

“All Together, Now, Part 10:  
‘Pray for One Another’ ”  
Ephesians 5:15-20; Romans 15:14

## **Introduction**

I’m not a very good singer. I love to sing. But I need to sing with people. If I am playing the guitar and singing, it’s hard for me to find the right note and start singing in the right key. But if others are nearby, they can start singing, and pull me into the right key, and keep me in tune.

Let’s say I have to lead “Amazing Grace” on guitar at a funeral service, and I started singing in the wrong key. Then quickly the congregation pulled me into the right key. It would be awkward, but not a disaster.

But what if it said “Amazing Grace” in the funeral bulletin, but I started singing “Amazing” by Aerosmith or “American Pie” by Don McLean or “American Girl” by Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers. That would be a problem, wouldn’t it? Maybe we would be able to laugh or clap or tap our toes and think about something other than the loved one who had died for a few minutes. We could avoid crying.

But which is worse at a funeral:

A little awkwardness if I sing off key, and some honest tears, as we sing Amazing Grace? Or singing the wrong song, perfectly in tune, that makes us forget the sadness and feel good?

Paul calls us today to “hymn one another.” To sing. Our problem is that we often sing the wrong song. We need Jesus to sing for us and to us. And then we need to learn to sing, and sing to learn.

That’s where we’re going:

1. Singing the Wrong Song
2. The Song of the Savior
3. Learning to Sing and Singing to Learn

### **1. Singing the Wrong Song**

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Martin Luther once said that it is better to think about church while you’re sitting in a bar than it is to think about the bar while you’re sitting in church. We might say that it’s better to sing church songs in a bar than it is to sing bar songs in church.

Paul says that we sing the wrong song---with our mouths, with our lives---when we fill ourselves with something other than the Spirit of God. We were meant to live lives of love (2). But fill up on the wrong thing (18), and what comes out are songs---but the wrong songs. Songs that are not love songs.

In verse 18 he says we shouldn’t get drunk on wine. Why? Because it leads to “debauchery.” Stupid things we say and do. Unloving songs.

He is definitely talking about alcohol here. But when you read the whole chapter, you can see that drunkenness is also a metaphor for the other things we tend to be filled with.

Verse 3: we’re filled with lust, and out comes the un-love song of sexual sin.

We are filled with greed, and out comes the ugly song of whatever lies and unethical practices we need to get what we want.

Verse 4: We are obsessed with people liking us, and so out comes the false songs of ugly jokes---anything to get people to laugh.

Whatever fills us up, comes out in a song.

Why are we singing the wrong songs? Because it’s like we are at a funeral, and we don’t want to deal with hurt and sorrow and brokenness and death. So we take something good---a rock and roll song!---and sing it at a funeral.

Jesus turns water into wine for his first miracle. Wine is not the problem. The problem is that we don’t have the courage and character to face the reality of this broken world, and so we fill up on alcohol.

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Some of us escape difficulties in our family by overworking, until the song of our lives is: “He escaped by working all the time.”

Some of us escape difficulties in our workplace by becoming obsessed with sexual pleasure until the song of our lives is: “She escaped by filling up on sex.”

Some of us escape the disappointment in our marriages by becoming obsessed with our children until the song of our lives is: “They crushed their kids under the weight of their expectations.”

Paul says (16) “yes, I know---the days are evil! So what song are you going to sing with your life during these evil days? Will it be a song of *escape* from the love you’re meant to show? Or will it be a song of love, of amazing grace, in the face of the world’s sorrows?”

In one way or another, if we’re honest, we are singing the wrong song. We’re not helping one another bear life’s difficulty. We’re not singing a song of love with our lives.

## **2. The Song of the Savior**

Pretty depressing, huh? Things are bad, and we’ve made it worse.

What now?

Why is Paul writing this letter? Why is he calling us to sing a new and different song, with our mouths and with our lives?

Because he has heard, in the life of Jesus of Nazareth, the Song of God.

God’s song in Jesus is beautiful. But it does not ignore the darkness and evil all around. It’s not a song like we might sing. We’d sing the song of giving up and starting over with someone else, with something else. But the Song of God is sung to us, even though we are stuck singing the wrong songs of greed and lust and drunkenness.

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What is the song of God that Paul has heard? What does the song sound like---this song that has captured his heart and sent him around the Greco-Roman world singing his heart out?

It sounds like the song of the Savior, that God sang through Zephaniah the prophet's voice (3:17)

The Lord your God is with you,  
the Mighty Warrior who saves.  
He will take great delight in you;  
in his love he will no longer rebuke you,  
but will rejoice over you with singing.”

The Song of the Savior.

Paul realized that Jesus was God's love song, sung in a fully human life --- verse 2, that “Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.”

Paul realized that when Jesus healed the sick, when he liberated those oppressed by demons, when he ate dinner with notoriously bad people, he was living God's song of love.

Paul realized that when Jesus sang the Psalms --- all the happy Psalms about God's glory and faithfulness --- Jesus was singing God's song of love with his very life.

But Paul also realized that when Jesus sang the sad psalms --- the dark Psalms of despair, the Psalms of loneliness --- he was singing in our place. Facing our own experience. And singing love back to God from inside our sorrows.

When the world that God created grew dark and ugly, God didn't distract himself with something else. And he didn't allow his righteous anger to be the theme of his song.

Father, Son, and Spirit knew exactly what it would cost them to face the darkness, and sing a song of love with their eternal life. And they went. And they sang: they sang the

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coming, the life, the loneliness, the condemnation, the death, and then the resurrection, of Jesus.

We sing the wrong song. But in our ears, we hear the Song of the Savior.

Do you hear it?

### **3. Learning to Sing and Singing to Learn**

If we hear it; if we're captured by the compelling love of that best of love songs; if we're saved by that sweet sounding Amazing Grace, Paul says, it's time for us once again to sing.

Instead of seeing the sorrows of this world, and drinking the medicine of food or work or wine or sex or success all the way to the bottom, Paul says (18) to be full of the Spirit. We must face the hard reality of our world, and, like the Savior, sing a new song.

We must learn to sing. And we must sing to learn!

*We learn* to sing.

Paul says that singing the wrong song is *foolishness* (17). Living those songs is *unwise* (15). Instead, we've got to be *wise*, he says. We've got to “make the most of every opportunity” (16). We've got to *learn* to sing the right song; the *new* song; the God-song.

The Bible is always talking about Wisdom. The Psalms and Proverbs tell us to do whatever it takes to learn to sing the right song with our lives, and to learn this from wise people. They sing a line, and we sing it back. They coach us on our breathing and our tone and our pitch. And bit by bit we both learn the song, and we learn to sing it.

If we're going to learn to sing---to live lives of love; to sing these “one-anothering” songs of the New Testament---then we need the wisdom of those who sing these songs well.

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The great jazz man Duke Ellington says “It don’t mean a thing if it aint got that swing.” Every one of us needs to hang around, and to be challenged by, the kinds of people whose lives are music with spiritual swing. Not just technically “in tune,” but full of rhythm and syncopation. Full of the Spirit.

If you’ve heard the love song of God, sung over you with delight in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, then it’s time to learn to sing. Who’s your voice coach? Who’s your band-leader? If you don’t have one---if you don’t have a *wise* one---then how are you going to learn to sing the Lord’s song in a weird world like this, at a weird time like this?

But we don’t just need to *learn to sing*; Paul calls us to *sing to learn*.

It’s fine to put on our earbuds and tune out the world, and listen to worship songs. It’s ok if you want to sing hymns to yourself in the shower. But don’t do those things as a substitute for what you’re actually called to do here.

What *are* you called to do?

It’s not so much that you are called to consume someone else’s melody. Sometimes we stop here. We listen. We enjoy. What a nice song. What a good singer!

You’ve got to (19) “make music.”

And not just *in* your heart, but *from* your heart. The melody goes *outward*. It’s not *not* for you.

But it’s especially for---guess whom!---for the Lord, and for *one another!* (19) “Speak to *one another* with Psalms, hymns and songs of the Spirit!”

We don’t just learn to sing, but we sing to learn. In Colossians (3:16) Paul says we “teach and admonish one another, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with grace in our hearts”.

Our lives are supposed to be songs. But our *songs* are supposed to be *songs*---like, actual songs!---too! To God. To one another.

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Wait. Should we sing songs in church to someone other than God?

Think about it. We do it all the time. When we sing “Crown him with many crowns.” We are teaching and challenging one another to rejoice in all the ways Jesus is a king: a king of peace, love, life.

In fact, some of the songs we sing are teaching and challenging us by being addressed not to God, not to us, but to *things*! “Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates!”---we are singing to a hole in a city wall with a door of wood and iron, and we’re telling it to open up. Weird, huh?

But you see what’s happening in a song like that? We’re teaching and challenging each other to let King Jesus enter into our church, into our lives. To sing his song inside us and among us, until we have learned to sing, and until we are always singing to learn.

## **Conclusion**

Friends, when loneliness and sorrow and disappointment creeps in on you, you are going to be tempted to sing the wrong song. A song that makes you feel better, but only for the 3.5 minutes that the song lasts. To get out of this cycle---of singing the wrong songs; of making an ugly, loveless song out of your life---you’ve got to hear the Song of the Savior. Jesus sang. He still sings. His song is the right song, and it’s always in tune with the grace, truth, and love of his Father. And this can become your song---the song of your life!---too. And you have musicians all around you---people with great pitch and rhythm and *swing*. We’ve got to be filled up with the Holy Spirit and inspired. And we’ve got to teach one another---with our lives, and, literally, with our songs---to sing.