

So let's take our bibles and turn to Colossians chapter 3. If you're visiting with us this morning, we're in a series of sermons called, Total Grace. We want to remind ourselves, and we want you to know, that grace, God's undeserved favor in Jesus Christ, that's not a leg up in the Christian life, it is the Christian life. We're not only saved by God's grace, we are equipped by God's grace and some day we will enjoy more of God's grace in Heaven. We've been looking at different facets of grace.

Last week we started to look at singing grace. Do you realize that God gives you the grace to sing? In fact, you're happy to do that because you want to sing about the grace that He's graced you with. We started to look at that in Colossians 3, verse 16, a message entitled, Join the Song. But, let's stand in honor of God's Word. We'll read that whole section, Colossians 3, verses 12-17.

Remember as our protestant forefathers taught us, the Word of God properly preached is the Word of God. We're about to hear the voice of Almighty God. "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, long suffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another. If anyone has a complaint against another, even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection, and let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which you were also called in one body, and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

You may be seated. I think you can identify with the story surrounding the life of W. E. Sangster. W. E. Sangster was a great London Methodist preacher around the time of the second world war. He's written several books. I have them in my study, as many pastors do. There's a famous story that surrounds his life that you can identify with. It's Easter Sunday morning. He has been suffering with an illness that has left him unable to speak. He's weak of body. He's lost his voice, and he says on Easter Sunday morning to his daughter these words, "It's a terrible thing to have no voice and want to shout, 'He is risen.' More terrible still would it be to have a voice and not want to shout, 'He is risen.'"

You see, Christians love to voice their love concerning God's love. They love to tell others about the Lord Jesus Christ. They love to praise and celebrate His life, and His death, and His burial, and His resurrection, His ascension and soon return in glory, because saved people are a singing people. Doesn't the psalmist say, "He has put a new song in my mouth even praise unto our God." When salvation enters a person's life so does a song, a desire to praise the One who has given the gift of eternal life.

As we said last week, finding Christ involves also finding your voice in confession and celebration. At salvation we confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord, having believed in our hearts that same truth. After conversion we give voice to celebration, because God has put a new song in our mouths. That's why we understand the writings of the psalmists in Psalm 92, verse 1, "It is a good thing to give thanks to the Lord and to sing praises to the name of our most high, to declare His loving kindness in the morning, and His faithfulness every night." In Psalm 95, verses 1 and 2, "Oh come let us sing to the Lord. Let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving. Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms, for the Lord is the great God, and the great King above all God's. In His hands are the deep places of the Earth. The heights of the hills are also His. The sea is His, and He made it. His hands formed the dry land."

What about Psalm 100? "Oh, make a joyful shout to the Lord all you lands. Serve the Lord with gladness. Come before His presence with singing. Know that the Lord, He is God. It is He who has made us and not

we ourselves. We are His people and the sheep of His pasture." Saved people, those touched and transformed by the love of God and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, saved people are singing people. When you find Christ, you'll find your voice concerning Christ. You'll want to confess Him. You'll want to celebrate Him. That's why I want to come back to a text we started to look at last week in Colossians 3, verse 16, a message I entitled, "Join the Song," because here Paul introduces us to the idea of singing grace. You and I have been looking at the gem of grace. We've been looking at different facets of God's unmerited work in our lives. We have looked at saving grace. We have looked at serving grace. We have looked at strengthening grace. We have looked at speaking grace. Now we are looking at singing grace.

Look what Paul says. He tells us to, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in your hearts, richly with all wisdom and teaching, and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, ..." Notice, "... singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." The grace of God in our hearts produces a song from our hearts that escapes through our lips concerning the grace of God in our hearts. There is singing grace. When we started to look at this text, we reminded ourselves, this is a unique verse. It's only one of a couple of verses in the whole of the New Testament where the door is opened and we are invited in to a New Testament worship service, where we actually see something of what goes on in the life of the early church and its worship of the Lord Jesus Christ. We started to look at the text, and we spent all of last Sunday looking at singing and the scriptures, singing and the scriptures.

We saw that preaching produces praise. We saw that the Word produces worship. We saw that scripture produces song. Then we quote from Psalm 119 where the psalmist acknowledged, "Your statutes, your law, your Word, has become my song." As you and I engage the Word of God, as we receive it, we allow it to take up residence in our life, and we begin to meditate upon the Word of Christ, the gospel of God-saving grace in Jesus Christ. As we meditate on it, own it, believe it, revel in it, songs are produced. We want to express this gospel in a musical manner in song and in worship. That seems to be what Paul anticipates here. "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs," or as the NASB has it, "with songs. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you, teach one another with songs," songs informed by the Word of Christ.

The whole thesis of last week was this. Good singing requires expository preaching and expository preaching requires expository listening, because we notice this is congregational in nature. When he says, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly," he's not saying it about a quiet corner in your home, or your sunroom, where you've got a cup of coffee and an open Bible, and you're thinking about God's work in your life. That's a wonderful thing, by the way. I'm not in any way demoting that, but this is in the plural; this is addressed to a church. He tells them to speak to one another so the congregation is in mind. This is not you by yourself doing your devotions. This is the church congregating to hear a sermon and to worship God. So, good singing requires expository preaching, and the Word of Christ if it is going to dwell in our hearts richly requires expository listening, and when good preaching is met by good listening, songs are the result, as God's statutes become our songs.

By the way, before we leave this idea of singing and the scriptures, I do need to just point out that if you connect Colossians 3:16 with Ephesians 5:18,19, you're going to see the correlation between the Word of God and the the Spirit of God, because if you go to Ephesians 5:18,19, where we're told to, "Be filled with the Spirit, singing to one another in psalms, and Hymns, and spiritual songs," you'll see that the filling of the Spirit results in the same thing that comes through a life in which the Word of Christ dwells richly. When the Word of Christ dwells richly, we do certain things. When we're filled by the Spirit we do certain things, and those things include singing to one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs.

So, you don't need to be a rocket scientist to know that those two things are tied together. Let me draw a conclusion for you. To be filled by the Spirit is to be controlled by the Word of God. The filling of the Spirit is not some esoteric, ecstatic experience where you get lost and detached from reality. No, no, no, it's being controlled by the Word the Spirit wrote Himself. You want to be filled by the Spirit, get your head into the Bible; bring your heart with your head and let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.

Just a reminder, what God has joined let no man pull asunder, and God has joined the work of the Spirit with the work of preaching and the receiving of biblical truth. That's why it's kind of sad; it's usually the opposite. I don't want to make a generalization but I think it bears the light of day. It's generally true that in charismatic and Pentecostal circles there's not as much emphasis on exposition and the preaching of God's Word and theology. Why is that? There should be no divorcing of the Word and the Spirit, because the filling of the Spirit is tantamount to being controlled by the Word of God.

Let's move on. The singing and the saints, not only singing and the scriptures, but singing and the saints. We've already made this argument. Paul is addressing a congregation of people and he's calling them to expository listening, to align the Word of God to take up residence in their hearts, and as they receive the gospel, and they revel in the gospel, they will want to worship the One spoken of in the Word. You'll move from the Word of Christ to the worship of Christ, and it will be done in the company of God's people. It will be done alongside the saints of God. As God's statutes become our songs, and we revel in the Word of Christ, the gospel, then we will teach and admonish one another through congregational singing.

You see, what does the bible say? "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." When the heart is full abundantly, and richly, of the Word the mouth speaks the Word, the mouth sings the Word, the mouth voices the Word. You see, look, God's people have always been a people of two books, The Book, God's Book, and the hymn book. In fact, in the tradition I grew up in it wasn't unusual to see God's people arriving on a Sunday morning with two books in their hands. Literally, on top of their Bible clasped in one hand was a Bible and a hymn book, the churches' hymn book. My wife was brought up among the Plymouth Brethren in Scotland, and to this day she still has her little believer's hymn book sitting on top of her Bible by her bedside. God's people are a people of two books, The Book, The Bible, and the hymn book, because the one leads to the other.

So, let's look at this singing and the saints. Let's look at, number one, the form of singing; number two, the function of singing. The form. Well, it seems that there are three forms of singing in our text. Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Now, let me say this before we actually try and kind of dissect that, that there are those who argue that there really isn't a big distinction here. You have a distinction without a difference, what Paul is simply doing here is he's piling synonyms on top of each other. His point is simply this, you know, find some manner of singing and sing. He's not trying to kind of draw very stark categories of song. He's piling synonym on top of synonym. His real concern is not the form of the song but the content of the song, is it the Word of Christ dwelling in the midst of the congregation where they teach one another the Word of Christ through, and with, songs and hymns, saturated with scripture? That's the point Paul's really after.

I have some sympathy for that. Point taken, but I think along with the majority of commentators that it's not enough simply to see this as a distinction without a difference. I think Paul is hinting at several genres or categories of song, because he wants us to embrace this idea that we should never have a monochrome view of worship. We can express our love our God, and our treasuring of Jesus Christ in several forms, and in several manners. Remember that famous quote by Henry Ford when the Model T

was rolling off the production lines in Dearborn, Michigan by the 10s of 1000s. "You know what, you can have a Model T in any color you want so long as it's black," because all Model Ts were black, monochrome, black.

Well, Paul doesn't want us to have a monochrome view of worship. No. Once the Word of Christ has been received, and the implication of it has been taken on board, and your heart and your mind is joined and reveling in the gospel, and Jesus is your treasure, and you can't believe you're saved, and you're Heaven bound, and you want to find an expression of that in song. Well, you've got several choices. You've got psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs. Let me kind of give you the big picture here. I think most commentators would say what I'm about to say. Psalms are pretty self-explanatory. For the most part, we're dealing here with the ancient hymns of Israel which, by the way, is an interesting thought. The early church sang ancient hymns, just throw that into the worship wars as you're thinking about it.

There's nothing wrong with singing ancient hymns, but some of these were 700 to 1000 years old by the time we get to Jesus. Some young people can't sing songs that are 400 years old. No, no hold on a minute. We've got psalms here. We've got these ancient songs that made up the psalter, and you'll find a great variation of songs in the psalter. Some are jubilant, some are laments, some are loud, some are quiet, but the psalter has been a wonderful blessing in the church. You go to my wife's native Scotland and you'll find that they love to sing the psalter on a Sunday morning. Many Free Church of Scotland sing it without accompaniment, which I respect their choice, but have never quite understood that since the word psalm means a song accompanied with a stringed instrument. But again you have one genre, or one category, psalms.

Then, hymns. This would seem to refer to songs that were being written around that time, at least songs that had theological material at the center of what it was about. The hymn was more credo in nature. You know, a psalm gave you voice, allowed you to speak to God, where a hymn spoke to you about God; something about His nature, as we'll see in a few moments. Some argue that John 1, verse 1-18, or Philippians 2, verses 6-11, or 1 Timothy 3, verse 16, are all fragments of early Christian hymns. They're very theological and credo in nature, speaking about Christ's deity and incarnation, virgin born, you know, death on the cross for our sins. They were a means of expressing theology, you know. That's kind of second category.

The third category is a little bit more slippery, spiritual songs. I think the best guess is these are songs sponsored by the Spirit. They'd be songs more spontaneous, probably nowhere near as deep as a hymn, nowhere near as poetic as a psalm, but they might be something just comes together as the Spirit of God operates on your spirit, and as your love for Jesus Christ and the gospel is bubbling over, you're given a song. It might only be a few refrains and you just kind of repeat it; it's probably much more personal, probably sung more by individuals who are being moved upon by the Spirit to do that. You might find that maybe somewhere like 1 Corinthians 14, in an open time of sharing in the early church someone might sing a spiritual song.

But the point is this. Even if we split the difference, I think we would agree Paul's point is there's no monopoly when it comes to worship songs and worship styles. You know, as your heart bubbles over with joy, and wants to find expression, well, take your pick. In fact, don't just pick one category, enjoy the variety and richness of Christian singing, in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs. By the way, that's why as a matter of choice the elders at this church have chosen a blended style of worship. If you're here for any length of time, when you add up the different Sundays together, you'll find that we sing old songs and new songs; we sing psalms and we sing hymns. Some of the music is celebratory in

nature; some of it reflective, even a lament, or a confession of sin. It's all of that. It's all of that, and it ought to be all of that.

We want to embrace the variety and richness of Christian singing past and present. It's not a question is it old or is it new; it's a question of, is it good, is it theological, and is it singable? If it meets good; if it meets correct and theological and singable then it's on the list. How sad to see God's people divide over worship styles and songs. It's not about us. There's meant to be a variety. If people of God are meant to come together, young and old, generation upon generation, and together with one voice sing to God, and you know what if you can't settle on what style then don't sing any style, just sing acapella but stay together; be a congregation of the saints singing God's gospel back to Him out of hearts that have been transformed by it. How sad the Christian leaders cater to music styles, offering this service for the young and that service for the old, and dividing the body. It's not gonna happen here.

It seems to be that the early church, young and old, got together; they heard the Word of God preached by the work of God's Spirit and work on their own end; it began to take home in their heart as it took home in their heart it produced thoughts; it produced emotions, and they began to want to sing the gospel to each other, and they did it in a variety of styles and songs. That's the picture here. That's the form of singing.

Here we've got to move on to the function of singing. This is kind of the heart of the message this morning, the function of singing. We've talked about how you ought to sing and how you might sing but why? I mean why should you sing? There's several reasons in the text and I've added a couple to them, so if you're taking notes you might want to [inaudible 00:22:04]. I don't know how this worked out but they all started with A. For me it all ends up being Ps, Ms, As, Ss. This is a series of As.

Here's the first reason; here's the first function, an act of association. Singing is an act of association. It's a matter of expressing unity together. Come let us exalt His name together. It's a secret duty on your part. It's a secret delight on your part to make sure you're here on time ready to sing with God's people. You should be here for the first song, because it expresses our unity, our togetherness. It encourages us. It fosters unity. It brings us together. It holds us together. I mean, we have already argued so I'm not gonna beat a dead horse here, but this is congregational in nature. Verse 15 speaks about the body of Christ. Verse 16 talks about speaking to one another and the Greek is in the plural.

This isn't individualized worship. This isn't you singing in your car or singing in the shower, or singing around the family table, and all of that's beautiful, by the way, except maybe singing in the shower, because you always sound better in the shower than you really sound. But, here's the deal, it's an act of unity. It's an act of association. They were to get together and sing. I love Psalm 149, verse 1. Write it down where it talks about singing in the assembly of the saints, singing in the assembly of the saints. In an act of association we gather to sing. That's a Christian thing. But, singing gathers us together, holds us together.

I like what Bob Kauflin says in his book, True Worshipers, "Singing helps us express our unity with the church." Paul uses the musical term harmony several times in his letters. In each case he's not referring to music, he's describing relational unity. Let me just pause, so he said, "Hey, read the epistles," I think Peter does this do. They pick a musical term like harmony, singing in harmony, being in unison, and say that's the way the body of Christ is to operate. We're to be harmonious, in tune with one another. Bob goes on, "While gathering together is in itself an expression of our unity, singing together is an opportunity to deepen it and express it better. Better than simply reciting or shouting words in unison,

singing enables us to spend extended periods of time communicating the same thoughts, passions, and intentions to each other."

That's not only a spiritual truth; this is a societal truth. You know this as a fact, singing brings people together. The pub in England during the second world war, if you walked by one you'd hear singing from it as people got together, as communities met at that kind of focal point and they sang songs about Packing Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit-Bag, and Smile, Smile, Smile. It was their way of getting together and raising each other in the face of a Nazi threat. Patriotic songs. I remember growing up in a divided country in Northern Ireland and some of the homes of my relatives you know just sitting around and all of a sudden somebody would be asked to sing a patriotic song. You're just sitting in a living room, man, but you felt you were part of something, part of a story, part of a history. I think that's the role of the National Anthem in the life of any nation. It's the flagpole around which people gather and find a unity and a common identity. Singing brings people together.

I mean, sports events, you get a little bit of singing here in the United States but you haven't experienced singing at a sporting event until you've gone to a British or a European soccer game. I mean, before I got saved I was into soccer in a big way, and got caught up in some of the kind of soccer hooliganism of the 70s and the 80s. You know, kind of my ritual get your clothes out, get your boots polished, get ready, you know leave the house with your scarf on, meet a couple of your mates and then after you're walking along the two become three, the three become four, the five become 15.

Before long you're singing your songs about your team, singing them on the bus; you're singing them in the stadium with 10s of 1000s of others. Literally, of the 90 minutes of soccer there could be 45 minutes of singing, and you might sing on the way home, depending on whether your team won or lost, but it's singing. Think about it, your own experience, how integral singing is if you're part of a people, part of a team, part of a country. What's true societally is true spiritually. Singing has a massive impact on unity within the church and the coming together of God's people.

Number two, it's not only an act of association, it's an act of affirmation. Singing is an act of affirmation. It's a telling of the truth. It's an echoing of the Word that's dwelling in your heart that you just heard at church in the sermon, but you want to give expression to your own emotions and your own commitment. Notice again our text, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, ..." Notice. "... teaching and admonishing one another with, or in, or through, psalms, hymns and spiritual songs." Did you realize that songs are teaching tools? That's why they've got to be good songs. That's why they've got to be theological songs. That's why they've got to be biblical songs, because they're gonna teach us, and you can no more sing heresy than you can preach it. But, you know what, singing is an act of affirmation. Singing the timely, substantial songs educates God's people, baptizes us into a knowledge of Jesus Christ that allows us to know Him better, witness for Him better, love Him better, worship Him better.

Some of the earliest Christian songs, as I alluded to, were credel; they were written with theology in mind, stuff that the church needed to kneel down, and so John 1:1-18, Philippians 2:6-11, Colossians 2:15-20, 1 Timothy 3, verse 16. It's argued that they are all fragments of early Christian hymns. If you look at those they're about the virgin birth; they're about the deity of Christ, they're about the atoning death, they're about the soon return of Jesus Christ to set up His Kingdom on Earth, big stuff, theologically substantial. They were sung at baptisms, and the Lord's Supper.

So, that would remind us, by the way, as I've alluded to, songs are to be theological. It's a reminder not to allow emotions to dominate. Now, emotions are part of worship; we'll come to this in a moment, but if songs are to be teaching tools they ought to have a theology that engages the mind and makes us think, not only moves us but educates us. That's why emotions must never dominate when it comes to worshipping, because we must always engage the mind with the words and the theology of Christ.

Number two, as I stated, we can no more sing heresy than teach it. You know what, if I was to preach heresy I'd expect you to pull me down off the pulpit, and if Tom leads us in a song that's heretical you can do the same to him, because that's kind of where we're at in this text. I like what Warren Wiersbe says, "I'm convinced that congregations learn more theology, good and bad, from the songs they sing than from the sermons they hear. Many sermons are doctrinally sound and contain a fair amount of biblical information, but they lack that necessary emotional content that gets hold of the listener's heart. Music, however, reaches the mind, and the heart at the same time. It has power to touch and move the emotions and for that reason can become a wonderful tool in the hands of the Holy Spirit or a terrible weapon in the hands of the enemy." A wonderful tool or a horrible weapon. So, it's not only an act of association, secondly it's an act of affirmation.

Thirdly, it's an act of assimilation. See, Paul here talks about letting the Word of Christ, the gospel, the Word of God, we kind of argued that last week, let that dwell in your hearts richly. We saw [inaudible 00:31:16] that was a very domestic word; it's about welcoming a guest into your home; it's about making them comfortable. So, "Come on in, sit down there." That's our word. We've got to do the same with the Word of God. We need to be people whose hearts are hospitable to scripture. To that end, Paul, I think, argues here. One of the ways that that can happen is through singing, where songs make scripture memorable. Songs not only allow us to express scripture, songs allow us to receive and remember scripture.

Songs stick to the walls of our mind like limpets to a rock. That's why you know this experience in the middle of a situation in life all of a sudden a line or a lyric from a song pops into your head, and it's just so appropriate for the moment, because songs are memorable. They have that ability. They have an ability to make theology and doctrine memorable. In fact, that's why if you take one of the songs in the psalter, Psalm 119, which is about the Word of God, do you realize that that is arranged after the Hebrew alphabet, that every stanza begins consecutively with a letter from the Hebrew alphabet? I would have to deduce from that that the writer of that Psalm arranged it in such a way that he wanted to make the Word of God memorable in song.

Let me give you a verse to write down and think about. Deuteronomy 31, verse 21. The Israelites are about to enter into the land of Israel, and God wants them to remember His Word, and so He teaches them a song. The reason He teaches them a song, according to that verse, Deuteronomy 31:21 is this, "When many evils and troubles have come upon them, this song shall confront them as a witness, for it will live unforgotten in the mouths of their offspring." So, as they are about to enter the Promised Land God teaches them a song and He believes that one of the benefits of this song it's unforgettable, it's memorable, it will come back to them again and again and again through their journey in the Promised Land. Huh, interesting. Again, there's this thought of singing being an act of assimilation. It allows us to take God's Word in and receive it.

In fact, I was reading a book on the life of Isaac Watts, who was a wonderful hymn writer many, many years ago. He was also a pastor. In fact his hymn writing career started when he was a young man, and like a lot of young me he didn't like the songs that the church was singing, and he was bellyaching one

night over the dinner table with his father, and his father said, "Okay, Isaac, then you go and write some better ones, and he did, and we still sing them today.

If you read his life story, as I did, a wonderful book by Graham Beynon out of England, as a pastor he wrote songs for children. One of his motivations was it would help children receive theology. When he wrote this little hymnal for children he said he had four reasons for writing it. Number one, it makes theology enjoyable. Number two, it makes it memorable. Number three, it gives children something to continue to think about themselves, and number four, it will allow families to sing around the dinner table. Beautiful.

Let me go on. Number four, an act of amplification, an act of amplification. Not only association, affirmation, assimilation, but amplification. Now, we warned about the danger of emotions, but here I want to quickly correct, or at least balance, stuff by saying we can never deny emotions, never deny emotions. Now, you've got to keep them under control. You want to get to a place like a literal church in Northern Ireland where the story came out that they got going singing and worshipping; they kind of detached their mind from their heart and before long the congregation was singing, "He'll be coming round the mountain when He comes." Well, He'll be coming to a mountain according to Zachariah 14; I don't know if He's coming around it. But, that's just an example of like, "Hold on a minute, you just detached your mind from your heart." That's emotionalism, and that's scary. But, emotion is different from emotionalism.

Doesn't Paul say in Philippians 5:19, a corresponding text to our text, "Make melody in your heart to the Lord?" So, we receive the truth in our mind, but it's got to get into our heart. We've got to feel it. We've got to be moved by it. We've got to own it. We've got to personalize it, and that sermon properly preached and properly received will produce worship and melody in the heart. It will be an emotional experience, and that emotion will want to find an outlet, and that outlet is singing, heartfelt singing, loud singing, visceral singing, emotional worship. There's nothing wrong with that. We've got to sing with grace in our hearts, sing with grace in our hearts, sing with our hearts, hearts that are touched by the gospel of grace, and that life touched by the gospel of grace will want to sing about God's amazing grace. Worship in song and music amplifies our emotions, gives expression to our emotions.

I like what Sam Storm says about that in a book *Singing God*, "Singing enables the soul to express deeply felt emotions that merely speaking cannot." Remember we talked about that last week? God is so glorious, so beautiful; His Son is so powerful, His grace is so amazing, His love is so wonderful, His mercy is so marvelous, and His joy so unspeakable that you can't simply talk about those things, you got to start singing about them. That's his point. "Singing enables the soul to express deeply felt emotions that merely speaking cannot. Singing channels our spiritual energy in a way that nothing else can. Singing evokes an intensity of mind and spirit. It opens the door to ideas, feelings, and affections that otherwise might have remained forever imprisoned in the depths of one's heart."

Well, said, Sam. He's right. Let me put it like this. You know this experience, it was my experience, and I thought about it this morning. Okay, you were moved by a sermon, a theological thought, a truth about Jesus Christ, about Heaven and hell, about redemption, about God's grace, about God's providence. Something like that grabs you and you get so moved you're kind of stuttering within your own soul. You can't put it into words. How do I express this feeling? Words seem so poor right now to express, or the least my words do. Now, either at that point you've got two options, when you get to that point where your soul is kind of stuttering out of excitement, you know. You know, someone's excited; they're trying to tell you. [inaudible 00:38:24] What are you saying? Get it out.

You can be at that place spiritually. You've got two options, either just be silent and let that melody work itself out in your heart, or, and this is where singing comes in, let someone else better than you give you words you couldn't have put together, but they wrote them in a song, and that song allows your soul to move from stuttering to singing. That is the beauty of singing, it allows our emotions to be amplified. It gives our emotions words that we couldn't, but the hymn writers of yesterday and the song writers of today give us voice. It's beautiful. Before I leave that thought and move on quickly, I did think about this. This is kind of to turn that thought on its head. Singing allows our emotions to speak, okay, gives expression to our emotions, and we're thankful for that.

But, I want to turn that on its head, because this is also important, singing not only allows our emotions to speak, singing speaks to our emotion. Singing has an emotional impact. It brings you to tears. It can move you physically where you put your hands up. Music and singing is emotional and it's meant to be. In its proper place and in its proper proportion it's a gift of God's grace where it ministers to us. Music can even do that by itself. Write down 1 Samuel 16, verse 23. Remember Saul had an evil spirit; Saul was quite often depressed, and you read that David would come and play before him and it would calm his spirit. It would affect him emotionally. I think we've all been there, when we're depressed or discouraged, sometimes all you can do, maybe amidst your tears, is lie on a couch and listen to music, and let the words and the music speak to your soul and soothe your soul, and calm your spirit.

What about Acts 16:25, Paul and Silas are held up in a Philippian jail. It's midnight. You know what you read in Acts 16, verse 25, "And at midnight they sang hymns." They allowed those songs, is the implication, to minister to them at a difficult time in their life. They were singing not only to allow their emotions to be expressed but allow singing to shape their emotions and speak into their emotions. Job describes music as bringing joy, in Job 21, verse 12. Jesus in Matthew 11:17 refers to music and it's ability to either make people dance or mourn, but the point is it affects emotions. My friends, singing and music affects the soul and good singing and good music affect the soul in a good way. Listen to good music, listen to good singing, have some worship CDs in your car, be playing music in your home. Don't miss the gathering of God's people. Let's sing in the assembly of the saints, because not only does singing allow us to express our emotions, it actually shapes our emotions, makes us joyful, God-centered and gospel-centered.

Several years ago I listened to Ed Dobson, who is the pastor of Calvary Church in Grand Rapids, connected to Moody Bible School. He spoke before six or seven hundred pastors. He was dying with Lou Gehrig's disease. It would be a couple more years before it would actually take his life. It was a powerful time. He shared lessons he was learning. One of the lessons he said he was learning was that sorrow had driven him to song, and song helped him with his sorrow, and that he was singing now in a higher key because of his sorrow, because song allowed him to express his inner thoughts and his confusion and his concerns, and then good songs, spiritual, spoke into his life.

He talked about negro spirituals that had ministered to him through his sickness. He raised the question that he had raised to himself one day. He says, "Why is it that black churches can sing the way they do; they can sing better than any other kind of church?" He came to this conclusion it was because of the black story of slavery, and sorrow. Their songs are soulful, because of the sorrow they've gone through, because of the trials that beat upon their lives. In the middle of that, those that find Christ find a song, and that song gave expression to sorrow, and lament, and joy, and aspiration from the heart, and then those songs sung among the slaves spoke to them, gave them hope, gave them faith, and shaped a whole people. It's true. What was reflected on that? Why there's probably a natural giftedness that helps explain that also. Their songs were forged in sorrow, and that's what makes them so powerful.

In fact, I was reading just yesterday that during the ugly chapter of slavery in this country, African slaves who had come to faith in Jesus Christ and who were forbidden by their evil masters to sing would go down by the river, and as they were doing laundry they would take wet sheets and put them on lines to form like these walls, and in the middle of these wet sheets they would take a bucket of water and sing into the bucket of water. It would absorb their sound, but the song that the Lord had put in their hearts would be able to escape as they worshiped in the midst of their sorrow. It's powerful. Singing is emotional. That's what makes it dangerous, but that's what makes it beautiful. You know what, when you and I sing it's an act of amplification. We express our emotion and good songs shape our emotions.

Here's another thought as we move to a close, the final thought, an act of attrition. Singing is an act of attrition. Now, what I mean by attrition. If you look up in English dictionary, the word attrition means the act of wearing someone or something down. In war it would speak of exhausting your enemy by constant attack. Singing is an act of spiritual warfare. It's an act of attrition where we wear the enemy down, where we send him packing. Singing is our battle cry where we announce, as Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 2, verse 14, that the Lord Jesus Christ leads us in triumph, always. We are not fighting for victory, we're fighting from victory. You know, our songs are declarations of victory in Jesus and what He accomplished on the cross, and they are a message of defeat to the enemy. They know it, and when they hear it they run.

I like what Luther, the Protestant reformer, said. He's right. "Music is a gift and a grace of God not an invention of man, thus it drives out the devil and makes people cheerful. The devil, the originator of sorrowful anxieties and restless troubles, flees before the sound of music, almost as much as before the Word of God." That's why the enemies of the Protestant reformation said of Luther that his songs did more harm than his sermons. We don't have time to go there, but the passage you might want to look at is 2 Chronicles 20. It's the story of Judah under King Jehoshaphat. They are being attacked from the Southeast by the Ammonites, the Moabites, threatening peace and prosperity in the kingdom. King Jehoshaphat goes before the Lord, and in response to God working in his heart he gets the troops together. But, interestingly, go to 2 Chronicles 20, in front of the troops he puts a choir and a musical band, and the soldiers march, being led by worshipping priests.

If you read the story they get to the camp of their enemies and God has taken care of their enemies, and they return celebrating a victory in which they never lifted the sword; they lifted a song. But, Luther is right, the devil flees at the sign of a singing congregation. Don't forget, he was a worship leader before he fell. He hates worship; it reminds him of what he once was, what he's not, and what he will be forever defeated and doomed. In fact, I wrote a devotion once called, Fight Songs. It's on our radio website. I was interested to learn that the place the songs, or bands, had in the Civil War.

In 1864, the Confederate general Robert E. Lee writes, "I don't think we could have an army without music." In 1865, the Union rival, General Philip Sheridan, orders his bands forward with this order, "Play the gayest tunes, play them loud, keep playing them and never mind even if a bullet goes through the trombone or the trombonest." Well, that's okay if you're not a trombonest, right? But, here he said, "Hey, let's go to war with our fight songs." This was what my studies discovered. During the Civil War, the U.S. Army, the Federal troops, had 618 bands composed of 28,000 musicians. That was one bandsman for every 41 soldiers. That's quite a ratio.

The Confederates had something similar to that. Here's what's interesting. Not all the generals liked that emphasis. In fact, one Confederate soldier asked his commanding officer if he could transfer into the military band, or the regimental band, and Confederate commander Daniel H. Hill wrote this reply in

February of 1862. He wrote this, "Respectfully forwarded, disapproved. Shooters are more needed than tooters." You're not gonna go and toot some trumpet, I need you with a musket. Well, you and I understand spiritually man, tooters are as important as shooters. Worshiping Christians are waring Christians, and the devil flees at the sign of a singing soul focused on a triumphant Savior.

Our time's gone. Here would be the last one. It's a very short one. Singing on the Savior, singing on the Savior. Because where do we end here, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. Our worship is focused on Christ and all that He is and all that He has done, and all that He remains forever to His people. You know what, many of your translations probably have this singing with thanksgiving in your hearts but that doesn't do the Greek justice because this word is a Greek word that can be translated grace or thanksgiving. It's from the same family of words, but it has a definite article attached to it in the Greek. So, I think that most commentators are right when they point out here that the focus of the definite article is, sing with the grace you've experienced in your heart to the Lord, speaking about the act of salvation. God's grace is the realm in which the praise of God ascends. The Christian exalts in the grace of God out of an experience of the grace of God. Amen. That's singing on the Savior.

Well, there's a lot of things we can sing about, a lot of things to be thankful for, food and clothing, warmth of a home, love of a family, gainful employment, solid and loyal friends, religious liberty, political freedom. I mean we could go on down the list, but none greater than the gift of eternal life. What would it be to enjoy all those things I just mentioned and go to hell forever, lose your soul having gained the world; live a short life of creaturely comfort to be snatched from this life, dropped into an everlasting hell where you'll be tormented endlessly forever, where your conscience will smite you each and every day for having heard the gospel and rejecting it? Oh, there's nothing greater than to be a brand plucked from the burning, to be a soul saved by the grace of God, kept by the power of God, looking forward to an inheritance in Heaven reserved for you and me. That's the greatest thing to sing about, singing on the Savior, singing about the grace of God in our hearts with grace in our hearts. We are what we are by the grace of God.

I sing because I'm happy, and I sing because I'm free. I sing because His eye is on the sparrow and He watches over me. It's a wonderful thing amidst His creation, that God would look upon you and me each and every day and own us as His child and say, "There is my daughter and there is my son, purchased at the price of my own Son's death." As the team comes up, grace is a wonderful thing and it's the best of things. When you sing Amazing Grace, remember that it was written out of the context of the life of John Newton, a man who was once a slave trader along the coast of Africa, but found Christ off the coast of Ireland in a storm. Every year he would look back on his life and marvel that God would ever show such a wretch His mercy. His sins, his treatment of the slaves haunted him to his dying day, and he only found peace in conscience and soul through the blood of Jesus Christ.

One year reflecting on God's grace upon the anniversary of his conversion he wrote Amazing Grace, How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. That's why he said many times in his life, "When he gets to Heaven there will be three surprises. Number one, there will be people not there he expected to be there. There will be people there he didn't expect to be there. But the greatest surprise of all that John Newton would be there." In fact, towards the end when he was losing his mind towards his death, he said, "I've forgotten most of things, but two things I remember, I'm a great sinner and Jesus is a great Savior." You can go a long way with those two thoughts, and they'll help you to sing with grace in your hearts for the Lord.

Let's pray and we'll be done. Lord, we thank you for our time in the Word. May it dwell in our hearts richly. May it cause us to sing with grace in our hearts by means of songs, and hymns, and psalms. Make us a singing congregation. Lord, help us with our voice to shout, "He is risen," and we have been raised with Christ, and Heaven is our home and God is our Father and Jesus our brother. Lord, help us indeed to see the importance of singing in the life of the church, and help us to express it in a way that glorifies you. For we ask and pray these things in Jesus name. Amen.