

What If I Don't Like My Church's Music?



**Matthew
Boswell**

Church Questions

Endorsements for the Church Questions Series

“Christians are pressed by very real questions. How does Scripture structure a church, order worship, organize ministry, and define biblical leadership? Those are just examples of the questions that are answered clearly, carefully, and winsomely in this new series from 9Marks. I am so thankful for this ministry and for its incredibly healthy and hopeful influence in so many faithful churches. I eagerly commend this series.”

R. Albert Mohler Jr., President, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Sincere questions deserve thoughtful answers. If you’re not sure where to start in answering these questions, let this series serve as a diving board into the pool. These minibooks are winsomely to-the-point and great to read together with one friend or one hundred friends.”

Gloria Furman, author, *Missional Motherhood* and *The Pastor’s Wife*

“As a pastor, I get asked lots of questions. I’m approached by unbelievers seeking to understand the gospel, new believers unsure about next steps, and maturing believers wanting help answering questions from their Christian family, friends, neighbors, or coworkers. It’s in these moments that I wish I had a book to give them that was brief, answered their questions, and pointed them in the right direction for further study. Church Questions is a series that provides just that. Each booklet tackles one question in a biblical, brief, and practical manner. The series may be called Church Questions, but it could be called ‘Church Answers.’ I intend to pick these up by the dozens and give them away regularly. You should too.”

Juan R. Sanchez, Senior Pastor, High Pointe Baptist Church, Austin, Texas

“Where can we Christians find reliable answers to our common questions about life together at church—without having to plow through long, expensive books? The Church Questions booklets meet our need with answers that are biblical, thoughtful, and practical. For pastors, this series will prove a trustworthy resource for guiding church members toward deeper wisdom and stronger unity.”

Ray Ortlund, President, Renewal Ministries

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Oh sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth!
Sing to the LORD, bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day.
Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous works among all the
peoples!

Psalm 96:1-3



Some of my earliest and fondest memories involve singing in church. I can still see my dad singing on the front row before he got up to preach. He belted out each chorus, bouncing on his toes and lifting his eyebrows. I remember my mom arrayed in a blue robe, perched in the choir loft, and brimming with joy as she sang anthems to the Lord. I recall standing on my tiptoes as I sang beside older saints. They held our worn-out hymnals with their worn-out hands as they joined their voices with the rest of the congregation.

I cherish these memories. The well-worn melodies and theologically rich lyrics nurtured

my understanding of Scripture and fueled my love for the Savior.

You may not have grown up in a church as I did, but if you've been a Christian for any amount of time, I'm sure you also have meaningful memories of singing with God's people.

Every Lord's Day, I show up at church full of anticipation. I'm eager to serve and be served by the gift of congregational song.

But this isn't the case for everyone. Church music is sometimes—both literally and figuratively—a clanging cymbal of frustration. I've known some Christians for whom singing was their least favorite part of corporate worship. They stood with arms crossed and lips sealed, basically holding their breath until the music was over.

What about you? Do you see congregational singing as a gift to enjoy or a burden to bear? Are you struggling to sing with God's people?

We can struggle with the music in our churches for many reasons. Perhaps the music in your church doesn't sound like that of the church down the street, with its seamless production

and spotless execution. Maybe the church you have long called home keeps the lights at full strength during the service, so you feel too “seen” as you sing. It might be that the volume of the instruments is intentionally kept low and you feel too “heard.” Or maybe the instrumental volume is much too high, so it’s all you can hear!

Perhaps you miss the hymns of your childhood, the choruses of your college experience, or the songs of a previous church. You wonder why your church doesn’t sing the songs you’re familiar with. Maybe your church has weathered a contentious “worship war,” and the conflict has soured your joy. Maybe the music has been changed, and now you find it too simplistic or too complex, too much of this or too little of that. Or perhaps you struggle with your church’s music because of the clumsy string of wrong notes, out-of-tune guitars, and fumbled entrances.

No matter what frustrations you may have with your church’s music, I hope to help you navigate those challenges and point you to some of the glorious reasons you have to lift your voice

in song during worship. My hope is that by the time you finish reading this book, you won't be able to wait until the next time you get to sing with your church.

The glorious truth is that all who are in Christ have joined the choir of the redeemed and have been given a song of salvation. Because of Christ, we have ten thousand reasons to sing.

I've invested the majority of my life participating in, leading, thinking about, and even writing church music. The goal of this book is to help you understand the Bible's vision for what it looks like for God's people to sing together. I want to convince you of the goodness of congregational singing and the vital role that you play in it. Along the way I also hope to give some practical counsel on how to address your heart if your church's music isn't your preference, grates on your nerves, or frustrates you.

Dozens of Scripture passages address the topic of music and singing. We'll consider many

of them in the pages ahead. But as we do, I'd like to make Psalm 96:1–3 our “home base.” David's words summarize the essential truths that help us understand church music rightly—truths that can help our souls if we don't like our church's music.

Oh sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth!
Sing to the LORD, bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day.
Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous works among all the
peoples! (Ps. 96:1–3)

In this psalm, David gives us three reasons why Christians sing together: singing is *an act of worshiping God*, *an act of discipling others*, and ultimately *an act of witnessing to the world*.

An Act of Worshiping God

Singing is an act of worship. David makes this clear in Psalm 96:1: “Oh sing *to the LORD* a new song.” For the Christian, singing is never *just* singing. It's so much more. Whether we sing

alone, at home with our families, or with our churches, our singing is first and foremost an offering unto God.

Because singing is worship, it isn't ultimately for us; it's for God. We sing for a divine audience. In fact, did you notice that in Psalm 96 David calls us to sing to the Lord three times? The Lord of all creation condescends to hear our song (Ps. 40:1). It really is quite stunning. We must worship him not only with narrative and prose, but also with music and poetry, melody and harmony, rhythm and rhyme.

Psalm 96 introduces us to two important truths we need to remember if we're struggling with the music in our churches. First, God commands singing. Second, he commands singing because church music is ultimately about worshiping him, not meeting our preferences.

Commanded by God

Why do Christians sing?

I realize this might seem like a silly question, but have you ever stopped and thought about

it? Of course, there are untold numbers of reasons why Christians sing. We sing as a practice of prayer, to express emotion, to communicate God's truth creatively, to celebrate the gospel, and the list goes on. But the ultimate reason Christians sing is because God commands us to do it.

We don't approach God on our terms or according to our preferences. He invites us to worship him on his terms. He dictates not only that we must worship him but how we worship him. One of the ways God has ordained that we should worship him is by song. That's why the Christian faith is a singing faith. We sing as an act of obedience. We sing because our singing pleases God.

In fact, when we consider the sum of the commands to sing in Scripture and the role singing plays at so many critical points in redemptive history, we have to conclude that our God really, really likes to hear his people sing. Singing saints bring deep joy to the heart of God—whether they're singing psalms of praise, hymns of devotion, lyrics of lament, or melodies from hearts

made new. Just as my heart swells when I hear my children singing in our home, the heart of the Father is stirred by his sons and daughters singing to him in love and devotion.

If you're struggling to resonate with your church's music, remember that our circumstances don't change what God expects of his people. Singing isn't a divine suggestion; it is a holy commandment. And like all of God's commands, it's not a burden to weigh us down but a law that lifts us up. Christian singing is a harmony of duty and delight. Just as God delights in our singing, our singing fuels our delight in God.

Commanded for God

I had become a Christian some years before, but when I was fifteen, the Lord gripped my heart with his grace in such a profound way that the only thing I knew to do was to sing. I started writing songs about who God is, what God had done, and what he was doing in my life. I had something to sing about. God's love causes the silent heart to sing.