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PERSPECTIVE

THE MONTHLY JOURNAL OF MOUNT VERNON BAPTIST CHURCH



SING THE WORD



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January 6	Leadership for the Lost <i>1 Peter 5:1-14</i>
January 13	Will You Be Serious? <i>Malachi 1:1-2:9</i>
January 20	Will You Be Married? <i>Malachi 2:10-3:5</i>
January 27	Will You Give? <i>Malachi 3:6-12</i>

> FIGHTER VERSE

- ⁵ For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence,
for my hope is from him.
⁶ He only is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I shall not be shaken.
⁷ On God rests my salvation and my glory;
my mighty rock, my refuge is God.

Psalm 32:5-7

INSIDE THIS EDITION >

Covenant Groups

An explanation and FAQ for Covenant Groups at Mount Vernon.

page 1

The Bookshelf:

Knowing God by J. I. Packer

A review on the importance of a high view of God.
by Rodney Barry

page 2

Sing the Word

An article explaining why and how we should sing to glorify God.
by Aaron Menikoff

page 4

Use the QR reader on your mobile ▶
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issue of *Perspective* by email.



THE DANGER OF DEAD FAITH

FOUR STUDIES THROUGH THE BOOK OF MALACHI

Beginning Sunday, January 13, Pastor Aaron will begin leading us in a four-part sermon series through the book of Malachi.

Each sermon will be available the Monday after it is delivered through the Mount Vernon Podcast on iTunes and on the church's website at www.mvbchurch.org.

Sermons are also available on CD for \$5 per copy.

Mount Vernon Baptist Church exists to know, equip, and send one another for the worship and glory of God. Part of

*the way we fulfill this mission is by encouraging and committing to a culture of discipling at MVBC. One way we do this is through Covenant Groups, small groups for MVBC members. We are in the process of organizing Covenant Groups that will begin meeting in February 2013. If you are interested, please complete the registration form online at www.mvbchurch.org/covenant-groups-2013. Once you have indicated your interest, you will receive more information. The registration deadline is **Friday, January 18, 2013**. Below is a list of Frequently Asked Questions about Covenant Groups at MVBC.*

What are Covenant Groups?

They are small groups for MVBC members. The purpose is to help us grow closer to God as we grow closer to one another. Each group studies either a passage of Scripture, an MVBC sermon, or a Christian book. Emphasis is on conversation, accountability, and prayer.

When do Covenant Groups meet?

The day and time depends upon the group. However, most groups meet once or twice a month.

Are Covenant Groups necessary?

No. Making disciples is necessary. Disciples can be made through one-on-one conversations over coffee, by building a fence together in the backyard, or by deliberately gathering together in a home to discuss Scripture. Sharing life together is necessary. A Covenant Group is one way to share life.

How is a Covenant Group different from Sunday School?

The emphasis of Sunday School is teaching. Sunday School does provide opportunity for discussion, and even for fellowship, but the primary goal is to collectively dig deeper into Scripture. Covenant Groups are more discussion and application oriented, and the conversation is usually more personal.



COVENANT GROUPS

If I am in a Covenant Group, do I need to be at church as much?

We encourage every member of MVBC to gather together for the Sunday morning service and for one evening service. Please prioritize those times when the whole church gathers.

Can non-MVBC members join a Covenant Group?

Covenant Groups are for members only. Members have promised to hold one another accountable. We believe it is best to have some groups to encourage this. However, non-members are welcome to every other meeting of the church and we also have Community Groups, which are open to everyone.

How are leaders selected?

Leaders are selected by the pastoral staff, under the oversight of the Elders. A few times a year, we offer training to equip Covenant Group leaders. If you are interested in serving as a Covenant Group leader, simply let a pastor know.

What does a typical Covenant Group look like?

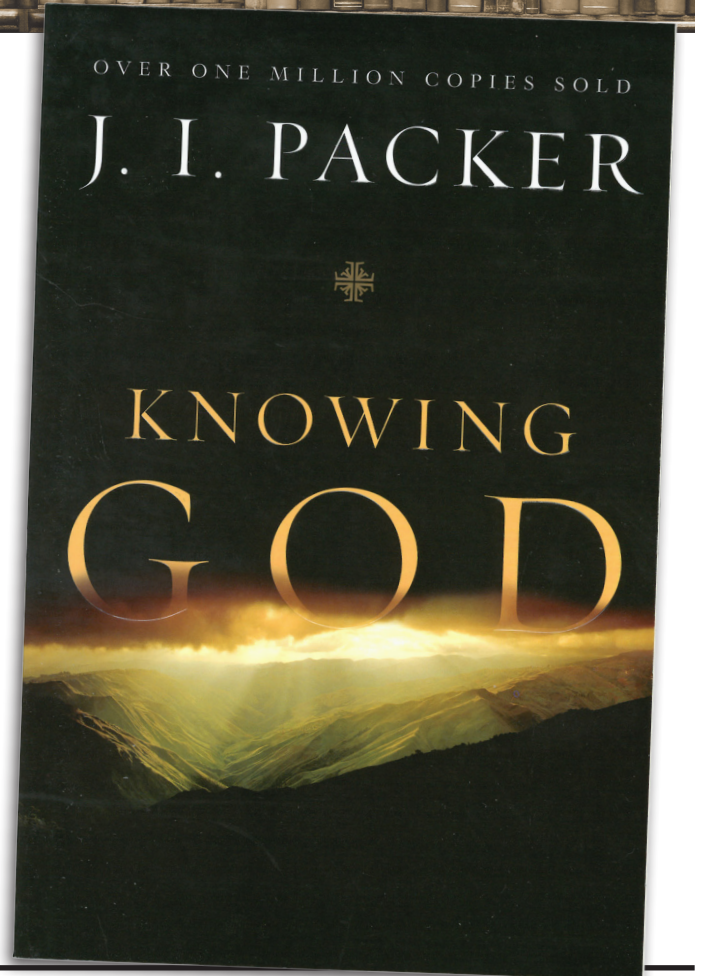
There is no typical Covenant Group. However, there are a few basics. They usually last for 2-3 hours. There may be time to socialize. Groups spend about an hour in group study/discussion/prayer. Lastly, Groups may break into men and women's groups for about a half hour of conversation and prayer.



Knowing God

by J. I. Packer

Reviewed by Rodney Barry



I FIRST READ *KNOWING GOD* by J. I. Packer some fifteen years ago and can say that it had a profound impact on my spiritual growth and helped me to begin to see God as the great Creator he is, who is sovereign over all things and all circumstances. Rereading it for this book review was no less rewarding. It is a book soundly grounded in scripture that helps one meditate on the greatness and glory of God, his ways, character, and attributes.

Intellectually, most of us know that God is big and the sovereign king of the universe, but do our lives reflect that knowledge? In other words, do we really believe it? In his 1973 preface, J. I. Packer states that "the conviction behind the book is that ignorance of God, ignorance both of his ways and of the practice of communion with him, lies at the root of much of the church's weakness today."

The first chapter of the book begins with a quote from a sermon given by C.H. Spurgeon on January 7, 1855. Spurgeon opens his sermon as follows:

It has been said by someone "that the proper study of mankind is man." I will not oppose the idea, but I believe it is equally true that the proper study of God's elect is God; the proper study of a Christian is the Godhead. The highest

science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father.... And whilst humbling and expanding, this subject is eminently consolatory. Oh, there is, in contemplating Christ, a balm for every wound; in musing on the Father, there is a quietus for every grief; and in the influence of the Holy Ghost, there is a balsam for every sore. Would you lose your sorrow? Would you drown your cares? Then go, plunge yourself in the Godhead's deepest sea; be lost in his immensity; and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated. I know nothing which can so comfort the soul; so calm the swelling billows of sorrow and grief; so speak peace to the winds of trial, as a devout musing upon the subject of the Godhead (17-18).

This sermon introduction provides a good description of what one can take away from a diligent study of *Knowing God*. While one could quickly read through the book in several evenings, much more can be gained by taking it more slowly, chapter by chapter and meditating on the scripture and insights provided by Packer. The book contains 286 pages including an extensive index of biblical passages and is divided into three sections

and twenty-two chapters. Most chapters are less than 10 pages, making it ideal for a personal devotional or group study.

The first section, "Know The Lord," contains six chapters and lays out the need for theology, the distinction between "knowing" versus "knowing about," what knowing God involves, the dangers in images, the mystery of God incarnate and the importance of the Holy Spirit. Packer disputes the all too common opinion that theology is boring and unimportant to the average layperson in today's modern world. Packer argues:

As it would be cruel to an Amazonian tribesman to fly him to London, put him down without explanation in Trafalgar Square and leave him, as one who knew nothing of English or England, to fend for himself, so we are cruel to ourselves if we try to live in this world without knowing about the God whose world it is and who runs it. The world becomes a strange, mad, painful place, and life in it a disappointing and unpleasant business, for those who do not know about God. Disregard the study of God, and you sentence yourself to stumble and blunder through life blindfolded, as it were, with no sense of direction and no understanding of what surrounds you. This way you can waste your life and lose your soul (19).

The book examines in detail what the Bible has to say about the nature and character of God in light of these five basic truths:

1. God has spoken to man, and the Bible is his Word, given to make us wise unto salvation.
2. God is Lord and King over his world; he rules all things for his own glory, displaying his perfections in all that he does, in order that men and angels may worship and adore him.
3. God is Savior, active in sovereign love through the Lord Jesus Christ to rescue believers from the guilt and power of sin, to adopt them as his children and to bless them accordingly.
4. God is triune; there are within the Godhead three persons—the Father, the Son the Holy Spirit—and the work of salvation is one in which all three act together, the Father purposing redemption, the Son securing it, and the Spirit applying it.
5. Godliness means responding to God's revelation in trust and obedience, faith and worship, prayer and praise, submission and service. Life must be seen and lived in the light of God's Word. This, and nothing else, is true religion.

Packer suggests that there is a great difference between knowing God and just knowing about God. He goes into considerable detail using the book of Daniel to describe four characteristics of someone that truly knows God. That being "those who know God have great energy for God, those who know God have great thoughts of God, those who know God show great boldness for God and those who know God have great contentment in God" (27-31).

The second section of the book, "Behold Your God," consists of eleven chapters, each expounding on a particular attribute of God. These are, "God Unchanging," "The Majesty of God," "God Only Wise," "God's Wisdom and Ours," "Thy Word Is Truth," "The Love of God," "The Grace of God," "God the Judge," "The Wrath of God," "Goodness and Severity," and "The Jealous God."

In "The Majesty of God," Packer asks, "How may we form a right idea of God's greatness?" He suggest that the Bible teaches two steps that must be taken, that is "to remove from our thoughts of God limits that would make him small" and "to compare him with powers and forces which we regard as great." He uses a short study of Psalm 139 as an example to the first step to realize how unlimited are his wisdom, presence, and power. As an example to the second step, he uses Isaiah 40 to draw a contrast between the greatness of God to things that may seem great to us but pale in comparison to God, such as the nations, the world, and great leaders.

The third section, "If God Be for US..." consists of five chapters of considerable more length than the earlier ones that bring application to what has been studied. Packer gives lengthy discussions on propitiation and adoption. He says, "These two concepts, indeed, link together; were I asked to focus the New Testament message in three words, my proposal would be adoption through propitiation, and I do not expect ever to meet a richer or more pregnant summary of the gospel than that."

The final chapter, "The Adequacy of God," is an exposition of the eighth chapter of Romans. Packer calls Romans the "high peak of scripture." He says all the main themes of doctrine are brought together in this book of the Bible, and he goes into considerable depth in context with the first seven chapters of Romans to develop four thoughts that the Christian can rely on. They are "no opposition can finally crush us," "no good thing will be finally withheld from us," "no accusation can ever disinherit us," and "no separation from Christ's love can ever befall us" (260-277).

Packer concludes "knowing God involves a personal relationship whereby you give yourself to God on the basis of his promise to give himself to you. Knowing God means asking his mercy and resting on his undertaking to forgive sinners for Jesus' sake. Further, it means becoming a disciple of Jesus, the living Savior who is there today, calling the needy to himself as he did in Galilee in the days of his flesh. Knowing God, in other words involves faith, assent, consent, commitment and faith expresses itself in prayer and obedience" (277-278).

J. I. Packer is one of the most renowned conservative evangelical theologians of our time and his book *Knowing God*, written forty years ago, represents his greatest work. Having a high view of God runs counter to our modern society, but it is necessary if we are to grow spiritually and live out the Christian life the way God intends. No matter where you are in your Christian walk, a diligent study of this book and meditation on the, grandeur, nature, attributes, and ways of God will be richly rewarding. ■



SING THE WORD

IN 1972 DON MCLEAN CAME out with his greatest hit, “American Pie.” At the time, I had no idea what it was about. Still, I loved to sing along when I heard it on the radio. The song once came on the air when I was driving with my Dad through downtown Portland. He quickly changed the station. I asked him why, and he told me that it brought back sad memories of his time in the Navy during the Vietnam war.

Music has a way of bottling time, doesn’t it? Just a few notes of a tune can bring back emotions you experienced decades ago. Bernard Herrman’s theme song to the movie *Psycho* may still send a shiver down your spine. John Williams’s score to *Raiders of the Lost Ark* may conjure up a sense of adventure.

While theme songs to famous movies may bring back trivial memories, a beloved hymn can stir in our souls the most lofty, important, and wonderful feelings a human can have. What do you think of when you hear the song, “And Can It Be?” It goes like this:

*And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Savior’s blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain—
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?
Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?*

Whenever I hear these words, I think about the many baptisms I’ve witnessed, and my heart fills with joy. God designed beautiful words, coupled with beautiful music, to cause us to remember him and his work.

When Moses was about to die, the Lord gave him a song to teach the people of Israel (Deut. 32:1-43). This “Song of Moses,” speaks of God’s greatness and of his protection of Israel for centuries. It

speaks of Israel’s rebellion and of God’s faithfulness. It speaks of the Lord as Israel’s greatest ally and the One in whom they are to rejoice. In a few choice words to be sung, God delivered a message that Israel needed to remember.

*Listen, O heavens, and I will speak;
Hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.
Let my teaching fall like rain,
And my words descend like dew,
Like showers on new grass,
Like abundant rain on tender plants.*

*I will proclaim the name of the LORD.
Oh, praise the greatness of our God!
He is the Rock, his works are perfect,
And all his ways are just.
A faithful God who does no wrong,
Upright and just is he.*

God gave his people voices and he gave them a word to sing. The same is true today—we have been given voices, and we have been given words to sing as well. Many of our hymns are simply Scripture put to music. Those that aren’t should be so saturated with Bible that we can’t help but affirm that we are singing God’s truth.

In heaven there will be singing—glorious, beautiful, robust, heart-warming, God-glorifying singing. Human and angels will sing together. The tunes will never get old. It won’t matter that while we walked on earth our voices were out-of-tune. Our Triune God ordained song as a means for us to give him eternal praise. When we gather as a church, we sing. Let us think together about singing.

I realize that as I broach this topic I am entering an area where the church, especially for the last 25 years, has been divided. This conflict even has a name: “the worship wars.”

Nonetheless, regardless of the controversial nature of the topic (a reflection of just how important music is to each of us) let us go to Scripture to see what we can learn about singing. In this brief article, I aim to present four, simple facts.

Our singing is to exalt the person and work of Christ.

The key passage is Colossians 3. Paul wrote this book to believers whose lives had been radically transformed by the Gospel. As he wrote in verse 3, their “life is now hidden with Christ in God.” The same is true for us. As believers we have a new identity—we are “Christians” before we are anything else. Paul noted that this new identity has huge implications.

In verse 15, Paul tells us to “[l]et the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.” That is the mandate for us as believers—we are to live “at peace” with one another especially since we have been given “the peace of Christ.” So many things divide us, but our identity as Christians unites us. Now look at verse 16, “[l]et 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.” This is where the peace of Christ leads—song. Let the praise begin!

The “word of Christ” (Col. 3:16) is the gospel. It is the message that the Son of God came to dwell with sinful humanity to eventually save us from our sins. Jesus Christ never sinned. He lived a perfect life, the life we should have lived. And when he died on the cross, he died in the place of sinners, just like us. God raised his Son, Jesus Christ, from the dead. This is evidence that everything Christ said was true. It is proof that Jesus has conquered sin and death. It is the reason we can know that we, too, can have everlasting life as we hide ourselves in Christ, our refuge (Col. 3:3). As we hide in Christ, this Word, this gospel dwells in us. It is more precious to us than anything. Stock, property, and prestige mean nothing when compared to the security that comes from the gospel that dwells within us.

This idea of dwelling is important. It is one thing to have guests in your home for a few days. These guests are temporary occupants. They are in and out of your lives for a short season—they don’t *dwell* in your house. But your family does. Your spouse and your kids are there all the time. They are part of your household. Just as your family dwells in your home, so the gospel is to dwell in your heart—and dwell there richly.

And what evidence is there that the word of Christ is dwelling in you richly? The first thing to notice is that your life changes. You are growing in holiness. You know what it means to put to death “what is earthly in you” (Col. 3:5). But that’s not all. We sing. Yes, we sing! “And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which you indeed were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Col. 3:15-16).

Let’s go even further back in time—centuries before the birth of Christ. When the Israelites gathered, they sang. Music and singing were a vital part of Israel’s worship. In fact, the responsibility for giving Israel a word to sing rested in the hand of the king.

King David wrote much of the book of Psalms. He was Israel’s hymn writer. And before David died, he described himself as “Israel’s singer in songs.” He was the Singer-in-Chief. Second Samuel 23:1, “The oracle of David, son of Jesse, the oracle of men exalted by the Most High, the man anointed by the God of Jacob, Israel’s singer of songs.” Isn’t that interesting? David didn’t describe himself as a man of wisdom, of strength, of courage—though he was all of these. He described himself as Israel’s “singer of songs.”

But it wasn’t just a ministry given to David. In 1 Kings 4:32 we are told that King Solomon “spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five.” David and Solomon were both kings and part of their job description was to give the people songs to sing. The music ministry of Israel came under the jurisdiction of Israel’s king.

Fast forward, now, to the early church. In Colossians 3:16 Paul is telling the church that the music ministry is still under the jurisdiction of the king. But there is a new and better king now. The songwriter is Jesus Christ, and the song is the gospel. That’s what I mean when I say that all singing is to be Christ-exalting—it is, after all, the “word of Christ” we are singing.

What does this mean for us?

First, it means that most of our lyrics should be obviously and explicitly about Christ, about his character and work. The content of our songs matters. It is not enough for a song to be easy to sing, it must glorify Christ because it is his word we are singing. There will be times when we sing a song that doesn’t mention Christ. Take the classic chorus from Psalm 42, “As the Deer,” for example. We often sing this psalm, even though there is no clear reference to Christ. But when we sing “As the Deer,” we do it aware that Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of the longing expressed in Psalm 42.

Second, it means we should sing about the cross every week. The cross is the central message of Christianity. Without a crucified Savior there is no salvation. The cross is the fountain of God’s mercy, grace, and love.

Third, it means the better you understand the gospel the better your singing will be. The better you know the rules of a sport, the more likely you are to watch it. There are exceptions to this rule (see Curling). But it is always true with the gospel. The more deeply you understand the work of Christ on your behalf, the more eager you are sing about this work. If you want to sing better, don’t hire a voice coach—study the Bible.

Fourth, it means that, on Sunday, the singing is not the prelude to the “good stuff.” There are some who minimize the sermon and relish the singing. But there are others who minimize the singing and relish the sermon. Both approaches are flawed. In both the preaching of the word and in the singing of the word, Christ is proclaimed.

Our singing is to be congregational.

To get a sense of why this is the case, let's look at a couple passages, back-to-back.

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Col. 3:15-16)

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart. (Eph. 5:18-19)

There are some important similarities to notice. In both passages Paul addressed local churches. In each congregation, Paul commands that “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” be sung. Historians and bible scholars for years have tried to discern the difference between psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Some suggest that a “psalm” is a song that requires musical accompaniment. A “hymn,” could be sung with an instrument or a *cappella*. Meanwhile, a “spiritual song” includes not just praise, but instruction. The modern consensus, however, seems to be that in first-century Greek, each of these words can be used interchangeably to mean, simply, a religious song.

Notice another similarity: Paul is instructing the members of these churches to sing to “one another.” Interesting. We normally think about singing praises to God. That is the vertical aspect of our singing. But there is a horizontal aspect, too. When we sing we are speaking to one another. In our singing we are actually teaching and admonishing one another. In song, we are calling upon one another to know who God is, to remember what he has done, and to love him more.

Let's go back in time again. This was a radical shift from what the Jewish people were used to. In 1 Chronicles 15, King David led Israel to prepare for the arrival of the ark of God in Jerusalem. The ark was the symbol of God's presence with his people. The ark was to be placed in the Tabernacle. This was a big deal, and David oversaw the entire operation. In verse 16 he told the leaders of the Levites to appoint their brothers as singers to sing joyful songs accompanied by instruments. A choir was formed, a choir of Levites. This became a staple of Old Testament worship.

We don't hear much more about these choirs in the Old Testament until we get to the age of Nehemiah the prophet. In Nehemiah chapter 12, the people are preparing to celebrate the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem. The Levitical choir was called upon to lead God's people in worship. So, in the Old Testament, a select group within Israel was singled out to lead God's people in singing praises to the Lord.

How different this is from Paul's commands. In a sense, Paul calls upon all the people to be song leaders. We all have the responsibility to sing and, in fact, to sing in such a way that it can truly be said that we are singing to one another, serving one another by helping to lead in song. Again, it doesn't matter

if we can carry a tune or not. We are commanded to sing to one another, to “sing and make music in our hearts to the Lord.” Fundamentally, singing is a congregational activity.

What does this mean for us?

First, it means we are free to have a choir and a praise team, but neither are biblically required. Their role is to encourage us in our collective responsibility to sing together. What a privilege it is to have a church full of people who are uniquely gifted to sing well. But let us never assume that because others can sing wonderfully, either in a choir or praise team, our singing is somehow less important to the body. It isn't.

Second, it means that *unity* is more important than *taste*. Let me explain what I mean. Everyone has a musical taste. We all tune in to a different dial on the radio or create different stations on Pandora. You may like Jazz, Classical, Folk, Pop, Gospel, or Hard Rock music. For lots of reasons, you may gravitate toward Fanny Crosby or Bach, to Lecrae or Chris Tomlin. That's the just the way it is. Because people are so passionate about their different tastes in music, it is not uncommon for churches to divide their services over these tastes. In other words, many churches cater their services to the musical preferences of those who come. That's why you'll find churches today with a traditional service, a contemporary service, and perhaps even an ultra-modern service.

I'm very thankful that before I ever came to pastor Mount Vernon, our church decided not to divide over music. This was a wise decision. You see, music—like the gospel—is supposed to unite us not separate us. The unity we share when the word of Christ dwells in us richly is supposed to be obvious when we sing together. But how obvious is this unity if some of us are in one room singing hymns and others in another room singing praise choruses? To divide over styles of singing actually undermines the very unity the gospel is supposed to build.

Our commitment to be united in our singing presents Mount Vernon with a particular challenge. Those, for example, who have grown up in an African American congregation or in an international context, will likely find our “style” of our worship unsettling. Others who are used to what I'll call the “rock band as praise team” experience will find us awfully traditional. Furthermore, those who grew up singing Southern Baptist hymns will find us awfully contemporary. You see the problem.

Let's face it, not everyone in a congregation will be always pleased about the selection of hymns and songs. David Carnes, our associate pastor of corporate worship, and I were recently talking about how we go about picking songs. David encapsulated our approach very well: we are content-driven when it comes to the selection of songs. It is the content that matters most. We will happily pick songs from the Wesley and Watts, from Crosby and from Getty. If the content of the song is excellent and the music lends itself to congregational singing—we just may sing it. Again, we are aiming for unity. Unity is more important than taste. Our singing is to be congregational.

Our singing is to be the outflow of the Spirit's work in our daily lives.

We need to think for a moment about alcohol. Strange, but true. Ephesians 5:18-19, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead be filled with [or by] the Holy Spirit, addressing one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart." Paul is contrasting an individual controlled by inebriating beverages with an individual controlled by the Spirit.

I take this to mean that when we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we sing. We will inevitably sing and make music to the Lord when the Spirit of the Lord is at work in us. Let me put it another way: gathering as a church to sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs is different than gathering at a concert to sing Country or Rock 'n Roll. The church sings because of and by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is only after the Spirit fills us that we are truly singing the word of Christ.

This means that our singing the Word of Christ on Sunday is a natural extension of our walking by the Spirit Monday through Saturday. All of life is worship. Singing on Sunday is the inevitable overflow of a heart that has been set apart by God's

**IN BOTH THE PREACHING
OF THE WORD AND IN THE
SINGING OF THE WORD,
CHRIST IS PROCLAIMED.**

Spirit for God's glory. We are not called to merely give God with an hour of our Sunday, but we are to give him our entire bodies as a living sacrifice—holy and pleasing to him. So whether we are changing a diaper, driving to work, closing a deal, diagnosing a disease, taking a vacation, or mowing the lawn, we are worshipping the Lord. It is our spiritual act of worship.

What does this mean for us? Simply that the quality of our "worship" experience on Sunday morning is a reflection of the quality of our spiritual walk the rest of the week. If you don't get a lot out of the singing or praying or preaching on Sunday morning, it *may* be because you are not putting a lot into your spiritual walk the rest of your days.

Many of us view Sunday morning as the time that we gather as spiritually-empty saints waiting to be filled by the Spirit through the singing and preaching. But according to Paul, it is *after* we have been filled by the Spirit that we then gather together to speak to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Strive to come Sunday filled by the Spirit and ready to minister to others through your songs and your prayers. Instead of praying, "Lord, help me get through this week until I'm ready to be filled again on Sunday morning," our prayer should be, "Lord, fill me by your Spirit so that on Sunday morning I'm ready to speak to my brothers and sisters in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs." That's what I mean when I say that our singing should be spiritual.

Our singing should be from a heart full of thanksgiving to God.

When we sing to the Lord, we are commanded to give him thanks. Let's compare those two passages one more time. Ephesians 5:19, "Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." Colossians 3:16, "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." In both texts singing is tied to thanksgiving.

In 1962, Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. Solzhenitsyn was a high-school math teacher in Soviet Russia. He grew up in a Christian home, but he served in the Red Army and soon became a Communist. During World War II, he was arrested and imprisoned for eight years because he wrote a letter critical of Joseph Stalin. In his prison camp he met Christians. The Lord used their example to turn Solzhenitsyn to Christ.

A Day in the Life is about a man unjustly sent to a prison camp. In prison, Ivan is starved and beaten; he doesn't know how there can be hope in such a dark place. But Ivan is not alone. On the bunk next to him is another inmate, a Christian named Alyoshka. Alyoshka is thankful. He understands that even as his body rots in a Soviet gulag, his spirit has been set free from sin and death by Jesus Christ. Even though he has no earthly hope, Alyoshka has reason to praise the Lord. Not only that, Alyoshka believes even Ivan has reason to be thankful. In the dark hole of prison, Ivan is forced to consider what matters most. And so Alyoshka tells Ivan, "You should rejoice that you're in prison. Here you have time to think about your soul."

Ephesians 5:19, "Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." Like Alyoshka, we are thankful to God that Jesus Christ came and that we died for us. Even though we deserved God's wrath and hell, we got his love and heaven. We owed God our very lives, but Jesus took our place. No matter how bad this world gets, it is merely a waiting room for the world to come. Every week we sing. We sing not merely because we are commanded to sing, but because we are thankful.

May we as a church build lasting memories around beautiful music and around beautiful words. As we wait for the consummation of the kingdom, may we sing boldly, and loudly. May we sing Christ-exalting songs. May we sing together, as once church. May we sing as believers filled by God's Spirit. And may we sing with thankful hearts. Horatius Bonar put it well:

*Thus onward still we press,
Through evil and through good;
Through pain and poverty and want,
Through peril and through blood;
Still faithful to our God,
And to our Captain true,
We follow where he leads the way,
The Kingdom in our view. ■*

~ Aaron Menikoff

January 2013

[illegible]

EVENTS ◀ ▶ BIRTHDAYS

Churchwide ▼

January 6 6:00 pm Lord's Supper

We encourage members to examine their hearts and relationships with one another in preparation for this celebration of Christ's death and resurrection.

January 27 4:30 pm Church in Conference

All members are encouraged to attend our next regularly scheduled Church in Conference as we consider many matters related to the life of the church.

Adult ▼

January 6 9:15 am New Sunday School Classes Begin

The new rotating classes being offered in our Sunday School are Romans I, Mark II, and Marriage. Our other Sunday School classes will continue as normal.

January 9 6:30 pm New Equipping Matters Classes Begin

Our new Equipping Matters classes being offered on Wednesday nights are Parenting, Personal Evangelism, and Church History.

January 13 4:00 pm Scripture Readers' Workshop

Members interested in participating in the ministry of the public reading of Scripture in our morning worship services should plan to attend a workshop in which we will pursue ways to more effectively communicating the power and message of God's Word.

January 20 4:30 pm Sunday Evening Teachers' Training

January 21 12:00 pm RW&A Luncheon

Everyone 50 and older is invited to the monthly RW&A luncheon. Bring a covered dish.

January 23 7:45 pm Sunday Evening Teachers' Training

Children ▼

January 12 10:00 am Elementary Bowling Trip

The Elementary students and parents are invited to a bowling excursion at the Brunswick Zone in Marietta. The cost for two hours of play with shoes is \$9.99.

New Members ▼

January 13 9:15 am Knowing MVBC: Session 1

12:00 pm Knowing MVBC: Sessions 2-4

(See ad to the right.)

Students ▼

January 19 9:00 am Youth Service Day

The students will get their hands dirty by volunteering in and around Sandy Springs to live out the words of James 1:27. Students should bring a sack lunch.

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|----|-------------------|----|---------------------|
| 1 | Bob Neal | 18 | Priscilla Barry |
| 2 | Fletcher Anderson | | David Dudley |
| | Bernie Davis | 19 | Amber Fouts |
| 3 | Gery Groslimond | | Jackie Tamsamani |
| | Doug Stanfield | 20 | Aaron Belt |
| 5 | Marian Spiceland | 22 | Bryan Pillsbury |
| | Bill Timmons | | Brooke Reid |
| 7 | Devra Brown | | Kyle Harris Timmons |
| 8 | Ted Noble | 23 | Brian Ferguson |
| 9 | Julie Lester | | Ron Kath |
| 10 | Justin Miller | 27 | Clifford Collins |
| 13 | Donna Clark | | Guerda Sajous |
| 15 | Jeff Neal | 28 | Laura Thompson |
| 16 | Louise Sweet | 30 | Candace Thayer |
| 17 | Leyna Vaughter | 31 | Mikell Mitchell |



Knowing MVBC is a four-session course that introduces you to life at Mount Vernon, covering the following topics:

- **Knowing Our Commitments: Church Covenant**
- **Knowing Our Beliefs: Statement of Faith**
- **Knowing Our Structure: Leadership**
- **Knowing How to Be Involved: Discipling & Serving**

All four sessions will be offered Sunday, January 13, during the Sunday School hour (session 1) and from 12:15-2:30 pm (sessions 2-3). Lunch will be provided. You may sign up on the edge of the bulletin, by contacting the church office at 404-255-3133, or by email at info@mvbchurch.org.



850 Mount Vernon Highway NW
Sandy Springs, GA 30327