

Sing for Joy

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Chapter 1

Sing for Joy

1.1 Introduction

Music has always been a significant part of culture and worship. While music has progressed from chants, to standardized music writing, to now instantly sending recording around the world, it's ability to affect people has remained.

Throughout the bible we are given passages describing the importance of shouting and song as part of worship.

¹Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord;
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.

²Let us come before him with thanksgiving
and extol him with music and song.
(Psalms 95:1–2)

¹Praise the Lord.
Praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in his mighty heavens.

²Praise him for his acts of power;
praise him for his surpassing greatness.

³Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,

praise him with the harp and lyre,

⁴praise him with timbrel and dancing,
praise him with the strings and pipe,

⁵praise him with the clash of cymbals,
praise him with resounding cymbals.

⁶Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord. (Psalms 150:1–6)

¹⁹speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, ²⁰always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(Ephesians 5:19–20)

1.2 Notes

And while music is not the only way to worship (often we treat the two as synonyms), music is certainly a part of worship. We don't need to be musicians to make music for Christ. We don't need to be producers to make music for Christ. We don't even need to sing on key to make music for Christ. All of the music we make in this life will be an imperfect worship. The harps and lyres we use won't be perfectly tuned, the intonation of the guitars and horns will be off, and the tempo of the timbrel and cymbals won't be perfect.

This study is meant to take a look at specifically at the music of our worship. The music has changed throughout history in both timbre and lyrical meaning. We also have to remember that the songs were written by other imperfect humans driven by the Holy Spirit. Hopefully looking through these songs allows us to look at Christ, and our personal relationship with him in different light.

We often say that music or ideas 'resonate' with us. The concept of resonating has to do with instruments. When you have two strings of a guitar tuned to the same note, plucking one string will cause the other to start vibrating. The more similar the notes are, the more they vibrate together. That's what happens when we hear ideas that 'resonate' with us. We don't know exactly what notes or ideas our heart strings are tuned to, but by plucking other strings we can resonate our heart strings. Throughout this study, look for ideas that resonate with you.

1.3 Questions

- How significant is music in your life and worship?
- When you think of worship music, what comes to mind?

Chapter 2

Amazing Grace

John Newton

2.1 Background

John Newton (1725-1807), most well known for writing this hymn, had anything but a straightforward path to Jesus. Having grown up with a shipmaster, Newton grew to join a merchant ship sailing the Mediterranean, and eventually sent into the Royal Navy.

Then, after being rescued following his crew deserting him in West Africa, Newton had his meeting with God. He woke during the voyage back to England to a severe storm. He prayed for God's mercy, and the storm began to die down. From that day on Newton began his conversion to Christianity.

While shortly after accepting the doctrines of the evangelical church (March 10, 1748), he would say his true conversion was later: "I cannot consider myself to have been a believer in the full sense of the word, until a considerable time afterwards."

Newton would soon become part of the slave trade, making several voyages until 1754, and even after leaving the seafairing he continued to invest in the slave operations. Though he eventually grew more and more sympathetic for the slaves.

In 1778, he broke his silence on the subject, and began working towards the abolition of slavery. He apologized for "a confession, which... comes too late... It will always be a subject of humiliating reflection to me, that I was once an active instrument in a business at which my heart now shudders." And one year later, *Amazing Grace* was published.

2.2 Lyrics

Amazing grace! (how sweet the sound)
That sav'd a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears reliev'd;

How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believ'd!

Thro' many dangers, toils, and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promis'd good to me,
His word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures.

Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease;
I shall possess, within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,
The sun forbear to shine;
But God, who call'd me here below,
Will be forever mine.

2.3 Verses

¹⁶Then King David went in and sat before the Lord, and he said:

"Who am I, Lord God, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?"

¹⁷And as if this were not enough in your sight, my God, you have spoken about the future of the house of your servant. You, Lord God, have looked on me as though I were the most exalted of men.

¹⁸"What more can David say to you for honoring your servant? For you know your servant, ¹⁹Lord. For the sake of your servant and according to your will, you have done this great thing and made known all these great promises.

(2 Chronicles 17:16-19)

¹²I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, ¹³though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, ¹⁴and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. ¹⁶But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. ¹⁷To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. (1 Timothy 1:12–17)

2.4 Notes

Paul and Newton give us a look at how much grace God has. If we need more of a look at how much grace God has, we can look back at what Paul (previously Saul) had done.

¹And Saul approved of their killing him. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. ²Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. ³But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison. (Acts 8:1–3)

It is easy for us to look at these men and say how wicked they were. And in doing so, we often then compare their sins to ours. We can confidently say, “If God can save these wicked men, surely He can save me.” But that is completely missing the point. Nowhere do we see God saying, “for all have sinned, but some have sinned more than others.” Rather we see,

²¹But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known,

to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²²This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

(Romans 3:21–24)

The slave trader, the killer of God’s people, and I are equally broken in the eyes of the Lord. By considering other sin as worse than ours, we are downplaying the severity of our sin. For the wage of *all* sin is death.

2.5 Questions

- What lyrics or verses stood out to you? Why?
- Do you find yourself downplaying your own sin?

Chapter 3

Make My Life a Prayer to You

Keith Green

3.1 Background

Keith Gordon Green (October 21, 1953 – July 28, 1982) was an American pianist, singer, and songwriter in the contemporary Christian music genre, who was originally from Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn, New York. Constantly questioning who or what is God led him to the eastern mysticism movement and drugs of the 70's. After a bad trip, he swore off drugs and began searching for God in the last place left, Jesus.

Keith strived to preach the True Gospel. His lyrics and performances convicted and transformed. He cared only about preaching the Gospel in the purest form, regardless of whether people would like him for it. His album titles show his motives clearly, *For Him Who Has Ears to Hear*, *No Compromise*, and songs like *Asleep in the Light*, and *Soften Your Heart*.

The Lord took Keith home at 28 in a plane crash, along with his two oldest children, and leaving his then pregnant wife Melody Green and their third child.

3.2 Lyrics

Make my life a prayer to You
I wanna do what you want me to
No empty words and no white lies
No token prayers no compromise

I wanna shine the light You gave
Through Your Son You sent to save us
From ourselves and our despair
It comforts me to know You're really there

Well I wanna thank you know
For being patient with me
Oh it's so hard to see
When my eyes are on me
I guess I'll have to trust
And just believe what You say

Oh you're coming again
Coming to take me away

I wanna die and let You give
Your life to me so I might live
And share the hope You gave me
The love that set me free

I wanna tell the world out there
You're not some fable or fairy tale
That I've made up inside my head
You're God the Son and You've risen from the dead

3.3 Verses

¹Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ²Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

(Romans 12:1–2)

²⁴Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. ²⁶What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ²⁷For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done. (Matthew 16:24–27)

²⁰I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have suffi-

cient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

(Philippians 1:20–21)

3.4 Notes

It is easy for us to not go *all in* for Christ. It is the norm to prioritize your career, family, or even hobbies over Jesus. Often times we try and figure out how to make more time for Jesus in our day. We will say, “If I just get up 20 minutes earlier I can have more quiet time with God”, or we can say “I’ll start going to another bible study on Thursday nights”, but both are missing the point. God doesn’t want a bigger piece of the pie. God wants the whole thing. It’s not about making a larger slot in your calendar for Christ. We should strive to make sure that every part of our calendar is working for His glory.

3.5 Questions

- What lyrics or verses stood out to you? Why?
- Is there something holding you back from giving Jesus your *entire* life? Not just Sunday morning, Wednesday evenings, Christmas, and Easter, but rather every day.
- What is a tangible step you could take that would make more of your life for Christ?

Chapter 4

Be My Escape

Relient K

4.1 Background

Relient K was formed in 1998 by Matt Thiessen, Matt Hoopes, and Brian Pittman. Their alt-rock, pop punk style is different than traditional Christian music, but this change in genre opened doors that many Christian artists don't have. While having accolades like Grammy nominations and Dove awards, they still were able to play at secular concerts like Warped Tour and be a light in dark places.

Bringing up-beat teen angst lyrics mixed with Christian undertones allowed them to spread through pop culture. Songs like *Sadie Hawkins Dance*, and *Who I Am Hates Who I've Been* were able to draw in all audiences, that many Christian artists can leave out.

Throughout the years the band gained and lost members, and as of 2022 Matt Thiessen and Matt Hoopes remain.

4.2 Lyrics

I've given up on giving up slowly,
I'm blending in so you won't even know me
Apart from this whole world that shares my fate
This one last bullet you mention is my one last
shot at redemption
Because I know to live you must give your life
away

And I've been housing all this doubt and
insecurity and
I've been locked inside that house all the while
You hold the key
And I've been dying to get out and that might be
the death of me
And even though, there's no way in knowing
Where to go, promise I'm going because
I gotta get outta here
I'm stuck inside this rut that I fell into by mistake

I gotta get outta here
And I'm begging you, I'm begging you, I'm
begging you to be my escape.

I'm giving up on doing this alone now
'Cause I've failed and I'm ready to be shown how
He's told me the way and I'm trying to get there
And this life sentence that I'm serving
I admit that I'm every bit deserving
But the beauty of grace is that it makes life not
fair

I am a hostage to my own humanity
Self detained and forced to live in this mess I've
made
And all I'm asking is for you to do what You can
with me
But I can't ask You to give what You already gave

I fought you for so long
I should have let you in
Oh how we regret those things we do
And all I was trying to do was save my own skin
But so were you

So were you

4.3 Verses

²⁸"Come to me, all you who are weary and
burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take
my yoke upon you and learn from me, for
I am gentle and humble in heart, and you
will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke
is easy and my burden is light."

(Matthew 11:28–30)

³His divine power has given us every-
thing we need for a godly life through our
knowledge of him who called us by his
own glory and goodness. ⁴Through these
he has given us his very great and pre-
cious promises, so that through them you

may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. (2 Peter 1:3–4)

4.4 Notes

Matthew tells us that God gives us rest. He is our escape from the wearies of this world. We are constantly and painfully beaten down by the stress of our jobs, hardship from family relationships, strain from social relationship, and pain from societal issues. The world demands us to live in an ungodly way to be ‘successful’. Instead of demanding us to run the rat race, God gives us His grace. He is, and will always be, our eternal escape.

4.5 Question

- What are some of the worldly things that are weighing on you?
- What are some ways that God is our escape from these worldly things?
- What are some tangible ways to acknowledge God as our escape?

Chapter 5

Worship From A Wretch

Front Porch Step

5.1 Background

Front Porch Step is the solo project of Ohio native Jake McElfresh. His first studio album in 2013 *Aware* focused on love, loss, and angst, and pushed Front Porch Step onto the big stage. Though while riding the wave of popularity allegations of sexual harassment forced him to take a step back from the lime light and lose his record label.

After a hiatus, he returned, but this time with conviction, not just for what he had done, but for who he was as a sinful person. His second album *I Never Loved Before I Found You* maintained the edgy lyrics, but focused on looking into himself at his own sinfulness while looking at how great God is.

5.2 Lyrics

Teach me how to worship you for who you are
Not for the feelings that I claim are in my heart
No flashing lights. No attractive schemes
Your beauty stretches out beyond my wildest dreams

Teach me how to worship you with all my soul
Not to impress in fear that I'll look like a fool
If I lift my hands, or if I'm on my knees
Help me make your praises be the only words I speak

No repetitious lines that claim a love for the divine
Then change my mind when I walk out the door
Jesus, help me find the plank to pull out of my eye
So I can do the work you built me for

Jesus, help me worship you because you are
Teach me discipline and let it steer my heart
If someone next to me, can't even sing on key
Let my heart be joyful that they're singing to my king

Lord, I'm a wretched man, that should take all the pain
But you let them murder you so I'd become a saint
Forgive me for my trespasses, forgive me for my sins
Teach me how to die each day so I can truly live
No search for hope in vain in these self help books that can't help a thing
Cause you're the only thing worth living for
So break this wretch apart. Create in me a clean heart
And kill the awful man I was before
Teach me how to love a soul while hating sin
And praise your name until my flesh is dust again
Make me a faithful servant and a joyful slave
Help me give my life to serve the one who's life you gave

5.3 Verses

¹⁴“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. ¹⁵I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! ¹⁶So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. ¹⁸I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

(Revelation 3:14–18)

¹⁰Hear the word of the Lord,
 you rulers of Sodom;
 listen to the instruction of our God,
 you people of Gomorrah!

¹¹“The multitude of your sacrifices—
 what are they to me?” says the Lord.
 “I have more than enough of burnt offerings,
 of rams and the fat of fattened animals;
 I have no pleasure
 in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.
¹²When you come to appear before me,
 who has asked this of you,
 this trampling of my courts?
¹³Stop bringing meaningless offerings!
 Your incense is detestable to me.
 New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—
 I cannot bear your worthless assemblies.
¹⁴Your New Moon feasts and your appointed festivals
 I hate with all my being.
 They have become a burden to me;
 I am weary of bearing them.
¹⁵When you spread out your hands in prayer,
 I hide my eyes from you;
 even when you offer many prayers,
 I am not listening.
 Your hands are full of blood!

¹⁶Wash and make yourselves clean.
 Take your evil deeds out of my sight;
 stop doing wrong.
¹⁷Learn to do right; seek justice.
 Defend the oppressed.
 Take up the cause of the fatherless;
 plead the case of the widow.
 (Isaiah 1:10–17)

an hour-long service, and call themselves members of the Church.”

We often can remove the love for God in our worship. We become callous in a repetitious ritual, and lose sight of why we worship. Worship without love is not worship at all.

5.5 Questions

- How do you feel about the God saying “Stop bringing meaningless offerings!” in Isaiah 1:13?
- Which lyrics stood out to you? Which lyrics seem to encapsulate the idea of half-hearted worship?
- There are few things in our life that we consistently do for our entire lives. For Christians who have accepted Christ a while back, how do you keep your heart from being callous, and for the newer Christians, do you find yourself becoming callous to the Glory of God?

5.4 Notes

In the book, *Letters to the Church*, Francis Chan writes,

“We Live in a time when people go to a building on Sunday mornings, attend