

Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



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Teaching by Song

God wants His people to sing for a very practical reason: it's a major source of instruction in our lives, utilizing the universal human capacity for music.

“And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord” (Eph. 5:18-19).

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3:16).

Our singing is “to the Lord,” but the *primary* purpose of the singing is not to glorify God (He really doesn't need it), nor to inform Him of our love for Him (He already knows if we do or don't). Rather, the main objective is more pragmatic—to “teach and admonish one another.” When we sing, we are “speaking to one another” as a means of instructing, encouraging, and motivating each other.

The technical aspects of music—pitch, rhythm, cadence, melody, etc.—touch a deep chord in the human psyche. That's what makes music a universal language. Add carefully crafted lyrics to

the music, using rhyme and symmetry, and the result is a powerful message to our hearts, one that stirs our emotions and is easy to remember.

Robert Turner once wrote of spending time in the hospital for a surgery. Lying on his bed during recovery, he heard music that was being piped into his room. The songs were all instrumental, quite relaxing, which was no doubt the intended effect. But one of the songs happened to be a standard old gospel hymn, the words of which Turner knew by heart. Even though the song he was hearing was instrumental, the *words* that he remembered imparted a timely message. The other songs had been pleasant enough; but none matched the emotional power of the one song whose words—captured in his heart through years of singing—gave him the comfort he needed in his time of affliction.

I fear that we do not give enough attention to the didactic nature of congregational singing. We come to church to hear the preacher preach, and that's fine. But we also come to church to hear words of encouragement and exhorta-

tion from one another, and singing is the primary medium of that edification. If we're listening to the singing like we're listening to the sermon, we should come away from the service armed with a renewed determination to fight sin and stand strong in our faith.

In times of anxiety or despair, for example, the words of the song, “Be with me Lord, I cannot live without Thee” provide reassurance. And it's a little easier to resist the temptation to get caught up in the mad chase for material possessions, when you have “I'm satisfied with just a cottage below” stuck in your head.

Andrew Fletcher, a 17th century Scottish politician, once wrote, “Let me make the songs of a nation, and I care not who makes its laws.” Fletcher appreciated the power of musical lyrics to mold the character of a people. God appreciates it, too, and that's why He has commanded His people to sing.

So when we sing, we should reflect on the words we are singing and ponder their message. Just like the sermon, there is much to learn, if we will listen.

– David King