



Christian Reflection
A Series in Faith and Ethics

Christian Reflection

Center for Christian Ethics
Baylor University
One Bear Place #97361
Waco, TX 76798-7361
Phone 1-866-298-2325
www.ChristianEthics.ws

The Center thanks the
Cooperative Baptist Fellow-
ship for its financial support
of these study guides.

© 2006 The Center for Christian Ethics

Study Guides for Singing Our Lives

These guides integrate Bible study, prayer, and worship to help us explore how singing can lift our hearts to adore God, awaken us to confess the disorder in our lives, and inspire us to good work that speaks God's transforming love into the hurting world. Use them individually or in a series. You may reproduce them for personal or group use.

Why We Sing 2

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.

Nurturing the Congregation's Voice 4

Every congregation is an unmatched creation with lessons to learn about its voice—what music it's intended to make and what music is meant for another congregation. These lessons can be learned through the disciplines of hearing, joining, sounding, remembering, and coaching its voice.

Singing with the Psalter 6

What sets the book of Psalms apart from other Scripture is the sacramental nature of its songs, their ability to mold and transform the believer. Reading or singing the psalms, we lift them to God as our prayers, as though we are speaking our own words rather than recalling an ancient litany.

Gifts of New Music 8

A prophetic song that lifts our hearts to adore God, awakens us to confess the disorder in our lives, or inspires us to share God's love for the hurting world is a wonderful gift. Three new hymns and their stories can inspire us to employ our own gifts with words and music to edify the Body of Christ.

Prophetic Music 10

Prophetic music—songs that raise our critical awareness of the world's needs and call us to responsible action through their holistic gospel message—occurs outside church walls as well as in our worship. How do we discern and encourage the true musical prophets?

U2: Unexpected Prophets 12

Arguably the most successful rock band in the world, U2 not only cries out against injustice, but also dares to imagine an alternative in light of the Christian vision. The band proclaims with Scripture "the place that has to be believed to be seen." Will we hear them?



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

Christian Reflection

Center for Christian Ethics
Baylor University
One Bear Place #97361
Waco, TX 76798-7361
Phone 1-866-298-2325
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)[†]

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

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



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Focus Article:

📖 Nurturing the
Congregation's Voice
(*Singing Our Lives*,
pp. 74-80)

Suggested Article:

📖 Music as Spiritual
Practice
(*Singing Our Lives*,
pp. 89-93)

What do you think?

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

© 2006 The Center for Christian Ethics

Nurturing the Congregation's Voice

Every congregation is an unmatched creation with lessons to learn about its voice—what music it is intended to make and what music is meant for another congregation. These lessons can be learned through the disciplines of hearing, joining, sounding, remembering, and coaching its voice.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 4:11-16

Responsive Reading: Psalm 84:1-4

How lovely is your dwelling place,
O LORD of hosts!

**My soul longs, indeed it faints
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and my flesh sing for joy
to the living God.**

Even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O LORD of hosts,
my King and my God.

**Happy are those who live in your house,
ever singing your praise.**

Reflection

Just as an individual has a voice, David Bolin says, each congregation has a distinctive common voice to discover and develop. "Pastors and teachers are gifted to equip the saints, build the body of Christ, and avoid musical gimmickry until the congregation attains unity and finds common voice," he writes. Rather than declare, "We're blended (or contemporary, or traditional)," a congregation should find its singular voice that is shaped by "traditions, history, the worship space, and countless other factors making it unlike the voice of any other congregation."

Five ongoing activities help a congregation find its singing voice. Each one is "most clearly observed as a particular age group encounters it for the first time," Bolin says. Yet we should not simply balance generational interests or play one group off the other. As the Ephesians model implies, each activity is a gift to build up the congregation's common voice. The activities are:

- ▶ *hearing the voice (childhood)*. Children are tuned in to sounds. They "learn to pray by hearing their parents pray, and they learn to sing by hearing their parents sing." Young parents should read Scripture, pray, and sing with their children in the home and in worship. "Hearing the voice only begins in childhood," says Bolin. "One must continue to listen intently to the world of song in all its diversity. Listen like a child for the voice that speaks in, to, and through your congregation."
- ▶ *joining the voice (adolescence)*. What can I add to the beauty of the church's voice? This insecurity grows in adolescence as "the exploration of God's world begun in childhood turns



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

inward as appearance and personality are evaluated for their worthiness in joining a social order outside the home." While the culture urges us to celebrate the moment and value attractiveness, the gospel says we "have worth unfettered by what is fashionable," Bolin notes. "When a congregation listens, encourages, and provides occasions for its members' gifts to be used, it invites them into its fellowship in a way that the mere completion of a membership card cannot."

- ▶ *sounding the voice (young adulthood)*. "Though contemporary culture must not set the standard by which the congregation sings its song, the congregation does exist within culture and relates to it." Young adults, as they build careers, start families, and find places of service, have new songs to proclaim God's word. Their "spirit of adventure is often associated with bravado that exceeds acquired wisdom," Bolin says, yet it reminds us that a congregation's voice is "a work in progress as a new generation adds its vocal line to the chorus."
- ▶ *remembering the voice (senior adulthood)*. Music can transport us to other places and times in our lives and in the life of the Church. "Senior adults best understand this power," Bolin believes. They "are trying not to dominate the church's music-making, but to... [provide] memories, the carriers of life experience, which can enrich the songs of those who follow."
- ▶ *coaching the voice (middle adulthood)*. Coaches help us to hear, join, sound, and remember the congregation's voice. "When children are not taught the music by which they can learn the language of praise, the coach becomes educator. When teenagers are not given opportunities to join the congregation's voice, the coach becomes advocate. When the unguided visions of young adults turn to disillusionment, the coach becomes mentor. When the songs of yesteryear are blasted away by the electric guitar, the coach becomes storyteller reciting the history that gives birth to the present." Middle-aged adults often are good coaches, Bolin says, for they parent children or adolescents, have developed discernment in young adulthood, and are learning to care for their parents.

Study Questions

1. Bolin notes that "every congregation is an unmatched creation," with a different history, set of challenges, ministers, and members. What events and people have shaped your congregation's singing voice? What challenges does it face?
2. Which of the five activities mentioned by Bolin does your congregation do well? How could the others be improved?
3. What are your gifts in music? How do you use them to help your congregation develop its voice through hearing, joining, sounding, remembering, or coaching?
4. Nathan Corbitt believes that "musicians' greatest gift to the kingdom is the critical listening skills to evaluate the present, the prudence to remember the past, and the wisdom to extend the kingdom outside one's own frame of reference." How are these three gifts shaping your congregation's voice?

Departing Hymn: "Fill This Holy Place with Music"



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Focus Article:

📖 Singing with the Psalter
(*Singing Our Lives*,
pp. 19-27)

Suggested Articles:

📖 Make a Joyful Noise
(*Singing Our Lives*,
pp. 36-37)

📖 Exuberant Praise
(*Singing Our Lives*,
pp. 38-42)

What do you think?

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

© 2006 The Center for Christian Ethics

Singing with the Psalter

What sets the book of Psalms apart from other Scripture is the sacramental nature of its songs, their ability to mold and transform the believer. Reading or singing the psalms, we lift them to God as our prayers, as though we are speaking our own words rather than recalling an ancient litany.

Prayer

Scripture Readings: Psalms 100, 22, and 30

Silent Meditation

Keep praising God with hymns, and meditating continually, and so lighten the burden of the temptations that attack you. A traveler carrying a heavy burden stops from time to time to take deep breaths, and so makes the journey easier and the burden light.

Sayings of the Desert Christians (fourth century)†

Reflection

Scripture resounds with singing. Moses sings to the people of Israel (Exodus 15:1-18), and his song echoes through the courts of heaven (Revelation 15:3-4). Job mournfully laments being forsaken by God, but an angel joyfully proclaims the Savior's birth to Bethlehem shepherds. Although biblical songs have inspired the Church's singing over the centuries, the inexhaustible muse has been the Psalter, the worship and prayer book of Israel.

"Psalm singing chases fiends, excites angels to our help, removes sin, pleases God," Richard Rolle wrote admiringly in the fourteenth century. "It shapes perfection, removes and destroys annoyance and anguish of soul. As a lamp lighting our life, healing of a sick heart, honey to a bitter soul, this book is called a garden enclosed, well sealed, a paradise full of apples!"

In the sixteenth century, John Calvin said that biblical psalms were the only songs worthy to be used in worship. Yet, "being a lover of music, Calvin stretched the point a bit to allow metrical paraphrases of the prose psalms, which could be sung to old and new melodies," Michael Morgan notes. "He recognized the power of music, beyond the inspiration of the words alone, to move the human spirits of those who make the music or hear it." English hymn writing really took off when Isaac Watts (1674-1748) paraphrased most of the psalms in metrical form (with meter and rhyme to fit the music of his day). He believed that "when we read a prose psalm from the Bible, God speaks to us; but when we sing a metrical psalm, we speak to God."

The Psalter can teach us to pray and sing in all the seasons of life, Morgan says, because "the psalms reveal every imaginable condition of our human experience, but never without the illumination of who God is and where we stand in relation to that wonderful Presence." In this vein Walter Brueggemann grouped the psalms into songs of orientation, disorientation, and new orientation. Morgan illustrates with these examples:

- ▶ *Psalm 100 – a psalm of orientation.* When "we are at peace with ourselves, our neighbors, and God," psalms of orientation call us to worship God and to give thanks for these seasons of



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

well-being. After introducing the One whom we are to praise (vv. 1-2), Psalm 100 describes our relationship with God (v. 3), offers thanks for God's goodness (v. 4), and confidently rejoices that God's love will endure forever (v. 5).

Among the other psalms of orientation, Brueggemann suggests, are the songs of creation (8, 33, 104, and 145), songs of Torah (1, 15, 19, 24, and 119), wisdom psalms (14 and 37), and songs for occasions of well-being (131 and 133).

▶ *Psalm 22 – a psalm of disorientation.* The psalms of disorientation "lament the ragged, painful disarray we inevitably encounter in our...anguished seasons of hurt, alienation, suffering, and death." Thus Psalm 22, the song that Jesus uttered from the cross (Mark 15:34; Matthew 27:46), voices our ultimate anxiety—being abandoned by God (vv. 1-2, 11). Yet even when we blame God for our grief-stricken condition (vv. 6-9a), we entreat God to rescue us and promise that "in the midst of the congregation I will praise you" (v. 22).

Psalms of disorientation may lift either personal (13, 35, and 86) or communal complaints (74, 79, and 137) to God.

▶ *Psalm 30 – a psalm of new orientation.* When God hears our lament, "reconciliation, redemption, rebirth, and resurrection are the themes we sing about in the psalms of *new orientation*." We welcome God's rescue and healing (vv. 1-2), and though we acknowledge both God's anger and grace, we can "see beyond the conflict to its sure resolution at the hand of God" (vv. 4-5). In the end, we can thank God for removing our grieving garments and clothing us with joy (vv. 11-12).

The Psalter brims with songs of restoration, from the personal and communal thanksgiving songs (34, 40, and 138; or 65, 66, 124, and 129, respectively) to the songs to the once and future king (29, 47, 93, 97, 98, 99, and 114) and hymns of praise (100, 103, 113, 117, 135, 146, 147, 148, 149, and 150).

Study Questions

1. Are the psalms always "praise songs"? What does the Psalter teach us about the range of experience that we should reflect on and express to God in our personal and communal songs?
2. How do you employ the psalms in personal worship? How are they used in your congregation's worship?
3. Have certain psalms been, in the words of the desert Christians, "deep breaths" that lighten your burdens in life?
4. What are the advantages of paraphrasing a psalm in metrical form? What are the dangers? (As an example, compare these metrical paraphrases of Psalm 23: Isaac Watts' "My Shepherd Will Supply My Need," George Herbert's "The God of Love My Shepherd Is," James Montgomery's "The Lord is My Shepherd," and Joseph Gilmore's "He Leadeth Me.")
5. Consider how Luca della Robbia and Donatello depict Psalm 150 in competing *cantoria*, or choir galleries, for the cathedral of Florence. What is the charm of each artist's interpretation?

Departing Hymn: "We Sing!"

† Benedicta Ward, trans., *The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 65.



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Focus Article:

📖 Gifts of New Music
(*Singing Our Lives*,
pp. 43-55)

What do you think?

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

© 2006 The Center for Christian Ethics

Gifts of New Music

A prophetic song that lifts our hearts to adore God, awakens us to confess the disorder in our lives, or inspires us to share God's love for the hurting world is a wonderful gift. Three new hymns and their stories inspire us to employ our own gifts with words and music to edify the body of Christ.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Romans 12:1-8

Responsive Reading: Psalm 96:1-5

O sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth.

**Sing to the LORD, bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day.**

Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous works among all the peoples.

**For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;
he is to be revered above all gods.**

For all the gods of the peoples are idols,
but the LORD made the heavens.

Meditation†

Naught exists without voice:

God hears always in all created things his echo and his praise.

Reflection

When Paul urges us, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds," he warns that discerning "what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect" must be a communal, not an individual, achievement. Our differing gifts of prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, generosity, leadership, or compassion must be offered humbly to the body of Christ. Only within that new community, where we become truly "members one of another," can our thoughts, desires, and behavior be renewed and transformed.

When we create songs that weave the landscape of Scripture and fabric of Christian character into the pressing moral issues of our culture, we are using musical gifts to help the body of Christ prophesy, teach, and minister. We asked Mark Hill, Mary Louise Bringle, and Kyle Matthews not only to write texts that examine how this practice of singing our lives can bind us to other believers and morally form us as disciples, but also to demystify the art of hymn writing by describing how they approach the task.

Hymn: "Fill This Holy Place With Music"

We are transformed by the texts and music we carry with us from worship. Pianist Mark Hill was inspired by a Habitat for Humanity project week. "This is what church worship should be like," he thought, "serving together with strangers only to discover they are part of God's family." The Habitat experience reminded him that the attitude of worship must pervade our lives: "worship does not end when the last 'Amen' is spoken; in fact, worship has just begun. Both worship and service look toward the day when all people live in peace and all creation joins to sing



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

a song of praise to its Creator.” He wrote in a popular meter (8787 D) so that his text could be paired with familiar tunes.

Hymn: “We Sing!”

“My hymn writing is essentially word-watching,” notes Mel Bringle. “Words are like shy forest creatures: they often seem more willing to come into view if they do not think they are being sought. Thus, when I began working on this hymn, I sent a question (‘Why do we sing in worship?’) into the thickets of my unconscious and settled in to wait.” As she was reading some short stories, “a line of hymn text began appearing at the edges of consciousness.” Soon it was followed by the words of the first verse, which established the metrical form and suggested themes for the other verses. She invited her friend Jane Marshall to compose a tune suitable to the rare meter (88444) and rhyme scheme.

Hymn: “Hear Our Hearts, O Lord”

Kyle Matthews wonders how we can sing our lives to the Lord of life. We “attempt to speak a spiritual language that transcends words alone. It is not merely what we mean to say, it is how we feel about it and how we attempt to make our meaning beautiful to God,” he says. “The ultimate hope of our singing is that God will hear beyond our presentation to our heart’s intention, thus, ‘hear our hearts.’” As a text unfolds, he composes music to emphasize the most important and “singable” words. “The melodic phrases rise and fall, but the third phrase...reaches a penultimate point that...essentially is passionate—a cry. The musical resolution of each verse is common in order to suggest the peace that follows the catharsis of spiritual song.”

Study Questions

1. What similarities do you notice in how Mark Hill, Mary Louise Bringle, and Kyle Matthews approach the task of hymn writing? How do they employ their diverse gifts?
2. Mark Hill’s “Fill This Holy Place With Music” is a prayer to God. For Hill, what is the ultimate source of our music? What does this suggest about the art of hymn writing?
3. In Mary Louise Bringle’s “We Sing!” what reasons do we have to sing our lives before God? How is this content mirrored in the poetic form of the verses?
4. According to Kyle Matthews’ “Hear Our Hearts, O Lord,” what are we doing when we sing our lives? How do these actions change us and how do they impact the world?
5. What qualities should a really good hymn have?
6. What are your gifts in writing text or music for worship?

Departing Hymn: “Behold the Glories of the Lamb”

Behold the glories of the Lamb
amidst his father’s throne.
Prepare new honors for his name,
and songs before unknown.

Isaac Watts (c. 1688)

Suggested Tune: NEW BRITAIN

†*Angelus Silesius* (1624-1677)



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Focus Article:

📖 Prophetic Music
(*Singing Our Lives*,
pp. 28-35)

What do you think?

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

© 2006 The Center for Christian Ethics

Prophetic Music

Prophetic music—songs that raise our critical awareness of the world's needs and call us to responsible action through a holistic gospel message—occurs outside church walls and in worship. How do we discern and encourage the true musical prophets?

Scripture Reading (A Call to Repentance): Deuteronomy 31:30-32:6

Season of Prayer

Holy God, we come before you, like the people of Israel, having betrayed your love in our thoughts, words, and deeds. We pray silently now, confessing our personal sins and repenting of our rebellion. (*Silent prayers.*)

The institutions where we work, our families, and our community are broken because collectively we have betrayed your love in our thoughts, words, and deeds. We pray silently now, confessing these corporate acts of unfaithfulness and asking that you will restore our broken lives together. (*Silent prayers.*)

Our world is broken because we have betrayed your love in our thoughts, words, and deeds. Each of us selects one part of the world, one troubled nation, or one distorted economy, and now intercedes on its behalf. (*Silent prayers.*)

Holy God, you are the Rock of our salvation, forever faithful in Jesus Christ, and our comfort in the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Scripture Reading (The Assurance of God's Forgiveness): Psalm 65:1-4

Reflection

The "Song of Moses" (Deuteronomy 32:1-43) is not only a searing prophecy of our unfaithfulness—for it pulls no punches in diagnosing how we are prone to betray God when pressed by a discordant culture—it is also a joyous celebration of God's faithful judgment and ultimate rescue. It is no wonder, then, that John the revelator hears this song echoing in heaven on the lips of the martyrs who have resisted the lures of the beast, a distorted Roman society (Revelation 15:3-4).

Scripture abounds in prophetic art. "The Jewish prophets, like Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Amos, employed drama, allegory, and poetry to jolt people into thinking about their lives," notes Nathan Corbitt. "And Jesus used parables to break through to listeners who did not recognize their own role in oppressing the poor."

We should tune our hearts not only to hear the prophetic voices in contemporary secular music, but also to embrace prophetic music in our worship. As first steps, congregations might

- ▶ *grow in their music-making beyond praise and evangelism to include a call for social justice.* We will "develop spiritual sight and courage for the street" as congregational "musicians move out of the choir loft and from behind the pulpit microphone to faithfully minister among the marginalized."
- ▶ *provide financial support for musicians with a prophetic voice, both inside and outside the church.* For example, one congregation supports "a hip-hop artist who left the secular recording industry to enroll in seminary and 'preach' the good news in



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

the tough places of Philadelphia.” The artist’s hour-long Christian hip-hop radio program is gaining in popularity.

- ▶ *include the voices of world Christians in worship.* Most Christians now live outside the western world. “When we incorporate some world hymns into worship on a regular basis, we not only will hear our brothers and sisters’ prophetic voices, but also will prophetically proclaim our unity with them.”
- ▶ *discern the true musical prophets.* “There should be no mistake that the primary goal of musical prophecy is the redemption of a fallen world,” Corbitt writes. “It is the fruit of a prophet’s life—how the prophet lives in consonance with Jesus’ way of living and not just what he or she says—that provides the ultimate test of the prophecies.” Some false musical prophets “lose credibility through their abuse of wealth and power.” Others, in their anger and alienation, preach violence and self-gratification.

Study Questions

1. How does Corbitt define “prophetic music”? Are the songs of secular musicians to whom you regularly listen prophetic?
2. Which of the first steps toward embracing prophetic music has your congregation taken? Which need to be taken?
3. In your congregation’s hymnbook, which hymns address issues of social justice, war and peace, wealth and poverty, the care of God’s creation, marriage and sexuality, the nature of discipleship, growth in spiritual discernment, or racial reconciliation? Which hymns are by nonwestern Christians?
4. “Do not think that a congregation must give up the old hymns and change all of its songs in order to embrace prophetic music,” writes Corbitt. What hymns were prophetic for Corbitt and his wife? Have you had similar experiences?
5. What are the barriers to using prophetic music in worship?

Departing Hymn: “In Their Speaking, Art, and Writing” (verses 1 and 3)

In their speaking, art, and writing,
in their music, hear God’s voice.
Why composer, painter, poet,
why the note and color choice?
God has whispered, granted glances,
to the prophets, who, then, show
that life’s dirges and life’s dances
harbor truth we need to know.

Back to old days for the new days,
to the path from which we’ve strayed.
With the truth before them always,
preaching, painting, lest it fade.
Call us forward, to the morning,
lead us to God’s promised day.
Through the darkness, from our wand’ring,
write and paint and sing the way.

Terry York (2003)

Suggested Tunes: EIGHTH AND SPEIGHT or HYMN TO JOY



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Focus Article:

📖 U2: Unexpected Prophets
(*Singing Our Lives*,
pp. 81-88)

What do you think?

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

© 2006 The Center for Christian Ethics

U2: Unexpected Prophets

Arguably the most successful rock band in the world, U2 not only cries out against injustice, but also dares to imagine an alternative in light of the Christian vision. The band proclaims with Scripture “the place that has to be believed to be seen.” Will we hear them?

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Psalm 40

Responsive Reading: Revelation 15:2-4

And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb:

“Great and amazing are your deeds,

Lord God the Almighty!

Just and true are your ways,

King of the nations!

Lord, who will not fear

and glorify your name?

For you alone are holy.

All nations will come

and worship before you,

for your judgments have been revealed.”

Silent Meditation

Created anew in him and made perfect in a more plentiful grace, we shall see in that eternal rest that it is he who is God, he with whom we shall be filled....

That day will be our eternal Sunday....

There we shall be in peace and we shall see. We shall see and we shall love. We shall love and we shall worship.

St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430)†

Reflection

Walther Eichrodt’s wonderful characterization of Israel’s prophets as bringing “the divine reality directly to bear on the sphere of moral conduct,” also describes John the revelator. As he hears the martyrs in heaven sing the victory song of Moses (now transposed into the Lamb’s song), he realizes the beast—the distorting culture of Rome—will not win and can be resisted: “All nations will come and worship before you, for *your judgments have been revealed.*” Yet Rome still threatens and destroys lives. Could John not echo the psalmist’s broken plea, “My soul also is struck with terror, while you, O Lord—how long?” (Psalm 6:3).

The “unexpected prophets” in U2—vocalist Bono (Paul Hewson), guitarist The Edge (Dave Evans), bass player Adam Clayton, and drummer Larry Mullen, Jr.—share this prophetic imagination, Steven Harmon suggests. “In their music they imagine, through their glimpses of the divine reality, a world that might be,” and call us to resist the distortions of western culture. Like John’s, their distinctively Christian imagination



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

- ▶ *is grounded implicitly in worship and steeped in the biblical story.* Though U2's songs are written for concert performances, Bono says, "They're all songs of praise to God and creation—even the angry ones!" Songs like "Gloria" and "40" borrow language from the book of Psalms, and Bono "gestures heavenward with an uplifted hand when singing lyrics addressed to God, kneels in prayer onstage, recites the psalms, [and] works bits of hymns into the set list." Many songs either retell or allude to biblical stories. Yet Harmon admits that "their deepest import may be veiled from those who do not share the framework of biblical narrative out of which the U2 catalog offers a distinctively Christian rendering of the world."
- ▶ *portrays the triune God and realizes our salvation is based on grace.* As the song "Grace" says of grace personified, "She travels outside of karma." Bono explains: "The point of the death of Christ is that Christ took on the sins of the world, so that what we put out did not come back to us, and that our sinful nature does not reap the obvious death. That's the point. It should keep us humbled.... It's not our own good works that get us through the gates of Heaven." All through its catalogue, U2 addresses God in triadic fashion as "Yahweh," "Jesus," and Holy Spirit ("God's only dove").
- ▶ *embraces the Christian hope and calls for social engagement.* The biblical tension between the "already" and the "not yet," that "the reign of God is at hand and people have the opportunity to participate in it in the here and now," Harmon says, "is the key theological concept for understanding the spiritual significance of U2's music." U2 celebrates God's redemption, yet calls us to "view the injustices of this world through Christian lenses and identify with those who are marginalized...[as] the proper response to our receiving God's grace."

Study Questions

1. How are the U2 songs "Gloria," "Yahweh," and "40" implicitly grounded in worship and steeped in the biblical story? (The lyrics for U2's songs are available on the band's website, www.U2.com.)
2. Consider how the songs "Until the End of the World," "The First Time," and "Wake Up Dead Man" extend or retell biblical stories.
3. How is grace understood in the songs "All Because Of You" and "Grace"?
4. Explore how God is portrayed in the song "The First Time."
5. What social problems are exposed in the lyrics of "Sunday Bloody Sunday," "Bullet the Blue Sky," "Miracle Drug," "Crumbs from Your Table," and "Beautiful Day"? Do you agree that these songs construe the problems and offer solutions with a Christian imagination?
6. What objections might be raised to viewing rock music bands like U2 as true prophetic voices in our culture?

Departing Hymn: "Hear Our Hearts, O Lord"

†Augustine, *The City of God*, Book 22, Chapter 30.

Appendix: Optional Lesson Plans for Teachers

For each study guide we offer two or three optional lesson plans followed by detailed suggestions on using the material in the study guide:

- ▶ An *abridged lesson plan* outlines a lesson suitable for a beginning Bible study class or a brief group session.
- ▶ A *standard lesson plan* outlines a more thorough study.
- ▶ For some guides a *dual session lesson plan* divides the study guide material so that the group can explore the topic in two meetings.

Each lesson plan is for a 30- to 45-minute meeting, with about one-third of the time being set aside for worship.

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.

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>.

Nurturing the Congregation's Voice

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Responsive Reading	Responsive Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1, 2, and 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To explore the idea that each congregation has a singular voice.
2. To outline five ongoing activities that help a congregation discover and develop its voice.
3. To discuss how members' diverse gifts can contribute to the congregation's voice.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 4-5 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 article and suggested article before the group meeting.

Begin with a Story

David Bolin, who formerly served as a minister of music in Oahu, Hawaii, describes learning the 'voice' of his congregation: "Familiar sounds reverberate through the room just as they do in any church fellowship hall—the comfortable, friendly sounds of people at ease with one another. They both know each other's stories and share a common one. There is laughter at the telling and retelling, and there are interruptions as latecomers are welcomed to the table, the sugar is passed, or a child demands her mother's attention. This conversational cadence, however, is unique. I've heard nothing like it before....

"I listen with amazement as my children are born into this voice sounding like any other 'local,' while I am unable to shake my slow Texas drawl. Then comes the day when someone says, 'Your voice is what we find charming about you.' I have always been grateful for those words. They put in perspective the voice of this and every other congregation. We have all journeyed from somewhere: the descendants of immigrants who worked Hawaii's sugar plantations, the military families, the couple from the Northeast who moved with their children in search of unending summer, and the strong, beautiful Polynesians whose ancestors navigated the vast Pacific guided by the stars. My Oahu congregation is made of people from many places who in spite of their mother tongue have sought and found a common voice.

"When pastors, music ministers, or church members listen deeply to the voice of their congregation, they will realize the sacred responsibility of calling it forth. Any suggestion that it should be made to sound like another voice will seem as ludicrous as proposing a bird should imitate a frog" (*Singing Our Lives*, pp. 74-75).

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by praying that members will recognize and develop their varied gifts of music from God to build up the Church, the Body of Christ.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Ephesians 4:11-16 from a modern translation.

Responsive Reading

The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Reflection

Christ gives equipping gifts to every Christian (Ephesians 4:7). These gifts are described as ministry activities that can build up the body of Christ by bringing unity to the group and Christian maturity to each person (4:12-13). This maturity (and church unity) would prevent members from being swayed by changing doctrine, gimmicks, and schemes (4:14).

David Bolin extends this biblical understanding of Christ's gifts to the ongoing activities that build up a congregation's voice. Members have received gifts that can help them hear, join, sound, remember, or coach an appropriate and rich pattern of worshiping God and serving others through music. The voice is singular because it flows from the particular history of the congregation and rich because it incorporates the gifts of every member. Bolin's notion of training a distinctive and unified voice is much richer than the gimmicks of selecting a "style" that caters to the tastes of members or seekers or bouncing from style to style in order to please everyone.

Study Questions

1. Significant moments in a congregation's history might include building or arranging the worship space for singing, adding a leading musician, forming a choir or ensemble, adding or changing musical instruments, selecting a new hymnal, discovering or writing important service music, or deciding to incorporate music in a new way in the worship service. A particular event might be a stirring musical performance, a workshop by a guest composer, a meaningful hymn festival, or a member's personal testimony about a song.

Group members might mention gifted musicians who select worship music, lead congregational singing, play musical instruments, sing solos, sing in an ensemble or choir, write hymn texts, compose music, or direct choirs for children, youth, or adults. Others shape the congregation's voice by singing with sensitivity to the music in worship, encouraging the worship leaders and musicians, signing with hearing disabled members, holding a hymnal for a child, attending to a sound system or projection system, supporting the music ministry financially, arranging the sanctuary to make it conducive to singing, sharing hymn stories, reflecting on the song texts in relation to Scripture and themes in the worship service, and so on. Every member plays some role in the congregation's voice and some make significant and memorable contributions to it.

Some challenges might be careless or timid worship planning, a casual attitude toward worship, poor acoustics, inappropriate expectations by members or visitors, the wide range of members' preferences, the lack of trained musicians, financial limitations on purchasing music, domineering egos, the lack of members' grounding in the history of church music or knowledge of the world church, changing cultural influences, and so on.

2. Encourage group members to inventory how different age groups are involved in the music of worship, education, mission, and ministry. Though the five activities are most evident as particular age groups encounter them, they are practices for all members. So remember to ask how everyone is doing at remembering, and so on. If an activity needs improvement, consider how everyone can become involved in the change.
3. Do not reduce "gifts in music" merely to skills in performing music. Branch out to include many other gifts like curiosity about music in other times or places, openness to singing new songs, skill in interpreting the poetry of texts, taking joy in singing with others, recollection of texts and tunes, sensitivity and wisdom to match songs to others' needs, awareness of and discernment regarding musical trends, patience in teaching children to sing, and so on.
4. Consider how these gifts not only influence worship (e.g., selecting new music, incorporating older songs, and using music from other times and places), but also shape education (for adults, youth, and children) and outreach ministries (e.g., to people who are new in the community, have particular interests, or are marginalized by age, infirmity, or poverty).

Departing Hymn

"Fill This Holy Place with Music" is on pp. 45-47 of *Singing Our Lives*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Singing with the Psalter

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	Psalms 23 and 150
Silent Meditation	Silent Meditation	Silent Meditation	Silent Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)	Reflection (skim all)	Discuss interpretations in art and poetry
Questions 1, 2, and 3	Questions (selected)	Questions 1, 2, and 3	Questions 4 and 5
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To appreciate the Psalter's remarkable role in shaping Christian prayer and song.
2. To interpret representative psalms of orientation, disorientation, and new orientation.
3. To consider how the wide range of psalms can become our prayers.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 6-7 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide. Distribute copies of *Singing Our Lives (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested articles before the group meeting.

Begin with a Comment

"When I was a young child, the first book of Scripture I learned to find with ease was the Psalter because it is at the very middle of the Bible," Michael Morgan recounts. "All I had to do was let the Bible fall open at its heart and there it was, ready to 'sing' to me of a mighty God, a loving and caring Shepherd, a Lord of righteousness and repentance and redemption. Of course, it took some years of living before I knew that if I opened my own heart, as I opened the Bible, the book of Psalms would become a source of personal dialogue between that same faithful God and a grown-up, more complicated me" (*Singing Our Lives*, p. 19).

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by praying that in every season of life members will be assured of who God is and where we stand in relation to that wonderful Presence.

Scripture Reading

Ask three group members to read Psalms 100, 22, and 30 from a modern translation. They might (1) read the psalms in sequence now or (2) read each psalm as it is discussed in the reflection.

Silent Meditation

Provide a period of silence for members to reflect on the saying from the desert Christians.

Reflection

When we discuss "singing our lives" before God, let us emphasize our continuity with and tremendous debt over the centuries to the book of Psalms, the worship book of ancient Israel. Michael Morgan urges us to pray and sing the entire range of psalms. Scholars categorize the psalms in various ways by their structure and content, but among the most helpful for modern readers is Walter Brueggemann's way of relating the psalms to seasons of life—times of "orientation," "disorientation," and "new orientation." An accessible introduction is Brueggemann's *Spirituality of the Psalms* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2002, 86 pp., \$6.00).

Morgan is an avid and talented proponent of *singing* the psalms in worship today. In his *Psalter for Christian Worship* (Louisville, KY: Witherspoon Press, 1999, 186 pp., \$14.95), he provides a metrical setting for each psalm and pairs it with a familiar hymn tune. Briefly, “meter” refers to a pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. “Amazing Grace,” to take a familiar example, repeats an unstressed-stressed (or, iambic) pattern for eight, six, eight, and six syllables: “A-ma-zing grace! How sweet the sound / that saved a wretch like me! / I once was lost, but now am found, / was blind, but now I see.” This 8686 pattern (called “common meter”) fits tunes like NEW BRITAIN, MCKEE, or AZMON, which highlights different facets of John Newton’s text.

You might extend this discussion to two sessions. In one, discuss how we can use the full range of psalms in worship. In the other, examine the interpretation of psalms in art and hymns.

Study Questions

1. Not all of the psalms praise God (especially some of the songs of disorientation like Psalm 137), and many of them are in no way “upbeat” or “cheerful.” Yet even the psalms that are the most full of pain and disappointment show us how to seek God with our complaints, petitions, and requests for comfort.
2. In personal worship, members may read aloud or chant portions of the psalms that are edited for devotional use. Or they may meditate on a single verse or short passage in the manner of *lectio divina*. Some may memorize entire psalms; choir members may remember the paraphrase of a psalm in a hymn or choral anthem. Some members may read straight through the book of Psalms every few weeks, or follow a daily schedule of reading psalms.

Congregations that follow a lectionary will read a prescribed psalm, or portion of a psalm, every Sunday on a three year cycle. Responsive reading of psalms can highlight the poetic repetitions in them. A choral anthem or congregational hymn might be based on a psalm. Should every worship service include the reading or singing of at least one psalm?

3. Recall the meditative reading from the desert Christians: singing hymns can “lighten the burden of the temptations that attack you.” The psalms of orientation and new orientation remind us of God’s guidance and salvation. The psalms of disorientation help us share our frustrations with God, confess our sin, petition God for the correction of evil, and seek God’s comfort in our despair. All of these can “lighten” our load of burdens and give us hope for the moral struggle. Encourage members to share why a specific psalm, or phrase from a psalm, is especially meaningful to them.
4. Metrical psalms may be sung to familiar tunes and are easier to memorize. If it is sensitive poetry, the metrical version of a psalm may highlight certain imagery in the psalm or give a devotional interpretation to the original. Morgan suggests that singing a metrical psalm, unlike the responsive reading of the original, “can be done not only in the company of other believers, but also when we find ourselves alone in the company of God.” A danger is that the metrical psalm will not be faithful to the biblical text. When we read only devotional and sanitized versions of psalms, we will miss the raw emotion and power of the original songs.

The four hymns are in many hymnals and at www.cyberhymnal.org. Though Gilmore departs from the biblical text, he best captures the theme of discipleship implied in the psalm (“his faithful follower I would be”). Herbert’s text is the least singable, but it wonderfully highlights that the psalm’s focus is on God, not us: “And all this not for my desert, / but for his holy Name” and “And as it [i.e., God’s love] never shall remove / so neither shall my praise.” Montgomery stays close to the original, yet I love his interpretation of the final image (“I seek, by the path which my forefathers trod, / through land of their sojourn, thy Kingdom of love”). Watts’ hymn is packed full of rich images, especially this one: “O may thy house be my abode, / and all my work be praise. / There would I find a settled rest, / while others go and come; / no more a stranger, nor a guest, / but like a child at home.”

5. Heidi Hornik thinks that “Luca more accurately represents the narrative” by depicting children playing the various instruments mentioned in Psalm 150, but “Donatello conveys the joy in the souls of those who hear and take to heart the call to worship in the final psalm.”

Departing Hymn

“We Sing!” is on pp. 49-51 of *Singing Our Lives*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Gifts of New Music

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Responsive Reading	Responsive Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1, 2, 3, and 4	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To explore through three new song texts how the practice of singing our lives can bind us to other believers and morally form us as disciples.
2. To demystify the art of hymn writing by exploring how three writers approach the task.
3. To consider how we can use our gifts of poetry and music to edify the body of Christ.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 8-9 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 article before the group meeting. The new hymns “Fill This Holy Place with Music” (pp. 45-47), “We Sing!” (pp. 49-51), and “Hear Our Hearts, O Lord” (pp. 53-55) are found in the focus article, “Gifts of New Music,” in *Singing Our Lives*. For the departing hymn “Behold the Glories of the Lamb” locate the familiar tune NEW BRITAIN in your church’s hymnal or on the web at www.cyberhymnal.org; it is often paired with “Amazing Grace.”

Begin with a Comment

“Writing either the words or music of a hymn is one of the greatest challenges possible,” writes the noted composer Alice Parker in *Melodious Accord: Good Singing in Church*. “That tiny form, all self enclosed: How does one get the words in a natural flow, expressing a cogent idea in language that is rich with the images of scripture, which are really the images of human life? How does one get a tune in which not one note is out of place?” (quoted in *Singing Our Lives*, p. 43).

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking members to think of one or two musicians who have deeply influenced their discipleship and to thank God for their gifts and their service to the body of Christ.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Romans 12:1-8 from a modern translation.

Responsive Reading

The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Meditation

Provide a period of silence for members to reflect on the thought from Angelus Silesius.

Reflection

This study introduces three new hymns that explore the theme of singing our lives before God. Each hymn also is featured as a departing hymn in another study guide in this series, but this is an opportunity to examine the texts more closely and enjoy them together. Group members might sing each hymn before they discuss the material in the reflection and the question related to the hymn (e.g., questions 2, 3, and

4, respectively).

The departing hymn, the first verse of “Behold the Glories of the Lamb,” is a fitting conclusion to this study of new songs. Composed in about 1688 when he was only fourteen, it was the first hymn written by Isaac Watts, the Dissenting minister who revolutionized English hymn writing for public worship.

Study Questions

1. Hill, Bringle, and Matthews describe a similar creative process—choosing a theme or idea to mull over and then waiting patiently, or ‘listening,’ for a phrase or verse to emerge at the edges of consciousness. The initial verse sets a form (poetic structure, rhyme pattern) and suggests themes for ‘completing’ the poem. Instead of a theme or idea, a biblical passage or a phrase or statement from Christian spiritual writing might provide the inspiration. Hill developed his theme in a creative way during a meaningful experience of a Habitat for Humanity work week. The writers also showed their texts to others for suggestions.

Hill restricts himself to a meter that is common in music, so that he can match his text to a familiar tune. Bringle gives herself more poetic freedom in writing, and she turns to a friend to compose the music. Matthews works on the music and text together. What are the advantages of each approach? Members might discuss which approach they would use.

2. Each verse credits God as the ultimate source of music—“may your music fill this place,” “Let your music fill each heart,” and so on. Various people provide the texts and tunes and lead our singing, but God is their inspiration in composing and ours in singing. This suggests that hymn writing involves our welcoming a number of complex gifts—especially gifts of poetry, music, prayerful sensitivity to the needs of the body of Christ, prophetic leadership, and wise proclamation—that must come together to produce a song for worship.
3. We sing about the suffering we witness or cause (v. 2), the deep ties of thought and feeling that bind us to saints of past years (v. 3), and our shared visions and dreams (v. 4). “Unthinkingly, I had mirrored form and content,” Bringle says, for “normally, each line of hymn text is a self-contained unit, so that meaning will not get distorted when singers inevitably take a breath between musical phrases. Yet, I had violated this ‘rule,’ letting full hearts not be ‘contained’ within their eight-syllable unit, but ‘burst their bounds’ (‘breathlessly,’ at that!) to flow over into subsequent lines. I decided I was happy with the transgression.”
4. “Our ‘singing’ is more than singing,” Matthews writes, “it is responding to inspiration (v. 1), bringing prayers to God (v. 2), offering praise (v. 3), and telling our story (v. 4).” As we confess our sinfulness and neediness (v. 2) and live in reverence (v. 3), we find that our life becomes “a witnessing life (v. 4), motivated in real ways by the crazy hope that our way of life, our stories themselves, can be tools in God’s hands to do God’s will in the world.”
5. Members might mention qualities of the *music* (a memorable and singable melody; interesting harmony parts; music that is distinctive, rather than ‘pop’ sounding; music that ‘fits’ the text; etc.), the *text* (phrases that are poetically arresting and rich in images; thoughts that are theologically solid and central to the Church’s proclamation; words that are memorable), or the *context* (fits into the order of Christian worship—welcomes God’s presence, confesses sin, corrects distorted thinking, or proclaims the gospel; is valuable in private as well as public worship; ministers to need in life’s turning points). What hymns do members value in all these ways? What are the strengths of the new hymns in this study?
6. Members may write short poems for service music or tackle the demanding poetic formats of hymn writing. Others can be ‘sounding boards’ for aspiring writers or can suggest texts for musicians to set to music. They may compose music for hymns (old or new) or be skilled at matching new texts to familiar tunes. Some may enjoy searching through hymn books or websites like www.cyberhymnal.org to ‘rediscover’ old tunes and texts for the congregation. ‘Encouragement’ is a gift that many people can offer to aspiring writers and composers.

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.

Prophetic Music

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Season of Prayer	Season of Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1, 2, and 5	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To define the idea of prophetic music.
2. To examine the ways that congregations can embrace and support prophetic music.
3. To sample hymns which are prophetic.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 10-11 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide. Distribute copies of *Singing Our Lives (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn “In Their Speaking, Art, and Writing,” you may either (1) locate the familiar tune HYMN TO JOY in your church’s hymnal or on the web at www.cyber-hymnal.org or (2) download the new tune EIGHTH AND SPEIGHT from the Ethics Library at www.ChristianEthics.ws (search by format under the listing for hymns or search by theme for the *Prophetic Ethics* issue of *Christian Reflection*). The hymn was published on pp. 51-53 of the *Prophetic Ethics* issue.

Begin with an Observation

“[The] message of good news and confrontation with the evil in society is never timeless,” writes Nathan Corbitt. “Rather it must be spoken to people living in a particular context of pursuing wealth, prestige, in-group solidarity, and power—to people who need to be awakened specifically to their time and reality.

“This is a basic reason, I think, so few prophetic hymns are found in hymnals and why prophetic music clothes itself in contemporary musical idioms. Prophetic music tends to be an oral and contemporary phenomenon, rather than a written and historical tradition. Prophets often address a contemporary form of injustice, and their songs require immediacy to the problem and culturally appropriate language” (*Singing Our Lives*, p. 31).

Scripture Reading (A Call to Repentance)

Ask a group member to read Deuteronomy 31:30-32:6 from a modern translation. This song calls us to repentance.

Season of Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by using the Season of Prayer to guide members in silent prayers of confession.

Scripture Reading (The Assurance of God’s Forgiveness)

Ask a group member to read Psalm 65:1-4 from a modern translation. This song assures us of God’s forgiveness.

Reflection

This study introduces Nathan Corbitt’s broad definition of “prophetic music” that could apply to songs written and performed for a secular market, for the Christian popular market, or for use in Christian worship. The reflection and most of the questions focus on the use of prophetic songs in worship. The

next study guide, “U2: Unexpected Prophets,” examines an important body of prophetic songs written and performed for the secular market by the musicians Bono and the Irish rock band U2.

Study Questions

1. “Prophetic music is a prophetic voice, based on biblical principles, that calls both the church and society to social justice,” writes Corbitt. Though it “may not include Christian language and imagery as it addresses poverty, injustice, degradation of the environment, and other problems in contemporary culture..., effective prophetic music always presents a holistic gospel message: it not only describes the problems, but also presents Kingdom-based solutions and calls individuals, congregations, and society to responsible action.” The words of prophetic songs “raise critical awareness about the needs of the world.”

Most secular musicians do not sing prophetic songs. Encourage members to think of songs that comment on the problems of contemporary culture with a prophetic voice.

2. You might combine a discussion of the first and third steps (singing more songs about social justice and songs written by world Christians) with a review of your hymnbook (see question #3). But you should think outside the hymnal. Worship can include performance, congregational singing, or readings of other songs of social justice (by contemporary musicians, Christian musicians through the ages, or from Scripture). Songs by Christians in other cultures, especially in nonwestern cultures, are more difficult to obtain. For collections of recent songs, see the new hymnbooks by Hope Publishing Company (www.hopepublishing.com), GIA Publications (www.giamusic.com), and major denominational presses. Many hymnals and song supplements are available through The Hymn Society (www.thehymnsociety.org). C. Michael Hawn’s *Gather into One: Praying and Singing Globally* (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002) introduces the work of five influential global church musicians.

On the second and fourth steps (supporting prophetic musicians outside the church and discerning true musical prophets), consider how the church might host concerts, workshops, or other learning opportunities to encourage appreciation for and discernment about the work of contemporary musicians.

3. You might search www.cyberhymnal.org for older hymns in the public domain or search the web for newer hymns. The hymns commissioned by the Center for Christian Ethics are available for download from the Ethics Library at www.ChristianEthics.ws. Carolyn Winfrey Gillette is writing new hymns on themes of social justice (see firstpresby.org/hymnlist.htm).
4. “Give of Your Best to the Master” by Howard B. Grose (1851-1939) and “Faith is the Victory” by John H. Yates (1891) were prophetic for the Corbitts (*Singing Our Lives*, pp. 34-35). Sometimes the text has a prophetic message, but sometimes a hymn takes on new meaning when it is sung in a prophetic context—e.g., in a worship service that unites people from different ethnicities, nationalities, or religious traditions.
5. Corbitt suggests these barriers: the *music* may be unfamiliar, difficult to appreciate, or inappropriate in worship; the *texts* make us uncomfortable when they call attention to significant problems or challenge our way of life. Congregations resist learning new music, and we may feel inadequate to the task of presenting it faithfully, for “new prophetic songs, whether they come to us from around the world or across the street, deserve our best efforts to ‘perform’ them well and present them within a context of meaningful explanation.”

Members may discuss other barriers, like the difficulty in locating and reviewing music by Christians in other cultures, lack of funds for purchasing new hymnals and supplements or paying royalties for new music. Brainstorm on how your congregation might use email contacts with friends or missionaries in other countries, church musician exchanges, providing a venue for local musicians, or other low-cost ways of learning new prophetic songs.

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.

U2: Unexpected Prophets

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Responsive Reading	Responsive Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
One of questions 1 through 5, and question 6	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To introduce the prophetic imagination of the Irish rock band U2.
2. To examine the distinctively Christian aspects of U2's prophetic vision in a sample of the band's lyrics.
3. To weigh objections to viewing popular musicians as true prophetic voices in our culture.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 12-13 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 article before the group meeting.

Begin with a Story

"On July 2, 2005, I watched the LIVE 8 concert on television from the comfort of my rocking chair," recalls Nathan Corbitt. "I was not about to face the many thousands of people gathered for this concert at the Philadelphia Museum of Art just down the road from my house. It was one of the world's largest concerts to end poverty. My first thought was that a group of opportunistic artists were using the event to promote their music; what do popular and wealthy musicians know about the issue? I wondered. Yet the more I reflected on the event and those who organized it and heard the reports of people who attended, I had more hopeful thoughts. Supported and encouraged by Bono, whom many people consider to be a prophetic Christian musician, the artists were doing exactly what prophetic artists do—raising critical awareness about a justice issue and motivating others to get involved.

"In debriefing the concert experience with a number of my staff who attended, I discovered that only one church had purchased a vendor table where they enlisted people to become involved through a local church ministry. There are nearly three thousand congregations in Philadelphia and many are involved in prophetic ministries. Most churches have a more traditional view about keeping the sacred and secular separate" (*Singing Our Lives*, p. 29).

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by praying that God's gracious help will "put a new song in our mouths" that encourages many to "see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD."

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Psalm 40 from a modern translation.

Responsive Reading

The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Silent Meditation

Provide a period of silence for members to reflect on the passage from the final paragraph of Augustine's great work, *The City of God*.

Reflection

This study guide explores some distinctively Christian themes in the prophetic songs written and performed for the secular market by Bono (pronounced “BON-o”) and the Irish rock band U2. It is a follow-up to the previous study guide, “Prophetic Music,” which introduces Nathan Corbitt’s broad definition of “prophetic music” that could apply to songs written and performed for a secular market, for the Christian popular market, or for use in Christian worship.

Invite members to share their knowledge of U2. Some will be fans of the band’s music and may share a favorite recording or describe an experience of listening to their songs. Others will know about U2 through the social activism of its lead singer Bono, whom TIME Magazine named, along with Melinda and Bill Gates, Persons of the Year for 2005.

After the group has reviewed U2’s body of work, consider the prospects and dangers of viewing popular musicians like Bono and U2 as true prophetic voices in our culture.

Study Questions

1. “40” restates Psalm 40, with a haunting refrain from Psalm 6:3. “Gloria” borrows the first words of Psalms 30, 31, and 51 to seek God’s help in singing about the self and the world honestly. “Yahweh” asks God to transform us (hands, mouth, and heart) and reshape our life together (“Take this city if it be your will”). Rebirth is the refrain’s theme (“Yahweh, Yahweh, always pain before a child is born; Yahweh, Yahweh, still I’m waiting for the dawn”).
2. “Until the End of the World” imagines a wiser Judas greeting Jesus on his descent into hell on Holy Saturday. (For more on the doctrine of Christ’s “harrowing of hell,” see Ralph Wood’s “The Gates of Hell Shall Not Prevail” in the *Heaven and Hell* issue.) “Wake Up Dead Man” imagines a disciple’s brutal prayer on Holy Saturday. The “already/not yet” tension of discipleship is especially clear on this day between Christ’s death and resurrection.
3. “All Because Of You” sees God’s grace in creation (“the curve of the moon”), in his presence with us (“You heard me in my tune when I just heard confusion”), and in redemption (“You can make me perfect again”); it describes redemption as rebirth. “Grace” distinguishes grace from karma, and celebrates its re-creative power (“Grace makes beauty out of ugly things”).
4. This Trinitarian song, which depicts God as lover, brother, and father (Holy Spirit, Son, and Father), focuses on God’s pursuit of us while we are yet sinners (“I spend my whole time running, He spends his running after me”). God is the source of all that is good (of the Holy Spirit, “She teach[es] me how to sing”; of Christ, “for the first time I feel love”; and of the Father, “He gave me the keys to his kingdom (coming”).
5. U2 responds to violence in Northern Ireland in “Sunday Bloody Sunday,” which describes the carnage and calls us to identify with “The real battle just begun to claim the victory Jesus won on... Sunday, bloody Sunday.” “Bullet the Blue Sky,” notes Harmon, “cast a spotlight on American support for repressive military dictatorships in Central America, and retooled versions of the song... have addressed the international arms trade and the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal.” “Miracle Drug,” “Crumbs from Your Table,” and “Beautiful Day” take up the cause of Africa’s need for debt relief, medical intervention, and trade reform.
6. U2’s music can stir wonderful discussions of theology with young people. Yet Harmon admits that “Bono’s occasional lapses into the language of the streets of Dublin do not serve as the best model for Christian speech,” and Corbitt doubted at first that the LIVE 8 concert was just “a group of opportunistic artists...using the event to promote their music; what do popular and wealthy musicians know about the issue?” Bono realizes that there are other difficulties in found different ways of expressing it, and recognized the power of the media to manipulate such signs. Maybe we just have to sort of draw our fish in the sand. It’s there for people who are interested. It shouldn’t be there for people who aren’t.”

Departing Hymn

“Hear Our Hearts, O Lord” is on pp. 53-55 of *Singing Our Lives*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.