



**“Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise” (Psalm 98:4).**

## **Music in Worship**

**Central Truth:** Music expresses worship.

**L358. Date:** January 1993. **Text:** Psalm 98:1-9. **Topic:** Music; Worship.

Music is more than a preparation for worship; it is a form of worship. Music is more than something we do until we get the “message” (sermon); it is a message. In good Christian music we speak to God our praises, offer to Him our prayers and express to Him the commitment of our lives. Those are acts of worship. Blessed is the church that experiences worship as she sings “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in [her] heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:19).

You can and should worship God in the music program of your church. (1) Participate in the singing even if you do not have a “good” voice. (2) Meditate on the things of God during the instrumental music of the prelude or the offertory. (3) Think about the words you say in the song and direct those words to the Lord. Your prayer, praise, and commitment might be better expressed in a hymn than with your own words. (4) Sing as if speaking personally to the Lord. What are your thoughts when you sing “My Jesus, I love Thee, I know Thou art mine” or “Draw me nearer, nearer, nearer, blessed Lord” or “Blessed be the name of the Lord”? To speak to God and with God in your singing is to worship God through music.

My home church has a worshipful spirit in singing. Once and again I rise to preach with the prayer in my heart, “Lord, You, are already ministering to my people. Please do not let me get in Your way as I preach.” What a responsibility and opportunity rests upon the person who leads God’s people to worship through singing!

## **I. WORSHIP IN MUSIC IS FRESH**

*“Sing unto the LORD a new song”* the psalmist writes. Does that mean we cannot sing the great old hymns of the faith? Not at all. The psalmist calls for life and vigor to permeate our music. A “new song” is a fresh song. It might be a newly written song. It might be an arrangement of an old hymn which gives it greater meaning. It might be the same words, music, and arrangement which are sung with fresh insight into the meaning of a familiar hymn. At the very least, the call is that singing to the Lord must never be stale, ordinary, or dull of meaning.

Music is made fresh by mixing *“psalms and hymns and spiritual songs”* as Ephesians 5:19 suggests. (We might call that “anthems, hymns, and choruses” today.) Praise choruses, including Scripture set to music, are an excellent aid to worship.

If you have been singing and suddenly you are enthused by the words of the song, you have made that song “a new song” to the Lord. Try singing as if this is the first time you have ever read those words. It will make the song “a new song” to you, and you will be more likely to worship in singing it. Never just sing in worship. Sing your new and fresh song *“unto the LORD.”*

## II. WORSHIP IN MUSIC IS APPROPRIATE (Psalm 98:1-3)

A summary of God’s work in the world is given in these words, *“He hath done marvellous things”* (verse 1). The wonderful works of the Lord are the subject of much of our singing.

**A. He has gotten the victory.** *“His right hand, and his holy arm, hath gotten him the victory”* (verse 1). As Miriam led the women of Israel in the praises of the Lord upon their miraculous crossing of the Red Sea and the destruction of Pharaoh's army (Exodus 14, 15), so the Lord's victories today are proper subjects of our songs. Who could keep from worship when singing with meaning, “O victory in Jesus, my Savior forever”? He who has gotten the victory over sin, death, and hell — giving us the victory through our faith in Him has given ample subjects for our worship of Him through music.

**B. He has made known His salvation** (verse 2). My heart overflowed in a recent worship service as I sang with the congregation, “My sin — O, the bliss of this glorious thought, / My sin not in part but the whole, / Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more, / Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul” (“It Is Well With My Soul” by Horatio G. Spafford). How can any Christian sing those words without a spirit of worship of our blessed Savior

and heavenly Father?

**C. He has vindicated His deeds before the unbelievers.** *“His righteousness hath he openly shewed in the sight of the heathen”* (verse 2). Those who do not trust His provision for sin or yield to the dominion of His lordship have a clear presentation of His perfections. That is a more effective witness than the poor words of a human witness. Rejoice that God is made known before unbelievers. Every nation has evidence that God is righteous. Rejoice in it. Sing of it.

**D. He is faithful to all His promises.** *“He hath remembered his mercy and his truth toward the house of Israel”* (verse 3). His steadfast love and faithfulness keep Him close to His chosen people — those who trust Him. He fulfills every promise and never forsakes His own. What an occasion for worship and a motive for singing! He never forgets to be merciful; so we sing, “O love that will not let me go, / I rest my weary soul in Thee” (George Matheson). He never forsakes His truth; so we sing, “Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father, / There is no shadow of turning in Thee” (Thomas O. Chisholm). Does that make you want to sing a new and fresh song to the Lord?

**E. He offers salvation to all.** *“All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God”* (verse 3). Think about that! Even the most distant parts of the earth have witnessed how God can save and give victory to His people. Have you entered the benefits of His saving work? Then you have a reason to sing. Since Jesus died for all (I John 2:2) and the message of salvation is sent to all (Mark 16:15) and everyone who comes to Jesus is welcomed with not even one cast out (John 6:37), we sing with joyful praise, “Whosoever will may come!” And we sing the blessed invitation, “Come to the Savior now, He gently calleth thee” (John M. Wigner).

Do you see how appropriate it is for us to worship God in music? No wonder the redeemed of God “break forth into singing” (Isaiah 54:1) as they consider the saving power of their God. Wouldn't you like to join them now? “O for a thousand tongues to sing, Blessed be the name of the Lord!” (Charles Wesley).

### III. WORSHIP IN MUSIC IS DYNAMIC (Psalm 98:4)

May God deliver us from dull, half-hearted singing. Such is an insult to God, who deserves our highest praise and purest worship. It is better to have no song service at all than to have one that is dispirited. Read the Old Testament and note how God's people worshiped Him in ancient times. They shouted, clapped their hands, danced, sang, played musical instruments, and

rejoiced before the Lord. Early worship was more than the solemn ritual of killing an animal and sprinkling its blood (though that was an essential part of worship). It was enthusiastic and joyous.

Christians could profit by following the example of early worshipers of our God. Christian worship should be reverent. At the same time it should be lively, emotional, and biblical.

Psalm 98:4 can be paraphrased, “All the earth should shout for joy before the Lord, breaking forth in joyful song and exulting in singing His praises.” Does that sound like the music service in your church? If not, a change should be considered.

Some songs are quiet and meditative. Others are enthusiastic and joyful. All types of Christian music are appropriate when offered by a worshiping believer. Enter with enthusiasm in the song service of your church. Help make it a time of worship.

#### IV. MUSIC IN WORSHIP IS INCLUSIVE (Psalm 98:5-9)

**A. Music in worship includes all instruments** (verses 5, 6). It includes the human voice, which is the finest musical instrument ever made! The psalmist calls us to “*sing unto the LORD with . . . the voice of a psalm.*” That means the words spoken in a song are important in worship. And they are, since the words express the sentiment of the heart. Psalm 100 calls on us to “*come before his presence with singing.*” Even if you do not have a “good” voice for singing, say the words before the Lord.

Instrumental music is appropriate in worship, also. The text speaks of harp, trumpet, and coronet. Other instruments are mentioned elsewhere in the Old Testament. It was common for prophets of God to play musical instruments (1 Samuel 10:5). David arranged for four thousand musicians to play on instruments in the worship of God (1 Chronicles 23:5). God must delight in instrumental, as well as vocal, music.

What musical instruments are permissible for use in the worship of God today? Every instrument of music can be used to the glory of God: piano, organ, guitar, wind instruments, percussion instruments, and all the rest. Only because we are more accustomed to the piano and the organ do they seem more appropriate. (There was a time when the piano was considered too “secular” to be used in Christian worship!) But always the instruments are secondary to the words when we sing with accompaniment before the Lord.

**B. Worship in music includes all creation** (verses 7-9). It includes all persons, “*the world, and they that dwell therein*” (verse 7). It includes all

nature, “*sea,*” “*floods,*” “*hills*” (verses 7, 8). Everything in creation finds its highest purpose in reflecting the glory of the Creator and Savior.

## V. WORSHIP IN MUSIC IS APPROPRIATE (Psalm 98:9)

*“He cometh to judge the earth: with righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity.”*

It is appropriate that all persons and things bow before Him who is and will be the judge of them all. That is why we must learn to worship in music, not just sing religious songs. Here are some suggestions to make your singing more worshipful.

(1) Sing songs and hymns which have deep biblical content. Some songs are more sound than substance, even though they are religious songs. Make sure your songs are biblical.

(2) Make the “special music” less of a performance and more of an act of worship. Emphasis must be on the message of the song and not on the singer or the musicians. Prerecorded music must always be on a lower volume than the vocal because the message is in the words, not the accompaniment.

(3) Encourage participation in the music ministry of your church. Sing. Offer your hymnal to those near you so that they may be encouraged to sing. Speak words of thanks to those who lead your worship music. Express the joy of your heart as you sing.

*“Come before his presence with singing”* (Psalm 100:2). *“Break forth into singing”* when you meditate on the goodness of God (Isaiah 14:7). Be one of those described in these words, *“The redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head”* (Isaiah 51:11). That is the way it should be in every song service of your church. God is glorified in Christian music.

## Questions

1. How is music an act of worship?
2. What message is given through Christian music?
3. How can you worship God in the music program of your church?
4. How can you sing a “new song” to the Lord?
5. Which hymns are particularly precious to you? Why?
6. What hymns speak of God's salvation, love, and grace toward you?
7. Why is half-hearted singing an insult to God?
8. How can musical instruments be used in the worship of God?

9. How can the singing in your church become more worshipful toward God?