



## SINGING IS SUPERNATURAL EPHESIANS 5:15-21

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When we stand and sing our praise to God, we should probably pause and express our gratitude to the 16<sup>th</sup> century Protestant reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546). What you probably don't know about Luther is that he was largely responsible for introducing into the life of the evangelical church the practice of congregational singing. From the Council of Laodicea in the 4<sup>th</sup> century until Luther in the early years of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, *virtually no one sang in church except for the ordained clergy.*

Luther was convinced that if God's people were to worship God as the Bible commands they must sing. He would often put Christian lyrics to the melodies sung in German beer taverns and introduce these songs in Protestant churches. Luther had an extremely high view of the importance and life-changing power of music. In fact, one of Luther's enemies insisted that he "had condemned more souls with his hymns than with all his sermons!"

Luther was committed to the primacy of music and song as *a means both for spreading the gospel and for the worship of God.* "I have no use for cranks who despise music," said Luther, "because it is a gift of God. Music drives away the Devil and makes people happy; they forget thereby all wrath, unchastity, arrogance, and the like. Next after theology I give to music the highest place and the greatest honor" (Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 341).

Some are surprised to hear what this great theologian thought about music. That a man with such indomitable courage and intellectual brilliance should place such a high premium on singing is unexpected, to say the least. "Experience proves," wrote Luther, "that next to the Word of God only music deserves to be extolled as the mistress and governess of the feelings of the human heart. We know that to the devils music is distasteful and insufferable. My heart bubbles up and overflows in response to music, which has so often refreshed me and delivered me from dire plagues" (*Here I Stand*, 341).

Luther was never one to mince his words. He had little patience for those who dismissed the power and primacy of singing. "He who does not find this [singing] an inexpressible miracle of the Lord is truly a clod and is not worthy to be considered a man" (343). Well, tell us what you really think, Martin! Luther insisted that "the gift of language combined with the gift of song was only given to man to let him know that he should praise God with both word and music, namely by proclaiming [the Word of God] through music" (Quoted by Richard D. Dinwiddie in "When You Sing Next Sunday, Thank Luther," *Christianity Today* [Oct. 21, 1983]:19-20). Whether you wish "to comfort the sad, to terrify the happy, to encourage the despairing, to humble the proud, to calm the passionate, or to appease those full of hate, name the emotions, inclinations, and affections that impel men to evil or good – what more effective means than music could you find?" (21).

There are few things in God's creation that have the power that music does. What else is there in all the world that has such universal influence? Music, in some form or other, is present in every culture of mankind. And wherever it is found it can unite people or it can divide them. It stirs people to patriotic fervor and it arouses them to unbridled anger. It can soothe the spirit or it can bring disquiet and fear. Music can create comfort and it can inflict discomfort. Virtually everything we do in life is done to musical accompaniment: riding in elevators; eating in restaurants; driving to and from work; watching a movie; cheering on a sports team; shopping at the mall; and, of course, worshipping God!

I believe that God created tone, melody, and rhythm, together with our capacity to recognize them because he wants to be worshipped and adored and magnified musically! No one has said it more clearly than John Piper. Here his words:

"The reality of God and Christ and creation and salvation and heaven and hell are simply too great for mere speaking; they must also be sung. This means that the reality of God and his work is so great that we are not merely to think truly about it, but also feel duly about it. Think truly and feel duly – that is, feel with the kind and depth and intensity of emotion that is appropriate to the reality that is truly known.

The reason we sing is because there are depths and heights and intensities and kinds of emotion that will not be satisfactorily expressed by mere prosaic forms, or even poetic readings. There are realities that demand to break out of prose into poetry and some demand that poetry be stretched into song" (Sermon, *Singing and Making Melody to the Lord*, [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org)).

And we will shortly see that singing praises to our great Triune God is the result of being filled with the Holy Spirit. This means that *singing is entirely supernatural*. It is far more than simply you and I opening our mouths and following the music as we extol God.

We must also remember that *not all singing pleases the Lord*. Listen to Amos 5:23-24 – “Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps, I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” Evidently, injustice and unrighteousness among God’s people invalidates our singing and even angers the Lord.

### *Spiritual Warfare*

14 Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and a harmful spirit from the LORD tormented him. 15 And Saul's servants said to him, “Behold now, a harmful spirit from God is tormenting you. 16 Let our lord now command your servants who are before you to seek out a man who is skillful in playing the lyre, and when the harmful spirit from God is upon you, he will play it, and you will be well.” 17 So Saul said to his servants, “Provide for me a man who can play well and bring him to me.” 18 One of the young men answered, “Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence, and the LORD is with him.” 19 Therefore Saul sent messengers to Jesse and said, “Send me David your son, who is with the sheep.” 20 And Jesse took a donkey laden with bread and a skin of wine and a young goat and sent them by David his son to Saul. 21 And David came to Saul and entered his service. And Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armor-bearer. 22 And Saul sent to Jesse, saying, “Let David remain in my service, for he has found favor in my sight.” 23 And whenever the harmful spirit from God was upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand. So Saul was refreshed and was well, and the harmful spirit departed from him (1 Samuel 16:14-23).

We read here in 1 Samuel 16 that music has more than simply a psychological or emotional effect on people. It also has *the power to drive away, frustrate, and defeat demonic forces*. Look again at v. 23 – “And whenever the harmful spirit from God was upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand. So Saul was refreshed and was well, and the harmful spirit departed from him.”

Don’t forget that in the OT the people of God were not permanently indwelt by the Spirit. But God would temporarily anoint kings and prophets and others with the Holy Spirit so they might be equipped and empowered to fulfill the calling on their lives. Here we are told that not only did the Holy Spirit depart from Saul but also that “a harmful spirit from the Lord tormented him” (1 Sam. 16:14b). In case you are wondering, yes, this is a demonic spirit. God is sovereign over all of creation and can use or employ anything and anyone to discipline his people. The Apostle Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” was inflicted upon him by a “messenger from Satan” but just as surely this messenger was doing God’s will.

The question for us is this: “Why or how did David’s music have this effect? Why did the demonic spirit depart from Saul such that he was refreshed and made well, every time David played on the lyre?” There’s no indication that David sang. He played instrumentally. Others might have also played and nothing would happen. Why? What was so special about David? Why did *his* music carry such power?

The answer is in v. 18b – *“and the LORD is with him.”* There may well have been other musicians in Saul’s court who were more skilled than David. But something about David empowered his music to pierce through the soul of Saul. *The Holy Spirit evidently infused the melodies and harmonies of David’s music with supernatural power*. The exalted sound rising from his instrument transformed his harp [or lyre] into a strategic weapon of war which drove the enemies of God into agitation and retreat.

Why? Because the Lord was “with” David! If God had not been with David, his music might have been entertaining and sweet and enjoyable to hear, but it would not have carried the power to drive a demon from Saul’s soul and bring spiritual refreshment to him. There were probably others who were as skilled on the lyre as David, but in the absence of God their music would have left any demonic spirit firmly entrenched.

In other words, *music played or sung by those who love God and are filled with God’s Spirit and who devote their talents to the glory of God irritates and agitates the enemy!* This is why I often recommend to people who are under spiritual attack or are suffering from depression to constantly play both instrumental and vocal worship music, whether they are at home or in their car or at the office. Music devoted to God’s glory, played or sung by a person in

whom the Spirit dwells, ***creates a spiritual atmosphere that is repellent and offensive to Satan and his hosts.*** There's nothing magical in this. Demons don't dislike music. It isn't that they are offended by someone playing or singing off key. It is the presence of God in and with the one playing/singing that accounts for this powerful impact.

Let's look at one more example, found in 2 Kings 3:15. The king of Israel was desperate to hear the word of the Lord regarding what would happen if he were to engage the Moabites in battle. So he sent for Elisha. Elisha then said: "But now bring me a musician. And when the musician played, the hand of the Lord came upon him" (2 Kings 3:15). The result is that Elisha prophesied. Why did Elisha want someone to play music? It would appear that, in a manner of speaking, music clears away the interference between heaven and earth. Perhaps an analogy is the way a rainstorm can clear the air of dust particles and make your radio more receptive to a distant station. ***Anointed and godly music creates a spiritual atmosphere in which God's voice can more readily be heard.*** It eliminates distractions and enables the heart to focus on God.

Elisha wanted to be quiet and calm before the Lord. He wanted to become emotionally and spiritually and mentally in tune with and sensitive to what God would say. Sometimes it's important to put oneself in a mood that is more conducive to receiving and understanding divine revelation.

We see something similar to this in a couple of other texts. We see in 1 Samuel 10:5ff. that often times people would prophesy while playing instruments, in this case the harp, tambourine, flute, and lyre. We also read in 1 Chronicles 25:1 that "David and the chiefs of the service also set apart for the service the sons of Asaph, and of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who prophesied with lyres, with harps, and with cymbals" (1 Chron. 25:1). Others are said to have "prophesied with the lyre in thanksgiving and praise to the Lord" (1 Chron. 25:3). The instruments themselves didn't prophesy but the music evidently served to open lines of communication and enabled the prophets to accurately hear the word of the Lord.

I've often been asked why we play background instrumental music when we pray for people. Are we just trying to create a mood and manipulate someone's emotions? Yes, we are trying to create a mood or atmosphere conducive to engaging with God and hearing his voice, and I make no apology for that. But no, we are not trying to manipulate anyone. We are simply seeking to minister effectively to people by acknowledging that the Holy Spirit is pleased to make use of music to soothe the heart of a person, to put them at ease emotionally, and to open their souls to God.

### *Singing versus Speaking*

Some of you are afraid to sing. You'd never openly admit it, but singing is incompatible with your sense of dignity. It requires an emotional involvement that threatens the image of strength and self-sufficiency that you are determined to project. ***Singing demands a public display of private devotion.*** Some of you aren't comfortable with your feelings and the thought of giving vent to them in sacred song is terrifying. This is why women are much more inclined to sing than are men.

You probably wouldn't struggle nearly as much if asked only to speak about your Christian convictions. But singing is another matter entirely. Why? Because singing makes you feel vulnerable. It brings to the surface passions that you feel more comfortable keeping tucked away, out of sight. You are determined at all costs to stay in control. Singing is a threat to your resolve to keep a grip on your feelings.

There's simply no denying that there is a vast difference between speaking and singing. It goes beyond the mere fact that some people are embarrassed to sing because they lack a melodious voice. Music has a peculiar power. Music infuses words with a dynamic energy that merely speaking them could never achieve. Warren Wiersbe put it this way:

"I am convinced that congregations learn more theology (good and bad) from the songs they sing than from the sermons they hear. Many sermons are doctrinally sound and contain a fair amount of biblical information, but they lack that necessary emotional content that gets ahold of the listener's heart. Music, however, reaches the mind and the heart at the same time. It has power to touch and move the emotions, and for that reason can become a wonderful tool in the hands of the Spirit or a terrible weapon in the hands of the Adversary" (*Real Worship*, 137).

Listen again to the words of Martin Luther:

"We want the beautiful art of music to be properly used to serve her dear Creator and his Christians. He is thereby praised and honored and we are made better and stronger in faith when his holy Word is impressed on our hearts by sweet music."

There is no escaping or denying the fact that the truth of God's "holy Word is impressed on our hearts by sweet music." Singing enables the soul to express deeply felt emotions that mere speaking cannot. Singing channels our spiritual energy in a way that nothing else can. Singing evokes an intensity of mind and spirit. It opens the door to ideas, feelings, and affections that otherwise might have remained forever imprisoned in the depths of one's heart. Singing gives focus and clarity to what words alone often only make fuzzy. It lifts our hearts to new heights of contemplation. It stirs our hope to unprecedented levels of expectancy and delight. *Singing sensitizes*. It softens the soul to hear God's voice and quickens the will to obey.

I can only speak for myself, but when I'm happy, I sing. When my joy increases it cries for an outlet. So I sing. When I'm touched with a renewed sense of forgiveness, I sing. When God's grace shines yet again on my darkened path, I sing. When I'm lonely and long for the intimacy of God's presence, I sing. When I need respite from the chaos of a world run amok, I sing. Nothing else can do for me what music does. It bathes otherwise arid ideas in refreshing waters. It empowers my wandering mind to concentrate with energetic intensity. It stirs my heart to tell the Lord just how much I love him, again and again and again, without the slightest tinge of repetitive boredom.

### *Singing in Scripture*

That's all well and good, Sam. But is it biblical? Good question. Consider this brief survey.

"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth . . . when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (Job 38:4, 7).

"Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the Lord, saying, 'I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously'" (Exod. 15:1).

"Hear, O kings; give ear, O princes; to the Lord I will sing; I will make melody to the Lord, the God of Israel" (Judges 5:3).

"Oh give thanks to the Lord; call upon his name; make known his deeds among the peoples! Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works!" (1 Chron. 16:8-9).

"Shout for joy in the Lord, O you righteous! Praise befits the upright. Give thanks to the Lord with the lyre; make melody to him with the harp of ten strings! Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts" (Ps. 33:1-3).

"Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises! For God is the King of all the earth; sing praises with a psalm!" (Ps. 47:6-7).

"Shout for joy to God, all the earth; sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise! . . . All the earth worships you and sings praises to you; they sing praises to your name" (Ps. 66:1-2, 4).

"I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving" (Ps. 69:30).

"Oh sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord all the earth! Sing to the Lord, bless his name" (Ps. 96:1-2a).

"Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises! Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre and the sound of melody! With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord!" (Ps. 98:4-6).

"Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of his wondrous works!" (Ps. 105:2).

"And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, with thanksgivings and with singing, with cymbals, harps, and lyres" (Nehemiah 12:27; see 12:28, 31, 38, 45-47).

In sum, more than *170x in the OT alone* we either read of people singing praises to God or we are commanded to do so. Singing is also emphasized in the NT:

"I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also" (1 Cor. 14:15).

"Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart" (Eph. 5:18b-19; Col. 3:16).

"Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise" (James 5:13b).

### *Undistracting Excellence*

The psalmist exhorts us to worship "skillfully" (Ps. 33:3). This is a call for excellence in our praise of God. Here is how John Piper describes "undistracting excellence" in worship.

"We will try to sing and play and pray and preach in such a way that people's attention will not be diverted from the substance by shoddy ministry nor by excessive finesse, elegance, or refinement. Natural, undistracting excellence will let the truth and beauty of God shine through. We will invest in equipment good enough to be undistracting in transmitting heartfelt truth" ("What Unites Us in Worship," [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org), October 1, 2003).

In other words, we strive to provide the highest quality sound equipment and lighting and the most aesthetically pleasing surroundings without you ever being distracted by them from your focus on God and the truth about who he is. We shouldn't want anyone walking out of our service on a Sunday morning saying: "Wow! The sound was just right today. Not too loud, not too low. And the lighting was so pleasant, neither too bright nor too dim. And that guy could really play the guitar and that gal is amazing on the violin."

Of course, that is precisely what we strive to do in terms of sight and sound and musical instrumentation: we pursue excellence in all we do, but not so that you would be distracted from God in order to focus on it. ***That is the difference between excellence and performance.*** Performance is designed to draw your attention to the singer or the sound technician or the instrumentalist. Excellence is designed to direct your attention to God and the truth of him as revealed in Scripture. ***Performance is man-centered. Excellence is God-centered.*** Our aim in worship should not be the pursuit of artistic or oratorical performance, but the atmosphere of a radically personal encounter with God and truth.

So what are the elements of spiritual excellence when it comes to music, singing, and our enjoyment of God in worship?

***Worship that honors God must be tethered to and an accurate reflection of the revealed truth of Scripture.*** This is simply another way of saying that it must be ***Bible-based and Bible-saturated.*** The first and most fundamental test to determine if our worship is pleasing to God is the degree to which it conforms to the truth of Scripture. Don't ever sing anything that you do not believe is true. You wouldn't tolerate your pastor preaching heresy or theological error, so why would you tolerate it in yourself or in anyone else when it comes to singing?

The psalmist insists that we "play skillfully" (Ps. 33:3) on whatever instrument we employ in our praise. ***Worship that reflects the exquisite beauty of God must itself be technically and aesthetically pleasing.*** The excellence of God calls for excellence in our celebration of him. There are certain rhythms and melodies that make it hard to think about God. They are by their very nature distracting. They make it difficult to focus our thoughts on the lyrics and often feel inappropriate to the message contained in them. I'm not going to get into the argument about whether or not there are certain rhythms and melodies that are either intrinsically demonic or intrinsically divine. But we must strive to make our music fitting and appropriately expressive to the majesty and glory of the God whom we love and adore.

We must aim for all of our worship, in whatever form it is expressed, to be joyful and free and expressive without being flippant or silly or beneath the dignity of both God and the people who are worshipping him. What this means is that some of our songs will be conducive to dancing in celebration of God's grace and love and other songs will be

conductive to kneeling and awestruck reverence of him. It also means that we will never stoop to sing such ridiculously silly songs as *Dropkick Me Jesus*. In case you're not familiar with it, here goes:

"Drop kick me, Jesus through the goal posts of life.  
End over end, neither left nor to right.  
Straight through the heart of them righteous uprights,  
Drop kick me, Jesus through the goal posts of life.

Make me, oh make me, Lord more than I am.  
Make me a piece in your master game plan.  
Free from the earthly temptations below,  
I've got the will, Lord if you've got the toe.

Bring on the brothers who've gone on before.  
And all of the sisters who've knocked on your door.  
All the departed dear loved ones of mine,  
Stick them up front in the offensive line." (Bobby Bare)

There is always a place for both simplicity and complexity in our worship. We need not always sing high church traditional hymns nor low church choruses. Sometimes we'll sing the simple song, "I Love you, Lord," and at other times the richly complex and deeply theological, "Be Thou My Vision." They both have their place in our singing.

We must strive at all times to be intellectually engaged with the greatness of God at the same time our hearts are warmly touched and our emotions and affections are awakened and stirred. Some are afraid that this might degenerate into manipulation. Should we avoid anything that tends to arouse and awaken our affections and feelings? No. Precisely the opposite is true. ***Intensified affections and heightened feelings and deepened emotions are to be celebrated as long as what awakens, intensifies, and arouses them is biblical truth!*** Sinful manipulation only occurs when music is employed to stir someone's emotions simply for the sake of the emotion itself. But if one's emotions are stirred by truth, by grace, by divine love, by the beauty of Christ, then praise God!

We must be diligent to orchestrate our worship in a manner that is profoundly theocentric and Spirit-led. "Shout for joy to God, all the earth; sing the glory of *his* name; give to *him* glorious praise! Say to God, 'How awesome are *your* deeds!'" (Psalm 66:1-3a). Note well: we are to "shout" in worship, but always "to God" in praise. Shouting for shouting's sake, to give vent to your emotions or as a way of seeking psychological relief, is not fitting in church. But shouting to God in gratitude and joy and celebration of who he is and what he has done is most appropriate. Again, note well: we are not merely to "sing" but to "sing the glory of his name," not our own. Our focus is on the "deeds" of God: "your deeds", Lord, are what fill our hearts and direct our praise.

### *Why Must we Sing?*

The author of Hebrews speaks of the "sacrifice of praise" as expressed in "the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name" (Heb. 13:15). The reference to the "fruit of lips" in v. 15 must be contrasted with what Jesus said when he denounced the hypocritical and vain worship of the Pharisees – "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me" (Matt. 15:8). Needless to say, that is not what our author means when he talks about praising God with our "lips". ***There is a world of difference between the labor of your lips and the "fruit" of your lips.*** The "fruit" of lips is what we say or sing that flows from a heart mesmerized by the mercy of God, a spirit that is saturated with the splendor of God, and affections set on fire by the magnificence of God.

Just think of it: according to Jesus you can "worship" God by singing and shouting and dancing and loud declarations of loyalty and love and it all be vanity! ***If the "heart" is not engaged, worship is a sham.*** You can be orthodox and honored among men, as the religious leaders in that day certainly were, fervent and faithful in your vocalized praise of God, quite "pious" by all outward indications, at the same time your "heart" is distant and cold and lifeless.

Note also that the singing that both Paul and the author of Hebrews have in mind is neither random nor aimless. It is ***"to God"*** (Heb. 13:15)! He is the focus of our faith, the object of our praise, the audience of One to whom we lift our hearts in wonder and awe. I suspect this is one reason certain people are uncomfortable with singing. It requires of them vulnerability, openness, and honesty as they direct their most heartfelt adoration, hopes, and desires "to God." They are fearful of the depth of commitment and devotion that singing "to God" entails. But sing "to God" we must.

One final comment is in order. I can almost hear some of you say, "But Sam. How can I worship when I feel nothing for God? My emotions are dead, lifeless, and I don't want to be accused Jesus of worshiping him in vain." Worship can be genuine, sincere, and authentic even when you are not red-hot for God.

Passion is essential to the act and experience of worship. Granted, you may be at a stage in your life where the only passion you feel is pain or brokenness or emptiness. It may be the passionate ache and yearning to be filled, feeling empty as you do. It may be the passion of desperation and need or of longing and anticipation for what you don't have but know you *must* have if you are going to survive. But it is, nonetheless, *passion*.

*So what should we do when we feel nothing, when we are bored and indifferent and dead on the inside, when we are downcast and can barely move our mouths to sing? What should we do when we've lost our sense of intimacy with the Lord, when we feel nothing of his presence, when there is but a haunting echo of his distance? Some of you struggle to attend church. You find little appealing in it but feel obligated to go because a friend or family member pressured you into coming. Can you still glorify God in worship? Yes!*

Even though you may not now feel any joy or satisfaction in his presence, *you want to*. You remember days past when your heart was aflame and your spirit ablaze with passion for God and with a sense of his presence. You delighted in his goodness and praise was easy and natural and free. You want it. You are desperate for it. You cry for it. But it's not there, for now.

Perhaps you are in a place of extreme emotional brokenness. Your life is crumbling all around you. Nothing has worked out the way you hoped. All that you've strived to achieve is disintegrating before your eyes and you are helpless to stem the tide. All that you once valued is vanishing. You feel nothing. Your spirit is dry and barren and you sense an ugly anger and bitterness rising up in your heart. Can *you* worship in a way that honors and glorifies God. Yes. So what should you do?

***Sing anyway. Worship anyway.*** Praise God for his matchless worth and his unexcelled beauty. "Wait a minute, Sam. That sounds like you're encouraging me to be a hypocrite. I thought I heard you moments ago denounce the very thing you now seem to endorse. I'm confused." I can appreciate that. But what I'm advocating isn't hypocrisy, because God is glorified by your *longing* for the joy that is to be found in him even if you are not yet experiencing it. God is honored by what John Piper calls "*the spark of anticipated gladness*" that leads you to praise him even when you don't feel like it.

In your brokenness you know that there is only One who can heal and bind up your wounds. In your spiritual weariness you know there is only One who can bring refreshment and renewal to your arid soul. In your cold-heartedness you know there is only One who can bring life-giving warmth. In your joylessness you know there is only One who can restore delight to your spirit. And it is precisely this deep and desperate desire in your spiritual desert that so profoundly honors God.

Isn't this what we see in Psalm 42:1-2? "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for Thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God." What honors the water: the deer bent over drinking, after a long journey in the desert, or the deer diligently panting for the water while *yet in* the desert? Both! Actually drinking is the best and most satisfying way to honor the water; but until you get there, continue to thirst for it.

### *In the Meantime*

Come to God in worship to enjoy the satisfying richness of all that he is for you in Jesus. If you are not yet enjoying him, here are a few words of practical advice:

First of all, confess the sin of joylessness. Joylessness is a serious sin. Acknowledge the coldness and indifference of your heart. Don't pretend that it doesn't matter how you feel. It matters, not only to you but especially to God.

Second, pray for a revelation of God's splendor and beauty and majesty and sweetness and all-satisfying, all-sufficient goodness. Ask the Holy Spirit to grant you spiritual ears that you might hear the Father rejoicing over you with loud and boisterous singing (Zephaniah 3:17). Ask the Holy Spirit to grant you spiritual eyes that you might again see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

Third, begin to take those steps set forth in Scripture to renew your joy - Bible reading, prayer, participation at the Lord's Supper, remembering God's past deeds of kindness, focusing on the cross, fellowshiping with those who *are* enjoying God, etc.

Fourth, think about hell! Yes, you read it right. Think about hell. Among his personal resolutions, Jonathan Edwards included the following: "Resolved, when I feel pain, to think of the pains of martyrdom, and of hell" (16:754). You'll be amazed at how a brief time of meditation on the agonies of hell, from which you have been so graciously delivered, will serve to increase and deepen your joy and gratitude!

Fifth, and finally, praise him anyway. Pursue the outward dimension of your duty in prayerful hope and expectation that it will help to rekindle the inward delight. Again, the reason this is not hypocrisy is because you are doing the outward act *hoping* to regain the inward joy, not as a substitute for it or as disguise to convince others you mean it when in fact you don't.

"My heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God!"  
(Ps. 84:2b)



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