

## When In Our Music God Is Glorified

Psalm 100

09 27 2009

See "Shout!"

### Introduction

In his book, Uh-Oh!, **Robert Fulghum** compared kindergarten to high school: "Walk into a kindergarten and then a high school. The environments differ only in scale. They each have the same opportunities and facilities. Tools for reading and writing, scientific equipment, the arts, are all present . . . But the most important difference is in the self-image of the students.

Ask a **kindergarten** class, How many of you can **sing**? All hands. What do you sing? Anything? What if you don't know the words? No problem--we'll make them up! Can you **dance**? Of course, we can all dance! What kind of music? What does it matter? Let's dance now!

Their answer is Yes! Over and over again. Yes! The children are confident in spirit, infinite in resources, and eager to learn. Everything is possible.

Try these same questions with a **high school** crowd. A small percentage of the students will raise their hands when asked if they sing or dance. Not infrequently, they will go on to qualify their answers. I only sing in the shower. I only slow dance.

Fulghum closes the article by asking: "What happened along the way? What happened to the 'YES! Of course, I can!'"

### I. Grown Up Christians

On the journey from childhood to adulthood, something vital is lost. We exchange spontaneity for rigidity, playfulness for decorum, and joy for seriousness. The result in **church** is a sin and a shame: lemon-sucking saints who say: "*This is the day the Lord has made, we shall show up and be counted present for it!*"

<p>During the sixteenth century, <u>Teresa Avila</u> was a member of the Carmelite Order of Nuns—a strict, devout branch of the Catholic Church. However, this devoted saint of God wrote this short prayer: "<i>From silly devotions and from sour-faced saints, good Lord, deliver us!</i>" And the people of God say "AMEN!"</p>
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Joyless Christians are an abomination before the Lord! And not much fun either. Maybe this is one reason why Jesus said we must become like **children** to enter heaven's kingdom. We are called to recapture a sense of wonder, awe, spontaneity, playfulness, and reckless abandon.

Each week our **Worship Team** meets to plan the upcoming services. In the past, staff members have dared to suggest that I'm a bit, uh, *persnickety* when it comes to planning worship. Family and friends have mentioned that I take the same approach towards life. This is patently false. I just like things to happen the way I want them to happen when I want them to happen!

I DO think it is important to prepare for worship services. I firmly believe the Holy Spirit can act in the moments of planning before church begins. I plan my sermon topics up to six months in advance. I dread dead space in worship. I want everything to move according to a plan.

But as every minister discovers, you cannot control the **children's sermon**. Oh, you might prepare an excellent lesson plan. It will survive the first five seconds of contact with the children! Where you go next is anyone's guess! The children wiggle, wriggle, and giggle. Maintaining control is like organizing earthworms, herding cats, and counting minnows.

The children's sermon is the one guaranteed moment of total chaos in an otherwise structured service. The boys and girls are the *Energizer Bunnies* of morning worship. Adults often get more out of the children's sermon than any other part of worship. It is that wonderful, awe-filled, exhilarating, terrifying moment when we let go . . . and don't know where we'll go. Just hang on and enjoy the ride.

Using Robert Fulghum's description, would you describe yourself as a kindergarten or high school type Christian? Do you dance and sing before the Lord? Or are you too mature for such nonsense? On occasion, I fear that **Methodists** have become too grown up. We *can* be a bit stuffy and respectable. It wouldn't hurt us to loosen up a bit and actually enjoy our faith.

I've attended churches where **clapping** was the theological issue of the day! People who clap loudly at a concert or play don't think such behavior is appropriate in church. Some of these same folk scream at ballgames but look sideways at someone who would dare SAY "Amen!" in worship. We make fools of ourselves at athletic events but resist acting as fools for Christ.

Christians are called to be an enthusiastic people. "**Enthusiasm**" comes from two Greek words that mean "*to be filled with God*"—another literal meaning is to be "God-possessed." When we are spirit filled, lives are transformed. We become excited about our faith and want to share it with others. This enthusiasm spreads from worship to every aspect of life. We recognize that God is present not only in church but all around us.

## II. Close Encounters with God

In 1977, Steven Spielberg released the movie: *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. In ufology, a "close encounter" is when someone experiences an unidentified flying object. The first kind is a sighting. The second kind is a sighting with physical evidence. The third kind is an actual encounter with an alien. Drawing on this imagery, God's people experience close encounters of the DIVINE kind—and they occur every day for those with sensitive spirits.

### **A. Natural**

- Daily: When we wake up in the morning feeling good. "*This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!*"
- Nature: The beauty of creation all about us.  
"*This is my Father's world and to my listening ears,  
all nature sings and around me rings the music of the spheres.*"
- Special: birthday, anniversary, birth of a child, visit from a friend, etc.  
Frederick Buechner: the last time you cried.

The Celtic people believed that there were "**thin places**" where the physical and spiritual

worlds come more closely together. Where are some of the thin places in your life?

### **B. Supernatural**

We encounter God in the natural world and in supernatural ways. There are moments when God taps us on the shoulder, calls our name aloud, or slaps us up side the head with a 2 x 4. (Retell the story of Moses and the Burning Bush).

I must admit that I have never heard the Lord speak in an audible voice or received a clear vision from heaven. Nonetheless, I HAVE heard God speak and seen God work.

A young girl in our church (Ava—4 years old at the time) was talking to her mother and asked, “Does God talk to your heart?”

Her mother wisely answered, “Oh, yes he does. “Why, is God talking to your heart?”

“Yes he is,” the child responded.

“And what does God say?”

The girl thought for a moment and said, “Oh, you know—blah, blah, blah, blah, blah!”

We are called to hear God in the blah, blah, blah of life!

### **C. Heightened Spiritual Awareness**

God is with us in all times and places. We need to cultivate a heightened spiritual awareness that enables us to experience the Lord's presence in daily life. Humans see what we have trained ourselves to see. For example, when I see **flowers**, I see roses and . . . flowers that are not roses! Although, I will say that the beautiful arrangements provided by the Dan and Paula Pinholster in the sanctuary have enabled me to also identify dahlias! Gardeners see different varieties and names. When you know what you're looking for, you see it.

When we look at our lives "*through heaven's eyes*," we see the Lord all around us. Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote a poem that reminds us:

*Earth's crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God,  
And only he who sees takes off his shoes  
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.*

For those with eyes to see and ears to hear, the Lord is all about us. For those with sensitive spirits, the Spirit's touch is always evident.

### **III. Dance, Sing and Shout**

When we encounter God, our natural and supernatural response is praise, worship, and thanksgiving. One of the church's ancient catechisms asked, "*What is the end/purpose of man?*" Response: "***To glorify God and enjoy him forever.***"

The Old Testament book of **Psalms** was the hymnbook of ancient Israel. The Psalter is filled with the sound of singing and the movement of dance. The Psalter comes to a climax of praise in Psalm 150:

*Praise the Lord!*  
*Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty firmament!*  
*Praise him for his mighty deeds;*  
*praise him according to his surpassing greatness!*  
*Praise him with trumpet sound;*  
*praise him with lute and harp!*  
*Praise him with tambourine and dance;*  
*praise him with strings and pipe!*  
*Praise him with clanging cymbals;*  
*praise him with loud clashing cymbals!*  
*Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!*  
*Praise the Lord!*

We too are called to dance and sing before the Lord!

### A. **Dance!**

Read the Bible—God's people have rhythm! Dance was a legitimate part of worship in the Old Testament. But can you imagine the reaction if we responded literally to Psalm 150 during church? Someone jumped up and began to shake a tambourine . . . and someone else crashed a pair of cymbals together . . . and others started dancing in the aisles! What is it about dance that makes it such a natural part of worship in the Old Testament?

1) The first step in dancing is a willingness to forget about **dignity and control**. Depending upon your generation, unless you are Arthur Murray, Fred Astair, or Beyonce, you are probably going to look fairly ridiculous dancing. And you have to surrender yourself to the rhythm and beat if you're going to do anything at all.

(*Dancing with the Stars* premiered this week. Chuck Liddell and Tom Delay among the dancers!)

You ever seen one of those counting dancers? You know what I'm talking about, they've just learned the dance and they're going to do it right! And you can read their lips, "One, two, three, four, and one, two, three, four . . . ." Contrast that to a trained dancer who certainly has been trained in the basics and knows proper technique. But when the dance really moves her, she flows with an artistry and grace that transcends the moment.

We naturally like to keep control of our lives. Some of the scariest moments in the Christian life is when we let go and let God take control. We talk a lot about Christ being "Lord," but what if we really took those words seriously. Let God lead in the dance of our lives.

2) The second element of dance important to worship and spiritual well being is **joy**. It is difficult to dance for any length of time and remain unhappy. Well, unless its rap, but that's another story! Physically, the heart starts pumping and the muscles constrict and relax. The body begins to produce endorphins and a natural high occurs.

3) The third important aspect of dance for our understanding of faith is that it is not something normally done alone. Almost every dance requires a **partner**. In square dancing, you can't do it without seven other people. And in line dancing, the number is limited only by the size of the room! Neither is the Christian faith a movement of individuals. The Old and New Testament testify that we are persons of faith within a community of faith. Partners with God and then with one another.

## B. Sing!

A second natural response to God is **singing**. I find three realities in my life. I love to sing. I can't sing well. I sing anyway! For those who don't sing, I have little doubt that at some point in your life someone said, "You don't sing well." So what?!? Do you think God judges our worship and praise by the quality of our voices?

The *Directions for Singing* written by John Wesley are printed in the front of every Methodist Hymnal. They read in part:

*"Directions for Singing" by John Wesley*

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| III. | Sing all. See that you join with the congregation as frequently as you can. Let not a slight degree of weakness or weariness hinder you. If it is a cross to you, take it up, and you will find it a blessing.   |
| IV.  | <b><u>Sing lustily and with a good courage. Beware of singing as if you were half dead, or half asleep; but lift up your voice with strength.</u></b> Be no more afraid of your voice now, nor more ashamed of its being heard, than when you sung the songs of Satan. |

I'm not quite sure exactly what it means to "**sing lustily!**" But what would worship be like if we sang like we sing in the shower? If we sang like we sing in the car? In 1971, Fred Pratt Green published the words to the hymn *When in Our Music God Is Glorified*. The title serves as our theme for today as we worship God with music and song. Two of the stanzas declare:

*When in our music God is glorified, and adoration leaves no room for pride,  
It is as though the whole creation cried Alleluia!  
Let every instrument be tuned for praise! Let all rejoice who have a voice to raise!  
And may God give us faith to sing always Alleluia!*

We join a chorus that began before the foundations of the world, blending voices with: the angels, archangels, and heavenly host; the stars, moons, and planets; the patriarchs and matriarchs of our faith; the prophets, seers, and sages; the apostles, disciples, martyrs, and saints.

## Conclusion

We are never too young or too old to learn these great truths. Open our eyes and see the Lord's goodness and grace all around us. We are called to respond with joy and celebration.

*Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.  
Worship the Lord with gladness;  
Come before him with joyful songs!*  
--Psalm 100:1-2

Dance! Sing! Praise the Lord! Amen.