

Why Do We Sing in Church?



Session 1



Ephesians 5:19; James 5:13; Colossians 3:16; Psalm 150

Session Objective

In this session, participants will . . .

- Have an experience of glorifying God, particularly with music.
- Learn about congregational song as an essential element to Christian life.
- Become more active in worship planning by compiling and suggesting favorite hymns and songs.

Faith Statement

Q.1. What is the chief end of humankind?

A. Humankind's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy God forever.
— *The Shorter Catechism* (7.001)

People respond to that divine initiative through the language of worship. . . . They . . . lift hands and voices in praise, sing, make music, and dance. Heart, soul, strength, and mind, with one accord, they join in the language, drama, and pageantry of worship.

— *Directory for Worship* (W-1.2001)

Session Overview

 Enter	Option A: Song Hear and Tell
	Option B: Why Do We Come to Church?
 Engage	Option A: Resting with the Question
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 Explore	Option A: Snapshot Charades
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 Express	Option A: Creating a Musical Psalm
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	Option C: Interview a Worship Leader
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Enhancements

Family Connections
Family Movie Night
Web Connections
Spiritual Ringtones
Creating Worship Liturgy



For instructions to download Web Resources and the coffeehouse version, see page 1.

Spiritual Reflection for Leaders

Read Psalm 150:1–6. Consider how much music surrounds our daily living. It signals moods (we know a scary part in a movie is coming by the music!) and shapes our frame of mind. It accompanies us through our life’s journey and helps us express emotion, belief, and connections with others. No wonder the psalmist cries, “Praise God with trumpet sound,” and lists many other instruments, too (Psalm 150:3–5). Music can hold the intensity and drive within us to communicate with God with our whole selves as we give thanks for life and blessings, to praise God and to pray for ourselves and others and the world, to mourn and also to rejoice.

As you prepare this session, remember how much music is a part of your life and your relationship with God.

- What music makes your spirit soar? What songs help you praise God?
- How in your life do you glorify and enjoy God? What do you wish you could do?
- How do you feel about singing in worship? How does your congregation feel about singing in worship? How could you help the young people in your congregation become even more involved in singing at your church?



Understanding the Scripture

Ephesians 5:19–20, Colossians 3:16, and James 5:13 all summon Christians to sing praise to God. Even though these epistles (letters) were written to different churches, the instructions to God’s people remain the same.

Written in the last half of the first century A.D. and circulated among churches in Asia Minor, each of these letters was intended to be read aloud during worship for teaching, reminders, and encouragement. According to tradition, James, the brother of Jesus, wrote the Letter of James before his death as a martyr in A.D. 62. Many biblical scholars believe that disciples in the Pauline tradition wrote Ephesians and Colossians in Paul’s name after his death in A.D. 58–59. (The practice of pseudonymous writing was common in that time and culture as a way to honor the teachings and apply them to new situations.) All three letters demonstrate the same concerns as other letters written late in the first century A.D.: They address issues of belief concerning unity between Jewish and Gentile believers and the worship of the one God, and they emphasize turning away from pagan practices and living a life that demonstrates the commitment Christians make to follow Jesus Christ.

The passage preceding Ephesians 5:19–20 invites Christians to put away the old, unwise life and put on the new, Spirit-filled life in Christ. Similarly, the passage preceding Colossians 3:16 encourages Christians to clothe themselves with the virtues of new life and act with God’s compassion and forgiveness. Right after these teachings, the Pauline authors remind Christians to sing praises to God—together, in their hearts, and with gratitude and thanks.

In James, praising God in song is listed with other acts of prayer in worship, including crying out to God in suffering, anointing the sick, confessing, and forgiving. All of these prayers happen within the Christian community, the primary context for Christian life for James.

Psalms 150 is the last psalm in the worshipbook of God’s people, the Psalms. It expresses the impulse of God’s creatures to give thanks and praise. In six short verses, this succinct hymn tells who is to be praised, why and how, and who should give praise. Psalm 150 captures the energy and drive of praising God in a community with music and singing and dancing. Praising God is life itself, this psalm seems to say.



Understanding the Faith Statement

In the 1640s, political and religious turmoil tore England apart. The English Parliament commissioned an assembly to sort out the mess over who had control in the church and state. The Westminster Assembly completed a form of church government, a directory for worship, and a confession of faith with a larger and shorter catechism. The Westminster Standards organized the teachings of the Reformation into a way of life for the church based on Scripture and covenant theology that focused on duties to God and to each other.

The Shorter Catechism condenses the confession of faith for the education of children. The confession and catechisms emphasize that God is preeminent in all things and that people should conform their lives to God’s perfect will. The famous first question of *The Shorter Catechism* sums up Reformed theology: Our purpose in life is ever and always about God. To fulfill that purpose, the Directory for Worship in the *Book of Order* describes how God’s people can live out the call to glorify and enjoy God.



Teaching Today's Question

It goes without saying that music is an important part of most young people's lives. This session tries to tap into the participants' love of music to help them see how music, singing, and giving praise to God are integral parts of being a Christian. In this session, participants enter into the experience of glorifying God as the primary job of all God's people. Participants will reflect on ways that they praise and glorify God with music and discover scriptural, confessional, and church resources to help answer questions about why and how Christians glorify God with music and singing.

Main points for this session include:

- Christians assemble to praise and glorify God, who alone is the audience of our worship.
- God created humanity for the purpose of giving praise and thanks back to God.
- The symbolic language of music and the use of breath and the whole body in song help us carry out our purpose to glorify and enjoy God forever.



Enter

Option A: Song Hear and Tell

- Recordings of a favorite song or songs that help you praise God, music player, computer with an Internet connection (*optional*)

Invite young people to bring songs that help them praise God to this session. These could be hymns or songs that they enjoy from worship, popular songs, or songs from a meaningful conference experience. If possible, have a computer with an Internet connection available so the participants can play a music video for a song that helps them praise God.

As young people arrive, lead them in a discussion about what music they (would) listen to for each of the following situations:

- Waking up in the morning
- Falling asleep at night
- Studying
- Psyching up before a big game
- Feeling bummed out
- Getting ready for a test
- Being tired
- Driving
- Feeling angry or upset
- Dancing

Take turns listening to the song that each person brought with him or her. After each song is played, lead a conversation about why the song is worshipful. If an Internet connection is available, consider playing the videos of the songs using YouTube and encourage participants who did not bring a song with them to think of a song and play it using YouTube.

Option B: Why Do We Come to Church?

- Copy of "Why Do You Come to Church?" (Web Resource 1a) for each participant, pens

Give each participant a copy of "Why Do You Come to Church?" (Web Resource 1a) and a pen, and invite each person to check the box next to each phrase that answers the question on the page. Give the participants a few minutes to mark their answers individually before discussing their responses as a class. Explore the following questions with the group:



- Which of the phrases on the page is the most significant reason why you come to church? Which of the phrases is the least significant reason?
- Have you ever thought about why you choose to come or not to come to church?
- Do you miss church if you are not able to come for a while? Why or why not?



Engage

Option A: Resting with the Question

Gather the participants in a comfortable location and use the following questions to guide a conversation that explores the question “Why do we sing in church?” Encourage the students to ask their own related questions during this time.

- Where do people sing together and why do they sing?
- Why do we sing in church? Why do we sing together in church when we don’t seem to sing together very often in other places?
- What is so important about music? What is the point of singing?
- Does God care if we are really bad or really good at singing? Why or why not?

Opening Prayer

Creating God, you have made us with inquiring minds, seeking hearts, and dancing feet. We come together today to pose questions, to seek your presence, and to celebrate your creation with music and singing and maybe even dance. Guide us in your Word so that we may glorify you. Illuminate our minds. Fill our hearts with music so that our voices may sing your praises. Bind us together in friendship and in song today. May our words and our lives be holy in your sight. Amen.

Option B: Luck of the Draw

- Copy of “Session 1 Questions” (Web Resource 1b), scissors, basket or small plastic cup

Before the youth arrive, cut out the questions found on “Session 1 Questions” (Web Resource 1b) and place them in the basket or small plastic cup.

Gather the participants comfortably in a circle and give each person an opportunity to draw a slip of paper from the basket or cup. Have the person read the question on the slip of paper out loud to the group before sharing his or her answer to the question with the group. Continue passing the basket or cup around the group as time allows, replacing the questions in the basket or cup as necessary. To make things more interesting, consider having the participant who draws the question choose someone else in the group to answer the question. Pray the opening prayer with the group.



Explore

Option A: Snapshot Charades

Bibles, *The Book of Confessions*, camera (optional)

Before students arrive, bookmark the first question and answer from *The Shorter Catechism* (7.001) in *The Book of Confessions*.

Assign three participants, or teams of participants, one of the following Bible verses: Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16, or James 5:13. Invite each participant or team to look up the verse and develop a “snapshot”—a pose without movement to portray the thought. Invite one of the participants or teams to go first, and gather the rest of the participants so that they can all see the first participant or team. Ask the youth in the audience to close their eyes while the presenting participant or team strikes the prepared pose. Then invite the presenting participant or one person from the presenting group to say “open” and “close,” signaling the rest of the class to take a one- to two-second glance at the snapshot. Invite the spectators to guess what the verse is about. (Another peek at the snapshot is permissible if needed!) Repeat these instructions with the other two participants or teams.

Make sure each participant has a Bible, and invite each person to look up Ephesians 5:19–20, Colossians 3:16, and James 5:13. Ask for volunteers to read each passage aloud, then explore the following questions together:



- How are these passages similar? How are they different?
- How were the snapshots similar? How were they different?

Summarize the information from Understanding the Scripture for the participants. Ask: In what ways does our church follow these instructions to the early church? How are we following them in our daily lives? Explain how throughout the two thousand years of Christian history, churches have developed statements of faith to explain how Scripture informs them about following Christ in that time and place. Invite a participant to read the bookmarked question and answer from *The Shorter Catechism*. Ask: How do music and singing help Christians praise and glorify God?

Invite a participant to read aloud Psalm 150 as though he or she were in a boring class at school. Then invite another participant to read the psalm as excitedly as possible, using his or her entire body to convey its meaning. Explore the following questions together:



- As a listener, how did each of these readings make you feel?
- How do you think it would feel to praise God with the same energy as the first reader? How do you think it would feel to praise God with the same energy as the second reader?
- What specific things made the second reading different from the first reading?

Point out to the youth that, in the second reading, the person's emotions and the whole person are involved, too.



And so it is with music and singing in worship, because we use more of our bodies in worship, including our breath, our voices, our minds, our faces, and our whole selves.

Invite the participants to develop a snapshot sequence based on Psalm 150 that incorporates what they just discovered about putting their whole selves into worship. Assign each participant or group of participants a verse or half a verse to develop into a snapshot using the previous instructions. Once everyone is ready, read the psalm while the participants show their snapshots.

Consider photographing each snapshot from your group's rendition of Psalm 150. Use the snapshots for:



- Part of a worship service (see Enhancements: Creating Worship Liturgy)
- A presentation for use in Bible study of Psalm 150
- A video submission on a church Web site or the youth group's online community
- A bulletin board about praising God

Option B: Surveying the Landscape



Bibles, copy of "Fun with a Concordance" (Web Resource 1c) for every 2 or 3 youth, *The Book of Confessions*, an NRSV concordance for every 2 or 3 youth or access to an online NRSV concordance, pens

Before students arrive, bookmark the first question and answer from *The Shorter Catechism* (7.001) in *The Book of Confessions*.

Make sure each participant has a Bible and ask each person to look up Ephesians 5:19–20, Colossians 3:16, and James 5:13. Ask for volunteers to read each passage aloud, then explore the following questions together:



- How are these passages similar? How are they different?
- What do these Scriptures say about worshipping God?

Summarize the information from Understanding the Scripture for the participants. Ask: In what ways does our church follow these instructions to the early church? How are we following them in our daily lives? Explain how throughout the two thousand years of Christian history, churches have developed statements of faith to explain how Scripture informs them about following Christ in that time and place. Invite a participant to read the bookmarked question and answer from *The Shorter Catechism*, then say the following:

 We might understand some of the church's reasons in the 1640s for confessing this statement by exploring some Bible passages!

Explain that a concordance is an index to the Bible that enables you to look up almost every word in the Bible to find a list of all the places where that word occurs. Divide the participants into groups of two or three, and make sure each group has a concordance or access to an online concordance. Assign each group to look up one of the following words: *sing*, *song*, *glorify*, *music*, *praise*, *worship*, or *dance*. Give each group a copy of "Fun with a Concordance" (Web Resource 1c) and a pen and ask the students to follow the instructions on the page. After a few minutes, gather the participants back together and give the groups an opportunity to share what they found. Then explore the following questions together:

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- How are all of these Scripture passages similar? How are they different?
 - What can all of these Scripture passages teach us about worshipping God?
 - How do music and singing help followers of Jesus Christ praise and glorify God?
 - Why do you think the church in the 1640s created the confession that we read earlier?



Express

Option A: Creating a Musical Psalm

- Bible, newsprint and markers, collection of musical and rhythm instruments (hand drums, tambourines, kazoos, shakers, wind chimes, and so on)

Post a sheet of newsprint with the words of Psalm 150 written on it in a prominent location.

Gather the participants around the newsprint and give each participant an instrument. Invite one or more participants to serve as the reader(s) for the psalm. Help the group work together to create a rhythmic or musical accompaniment to the psalm by reading the psalm one line at a time and helping the students use their instruments to interpret it musically or rhythmically. Make notations on the newsprint to help the group remember what to do with each line.

Ideas for Creating a Musical Psalm

- If you have young people in your group who play an instrument, find a way to incorporate their instrument into this activity.
- Invite a young person with dramatic speaking experience to read the psalm dramatically while the rest of the group plays the accompaniment.
- Consider dividing up the words of the psalm so different participants say different words and phrases for dramatic effect. Also consider having pairs, small groups, or the entire group say specific words or phrases together for dramatic effect.
- Encourage the young people to develop rhythmic instruments using materials available in the meeting space or in the church building. (For example, two pot lids could serve as cymbals.)

Once the entire psalm accompaniment has been developed, have the group members go through the psalm as if they were presenting it as a gift to God. If possible, present the psalm to another group in the church and consider using the psalm in an upcoming worship service.

Option B: What Helps You Praise God?

- Book of Order* or copy of "Directory for Worship Excerpt" (Web Resource 1d), music player, diverse set of recordings of worshipful songs (such as gospel music from the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir; traditional hymns sung by a congregation or choir; praise music; pipe-organ music; worship music in Korean, Spanish, and other foreign languages), hymnal or songbook regularly used in your congregation's worship service for each participant, newsprint, markers

Discuss with the participants how God's people use different language and types of music to express their praise and glory to God in different cultures, countries, communities, and even neighborhoods. Using the *Book of Order* or "Directory for Worship Excerpt" (Web Resource 1d), give the participants an overview of W-1.2005 and W-1.2006. Be sure to include the following from W-1.2005: "Language proves to be appropriate when a worshipping community can claim it as its own when offering praise and thanksgiving to God."¹

Play the recordings from the diverse set of worship music that you collected. After playing each recording, ask: What about this song helped you glorify and enjoy God, and what about it hindered or distracted you? Help the participants name specific things such as tempo, tone, lyrics, language, rhythm, melody, instrumentation, and so forth. Give each participant a hymnal or songbook and show the group how to use the indexes to find a familiar hymn by topic or by name. Brainstorm together a list of hymns or songs that the group enjoys singing in worship as well as during youth events or privately. Compile all suggestions on newsprint. Lead the participants in a discussion about how these hymns or songs help them glorify and enjoy God. Consider sharing the list of hymns or songs with your congregation's music minister or pastor.

1. From *Book of Order*, Part II of *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*. Copyright © 2007 by the Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Option C: Interview a Worship Leader

- Hymnal or songbook regularly used in your congregation's worship service for each participant, newsprint, markers

Invite someone who is involved in selecting music for your congregation's worship service (a pastor, a worship/music leader, or a member of the worship committee) to come to this part of the session to be interviewed by the youth about worship planning.

Before the interviewee arrives, help the group members brainstorm questions that they have about selecting music, hymns, and songs for worship. Write the questions on newsprint. When the interviewee has arrived, have the youth take turns asking the interviewee the questions on the newsprint. When all of the questions have been discussed, give each participant and the interviewee a hymnal or songbook and show the group how to use the indexes to find a familiar hymn by topic or by name. Help the young people use the hymnals or songbooks to brainstorm a list of hymns or songs that the group enjoys singing in worship as well as during youth events or privately. Write suggested hymns or songs on a sheet of newsprint. Ask the interviewee if the suggestions could be incorporated into worship.



Exit

Option A: Song Litany

- Bibles

Make sure each participant has a Bible, and have the group look up Psalm 57:7–11 together. As a group, create a verbal response or a physical action in response to each line of the psalm. Read the psalm with the corresponding responses or actions and then conclude with the closing prayer.

Option B: Close with Singing

- Hymnal or songbook for each participant

Make sure each participant has a hymnal or songbook. Have the group select a favorite hymn or song and sing it together before praying the closing prayer.

Closing Prayer

*O God who loves music,
and created us to love it too,
we pray in the words from a
hymn of our church:*

*When in our music God
is glorified,
And adoration leaves no
room for pride, It is as
though the whole creation
cried: Alleluia!*

*Let every instrument be tuned
for praise! Let all rejoice
who have a voice to raise!
And may God give us faith
to sing always: Alleluia!
Amen.²*

2. "When in Our Music God Is Glorified." Words: Fred Pratt Green © 1972 Hope Publishing Company, Carol Stream, IL 60188. All rights reserved. Used by permission.



Enhancements

Other Ways to Connect with the Session

Family Connections

"Family Connections" (Web Resource) has a set of discussion questions for each of the four sessions in this course that families can talk about after class. Provide each family with a copy of this resource.

Family Movie Night

Sponsor a family movie night to watch and discuss *Sister Act 2: Back in the Habit* with youth and parents. In *Sister Act 2*, music forms the backdrop for a story about youth, the importance of family, and the coming together of a community ultimately to express the theology they feel led to convey. After viewing the movie, invite participants to talk about the role of music in worship and the role of music in the faith life of a family at home.

Web Connections

E-mail links to online videos of different people or groups singing the same song. (For example, search for the song "Blessed Assurance" and choose different kinds of presentations or performances.) Then begin an online conversation about the difference between performing sacred music and presenting music as praise to God. Help the youth understand that when we focus on God in our music it becomes worship. Emphasize that music tends to become a concert when the musicians are most concerned about their own personal performance.

Spiritual Ringtones

If members of your group have cell phones, help them download a ringtone of a song that is praise-filled or spiritual in nature. Then have them set that ringtone for you and each member of the group. Each time a group member calls another group member, the person who receives the call will be reminded of God's love for him or her through this spiritual ringtone.

Creating Worship Liturgy

One way to link all four sessions of this course together is to write a worship liturgy together as a group. Spend time in each session writing a part of the worship service.

For the first worship planning session, go along with the practice of glorifying God that was explored in this session. Have the group pick the music for the worship service, and focus on the first part of the service, which is "Gathering Around the Word." (See the *Book of Order*, W-3.3300.) This section often includes items such as a prelude, a call to worship, hymns or songs of praise, a prayer of confession, an assurance of forgiveness, a response of praise ("Gloria Patri," for example), and sharing the peace of Christ.

Check pcusa.org/theologyandworship for additional worship resources.