

# Worship *and* Song *and* Praise



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Ps. 32:1–5; 1 Chron. 51:1–6, 17; 1 Chron. 16:8–36; Rev. 4:9–11; 5:9–13; Phil. 4:8.*

**Memory Text:** “O sing unto the Lord a new song: sing unto the Lord, all the earth” (*Psalms 96:1*).

**K**ing David's life is recorded in the Bible for many reasons: not only does an important part of Israelite history center on his life and reign, but we can learn many spiritual lessons from him, both from his good deeds and his bad.

This week we will start out using some examples from David and his life in order to delve more into the question of worship: what it means, how we should do it, and what it should do for us. For in David we can see many examples of worship and song and praise. These things were a crucial part of his life and of his experience with the Lord.

Thus, it must be with us, as well, especially if we constantly remember that the first angel's message is a call to worship. What does it mean “to worship”? How do we do it? Why do we do it? What role does music play in worship? What distinguishes true worship from false worship?

These all are themes that we will touch on in various ways this quarter as we heed the call: “O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand” (*Ps. 95:6, 7*).

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 6.*

## Between Saul and David

**Read** the following glimpses into David's life before he became king: 1 Samuel 16:6–13, 17:45–47, 18:14, 24:10, 26:9, 30:6–8. What does this tell us about David?

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God chose Saul as the first king of Israel because he matched the description the people had requested. But when God chose David to be the next king of Israel, He reminded Samuel that the Lord looks on the heart (*1 Sam. 16:7*).

David was far from being perfect. In fact, some would argue that David's later moral lapses were much more serious than Saul's sins. Yet, the Lord rejected Saul but forgave even David's worst mistakes, allowing him to continue being king. What made the difference?

**See** Psalms 32:1–5, 51:1–6. What crucial concept is found in these texts that is so central to faith?

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God is in the heart business. He not only reads the heart—the center of thought, inner attitudes, and motives—but He can touch and change hearts that are open to Him. David's heart yielded to the conviction of sin. He repented, and he patiently accepted the consequences of his sins. In contrast, whatever outward confessions Saul made, it was clear that his heart was not surrendered to the Lord. "Yet the Lord, having placed on Saul the responsibility of the kingdom, did not leave him to himself. He caused the Holy Spirit to rest upon Saul to reveal to him his own weakness and his need of divine grace; and had Saul relied upon God, God would have been with him. So long as his will was controlled by the will of God, so long as he yielded to the discipline of His Spirit, God could crown his efforts with success. But when Saul chose to act independently of God, the Lord could no longer be his guide, and was forced to set him aside."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 636.

**Ask yourself, how does what goes on inside your heart differ from what people see of you on the outside? What does your answer say to you about yourself?**

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## A Broken Heart, a Broken Spirit

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise” (*Ps. 51:17, NKJV*). Think about these words of David, but in the context of worship. (After all, in ancient Israel, worship centered around the sacrifice.) Realize, too, that the word translated “contrite” comes from a Hebrew word that means “crushed.” What is the Lord saying to us here? How are we to understand this idea along with the idea that there should be joy in our worship? Why are these two contrasting concepts not necessarily contradictory?

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As Christians, we take it as a given (or at least we should) that all of humanity is fallen, sinful, degraded. This degradation and sinfulness includes each one of us, individually. Think of the contrast between what you know you could be and what you are; the contrast between the kind of thoughts you think and the kind you know that you should think; the contrast between what you do and what you should do, between what you do not do and what you know that you should. As Christians, with the biblical standard of Jesus before us, the personal realization of our true nature can be especially devastating. This is where our broken spirit and crushed and broken hearts come from. If those professing to be Christians do not see this, they are truly blind; most likely they have not had a conversion experience or have lost it.

Yet, the joy comes from knowing that, despite our fallen state, God loves us so much that Christ came and died, offering Himself for us, and that His perfect life, His perfect holiness, His perfect character, becomes credited to us by faith. Again, the theme of the “everlasting gospel” (*Rev. 14:6*) appears. Our worship should center not just on our own sinfulness but on God’s amazing solution to it: the Cross. Of course, we need that broken and crushed heart, but we always need to frame that sad reality against the background of what God has done for us in Christ. In fact, the realization of how bad we are leads to joy, because we know that, despite our state, we can have eternal life anyway, and that because of Jesus, God will not count our transgressions against us. This is a truth that must always be at the center of all worship experiences, whether corporate or private.

## David: A Song of Praise and Worship

David's understanding of God and the salvation He offered shaped not only his own life but his spiritual leadership and influence over his people. His songs and prayers reflect a deep sense of awe for the God he loved and knew as a personal friend and Savior.

According to 1 Chronicles 16:7, David presented to Asaph, his chief musician, a new song of thanksgiving and praise on the day that the ark was moved to Jerusalem. This praise psalm consists of two important aspects of worship: the revelation of God as One worthy of worship and the appropriate response of the worshiper. In this song, David first calls worshipers to active participation in worship.

Read the entire song in 1 Chronicles 16:8–36. Notice how often the following action words and expressions are used, especially in the first part of the song: *give thanks, sing, call on His name, seek the Lord, make known, talk of, declare, give glory to, proclaim, remember, and bring an offering*. David then recited some of the reasons why God is worthy of our praise and worship.

**What** were some of the events of the past that the people of Israel were to make known to others? *1 Chron. 16:8, 12, 16–22*. What special acts of God were they to remember? *Vss. 12, 15*.

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**The** psalmist's rehearsal of the covenant takes up nearly a third of this thanksgiving hymn. In what way does the covenant relate to worship?

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The covenant God made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was based on His ability, as their Ruler, to make them a great nation, to bless them, and to bring them into the Promised Land. Their part was to love, obey, and worship Him as their Father and God. However different our context today may be, the same principle still holds.

**Meditate on the ways David calls us to worship God. In our own time, place, and context, how can these same ideas be reflected in our corporate worship of the Lord?**

## David's Song

**“When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy”** (*Job 38:7*).

Second Samuel 22 records a song that David wrote in praise of the Lord. (Skim through the song and note the key elements and how they are linked to worship.) The key point here, and in so many other places in the Bible, is that this was a song. It was music. All through Scripture, we find music as an integral part of worship. According to the text above, the angels sang in response to the creation of the world.

**Read Revelation 4:9–11, 5:9–13, 7:10–12, 14:1–3. What does this tell us about some things that go on in the sinless environment of heaven? What are some of the themes expressed here, and what can we learn from them about worship?**

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Central to the theme of the songs and praise and adoration is Jesus as Creator and as Redeemer. If they sing about that in heaven, how much more so should we be doing that here on earth?

There is no question that song and music and praise are part of our worship experience. As creatures made in God's image, we share a love and an appreciation for music, as do other intelligent beings. It is hard to imagine a culture that does not use music in some way or another, for some purpose or another. Love and appreciation of music are woven into the very fabric of our human existence; God surely made us that way.

Music has the power to touch us and move us that other forms of communication do not seem to have. At its purest and finest, music seems to lift us into the very presence of the Lord. Who has not experienced, at some point, the power of music to bring us closer to our Maker?

**What has been your own spiritual experience with the power of music? What kind of music do you listen to, and how does it impact your relationship with the Lord?**

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## “Sing a New Song to the Lord!”

Unfortunately, though we have access to some of the themes and lyrics of divinely inspired songs, we do not have any of the music itself. Thus, using our God-given gifts (at least, those of us who have those gifts), we write our own music if not always our own lyrics. But as we all know, we do not do this in a vacuum. We worship in relationship to the culture we live in, a culture that to some degree influences us and our music. This can be a good thing, or this can be a bad thing. The hard thing is to know the difference.

**Read** the following texts. How can they give us principles that should guide us in the kind of music we have in our worship? *1 Cor. 10:31, Phil. 4:8, Col. 1:18.*

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Over the years, the question of music and types of music in worship has arisen in our church. In some cases, hymnal music has been given all but sacred status; in others, it is hard to tell the difference between what is being played in church and what is being played as secular music.

What is important for worship music is that it point us to the noblest and the best, which is the Lord. It should appeal, not to the baser elements of our being but to the higher ones. Music is not morally neutral: it can move us to some of the most exalted spiritual experiences, or it can be used by the enemy to debase and degrade us, to bring out lusts and passion and despair and anger. All one has to do is look at what some of the music industry today produces to see powerful examples of how Satan has perverted another of God’s wonderful gifts to humanity.

Music in our worship services should have a balance of spiritual, intellectual, and emotional elements. The lyrics, in harmony with the music itself, should uplift us, elevate our thoughts, and make us long more for the Lord who has done so much for us. Music that can bring us to the foot of the cross, that can help us realize what we have been given in Christ, is the kind we need for our worship.

Again, various cultures have different tastes in music, and music and musical instruments vary in our worldwide family. What is uplifting and encouraging to those in one culture might sound strange to those in another. Either way, how important it is that we seek the Lord’s guidance in having appropriate music for our worship services.

**Further Study:** “Let the subject be made distinct and plain that it is not possible to effect anything in our standing before God or in the gift of God to us through creature merit. Should faith and works purchase the gift of salvation for anyone, then the Creator is under obligation to the creature. Here is an opportunity for falsehood to be accepted as truth. If any man can merit salvation by anything he may do, then he is in the same position as the Catholic to do penance for his sins. Salvation, then, is partly of debt, that may be earned as wages. If man cannot, by any of his good works, merit salvation, then it must be wholly of grace, received by man as a sinner because he receives and believes in Jesus. It is wholly a free gift. Justification by faith is placed beyond controversy. And all this controversy is ended, as soon as the matter is settled that the merits of fallen man in his good works can never procure eternal life for him.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, pp. 19, 20.

Music “is one of the most effective means of impressing the heart with spiritual truth. How often to the soul hard pressed and ready to despair, memory recalls some word of God’s—the long-forgotten burden of a childhood song—and temptations lose their power, life takes on new meaning and new purpose, and courage and gladness are imparted to other souls! . . .

“As a part of religious service, singing is as much an act of worship as is prayer. Indeed, many a song is prayer. . . .

“As our Redeemer leads us to the threshold of the Infinite, flushed with the glory of God, we may catch the themes of praise and thanksgiving from the heavenly choir round about the throne; and as the echo of the angels’ song is awakened in our earthly homes, hearts will be drawn closer to the heavenly singers. Heaven’s communion begins on earth. We learn here the keynote of its praise.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 168.

## Discussion Questions:

- ❶ In what ways do your culture and society impact the music in your church, or do you deny that it does?
- ❷ Read the Ellen White quote in Friday’s study about music. How much of this do you experience with the kind of music that is part of your church’s worship service? What are ways that we can evaluate the role of music in our church services? How can your church members work together to make sure that the music is, indeed, uplifting and encouraging, fulfilling the role that it should?

# Stubborn Faith

by JOANNE LAFEVER

“What? You’re not going to attend the study session on Friday night!” Wa Wa’s English teacher, Mr. Peter, almost shouted at her. Wa Wa studied hard throughout high school, and ranked near the top of her class. But she loved God more than grades, and she had great faith that He would help her pass her tests so she could study at a good university.

The pressure to score well on tests mounted as Wa Wa entered her last year of high school. Teachers offered extra study sessions to help their best students score even higher. High test scores brought prestige to the schools and increased students’ chances to enter their choice of universities. Mr. Peter noticed when Wa Wa didn’t attend study sessions on Friday evenings or Saturdays. He encouraged her, pleaded with her, and even scolded her in an attempt to get her to attend the sessions. But she refused.

“No, on Sabbath, from sundown Friday till sundown on Saturday, I worship my God,” she told her teacher. Wa Wa was positive that God would help her do well on her tests if she was faithful to Him.

Eventually, Mr. Peter realized that he couldn’t change her mind. He respected her determination, though he didn’t understand her religion.

When Wa Wa’s classmates learned of her refusal, they were shocked. But they, too, saw Wa Wa’s determination and accepted her decision to skip study sessions.

When the students’ test scores arrived, Wa Wa had scored in the top 10 percent of her class, even without the additional study sessions. Her teachers were shocked. Her classmates were shocked. “You haven’t studied nearly enough to do this well!” some said.

But Wa Wa wasn’t shocked. “I trust in God,” she told them. “He is a powerful God. I knew that He would help me.”

Wa Wa was accepted at a good university near her home in Taipei, Taiwan. She testifies to her classmates and teachers that God is leading in her life. And she continues to keep the Sabbath and worship God rather than attend classes and study sessions on His holy day.

One in every 4,300 people in Taiwan is a Seventh-day Adventist. Among the ethnic Chinese, only 1 in every 25,000 is an Adventist. Our mission offerings help spread the message of God’s love through the Adventist hospital, Adventist schools, health programs, and local evangelistic outreach in this nation.

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