

Sing Liberation

EXODUS 15:1–21

GOAL

Through the songs of Moses and Miriam, participants explore how singing has played a role in movements for liberation throughout history, including today.

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



Visit our YouTube channel, bit.ly/FMYouTubeGFR, for conversation starter videos.

PRAYER

Blessed are you, O God, author of freedom and champion of liberty. May I step boldly after your leadership. Amen.

THIS SESSION

The exodus is a pivotal moment in God’s story of salvation. At such times, speaking is not enough. At the edge of the sea, the people sing. At the threshold between slavery and freedom, fear and hope, death and life, the people sing. At the end of centuries of captivity and the beginning of their pilgrimage to the promised land, the people sing. At such times, speaking is not enough. The story of salvation must be sung.

A revered children’s choir director once said, “Body, mind, spirit, voice: it takes the whole person to sing and rejoice.” Indeed, even non-singers give praise to God and participate in God’s new song. “For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. Be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating” (Isaiah 65:17–18a).

Hymns are a vital part of how we learn, remember, and practice God’s saving story. Songs from Sunday school introduce us to the basic vocabulary and grammar of Christian faith. Hymns in worship flesh out the theological teaching and fill in the biblical narrative. Songs and hymns remain with us throughout the life of discipleship, as music reinforces memory and community. Recalling God’s magnificent acts inspires God’s people and gives confidence to step out in faith, follow Jesus, and champion God’s kingdom: a place of freedom and liberty.

THE BIBLE STORY

Exodus 15:1–21 includes Moses’ and Miriam’s songs of liberation after God led the Israelites across the Red Sea. Their songs mark the end of enslavement and captivity and the beginning of their identity as the people of God. Moses begins the song; the Israelites join in, praising God’s majesty and might. This is not a sentimental ballad, not a love song nor a lullaby. It is a battle hymn, the song of those who have come out of a great ordeal. It reflects real struggle, raw emotion, and great thanksgiving for God’s saving work. The song spills over into dancing as Miriam picks up the refrain, taking up a tambourine; the women join her. The community marks the event, celebrating together with singing and dancing.

SESSION PREPARATION

Depending on the options you choose:

- “Conversation Starter Video” (p. 5): See the Growing Faith Resources YouTube channel, bit.ly/FMYouTubeGFR, for a summary video of this practice and a conversation starter video for each session.

GETTING STARTED

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Welcome participants and allow time for gathering activities particular to your group (*introductions, offering, prayer concerns, and announcements*). Review the “Summary of the Practice” found in the Unit Overview (p. 3). Explain that a more detailed discussion of the practice can be found in the foundational essay that begins on page 47 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Encourage participants to read the essay during the course of the next four sessions.

OPENING RITUAL

Explain that the person who wrote the foundational essay about this practice is a minister and professional musician, David Gambrell. He wrote a new text that may be sung to the tune of “Morning Has Broken” and is used in each session of this practice.

Refer participants to “Sing a New Song” in the box on page 8 of the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Play the familiar tune of “Morning Has Broken,” with accompaniment using music from either bit.ly/FMBunessanTune (click on “Recording” for one verse) or the YouTube video “Giovanni Marradi—Morning Has Broken” (bit.ly/FMBunessanMusic, 3:39), stopping at :50 for one verse. Invite participants to sing along with the music.

Alternatively, use the verse as a responsive reading, saying each line and having participants repeat after you.

INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

CONVERSATION STARTER VIDEO

Show the “*Sing a New Song Practice Overview*” video and the “*Sing Liberation, Session 1*” video from the Growing Faith YouTube channel (bit.ly/FMYouTubeGFR). Lead a brief conversation about participants’ thoughts and questions the videos prompt as you begin the session.

PSALMS, HYMNS, OR SPIRITUAL SONGS?

Refer to the text box on page 7 of the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Invite participants to name varieties of music that they have heard sung in worship. Encourage them to identify their musical preferences. Discuss:

- What types of music do you associate with particular worship experiences?
- How do you feel when you hear new types of music in worship?
- How do you respond when hearing traditional church music outside of a worship setting?

SONGS OF LIBERATION

Use the questions about songs of liberation on page 8 of the *Adult Reflection Guide* for group discussion. Tell participants that they will be exploring biblical and contemporary songs of liberation in this session.

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- This and all sessions require that the leader and participants have their copy of the *Adult Reflection Guide* with them.

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- Internet-connected device

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FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or more options.

Bibles

THE SONG OF MOSES

Have participants read the first paragraph in the section “The Song of Moses” on page 9 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. If participants have seen films depicting the ancient Israelites’ crossing of the Red Sea, invite them to describe the images they recall of this scene. With these in mind, have participants take turns reading aloud Exodus 15:1–18. Discuss the questions on page 10.

Bibles

THE SONG OF MIRIAM

Refer participants to the picture on page 11 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Read aloud Miriam’s Song, Exodus 15:20–21. Reflect on the picture as a depiction of the celebratory dancing of Miriam and the other women. Use the questions on page 11 for discussion.

Bibles

Musical instruments: tambourine, drums, bells (optional)

ENACTING SCRIPTURE

Form two groups. Have both groups read Exodus 15:1–21 and create short skits depicting this story. Group 1 is to tell the story by speaking only, without any singing or dancing. Group 2 tells the story using singing, dance, and musical instruments (if available.) Have the groups present their skits.

Discuss:

- ➔ What did you feel as you told the story?
- ➔ What feelings were expressed when music and dancing were included?
- ➔ How do the songs of Miriam and Moses capture the emotion of their moment of liberation?



One group can prepare the skit twice, once with spoken word and once using musical instruments.

FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or more options.

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Hymnals (optional)

AMAZING GRACE

Invite participants to discuss what the hymn “Amazing Grace” means to them. Refer them to “A Classic Hymn of Liberation” on page 12 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Read the information provided there.

Show the YouTube video “Amazing Grace: The Story behind the Song” (bit.ly/FMAmazingGraceHistory, 14:29). Discuss the questions provided in the *Adult Reflection Guide*.

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WE SHALL OVERCOME

Refer to “American Songs of Liberation” on page 13 of the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Have participants name songs of liberation heard in the United States, both secular songs and hymns sung in worship. Ask:

- ➔ What historical period or events inspired the writing of the songs?
- ➔ What do these songs have in common?

Listen to an audio segment from *All Things Considered*, “The Inspiring Force of ‘We Shall Overcome’” (bit.ly/FMWeShallOvercomeHistory, 8:00).

Discuss:

- ➔ How is “We Shall Overcome” a promise?
- ➔ Why has such a wide variety of musicians sung this song?

- ➔ What other verses have been added to this song? What was the occasion for the additions?

GLORY

Tell participants that, in the twenty-first century, there has been a resurgence of songs of liberation in response to civil unrest, abuse of power, and systemic racism. Contemporary musicians Common and John Legend recorded the song “Glory,” with reference to civil rights challenges in the 1960s and the 2020s.

Show the YouTube video “Common, John Legend—Glory” (bit.ly/FMCommon, 3:08). Invite participants to talk about their reaction to messages in the song. Use the questions on page 13 in the *Adult Reflection Guide* for discussion.

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PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

EXPLORING A HYMNAL

Many hymnals include a variety of indexes or guides to help users find hymns and songs that relate to themes and Scripture. Use a hymnal to show the Table of Contents, topical index, and Scripture index.

With partners or small groups, have participants look through the hymnal and note the way it is organized. Have them locate and choose three hymns with a “Sing Liberation” theme. Encourage them to notice which of these hymns are familiar, are sung regularly in your congregation, or are new to them. Have them read the lyrics and identify the message of liberation in the hymns.

Gather the group and have participants name the hymns they chose. List the titles on newsprint. Display the hymn titles throughout the session.

Hymnals
 Newsprint and markers

USING HYMNARY.ORG

Refer participants to “Practicing the Practice” and “[Hymnary.org](https://www.hymnary.org)” on page 14 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Summarize the information on the page and introduce the use of [Hymnary.org](https://www.hymnary.org) for searching for hymns.

Working in pairs or individually, have participants search for hymns with a “Sing Liberation” theme. Invite them to each select one hymn and gather information about it using [hymnary.org](https://www.hymnary.org). Read the words to the selected hymn and consider its meaning for those who first sang it and for those who sing it now.

Gather participants to report on their selected hymn. List the titles on newsprint and display the list throughout the session.

Internet-connected devices
 Newsprint and markers

 For hymn suggestions, refer to the list of “Hymns of Liberation” on page 15 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*.

LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING

Remind participants that, in the exodus event, Moses led God’s people to freedom by following God’s liberative guidance. Discuss ways people seek to follow God’s liberative guidance today.

Show the YouTube video “Lift Every Voice” (bit.ly/FMLift, 4:30). Ask:

- ➔ How do these lyrics point to God’s work of liberation?
- ➔ What role or activity do people take toward their own liberation?
- ➔ What actions can you take in following God’s lead toward liberation?

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FOLLOWING JESUS

SING LIBERATION REFLECTION

Refer participants to “Following Jesus” on page 16 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Use the paragraph to summarize the value of singing liberation as a faith practice.

Review the list of “Sing Liberation” hymns and select one. Encourage participants to reflect on this hymn in the coming week. Distribute hymnals and have participants locate the selected hymn. Read one or more verses together to close the session.