

## **Are You Not Entertained?**

I know time is flying by way too fast. I was going to start by mentioning a movie that had come out a while back, but it turns out it was 24 years ago. The movie I was going to mention is titled, “Gladiator.” It starred Russel Crowe as Roman General Maximus Decimus Meridius. It was on TV yesterday.

His character is betrayed in becoming the Emperor by the Emperor’s true son, Commodus (who is played by Juaquin Phoenix.) Commodus has Maximus hauled off to the woods to be executed, but as Maximus was a true warrior, he kills his executioners and survives but is wounded in the process. Left for dead, he wakes up to find that he has been captured by a slave trader who trains gladiators for the arena.

He rebels at first but realizes, his revenge against Commodus (who is now Emperor), may be possible as they may go to Rome to compete. In one arena fight scene, Maximus kills several opponents. After he is victorious, he takes his sword and throws it at the crowd and yells, “Are you not entertained!” His disdain is apparent for those in the stands watching the carnage.

The Cambridge Dictionary defines “Entertain as “to keep a group of people interested or enjoying themselves.”

I know you are thinking, where are you going with this one? The thoughts on this came from discussions we have had the past couple of weeks in our young adult group. Both Kristina and Troy were the sources to throw them under the bus. Sorry guys, but I am proud of you for bringing this up (**Matthew 21:16**). The focus was on the content of our Praise and Worship music. It was pointed out that many of the songs we sing do not praise nor worship God but rather focus on the self, *our* needs and what God can do for us. A spirited discussion followed and included playing videos of several hymns and looking at the content. There is a stark difference between praising and worshipping God and singing songs that entertain us. I wonder if God gets annoyed with us for entertaining ourselves rather than praise and worship Him?

While most of the music is enjoyable and the songs are not evil in any intent, the lyrics do not reflect the love and admiration for God. When the words of a song use “I” and “me” extensively and do not glorify God, it really is not praising Him. Even in some of the lyrics, they do not capitalize **G**od or **J**esus when they are mentioned. This may be an oversight but when anyone addresses God with a small “g,” it should catch our attention right away. Satan is referred to as “the god of this world,” with a small “g.” David killed Goliath because he insulted our God. Is this small thing disrespecting God? I am sure He will let you know some day. When we remember Who we are singing to, what we sing should be a major focus. As not to

cause anyone any concern, it may be time to revisit this topic as we covered it a couple of years ago.

“For thus says the LORD, “Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations. Cry out, give praise and say, ‘O LORD, save Your people, the remnant of Israel.’”- **Jeremiah 31:7**

We do it every week. We have all done it in some form or another in every church service and denomination we have ever attended. I am referring to praise and worship. With the numerous churches I have attended in my life, I have seen a variety of formats and displays of praise and worship. When we were in Tennessee for Tabernacles one year and even visiting Fred Coulter in Hollister, California, they had song books of hymns.

Personally, I have seen the monotonous recital of a Catholic missal (no not an ICBM), to a near Rockettes performance by a choir with tambourines and dancing in the isles. Then there is the Pentecostals who continue in the same verse or melody repeatedly until they are successful in “calling down the spirit” like God’s Holy Spirit is kept in a box until it is needed to edify the group. Or their efforts further yield someone in the congregation to “speak in tongues” or “prophecy in

the spirit” in some form of babbling gibberish. If they really get the spirit out of the box, someone else in the congregation may give an “interpretation” of the gibberish everyone heard.

Chauncey and I have both witnessed folks at The Haitian Church in Immokalee singing their hearts out playing sour notes on a busted organ. I am sure The Lord smiled on their effort from their hearts but to anyone else, it was likened to a cat in a blender. So, what is praise and worship? Why do we do it and does God really hear us?

According to the Free On-line Dictionary, **Praise** is defined as: “to glorify, exalt, acclamation, compliment.” **Worship** is defined as: “the reverent love and devotion accorded to a deity, an idol, or a sacred object.” Of course, we are only concerned with praising and worshipping our Creator and Sovereign God.

### **Why Praise and Worship?**

If we pause to think about the “why” we praise God, just hold your breath. After about 30 seconds and on towards a minute or two, if you do not pass out, you will burst from trying and suck in that life giving air we all need for life.

“Then the LORD God formed man *of the* dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”- **Genesis 2:7**

**Genesis 6:17-** “And behold, I, even I am bringing a flood of waters upon the earth in order to destroy all flesh—in which *is* the breath of life—from under heaven. Everything which *is* upon the earth shall die.”

**Genesis 7:15-** “And they went to Noah into the ark, two *by* two of all flesh in which is the breath of life.”

**Genesis 7:22-** “*And* all who breathed the breath of life, of all that *was* upon the dry land—died.”

**Job 33:4-** “The Spirit of God has made me, and the *breath of the Almighty gives me life.*”

Beginning with Him giving us the breath of life, everything after that is a bonus. But only our God could go beyond just merely giving us life, He gave us His only Son Who died for our sins adding the hope and promises of eternal life in His

Kingdom. He gave us Prayer, His Holy Spirit, His Sabbaths, His Holy Days, and His Commandments. He is most worthy to be Praised.

**2 Samuel 22:4-** “I will call upon the LORD, *Who is* worthy to be praised. And I shall be saved from my enemies.”

**Psalm 18:3-** “I will call on the LORD, Who is worthy to be praised, so shall I be saved from my enemies.”

**Revelation 4:11-** “Worthy are You, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power because You did create all things, and for Your will they were created and exist.”

This is quite a brief list, but I am glad we will have all eternity to praise and thank Him for the infinite blessings He bestows upon His children.

The Free On-line Dictionary defines “worthy” as: Having worth, merit, or value: a worthy cause. Honorable, admirable, a worthy fellow. Having sufficient worth deserving, worthy to be revered, worthy of acclaim.

Knowing the way Jesus gave His life for us and endured the shame and crucifixion upon the cross, this definition while complete, falls short of just how worthy He truly is.

Just think about that for a moment. The Creator of all things chose to give up all His Divine power and become human to reunite mankind with God. The pain, suffering, and humiliation He endured for us and the horrible death on the cross, should not that make us even more determined to make sure we are truly worshipping and praising Him in the way He deserves? Singing songs to make us feel good should not be the reason we sing. Save those for the shower or driving in your car.

We worship Him because we love Him first!

**Matthew 22:36-38-** “Master, which commandment *is the* great commandment in the Law?” And Jesus said to him,” ‘You shall love *the* Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is *the* first and greatest commandment;”

**Psalms 96:1-9-** “O sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. Sing to the LORD, bless His name; proclaim His salvation from day to day.

Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all people, For the LORD is great, and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods, For all the gods of the nations are idols; but the LORD made the heavens. Honor and majesty are before Him; strength and beauty are in His sanctuary. Ascribe to the LORD, O you kindreds of the people; give to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due to His name; bring an offering and come into His courts. O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness; tremble before Him, all the earth.”

### **Glorifying God**

We *glorify* God through our praises. To *glorify* means to give glory, honor, high praise or exalt.

**Psalm 86:12-** “I will *praise* You, O LORD my God, with all my heart, and I will *glorify* Your name forevermore,”

**Psalm 22:23-** “You who fear the LORD, praise Him; all of you, the seed of Jacob, glorify Him; and stand in awe of Him all of you, the seed of Israel,”



**Luke 18:43-** “And immediately he received sight; and he followed Him, *glorifying* God. Now after seeing this, all the people gave *praise* to God.”

**1 Chronicles 16:35-36-** “And say, ‘Save us, O God of our salvation, and gather us, and deliver us from the nations, so that we may give thanks to Your holy name, *and glory* in Your *praise*. Blessed *be* the LORD God of Israel forever and ever.’ And all the people said, ‘Amen, and *praised* the LORD.’”

**Isaiah 43:21-** “This people *that* I formed for Myself; they shall declare My *praise*.”

It is apparent that praise and glorify are two sides of the same coin.

Praising God is a frequent theme in the Psalms, the Hebrew title of which is "Praises." Yet praise is a theme that saturates all of Scripture. From Genesis to Revelation, direct and indirect praise can be found in Exodus, 2 Samuel, Isaiah, Daniel, Ephesians, Revelation, but particularly throughout the Psalms. Many of the synonyms of praise we have already mentioned (bless, exalt, glorify, magnify, etc.) are also used. ***Praising God calls attention to His glory.***

We usually begin our fellowship by playing a few songs or hymns as music has been used for centuries, especially in praise and worship. There is a book by William Law, titled “A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life.” Law was an 18<sup>th</sup> century minister in the Church of England. In a brief excerpt from chapter 15, he writes: “You are to consider this singing of a song as a necessary beginning of your devotions, as something that is to awaken all that is good and holy within you. That is, to call your spirit to its proper duty, to set you in your best posture toward heaven, and tune all the powers of your soul to worship and adoration. For there is nothing that so clears a way for your prayers, nothing that so disperses dullness of heart, nothing that so purifies the soul from poor and little passions, nothing that so opens heaven or carries your heart so near it as these songs of praise. They create a sense and delight in God, to awaken holy desires, they *teach* you how to ask, and they prevail with God to give. They kindle a holy flame, they turn your heart into an altar, your prayers into incense, and carry them as a sweet-smelling savor to the throne of grace. A man singing of a song though not in a very musical way, may yet sufficiently answer all the ends of rejoicing in and praising God. Our Savior and the Apostle, sang a hymn, but it may be reasonably supposed that they rejoiced in God, rather than made fine music.”

God knows our heart. ***This cannot be emphasized enough.***

**Psalm 44:21-** “Shall not God search this out? For **He knows** the secrets of the heart.”

If we are truly seeking to see things through God’s Eyes, we should also endeavor to hear things through His Ears. Growing in our relationship with Him on that personal level will open both our eyes and ears.

We will be praising God for *all* eternity and continuing to learn as well.

**Rev. 5:12-13-** “Saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb Who was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory and blessing.” “And every creature that is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and those that are on the sea, and all the things in them, I heard saying, “To Him Who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, *be* blessing, and honor, and glory, and sovereignty *into the ages of eternity.*”

In His Kingdom, we will continue to learn forever.

**Ephesians 3:18-21-** “*And* that being rooted and grounded in love, you may be fully able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the breadth and length and depth and height, And to know the love of Christ, which surpasses *human*

knowledge; so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him Who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that is working in us, To Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all generations, *even* into the ages of eternity. This is an excellent focus on why we sing songs as praise unto God.

### **The Influence of Music**

Music is a powerful medium, one for which we have given extraordinary regard throughout history. It has been used in all facets of culture. Some primitive peoples thought music to have the power of the gods working through musicians, possessing the minds of the listeners. The Greeks and the Romans with their intellect, later scoffed at this idea as silly. They deemed music as a powerful tool, which could embody the morality and ethics of their society. Other cultures in Asia viewed its use in more of a cosmic spiritual sense.

Music also provides a vital part in the history of mainstream Christianity. In the Middle Ages, theologians attributed to music the exclusive purpose of worshipping God. This view was held until after the Protestant Reformation in 1517, when musical composition expanded into an art form. This was seen as man's

ability to participate as individuals within God's creative power. There certainly has been a focus on individuality in contemporary music although the connection to religious devotion has faded.

When we are setting the stage with our praise and worship, are we focused on worshipping God? Are we concentrating on the lyrics of what is being sung? Or are we wanting to hear something to make us feel all warm and fuzzy within ourselves? There is nothing wrong with having favorite songs nor is it wrong to feel good hearing a song. The disconnect occurs is when we leave God out of it.

It is critical we pay attention to what we sing due to the significance of The One to Whom we sing. So many of the songs nowadays are fixated on what God can do for us rather than paying reverence and our loving devotion to our Creator Who gives us all things.

**1 Timothy 6:17-** “Charge those who are rich in this present age not to be high minded, nor to put *their* hope in *the* uncertainty of riches; but *to put their hope* in the living God, Who abundantly gives us all things for *our* enjoyment;”

I know I have mentioned this before, I remember seeing people leave a church service complaining because the Praise and Worship service was inadequate. They

would say, “I didn’t feel anything.” We would see a variety of music performed by the choir but often, many thought that they were up there just to entertain them. These are the same people who have the “itching ears,” much like the sermons they desire to hear. “Tell me a happy story but do not ask me to do anything. And hurry up, we must beat the Baptists to the buffet.”

**2 Timothy 4:3-** “For there shall come a time when they will not tolerate sound doctrine; but according to their own lusts they shall accumulate to themselves a *great number of teachers, having ears itching to hear what satisfies their cravings;*”

Praise and worship are not for our entertainment. It is to honor and worship our Heavenly Father and prepare our hearts and minds to receive God’s message for the day.

If someone’s motive to attend a church is to be entertained, they would be better off staying at home. It was a Sunday church anyway so in either case, staying at home will yield the same result.

When we arrive for fellowship, we are entering God’s sanctuary. *It is the Sabbath.*

Do we leave the world outside the door and focus on meeting with God? Or do we

bring up Facebook or Fox News and talk about what politician told the biggest lie for the week? It is okay for fellowship and conversation but try to leave the world outside as much as you can. *It is the Sabbath*. Is your heart and mind truly focused on God and what He wants us to learn? Do you praise and worship Him in spirit and in truth? Do we genuinely with all our hearts offer God the sacrifice of praise?

**Hebrews 13:15-** “Accordingly, let us offer *the* sacrifice of praise continually to God through Him; that is, *with the* fruit of *our* lips openly professing *our faith* in His name.”

**Psalms 27:6-** “And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies round about me; therefore I will offer sacrifices with shouts of joy in His tabernacle. I will sing; yea, I will sing praises unto the LORD.”

**Jeremiah 17:26-** “And they shall come from the cities of Judah, and from the places about Jerusalem, and from the land of Benjamin, and from the plain, and from the mountains, and from the south, bringing burnt offerings, and sacrifices, and grain offerings, and incense, and bringing sacrifices of praise to the house of the LORD.”

**Jeremiah 33:11-** “The voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of those who shall say, “Praise the LORD of hosts, for the LORD *is* good, for His steadfast love *endures* forever;” and the voice of those who shall bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the LORD. For I will restore the fortunes of the land, as at the first,’ says the LORD.”

I have mentioned a few times of a TV Evangelist show I skimmed past one night channel surfing. They played the same song over and repeatedly for longer than 20 minutes. I know as I switched channels and came back 20 minutes later, and they were playing the same song. During this time, one of the participants was running up and down the isles like he had stepped in Fire Ants. I do not know if they called down the spirit or not, but it wore me out watching this “worshipper” doing his holy aerobics. Dancing before the Lord is not wrong as King David did so.

**2 Samuel 6:14-** “And David danced before the LORD with all *his* might. And David *was* girded with a linen ephod.”

Our young adults brought to my attention during our praise and worship discussion a video of a church rally that had tanks, pyrotechnics, and car crushing. They had guys dropping down on rappel ropes and what a show. Do you think God was



amused...worshipped or were *they* entertained? Slap that Jesus label on it and it must be holy, right? How does a tank and crushing cars praise God? Your guess is as good as mine.

Much like some of the Hillsong renditions of praise and worship songs, they play a continuous melody *over* and *over* and *over* again to the point of monotony. The group of folks on stage are all playing different instruments and I am not a musician; they *all sound the same*. The guitarist is strumming away like he is playing with The Who and some of them are bouncing up and down like they are doing cross-fit.

In the Pentecostal church we used to attend, this was all done to “call down the spirit.” Again, it is as if the Holy Spirit of God Almighty is a genie in a bottle and with the right amount of monotonous music and bouncing antics, the bottle will be rubbed exactly right, and someone may speak in tongues when it shows up. Again, we are blessed to have been given God’s Holy Spirit when we were baptized. Our communication lines are wide open through our Savior Jesus Christ who gives us direct access to the Throne.

**Hebrews 4:16-** “Therefore, we should come with boldness to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

God’s Holy Spirit is *in us*, it is *not* kept in a box on a shelf to be *called down* by the will of a congregation. If they actually read the Bible and followed Jesus Christ as He instructed, they would know this. Remember Hosea 4:6.

### **What words are we singing?**

The lyrics of the songs we sing have a tremendous impact on our fellowship with God. We need to keep in mind that God does not want us to just lift our voices because it is a “requirement” or “procedure” but a genuine act of our devotion to Him. We know how powerful words can be (“Let there be light”- **Genesis 1:3**) and the lyrics to a song can have a significant impact on our study.

Have any of you ever attended a rock concert? Most of us have at one time or another. I am sure we have all seen at least films of one or two if we have never been to one. People are moved by the music they are experiencing. Music has the power to transform our mode of thinking from stress to peace, anxiety to ease, and just the opposite, calm to “wound up.”

Music can be used to help heal people. It can cheer you up, it can strengthen your faith. If you need an example of music's influence, try listening to relaxing spa or classical music when driving as compared to rock and roll. Driving in southwest Florida is stressful enough without adding Led Zeppelin to your traveling. Save that for the gym when the adrenaline is needed. It can be a destructive rhythm, and it can move people in the wrong direction.

So much of today's music has an incredible amount of satanic influence. Imagine the lyrics to AC/DC's Highway to Hell "I'm on a highway to hell" which should, in biblical terms, would be "I'm driving to the grave." It is doubtful even the lost would think it is still cool but as they cannot determine which sex they are these days, anything is possible.

It reflects an increasingly self-centered, divided, and confused nation. That is why it is so important to be mindful of the lyrics of any praise and worship songs. Even some of our most beloved tunes are not all up to par with the Word of God. Songs that sing of going to heaven, even the Old Rugged Cross contains more than questionable lyrics. Remember, God is not a respecter of persons.

**2 Chronicles 19:7-** “And now therefore, let the fear of the LORD be upon you. Be careful and act wisely, for *there is* no iniquity with the LORD our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of a bribe.” (**2 Samuel 14:14, Acts 10:34, Romans 2:11**).

In our *willing* participation we fill our hearts and minds with the sentiment of the music as we *humble ourselves* before God. However, because of music's considerable influence, we must consider all the music we listen to, questioning what spirit it carries and transfers. Are we our feeding flesh or our spirit? Granted it would be a difficult cardio workout listening to Zamfir play his pan flute...Satan has special musical talents and can confer his defiant attitudes through the art.

**Ezekiel 28:15-16-** “You were perfect in your ways from the day that you were created, until iniquity was found in you. By the multitude of your merchandise they have filled your midst with violence, and you have sinned. Therefore I will cast you as profane from the mountain of God, and I will destroy you, O covering cherub, from among the stones of fire.”

A song can be a teaching vehicle. In the illustration of our praising God, it is God's primary reason for having music. When we are singing, we are not to be just lip-syncing, but we need to be thinking about the words, because the words come from

*our heart* and are *imparting to us knowledge that is necessary for our life*. God has endowed us with great gifts for music, but unfortunately so much of it is wasted on perverted and mindless trash. Again, *we must always remember **Who** we are singing to*.

### **Does God really hear us?**

**Psalm 22:3-** “Yet You are holy, O You *enthroned* upon the praises of Israel.”

(AFV) The King James Version renders the scripture as ‘But thou art holy, O thou that *inhabitest* the praises of Israel.’”

By His Word we know He hears and is *in* the praises of His children. We can also know that God provided a collection of songs that expresses His nature and relationship with us, the inspired Psalms, and the Song of Songs. We will be given new songs to sing in our walk with Him.

**Revelation 5:9-** “And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are You to take the book, and to open its seals because You were slain, and did redeem us to God by Your own blood, out of every tribe and language and people and nation,”

**Psalm 40:3-** “And He has put a new song in my mouth, *even* praise to our God; many shall see and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.”

We put an immense value on music. So does God! A quick study of music in Scripture reveals God *loves* music. Music is widespread in the Old Testament as essential to life in ancient Israel. They used songs to praise and worship God.

**Psalm 66:1-5-** “To the Chief Musician. A Song. A Psalm. Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth. Sing forth the honor of His name; make His praise glorious. Say to God, “How awesome are Your works! Through the greatness of Your power, Your enemies submit themselves in obedience to You. All the earth shall worship You and shall sing praises to You; they shall sing praises to Your name.” Selah. Come and see the works of God; He is awesome in His deeds toward the sons of men.”

**Isaiah 44:23-** “Sing, O heavens; for the LORD has done *it*. Shout, O lower parts of the earth. Break out into singing, O mountains, O forest, and every tree in it, for the LORD has redeemed Jacob, and glorified Himself in Israel.”

Understanding the use of music and how we praise, and worship God gives us insight to the importance of the *way* we sing unto our Creator. Music can move and change us if we have the proper focus. It can transform our mental and emotional state. It can also, more importantly, unify the minds of an entire group. Just look at all the patriotic songs played around the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. Or how about the National Anthem played in a stadium?

I remember standing at the top of the Olympic Stadium for the opening ceremonies of the 100<sup>th</sup> Olympic Summer Games in Atlanta, GA in 1996. There were 85,000 people in the stadium, Presidents, and Prime Ministers from 197 countries. There was a two-hundred-member Baptist Church choir that sang the Star-Spangled Banner, complete with a US Air Force Thunderbirds roll-over the stadium at the “rockets’ red glare” (accompanied by fireworks from two stadiums of course). My dear friend from Australia, who recently passed away, was crying! Why was he crying? Because music reaches a depth of feeling that is far beyond the spoken word, so far beyond that there is no comparison. Talk about music moving you! Only Whitney Houston could have rivaled this rendition of the Star-Spangled Banner.

Singing praise unto our God as we worship Him in spirit and in truth should have more importance to us, considering Who He is and what He does, has done, continues to do for all of us and will do in the coming Kingdom and beyond. For

the duration of our praise and worship portion of fellowship, we can be in harmony, mentally and spiritually with God and our brothers and sisters in His family. Hopefully, when fellowship is over, we carry that unity forward throughout the coming week. If you hit a snag midweek, try listening to praise music (with good lyrics) and sing to yourself (or aloud if you are by yourself like me). Just see if God does not meet you where you are at and ask, “how are you, my child?” He already knows anyway.

I pray that with this insight we have a little more understanding of the importance of praise and worship as part of our devotion to God in our Sabbath fellowship. By singing praise and worship to our Father God, we are of one accord in the Body of Christ, ready to receive His message.

**Colossians 3:16-** “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.”

We began to prepare for Passover right after we left the Feast of Tabernacles. Our covenant renewal will soon be upon us. Hopefully, we are growing with each



passing year, learning, and understanding and having more spiritual discernment of the very nature of God and His Son, Jesus Christ our Savior.

**Philippians 2:12-** “So then, my beloved, even as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”

If we are truly growing in wisdom and in knowledge, we will be working out our salvation with fear and trembling. Praising and worshipping our God for Who He is, what He does, we must include *how* and *what* we sing unto Him. We must be more concerned with true worship of Him. If we are in the proper frame of mind and are mindful of the words we sing to Him, we will be *more* than entertained, we will become *enlightened*.

Our young adults are quite aware of these things, and we should be even more so. Be alert of what music is requested, does it praise and give glory to God? Or is it something that moves us and leaves Him on the sidelines? This is the Sabbath; we are here to seek and fellowship with Him. God certainly wants us all to feel good but, *in our worship, and relationship with Him*. The youth are listening and paying attention, even more important, so is God. Should we do less? Amen.

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