

## **Why To Sing** **[Deeper Sheet 7.26.09]**

Read Psalm 8, Psalm 92

There's something significant about the fact that whenever we gather, we sing. But singing isn't the point—at the heart of our singing is a shared experience. Some people enjoy singing and belt it out with passion and energy. That energy is crucial because there are always those among us who can't find it in ourselves to sing the words, but just hearing it on someone else's lips gives hope. But there are also those among us who are less inclined to belt it out and more prone to ponder the words. That kind of deep engagement and reflection is just as crucial. Yet whether a person likes to sing or not, singing isn't the point. At the heart of our singing is the shared experience of encountering God together.

Often we sing really old songs, songs full of enthronement language: kings, servants, robes, crowns, and diadems. But most of us haven't used a diadem in years—like, hundreds of years. Yet we keep using this kind of language to sing about God. Why? To remind ourselves that even though the world is constantly changing there is something, someone, unchanging. Some traditions have even used songs as maps, as if the words and notes laid down a trail for others to follow. So we join the chorus of those who for thousands of years have acknowledged that there is something "More" by routinely, intentionally, and often musically creating space to remind ourselves of and orient ourselves around this "More". The singing isn't about what people like but rather about together orienting ourselves around God.

Most of what we sing is poetic and not literal: in the Psalms God is like a rock or a shepherd, the righteous are like palm trees or the cedars of Lebanon. There is a point at which literal language fails and poetry is all we're left with for describing the beauty and truth of who God is. Poetry is porous; it invites a broad spectrum of interpretation and meaning. It's why we can sing the same song and read the same Bible and have endlessly different experiences. Poetry might be the only equipment we have for wrapping our minds around the bigness of God.

Ironically, there is always a moment in our singing when a leading voice drops away and together we find a collective voice. It never fails, and somehow in that moment everyone is leading and no one is leading. This is the kind of thing that happens when a group of people start tapping into the reality and mystery of a God who is "one". We begin to become one ourselves. The shared experience of singing together is a deeply subversive, counter-cultural act of mutual submission.

Are there songs or particular phrases in songs that are difficult for you to sing? If so, which ones and why?

What particular songs have served like maps for you, helping you better understand what it means to follow God?

Where else do you see the counter-cultural practice of mutual submission in your life?

Try having a shared experience with a group of people this week. [To learn more about how to practice having a shared experience, check out our Spiritual Practices Reader at [marshill.org/teaching/sp.](http://marshill.org/teaching/sp.)]