands
My name is written on His heart
I know that while in heaven He stands
No tongue can bid me thence depart

I've often sung these precious words from "Before the Throne of God Above" (lyrics by Charitie Lees Bancroft, music by Vikki Cook) during my morning shower. They are a powerful antidote to feelings of condemnation or guilt. "I have a strong and perfect plea...who ever lives and pleads for me."

Like me, you could probably name many songs God has used to speak truth to your heart. Now, we could just *say* the words to ourselves, but normally we don't—we sing them. Why?

Along with helping us *remember* truths about God (which we discussed last week), singing also helps us *meditate* on them.

Unlike normal speech, singing allows us to draw out words or phrases, repeat them, or pause in between them. All these techniques help us think more deeply about what we're singing.

Try reciting the first verse of “Amazing Grace.”

Now, try singing it. (Don’t worry about who might hear you. They’ll *love* it!)

Notice how you’re able to think more about the words when you sing them? That’s because music provides time to think about what we’re saying.

Singing also enables us to enjoy the repetition of lyrics as they are combined with music that affects our emotions. As we sing with faith and understanding, the words we sing are worked deep into our hearts where we can draw from them weeks, months, even years later. These next two well-known songs (one a hymn, one a praise chorus) are good examples of how this works:

It is well,
It is well,
It is well,
It is well with my soul

or:

I could sing of Your love forever
I could sing of Your love forever
I could sing of Your love forever
I could sing of Your love forever

Simply reading either phrase several times doesn’t have the same effect as singing it. Singing “it is well” enables me to grasp that, regardless of storms and trials, it truly *is* well with my soul. And yes, if this body didn’t get tired, I really *could* sing of God’s love forever—and repeating these lines now is a foretaste of the day when I will never have to stop declaring the greatness and wonders of my Savior!

There have been countless times when a song has enabled me to appreciate some aspect of God’s character in a deeper way. I believe that’s one reason the Psalms were set to music—to drive their message home.

We should also remember that singing helps *those around us* meditate on God’s truth, helping to build them up. This is why worshipping God should not only be done individually, but together.

Knowing that singing has been given to us for the purpose of remembering and meditating on God’s Word will influence the songs we choose to sing.

Sing the Glory of His Name

In the middle of this series on “Why Do We Sing?” some of you may be asking, “Why is he making such a big deal about singing? Don’t we sing because we *want* to sing? It sure beats talking for the whole meeting!”

Yes, it certainly does. And so far in this series, we’ve discussed how God gave us singing to help us remember and meditate on truth about him. But the purposes for our singing go far beyond that. Singing is also one of the Christian’s primary means for expressing objective truth about God.

Psalm 66:2 says, “Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious!” When we sing the glory of God’s name, we declare and reflect on who he is, what he has done, and what he will do. God wants us to sing the glory of his name because he is like no other. He is the I AM, Redeemer, Shepherd, Almighty Lord, God our Provider, Deliverer, Holy One. He wants us to sing about his unique work as Redeemer, Creator, and Savior. Each name represents a unique aspect of God, and each draws us to worship him in a slightly different way. He wants us to describe over and over again the specific ways He has proven his faithfulness, goodness, greatness, majesty, purity, compassion, love, and mercy. He wants his name and character to be set apart.

That’s why the songs we sing ought to be derived from or thoroughly tested by Scripture. A friend pointed out to me that if most of our songs can be sung just as well by Buddhists, Muslims, or Hindus, we need to change our repertoire! This doesn’t mean that the songs we sing are intended to be a systematic Christian theology, but they should help us clearly and accurately glorify the only true God. That’s why, when we’re choosing songs for the Sunday service or our small group, the lyrics are of greater concern than the chords and the beat!

It’s also a good idea to memorize songs as we’re able. You’ve heard of ADD? That’s attention deficit disorder. Well, I think on Sundays many of us can suffer from a modern affliction called ODD—overhead dependency disorder—which is closely related to a much older malady known as HFS, or hymnal fixation syndrome.

I’ve watched people keep their eyes glued to the screen or printed page throughout the worship, even when they’re singing songs they know by heart! How much more valuable it would be to learn some of these songs, and then sing them, *from memory*! The more words about God I can store up in my heart, the more I can be helped by them throughout the day.

Some years ago I realized I had a very limited knowledge of hymns. So I started using a hymnal in my devotional times. What a difference it made! My prayer life received a fresh infusion of truth, passion, and depth. Over time I've tried to memorize a number of the hymns, and this has benefited me immeasurably by expanding my vocabulary for singing God's praise.

Sing to Respond to God

I grew up in a religious tradition that downplayed outward emotional responses to God.

If you sang with enthusiasm during the service, you were basically singing a solo. Heads turned, necks craned. "Who *is* that singing so loudly and what could they possibly be so excited about?"

I'm happy to report that my present church setting allows me to sing as loudly as I want, and no one seems to mind. Which brings us to our next point in this series—as we sing songs that express truth *about* God (this was last week's topic), our singing helps us to respond fully *to* God.

What does "respond fully to God" mean? First, it means responding *in a variety of ways*.

Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God."

Here, we are commanded to sing to God in various styles: psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. After reading what numerous scholars have written about Paul's meaning behind "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs," I've come to a firm, unequivocal conclusion... We don't know exactly what Paul meant!

However, there is a general consensus that he was seeking to highlight different sources for songs. "Psalms" most likely referred to lyrics drawn from the Old Testament book of Psalms. "Hymns" were probably New Testament songs written to God or Christ. "Spiritual songs" were most likely sacred songs of a more spontaneous nature.

The point is, God supports diversity in our worship, not simply for the sake of including everyone, but so that we might understand and experience the truth more profoundly. We see this reflected in Scripture, where God is worshiped in a variety of ways. Donald Hustad, in commenting on this passage, says, "Apparently, first-century worship included traditional (classic) as well as contemporary materials, highly cognitive as well as more

emotional forms, and carefully-crafted as well as improvised compositions—psalms of praise and prayer, hymns of doctrine, and spiritual songs of Christian experience.”²

“Responding fully to God” also means responding in ways that are expressive and emotional. In Colossians, we are not told simply to sing. We are to sing *with gratitude in our hearts*. Ephesians 5:19 says that, as we sing, we are to *make music in our hearts to the Lord*. God is interested in getting his Word not only into our heads, but into our hearts. Singing helps us do that. As John Piper has commented, “The reason we sing is because there are depths and heights and intensities and kinds of emotions that will not be satisfactorily expressed by mere prosaic forms, or even poetic readings. There are realities that demand to break out of prose into poetry and some demand that poetry be stretched into song.”

Sing with All Your Heart

A few years ago, a couple began attending the church where I led worship. They enjoyed the theological depth of the song lyrics, but experienced a serious disconnect with the *way* we worshiped God. Like many other Christians, they had been taught that emotional expression in worship is dangerous at best, and probably sinful. Yet here they had encountered a group of Christians who loved sound doctrine, but also expressed their response to truth by raising their hands, clapping, kneeling, crying, and other forms of emotion. Was God OK with this?

Last week, we discussed how responding fully to God in worship ought to include emotional expression. Does that mean we’re free to pursue spiritual goose bumps? Obviously not. So, is all emotion in worship bad? Hardly. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Puritan theologian Jonathan Edwards responded to critics of the emotionalism commonly seen during the first Great Awakening. He said this about singing: “The duty of singing praises to God seems to be given wholly to excite and express religious affections. There is no other reason why we should express ourselves to God in verse rather than in prose and with music, except that these things have a tendency to move our affections.”³

Singing allows us to combine intellect with emotion, objective truth with our response to it. In other words, *singing exists to help us express emotion—that’s the whole point!* It is never to be done half-heartedly. What’s the purpose of singing any song (much less a worship song!) in monotone?

² Donald Hustad, *Jubilate II*, p 155

³ Jonathan Edwards, *Treatise on the Religious Affections*, p 44

Scripture also teaches us that singing is to be enjoyable! “Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good; sing praise to his name, for that is pleasant” (Ps 135:3).

We bring no honor to God when we suppress our gratitude and joy while meditating on the mercy and kindness he has shown us. Do you know which emotion is most often connected to singing in the Bible? Joy!

“Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs” (Ps 100:2).

The book of James has more instruction for us along these lines: “Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise” (Jas 5:13). Let him *sing!*

God created us, he created the universe, and he keeps it in order. He protects our lives, gave us a family, guides our paths perfectly, and knows the number of hairs on our head.

But most precious is this truth: All our sins are forgiven. Although I have lusted too many times to count, been impatient with my children, spoken harshly, envied, coveted, killed in my heart, and lived much of my life without God, he has sent his Son to take my punishment. He became sin so that we could be clothed in his righteousness. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and we are among them! We have become God’s children, and that’s something to get emotional about. Singing helps us do that in a way that pleases God.

But...um, what if I don’t *feel* like singing?!

The Greatest Reason to Sing

We saw that God has given us singing to help us express emotion. But, someone could legitimately ask, “What if my emotions are dried up? What if I don’t *feel* like singing?” Let’s examine three of the common reasons for a lack of emotion in worship.

First, we may have forgotten that we’ve been forgiven of our past sins (2Pe 1:9).

Worship should always contain the emotion of gratitude (Col 3:16, Eph 5:19–20) for what God has done, especially Jesus’ work for us on the cross. If I’m ungrateful for that, then I don’t see the severity of my sin, or the magnificence of God’s gift of salvation. The solution? Soak yourself in the gospel of God’s amazing grace. Don’t think the gospel is just for evangelism—God means for it to be part of our daily diet!

Study the book of Romans or Galatians. Read *The Discipline of Grace*, or *Transforming Grace*, both by Jerry Bridges. Spend some time with *Sin and Temptation* by John Owen.

Let your eyes be opened to the greatness of your sin, so that you might experience the inexpressible joy of God's mercy and forgiveness...every day. No matter what our trials or challenges, nothing diminishes the infinitely good news that our sins have been completely forgiven through the death of Jesus on the Cross, and we have been reconciled forever to God! The gospel has always been, and will always be, our greatest reason to sing.

Second, we may have yielded to the sin the Bible calls "fear of man" (Pr 29:25).

"What if people don't like my voice? How can I raise my hands or cry in public? Won't people think I'm some flake or weirdo?" Such fears can easily quench our affections, making our worship more dutiful than delightful. Many in Jesus' day would not confess their faith because they feared they would be put out of the synagogue (Jn 12:42). In Isaiah, God confronts those who withhold obedience because of their fear of others:

"I, even I, am he who comforts you. Who are you that you fear mortal men, the sons of men, who are but grass, that you forget the Lord your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth?" (Isa 51:12-13)

That's a sobering question. Here's another, and one I've often had to ask myself: If my worship is controlled by what other people might think of me, instead of by what God has revealed about himself, who am I really worshipping?

Finally, we may believe that expressing emotion in worship is wrong.

If so, we need to allow God, through his Word, to renew our minds. As we grow in our understanding of God's truth and love for us, we should grow in the depth of our feeling for these things. Read through the Psalms and see the varied forms of emotional expression there. As the psalmists focus on who God is and what he has done, their hearts and affections are increasingly drawn to him. The same will happen to us.

I know I haven't covered every objection or concern about emotion in worship, but I do know one thing. If emotions were given to us for anything, they were given to us for God.

Sing to Reflect God's Glory

We've seen that singing helps us remember and meditate on God's Word. We've also looked at singing as a means of responding fully to God. But singing is much more than a means to some other end, however worthy. When done as an act of worship, singing is an end in itself. Such singing does, of course, *declare* God's glory, but have you ever

considered that it also *reflects* God's glory? I believe there are at least three ways in which this takes place.

First, singing reflects God's glory, for he himself sings.

Did you know that all three members of the Trinity create song? Zephaniah 3:17, speaking of the Father, reads: "He will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing." Hebrews 2:12 quotes Psalm 22, where the Son of God sings the Father's praise in the midst of the congregation. In Ephesians 5:18–19 we are told that being filled with the Holy Spirit inspires songs in the heart of each believer. This is one reason why we often sense God's presence in a more pronounced way when we gather to sing his praises. The Holy Spirit is in our midst inspiring our songs!

Second, singing reflects God's glory as Author of all music.

As Creator, God is the ultimate author of all creativity. He created music—melody, harmony, rhythm, timbre, and texture—for his glory, and is the true source of every creative idea in music. No one has ever conceived a musical idea God did not originate. No one ever will.

So, no matter how sophisticated, cultured, current, or excellent our singing may be, we must never think that God is impressed or surprised. But at the same time, *any* sincere attempt to glorify him through song brings him pleasure—because, however pale or distorted, it is a genuine reflection of his vast, immeasurable creativity. (If it seems at all odd to you that God would delight in a reflection of some aspect of himself, let me encourage you to read John Piper's book, *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God's Delight in Being God*.)

How God loves it when we are edified and stirred by the sounds he has given us. Just as the making of a chair or an airplane reflects God's wisdom as the master builder, so singing reflects his glory as the master musician.

Finally, singing reflects God's glory because it is a foretaste of the eternal glory yet to come.

Revelation gives us a breathtaking picture of the singing around the throne by the heavenly creatures, the 24 elders, countless angels, and the redeemed. When we read about the worship described in Revelation, our hearts cry out, "I want to do that!" What a joy to sing of God's ultimate triumph and outworking of his redemptive purposes in Christ, even before those events have been fully seen. We sing as though the last chapter has been written—because it has been.

Why Do We Sing? A Coda

As we come to the end of our exploration of why Christians sing, we come, also, to the end of ourselves. That is, we realize that our best attempts to glorify God through singing fall short for three reasons.

Limited time: Families, jobs, and responsibilities keep us from singing to God 24/7.

Limited understanding: Our finite intellects and innate sinfulness keep us from seeing how great God really is.

Limited strength: Despite my desires to the contrary, I can't jump, clap, or sing for as long as I once could.

But there will come a day when our time and strength will be unlimited, and our understanding of God will be permanently, endlessly increasing. On that day, the song around God's throne—the song we now perceive as only a dim and distant sound—will be our immediate, joyous reality.

What might that be like?

Because our singing in this life reflects the song currently being sung in heaven before God himself, I believe it benefits us to use our sanctified imaginations to think about what lies ahead. Randy Alcorn is an author who, with scrupulous attention to Scripture, has produced some moving fiction that helps us imagine what heaven might be like. Here, from his book *Edge of Eternity*, is a passage on worship in heaven:

We rejoined our comrades in the great camp of [heaven], embracing and shedding tears and slapping each other on the back. Then warriors around me turned toward the masses of untold millions gathered in [heaven]. The army began to sing, perhaps hundreds of thousands, perhaps a million.

I added my voice to theirs and sang the unchained praises of the King. Only for a moment did I hear my own voice, amazed to detect the increased intensity of the whole. One voice, even mine, made a measurable difference. But from then on I was lost in the choir, hardly hearing my voice and not needing to.

As we sang to the gathered throngs of [heaven], the sheer power of their voices, our voices, nearly bowled me over.

Then suddenly the multitudes before us sang back to us, and our voices were drowned by theirs. We who a moment earlier seemed the largest choir ever assembled now proved to be only the small worship ensemble that led the full

choir of untold millions, now lost to themselves. We sang together in full voice, “To him who made the galaxies, who became the Lamb, who stretched out on the tree, who crossed the chasm, who returned the Lion! Forever!”

The song’s harmonies reached out and grabbed my body and my soul. I became the music’s willing captive.

The galaxies and nebulae sang with us the royal song. It echoed off a trillion planets and reverberated in a quadrillion places in every nook and cranny of the universe. The song generated the light of a billion burning supernovae. It blotted out all lesser lights and brought a startling clarity to the way things really were. It didn’t blind, it illuminated, and I saw as never before.

Our voices broke into thirty-two distinct parts, and instinctively I knew which of them I was made to sing. “We sing for joy at the work of your hands...we stand in awe of you.” It felt indescribably wonderful to be lost in something so much greater than myself.

There was no audience, I thought for a moment, for audience and orchestra and choir all blended into one great symphony, one grand cantata of rhapsodic melodies and powerful sustaining harmonies.

No, wait, there was an audience. An audience so vast and all-encompassing that for a moment I’d been no more aware of it than a fish is aware of water.

I looked at the great throne, and upon it sat the King...the Audience of One.

When we completed our song, the One on the throne stood and raised his great arms and clapped his scarred hands together in thunderous applause, shaking ground and sky, jarring every corner of the cosmos. His applause went on and on, unceasing and unstoppable.

And in that moment I knew, with unwavering clarity, that the King’s approval was all that mattered—and ever would.

We sing, not for our own glory, preferences, or pleasure, but for the pleasure of the One who gave us a song in the first place. The great Redeemer has given us the song of the redeemed, so that in endlessly varied interpretations of that one glorious song, we might remember his words, respond fully to him, and reflect his glory.

God gave us singing to develop and deepen our relationship with him until that day when we will wake to find ourselves singing directly to him. And what a day, what a song that will be.

I want to get as much practice as I can.