



## Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

### Focus Articles:

📖 Why We Sing  
(*Singing Our Lives*,  
pp. 11-18)

📖 Being Subject as We Sing  
(*Singing Our Lives*,  
pp. 66-69)

### Suggested Article:

📖 Words of Comfort  
(*Singing Our Lives*,  
pp. 70-73)

### What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to

[Christian\\_Reflection@baylor.edu](mailto:Christian_Reflection@baylor.edu)

### Christian Reflection

Center for Christian Ethics  
Baylor University  
One Bear Place #97361  
Waco, TX 76798-7361  
Phone 1-866-298-2325  
[www.ChristianEthics.ws](http://www.ChristianEthics.ws)

© 2006 The Center for Christian Ethics

# Why We Sing

When we come before God in worship, why do we sing rather than merely think or talk with one another? Singing is a language that God has given us to express our deepest longings, greatest joys, and most profound trust in the One who created us and loves us unconditionally.

### Prayer

Creator of heaven and earth, we lift our hearts to you that we might adore your beauty and goodness.

Our Rock and Redeemer, we open our hearts to you that we might reveal the pain and disorder in our lives.

Giver of all good gifts, we surrender our hearts to you that you might bring forth in us the fruit of good works.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, we sing our lives to you that you might raise us, with all creation, into your eternal song. Amen.

**Scripture Reading: Ephesians 5:18-6:9**

### Reflection

In the Scripture passage, "Paul is painting a picture of wives and husbands, fathers and children, and masters and slaves learning how to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ as they worship and sing together," writes Randy Cooper. Ephesians 5:18-21 is one long sentence in Greek: "We are to be filled with the Spirit not through the intoxication of wine but the intoxication of worship, which involves the communal practices of singing to each other and to God, of singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, of making melody to the Lord, of giving thanks to God, and of *submitting to one another*" (Cooper's translation).

What an amazing picture of worship—wives and husbands, children and parents, and even masters and slaves singing to one another and to God and destroying the barriers that separate them. "In singing and worshiping, we enter the life of God through the Holy Spirit," Cooper says. "If God's Triune life is indeed one of mutual submission and love among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then as we become one body in Christ we share in God's eternal 'singing.'"

Yet, we should not think that singing is a magic potion that brings us together if we sprinkle some into worship. That's not *why* we sing. Rather, we sing because music is a gift from God that we are called to use with gratitude, notes Carolyn Winfrey Gillette. When, in our singing, we embrace this gift of love to all and offer it to one another in the Spirit it was given, *then* singing can unite us in worship and help us to grow as children of God. When our singing is "a thankful prayer," Gillette says, it will:

- ▶ *help the Church grow strong.* The very act of singing teaches us *who* we are: "The variety of voices—high pitched or low pitched, on-key or off-key, some soaring to the rafters and others barely above a whisper—reminds us of the wonderful diversity in the Church." And the words remind us *whose* we are. Some songs "are based on the Church's great statements



## Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Robert B. Kruschwitz, the author of this study guide, directs The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University. He serves as General Editor of *Christian Reflection*.

© 2006 The Center for Christian Ethics

of faith," while others express more informally "what the Church believes in the face of the world's conflicting values."

- *help us share and rekindle faith.* "We sing not only for ourselves, but also out of love for others," Gillette writes. Since "our songs invite others into a closer relationship with God in Jesus Christ," we should "be willing to sing new songs that will speak to new Christians and to 'seekers.'" Furthermore, when we or others must endure suffering or face death, sharing the songs of the Church is comforting. In our time of need, Glenna Metcalfe notes, "music surrounds us with the assurance that God loves, God cares, and God is able."

### Study Questions

1. What should be our motive when we sing together in worship, according to Gillette? What other motives might we have, and how would they affect what and how we sing?
2. How, for Gillette and Cooper, does singing contribute to our growth as disciples? Do you agree? Are there other ways in which singing is important in Christian moral development?
3. How can members who cannot hear, speak, or understand, or who choose not to sing, share in congregational singing?
4. In your congregation, what are best things about singing in worship? Are there aspects that need to be improved?
5. "Most of us can recall more hymn texts than scripture texts," Metcalfe notes. "So, couldn't we offer hymns, sung or spoken, to a person in need?" Have you ever done this?
6. Which songs of the church would you sing (or read) if you or a family member were lonely and discouraged, suffering in the hospital, or facing death? Which songs would you sing (or read) if your family were celebrating a happy moment?

### Departing Hymn: "All the Music Sung and Played Here" (Verses 1 and 4)<sup>†</sup>

All the music sung and played here  
is a gift, O God, from you.  
For as long as we have prayed here,  
we've been blessed by music, too.  
By your Spirit, each musician  
finds new depths of faith to share.  
Music is a gift you've given  
and becomes our thankful prayer.  
Bless the talents we are bringing,  
for we offer you our best.  
If our gifts are not in singing,  
may our joyful noise be blest.  
If our world is ever silent,  
may we sign to you above.  
Touched by grace, may each one present  
offer back your song of love.

Carolyn Winfrey Gillette (2000)  
Suggested Tune: NETTLETON

<sup>†</sup> Copyright © 2000 by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette. All rights reserved. A complete list of her hymns is online at <http://firstpresby.org/hymnlist.htm>.

# Why We Sing

## Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>	<i>Dual Session (#1)</i>	<i>Dual Session (#2)</i>
Prayer	Prayer	Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading	Psalm 27:1, 4-6
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)	Reflection (skim all)	Discuss Metcalfe, "Words of Comfort"
Questions 1, 2, and 4	Questions (selected)	Questions 1, 2, 3, and 4	Questions 5 and 6
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

## Teaching Goals

1. To clarify why we sing (i.e., our motive for singing) together in worship.
2. To survey the ways that singing contributes to our growth in discipleship.
3. To examine how reading or singing the songs of the Church can provide comfort and encouragement to people who are in need.

## Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 2-3 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Singing Our Lives* (Christian Reflection) and ask members to read the focus articles and suggested article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn "All the Music Sung and Played Here" locate the tune NETTLETON in your church's hymnal or on the web at [www.cyberhymnal.org](http://www.cyberhymnal.org).

## Begin with a Story

Carolyn Winfrey Gillette recounts a poignant television news story about the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, which crossed South Florida and hit the Central Gulf Coast in August, 2005. The story "involved the medical staff in a New Orleans hospital struggling to care for patients when their medical facility no longer had electricity, water, food, or medicine to offer. In that horrible situation, several medical staff members gathered around a patient's bed. They sang songs of faith and trust in the only One who could be counted on to help them. They shared the hymns that some of them had heard in worship services Sunday after Sunday throughout their lives, until the words and music had become part of their very being. In that storm-damaged hospital during devastation that's been described as 'hell on earth,' they were singing together, heavenward....

"We sing," Gillette concludes, "because, as those medical staff members in a New Orleans hospital knew, singing is one of many ways that God has given us to cry out in utter despair and in complete trust" (*Singing Our Lives*, pp. 11 and 12).

## Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by reading the prayer in the study guide.

## Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Ephesians 5:18-6:9 from a modern translation.

## Reflection

In this introductory study, encourage group members to brainstorm on the various ways that singing together can shape our discipleship. Later study guides will focus on the roles of singing in uniting the generations within a congregation and in proclaiming the Christian prophetic message both in the congregation and beyond the church walls.

Your group may want to extend its discussion of this material. In the first session you might discuss the articles by Gillette and Cooper, focusing especially on our motive for corporate singing in worship and how it forms us in Christian moral character. In a second session, use Metcalfe's article to examine how singing can be a ministry of comfort and encouragement.

(Here is another teaching plan for a single study period or for the first of two sessions: Since Gillette's article is a commentary on themes in her hymn "All the Music Sung and Played Here," you might

ask four members each to read one of the verses aloud and then lead the group in discussing the insights in that verse. You may reproduce the full text of Gillette’s hymn, which appears on the next page, for the study group.)

### **Study Questions**

1. Gillette believes that music is a language given by God “to express our deepest longings, our greatest joys, and our most profound trust” in God. Our motive when we sing, therefore, should be “to use [this gift] with gratitude.” The first verse of “All the Music Sung and Played Here” explores the theme. This gift from God (“By your Spirit, each musician / finds new depths of faith to share”) is mediated to us through other members of the Church (“for as long as we have prayed here, / we’ve been blessed by music, too”). As we share this gift with others and return it to God, our singing “becomes our thankful prayer.”

Of course, some motives—like calling attention to ourselves, impressing others, or going through the motions—are incompatible with expressing gratitude to God. Others—like stretching musically and improving our skills, encouraging others with music, or bringing unity to the congregation—help us to embrace God’s gift and show gratitude to God.

2. Gillette and Cooper stress that singing from the right motive (1) may bring unity and peace in a congregation and (2) gives a glimpse of life together in heaven. Cooper adds that singing to one another (3) teaches mutual submission (not subservience) and, in this way, is “a political act that challenges all human categories and divisions.” Gillette notes that *congregational* singing (4) corrects our individualism by reminding us of “our place in the community of disciples” and (5) helps us to be grateful for the diversity of members in the Body of Christ. The words and music that we take with us from worship (6) bring comfort in discouraging situations, (7) remind us through the week of God’s grace, (8) help us to grow in our understanding of discipleship, (9) enable us to resist the world’s conflicting values, and (10) help us to express God’s love to others and invite them to faithful discipleship.
3. “Our songs are imperfect now. Many of us cannot carry a tune,” Gillette writes. “Others of us cannot hear, speak, or understand, but we can only feel the rhythm of the music, or sign the words, or experience the presence of God’s love as the congregation sings together.” Members may brainstorm on how they can involve everyone—e.g., young children, people with disabilities, or those confined to home or care facilities—in the congregation’s singing.
4. Without disparaging others, members can discuss questions such as these: Is everyone involved in singing? Do they sing enthusiastically and well? Are the right number and type of songs used in worship? How is the congregation being educated in the music and texts of the Church? Are the song texts rich in content and appropriate for the service? Are suitable musical instruments played worshipfully? Is special music carefully prepared and sensitively offered? Do the layout and design of the worship area encourage singing?
5. Encourage members to share their experiences of singing either individually or in a group to comfort someone in need. Have they ever quoted hymn texts in a conversation or included them in a letter to encourage someone? Do they read or share “hymn stories” (accounts of the writing or use of hymns and their music)? Have particular songs or hymns been helpful in comforting others? How does this depend on the person in need and the context?
6. Provide hymnals, if possible, and ask each person to choose at least one hymn or song for each situation—when one is lonely and discouraged, suffering in the hospital, facing death, or celebrating a joyful event. What patterns do you notice about their choices?

### **Departing Hymn**

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

## All the Music Sung and Played Here

All the music sung and played here is a gift, O God, from you.  
For as long as we have prayed here, we've been blessed by music, too.  
By your Spirit, each musician finds new depths of faith to share.  
Music is a gift you've given and becomes our thankful prayer.

All creation sings your glory; in the Psalms are pain and praise.  
Mary sang your saving story in her long, expectant days.  
Through the years, with great emotion, some have reached to you in song.  
May we sing with such devotion; music helps your church grow strong!

You give hymns and songs for singing, toes for tapping your good news,  
organ sounding, handbells ringing, faithful hearers in the pews.  
With the trumpet and the cymbal, with guitar and violin,  
faith is found here and rekindled; hearts are lifted, once again.

Bless the talents we are bringing, for we offer you our best.  
If our gifts are not in singing, may our joyful noise be blest.  
If our world is ever silent, may we sign to you above.  
Touched by grace, may each one present offer back your song of love.

*Carolyn Winfrey Gillette (2000)*

*Tune: NETTLETON 8.7.8.7 D ("Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing")*

Biblical texts: Psalms 148, 22, 100; Luke 1:46-55; Psalm 150

Tune: Wyeth's *Repository of Sacred Music*, 1813

Text: Copyright © 2000 by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette. All rights reserved.

Carolyn Winfrey Gillette is the copastor of the Limestone Presbyterian Church in Wilmington, Delaware, and author of *Gifts of Love: New Hymns for Today's Worship* (Geneva Press, 2000). A complete list of her hymns can be found at <http://firstpresby.org/hymnlist.htm>.