

PERSPECTIVE

MARCH 2023

An - cient of Days, Pa - vil - ioned in the
thun - der - clouds form, And dark is the
scends to the plain, And sweet - ly dis - cuss
firm to the end; Our Mak - er, De -

**SINGING
THE WORD**

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Ricky Hutchins



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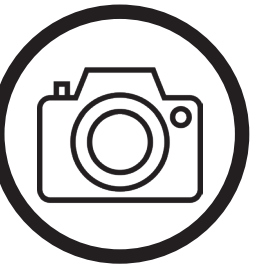
Recommended by Ricky Hutchins



BIBLE READING PLAN 7

Take Up & Read

March



NEW MEMBERS 8

Parker & Madeline Bentley, Richard & Leslie D'Cruz, James & Madison Gibson, Morgan & Kahra Nix, David Rhoden, Caleb Rogers, Kathryn Smith

Singing the Word

The Why, What, & How of Our Singing

If, over the course of ten years, the average member would sing over 4,000 songs on Sunday morning, imagine how quickly that number grows when you include Sunday evenings and other special church gatherings. Over the course of ten years, one might spend over 230 hours singing on Sunday morning alone. Every week, we open our bulletin and follow along with those who lead us: praying, reading Scripture, confessing our shared faith in creeds, and singing.

Have you ever taken the time to examine why we sing so much? Why is singing such an integral part of our Sunday morning gathering?

In this article, I have two primary objectives. First, I want us to understand the why, what, and how of Christian singing. Secondly, and more importantly, I desire that each member embraces his or her role as a singer who praises our sovereign God and builds up his church. Every member of the body of Christ has different, complementary spiritual gifts to offer the Lord and his church. However, singing isn't one of them! Some people might sing better than others, but God commands all Christians to sing!

WHY WE SING

WE SING TO PRAISE.

Christians are a singing people. Yes, we are a people of the Book, but we are also a people of song. We don't fundamentally sing because we like music, and we don't sing just because it's been the pattern of the church. As Keith Getty writes in his book, *Sing!*, "*We sing because we're created to, commanded to, and compelled to.*"ⁱ

Imagine watching your favorite team, with home-field advantage, play against its archrival. What happens when your team scores? The stadium erupts. In many sports, the fans burst out with song—maybe a fight song or a raucous chant. If you're not into sports, remember that classic movie, *The Sound of Music*. When young Maria adventures out into the meadow surrounded by the beautiful and grand German Alps, she bursts into song—"*the hills are alive, with the sound of music!*"

Singing in the Bible is most often accompanied by thanksgiving because God's love for us in the Gospel of Jesus compels us to sing out of gratitude. Passages from Ephesians and Colossians are pivotal in understanding why we sing. We sing at God's command and for our

pleasure. But the singing is not coerced—the gospel moves us to sing God's praises with heartfelt gratitude.

Paul writes in Ephesians 5, "*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, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" So, likewise, in Colossians 3, we read, "*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.*"

Singing gives voice to a heart that deeply knows the gospel of grace. It is the overflow of a heart captivated by the gospel.

WE SING TO EDIFY.

It is hard to understand the role of singing in the life of the church apart from understanding why we gather every week. Why do we gather?

For starters, God commands us to gather. Much of our New Testament is a collection of letters the apostles wrote to gathered churches. These New Testament writers fill their letters with instructions and teachings for individual Christians. However, they specifically address Christians in the context of a community of other Christians. In Hebrews, we see our clearest admonition to not neglect meeting together. The author tells us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together.

But we need to keep pressing. Why is gathering necessary, and why are we warned against neglecting it? What are we doing in our corporate worship service each week?

If your answer is we gather "*to worship,*" you wouldn't be wrong. When we gather, we "*sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in our hearts to God.*" We "*sing and make melody to the Lord with all our heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" We gather in Christ each week to worship the Lord by the power of his Spirit. However, there is more to our gathering—more than simply worship. This other goal is not more important than worship, but it is not less important. It may even be a component of our worship of God.

In addition to gathering for worship of God, we gather for edification—the building up—of the body of Christ, the church.

In other words, our singing is strictly vertical: toward God. However, it has a horizontal component: toward one another. Paul in Colossians 3:16-17: *“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.”* Teaching and admonishing one another is a goal of our singing. Our mutual building up of one another glorifies God. Thus, if we truly worship God, we will strive to edify one another in song.

If we approach our corporate worship service with the expectation that we’ll encounter God primarily on a personal and emotional level—dictated mainly by what *“we get out of the service”*—we will be continually let down. But if we gather each week to worship the Lord by edifying our brothers and sisters, we can always leave encouraged and strengthened.

WHAT WE SING

The Word of God should permeate all we do on a Sunday morning, including our singing. You may think this is a no-brainer, but sadly, it’s not.

I have been at churches as they sang U2’s “Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For” and Rascal Flatts’ “God Bless the Broken Road.” My wife, Eden, once visited a church children’s event that included the Black-Eyed Peas song, “I Got a Feeling (that tonight’s gonna be a good night).”

The point is not to criticize other churches but to ask if Scripture says anything about what we are to sing.

It’s essential to recognize music ministry is pastoral ministry. It is a ministry of the Word, which means we can’t simply delegate it to the “music guy.” It needs to fall squarely under the leadership and oversight of the elders and perhaps even the senior teaching pastor. As one music leader said, singing is the only context where we have the opportunity to put words into other people’s mouths. Think about that. Every Sunday, when we gather, someone else selects the songs we will sing. Those words are given to us to point us to God and encourage the body. We do not and should not take that responsibility lightly.

What the church has sung over the years has changed. Many have debated: Should we only sing Psalms? Should we only sing hymns? Is there a place for contemporary songs? Churches have sadly divided over this subject. Yet, pushing through all of the debate, Scripture is clear that the following elements should characterize the contents of our songs:

- ✦ Our songs should have God at their center. When we gather together to sing, the glory of God is to be the aim of our hearts. We are to sing to him, about him, and for him.
- ✦ Our songs should be biblical. How can we know what to sing without God’s divine revelation: his Word? How do we know who God is, and how can we praise him? We base our singing on his Word. While the lyrics for most of the songs we sing are not simply Scripture set to music, they are poetic and often expository reflections on Scripture. In these words, the hymn writers unpack the truth of God’s Word in the lyrics we sing. Our hymns teach and shape the way people view God, man, Christ, and how we are to live in light of the gospel.
- ✦ Our songs should point to the gospel. They should be rich with gospel language, remind us of God’s holiness and our sinfulness, talk of Christ’s atoning work on the cross, and lead us to respond in repentance and faith.
- ✦ Our songs should be congregational. Singing in our corporate gatherings is not merely a time for individual, personal worship. Nor is it for our entertainment. Listening to each other mumbling quietly as a band “performs” on stage in a church building is not the same as singing together as a congregation.
- ✦ Our songs should be evangelistic. I do not mean to say that evangelism should drive our decisions about what we sing. I mean that our songs should declare to all who listen—including often, unbelievers—the gospel of Jesus Christ with the hope that all who sing (or listen) will believe. A singing church is a faithful church. And God uses faithful churches to draw his children to Himself.

What does this mean for Mount Vernon? How do we select songs?

From a high-level perspective, we typically plan several months of our services at a single meeting. After Aaron selects the passages for the upcoming semester, a small team gathers to plan the service around the passages he has set. A typical planning session includes Aaron and a few ensemble leaders. Other pastoral staff and elders are welcome as well. First, we sit down and look at the sermon text, the associated Scripture reading, and the theme for each week. Then, we prayerfully think through our canon of songs to select ones we believe fit and support the theme and text of the morning. Of course, not every

song we sing in a given service fits perfectly, but we want to find at least a handful of songs that serve as ballasts for the text that morning.

In addition to selecting songs that fit the morning's theme, we also consider each service with a particular structure. We aim to begin each service by singing songs about God's character. We focus our attention and our affection on God. We take our eyes off of ourselves. During a service, we strive to sing explicitly of the cross. Most of our songs touch on the theme of our salvation through Christ, but we like to sing at least one song that is very, very clear about Christ's work at Calvary. Usually, right before or after the sermon, we sing a song of response to guide how we are to think or act in light of the passage before us.

WELL-BALANCED DIET

How do we decide which songs to include? We think about our songs like a diet. There is room for different types of songs with differing levels of lyrical depth and richness. While all our songs must meet the fundamental criteria I've listed above, this metaphor of a diet is helpful.

Like most well-balanced diets, we want our singing to lean towards protein and leafy green vegetables! We want our songs to be filling and good for growth. You can think of songs like "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name" or "Hallelujah, What a Savior!" These songs are a bit denser than others, brimming with rich theology.

In addition to these filling and nutrient-rich songs, we want to sing other songs that serve a slightly different purpose—think carbohydrates. These are songs that give space for digesting the more filling songs. Songs like "The Steadfast Love of the Lord Never Ceases" or "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" come to mind. They are still good theologically but not as dense. Perhaps even easier to digest.

To be clear, I am not pitting "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" against "Hallelujah, What a Savior!" Both are beautiful songs rich with content that point us to God's character and mercy for sinners. But these songs offer different qualities to our singing diet. The song "Hallelujah, What a Savior!" is four verses of pretty weighty theological ideas like atonement and propitiation. "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" is a sweet reflection of the enduring faithfulness of God. After each of the three verses, we repeat a chorus, reminding us that God's mercies are new every morning and that he will provide all that we need. Both of these songs deserve a place in our song list. Both contain lyrics that deserve a place in the hearts of God's people.

This diet metaphor applies to new songs and songs the church has sung for hundreds of years. So naturally, we want to go lighter on the former and heavier on the latter. Our songs need to give us a balanced, rich, nutritious diet so that we will be spiritually healthy people.

Of course, there are still many opinions about which songs to select. An experienced musician and pastor, Bob Kauflin has a helpful perspective on how to view the issue of our preferences. He encourages us to reorient our thoughts and thank God for the privilege of dying to self. We are to remind ourselves it's the kindness of God that we even have the opportunity to sing songs to encourage others. Thank God for the chance to love others the next time we sing a song that isn't your favorite.

We all have preferences regarding the songs we sing; preferences about what we sing or how we sing. May we continue to lay aside these preferences from time to time as we gather each week, standing shoulder to shoulder with our brothers and sisters as we worship God and encourage one another.

THEOLOGICAL VOCABULARY

In addition to providing a well-balanced diet, we want to give the church a theological vocabulary they can rely on daily. The songs we sing touch on various aspects of the Christian experience. Like the Psalms, our songs allow us to express our emotions to God. The lyrics should help us respond appropriately to our circumstances—both good and bad.

- If you are struggling with doubt, maybe the words of "He Will Hold Me Fast" run through your mind: *"When I fear my faith will fail, Christ will hold me fast. When the tempter would prevail, He will hold me fast."*
- If you fear the changing world around you, let the words of "A Mighty Fortress" provide strength: *"And though this world with devils filled should threaten to undo us, we will not fear, for God hath willed his truth to triumph through us. The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him; his rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure. One little word shall fell him."*
- If you feel overcome with grief, take comfort in the words of "It Is Well": *"Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come, let this blest assurance control: that Christ has regarded my helpless estate and has shed his own blood for my soul."*
- If you feel weighed down by sin, you might sing "From the Depths of Woe": *"From the depths of woe, I raise to thee the voice of lamentation; Lord, turn a gracious ear*

to me and hear my supplication. If thou iniquities dost mark our secret sins and misdeeds dark, oh, who shall stand before Thee?"

HOW WE SING

When considering how we sing, we enter territory that can be subjective. Every church is different, and unique styles abound. So, I don't want to focus on style here. Instead, think of that about which every church should agree. The principle of edification is biblical and must guide us. It is helpful to think about the goal of edification. The edification of the body is one of the answers to the "why we sing" question. It is also one of the answers to the "how we sing" question.

To build one another up, everyone must engage in singing by actively participating. Active participation takes effort! It might be hard for you. I encourage you to grow in your commitment to congregational singing. When we sing together, pay attention. Focus when you sing. It is easy to be distracted when it comes time to open your mouth in song. Maybe singing has become a mindless habit for you. Fight the temptation to check out. Pay attention to what is happening around you as you stand to sing. Ask God to help you focus—think about the words you are singing and those sitting around you—they are blessed by hearing your voice.

Robust congregational singing displays unity in the body. It is the biblical, gospel-centered content of our songs that unifies us, but it is our singing that shows or showcases that unity. Men and women should join with full voice as we sing to God and one another. The way we sing communicates to others; it embodies the truth of the songs.

You might be reading this and thinking that this all sounds great for others but not for you. Maybe you would say that you don't know how to sing, that you're too embarrassed to sing out because you don't think you have a good voice. Maybe you are afraid to make a mistake or sing in the wrong key.

Here is some advice from one of the greatest singing coaches of all time, Buddy the Elf: Singing is "just like talking, except longer and louder, and you move your voice up and down." Though this is funny, it's also true! We don't need expert singers, just singers! Remember, many of our songs are for the encouragement, building up, and even correction of the saints. How should we sing? To one another.

CONCLUSION

Over the course of ten years of regular attendance at Mount Vernon, one might sing over 230 hours. With careful attention to why we sing, what we sing, and how we sing, these many hours of singing will grow you in your love for the Lord and his church. Singing is God's gift to the church, and I pray that you will embrace your role as a singer praising our sovereign God and building up his church.

— Ricky Hutchins

ⁱ Keith and Kristyn Getty, *Sing!: How Worship Transforms Your Life, Family, and Church* (B&H Publishing Group, 2017), p. 35

Engaging with God

A Biblical Theology of Worship

Written by David Peterson

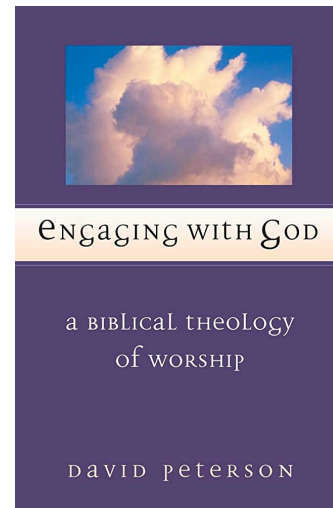
Engaging With God: A Biblical Theology of Worship by David Peterson analyzes Scripture's themes to understand better how Christians should worship God. Peterson says that "*worship of the living and true God is essentially an engagement with him on the terms that he proposes and in the way that he alone makes possible*" (16). Peterson repeats this thesis several times as he demonstrates that this definition is always the essence of worship regardless of the particular forms or times in which it occurred.

Peterson begins by analyzing the words translated as "*worship*" in the Hebrew Old Testament and Septuagint, their uses outside of Scripture, how context often determines their translation, and what that can teach us about worship today. Then, as he moves into the New Testament (the bulk of the book), he focuses on key themes that have implications for worship. Primarily, he considers the new temple and covenant, what we know of the early church's practices in Acts and 1 Corinthians, and the heavenly realm in Hebrews and Revelation "*where Jesus the crucified Messiah reigns in glory*" (189). Peterson repeatedly drills into the original language throughout these chapters to find meaning.

The book's most helpful parts were the rare occasions when Peterson would offer practical implications of the content, mainly each chapter's conclusions. For example, he takes Jesus' teaching on the new temple (among other things) to imply that our teaching, preaching, and discipleship should center on his person and work (73). Additionally, Peterson briefly discusses whether church services should be formal or informal (111). He also offers some helpful thoughts on the out-workings of the Lord's Supper (ch.4, "Jesus and The New Covenant"). And he consistently emphasizes the necessity of worship as obedience, prayer, and praise to God and edification of others in everyday life (17, 23, 54, 129, 150, 189, 194).

Although the book was well-researched and Peterson argues persuasively, I found it rather technical in its treatment of Hebrew and Greek words, hard to follow at times, and overall difficult to read. It was nonetheless a helpful resource reminding me that God alone determines true worship. I recommend it to anyone with the mettle and patience to read it slowly and carefully.

– Recommended by James Chastain



Excerpts from the Book

1

"If worship is an engagement with God on the terms that he proposes and in the way that he alone makes possible, preaching Christ is a key to that engagement."

– "Jesus and the New Temple," p. 98

2

"The preaching of the gospel is designed to bring about a consecrated lifestyle that will enable believers to glorify God, by word and deed, wherever and whenever they can. This view of worship highlights the importance of the family, the workplace, and leisure activities as the sphere in which to work out the implications of a genuine relationship with God."

– "Jesus and the New Covenant," p. 129

3

"Although some of Scripture's terms for worship may refer to specific gestures of homage, rituals or priestly ministrations, worship is more fundamentally faith expressing itself in obedience and adoration."

– "Paul and the Service of the Gospel," p. 191

Gather God's People

Understand, Plan, & Lead Worship in Your Local Church

Written by Brian Croft & Jason Adkins

In their book, *Gather God's People*, Brian Croft and Jason Adkins have elders and music leaders in their sights. They helpfully divide the content into three main sections: Understanding Worship, Planning Worship, and Leading Worship. In the first section, they provide a brief theological description of what biblical worship is. While this section is well thought out and straightforward, better resources exist for a more robust understanding of worship. But I don't think the authors intended to "compete" with these other resources. Instead, their goal seems to be one of transparency and practicality. The book shines in the second and third sections, Planning Worship and Leading Worship.

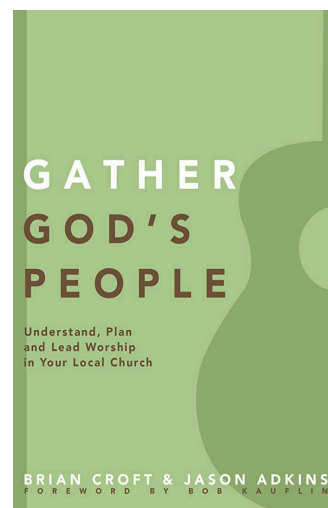
On these pages, the authors, Croft (the senior preaching pastor) and Adkins (the music leader) open up their church for their readers to glimpse behind the curtain. For example, in the Planning Worship section, they walk through each element of a corporate gathering: reading, praying and singing the word. For each of these elements, they give examples of service orders, song selections, scripture readings, and even disagreements within their service planning sessions.

The final section, Leading Worship, walks through the same service elements, but this time, with leading in mind. Again, they provide countless examples of what leading a service looks like in their church. Each page contains both biblically sound and tremendously practical advice.

But wait, there's more! At the end of the book, they provide several appendices with even more real-world, practical help. The first appendix stands out and would be worth a read for anyone, leader or not. In this appendix, they make a very inspiring plea for churches to reintroduce Psalm singing. Singing Psalms ensures that we are singing God's word. It benefits and edifies the church and covers a range of human emotions and experiences. Beyond this, God's Word commands us to sing Psalms.

This book would benefit elders and music leaders who desire to look more critically at their church's corporate gathering but aren't sure where to start. Though MVBC differs from the authors' church, we share many of the same convictions in our service planning. So, it is also a valuable read for any MVBC member who wants to understand better how we organize our Sunday morning services.

— Recommended by Ricky Hutchins



Excerpts from the Book

1

"A failure of theological leadership will leave God's people unanchored, carried about by every wind of human cunning. In matters of Christian worship, ministers who do not lead theologically hand over the role of leadership to passing cultural fads or venerated traditions."

— "Biblical Theology of Worship," p. 19

2

"Worship music has become a key identifier for local churches. Descriptors like 'contemporary,' 'traditional,' 'blended,' and 'arts' are often innuendos for music styles and song repertoires. However, the most important descriptions of worship...are ones like 'congregational' and 'corporate.'"

— "Planning the Singing of the Word," p. 73

3

"When we sing the psalms, we sing words that are inspired and infallible and without flaw; we sing lyrics marked by permanence and power."

— "Reintroducing Psalm Singing," p. 124

MARCH

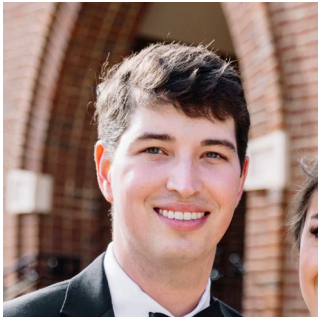
These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!

March 1	Romans 7:7–12	March 17	Luke 23:26–43
March 2	Romans 7:13–20	March 18	Psalms 94
March 3	Psalms 51	March 19	Habakkuk 3:1–16
March 4	Romans 7:21–25	March 20	Romans 3:21–31
March 5	Romans 3:1–8	March 21	Romans 9:1–13
March 6	Romans 3:9–20	March 22	Romans 9:14–18
March 7	Romans 8:1–11	March 23	Romans 9:19–29
March 8	Romans 8:12–17	March 24	Isaiah 53:1–12
March 9	Romans 8:18–30	March 25	Romans 9:30–10:4
March 10	Psalms 14	March 26	Romans 3:21–31
March 11	Romans 8:31–39	March 27	Romans 4:1–12
March 12	Romans 3:9–20	March 28	Romans 10:5–13
March 13	Habakkuk 3:1–16	March 29	Romans 10:14–21
March 14	Psalms 85	March 30	Romans 11:1–10
March 15	Exodus 14	March 31	Psalms 32
March 16	Joshua 10		

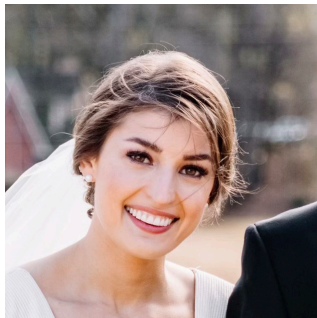
*Sermons in bold

TAKE UP & READ

NEW MEMBERS



**Parker
Bentley**



**Madeline
Bentley**



**Richard
D'Cruz**



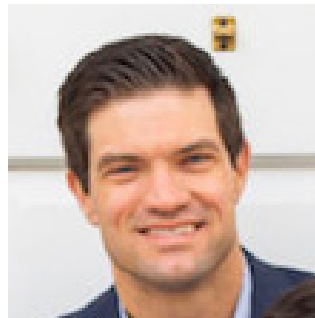
**Leslie
D'Cruz**



**James
Gibson**



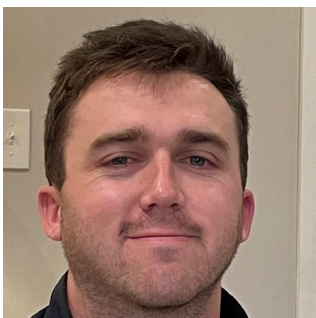
**Madison
Gibson**



**Morgan
Nix**



**Kahra
Nix**



David Rhoden



Caleb Rogers



Kathryn Smith



Mount Vernon
BAPTIST CHURCH