

The Importance of Congregational Singing
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I have been approached numerous times asking why we don't have a 'worship team.' What's being asked is why we don't have a group of people standing up front helping to lead the singing – because certainly it's true that we have many here in our congregation who have been given beautiful voices and a heart to use those voices for the Lord. I am grateful so many are willing to offer special songs from time to time. But regarding the worship team question - this pastor's answer has always been the same: The congregation is the worship team. The congregation is the choir. Our focus when we sing together to the LORD must not be on the distraction of a group of people up front but on the LORD, on the words we are singing to the Lord. That's why we keep it minimal up front - because as sinful humans we are so prone to distraction and comparison – and it's not about who's up front or who isn't – it's about the ONE to whom we are singing.

Congregational singing is an act of obedience; we gather and sing because we're called to over and over and over again in the Bible - like telling the truth, loving our wives and our children, like loving our neighbor as ourselves. Singing is a real and tangible expression of loving the Lord with our whole hearts and our whole selves and loving our neighbor as ourselves. Congregational singing is an act of obedience. But it is also a privilege, a foretaste of heaven. After all, one day in the future every tribe, language, nation, and people will sing as one congregation before the throne of the risen Lamb. Until then, we find a microcosm of that day in congregational singing. As we anticipate the matchless glories of heaven, there's immeasurable value in our singing together on earth.

1. Congregational singing affects us as individuals. In our society depression abounds, self-worth is confused, marriages and families are shattering, suicide rates are soaring, and a sense of global turmoil endures. Amidst all this, it's only when we worship that we put God in his rightful spot, engaging him with our intellect, emotions, and bodies. We cannot rise above the world's difficulties until we turn our eyes to the one higher than ourselves. We proclaim in congregational singing what sometimes seems impossible to proclaim in our natural selves: "You, Lord, are the center of the universe. I am but a moment; you are eternal." In worship, what's *personal* engages with who is *eternal*. And so as we sing, we lift our eyes to what's higher, and we find relief. Ultimately, our minds are renewed as we remind ourselves of God's mercy and offer our bodies as living sacrifices to him (Rom. 12:1-2).

2. Congregational singing affects our community. What it does for us as individuals ripples outward toward those around us. The apostle Paul often encouraged the earliest churches toward authentic worship. He told these new Christians to encourage one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19). In other words, when we sing, we're reminding each other of eternal truths and therefore forging a lasting spiritual bond between us. We're not merely singing to God; we're singing to one another.

3. Congregational singing affects our witness. Imagine what our singing together sounds like to an onlooking world that doesn't believe. They see people singing together passionately. They see communities of desperate individuals joining together, men and women who perhaps don't even see each other from Sunday to Sunday or don't have their kids in the same school. And yet they're joined together, singing to one another the unique melody of the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Congregational singing is *always* a witness to the greatest relationship and privilege of our lives here on earth. From those who visit our churches, to our children who've yet to believe - when we sing together of the grace of our Savior, it's a powerful witness.

Singing with God's people, joining the eternal chorus, embracing our blood-bought destiny, standing with those who have tears in their eyes, remember when those same people stood next to you when you had tears in yours. Singing together of the only hope we have for our sin-stained souls. **There is no greater worship team. There is no greater choir. You, me, us together – singing the eternal songs of the soul.**