



WESTMINSTER  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

# “SING ALONG”

John Galbreath  
Bible Study Series

Text: Psalm 96  
Date: June 20, 1966

About Westminster's Galbreath Bible Study Series:

This lesson is one taken from a sermon preached by John Galbreath at Westminster Presbyterian Church on June 20, 1966.

To complete the lesson, we suggest that you begin by reading the designated Bible passage (Psalm 96).

Next, review the outline of the sermon. Reflect on the chosen scripture and how you would “fill in” the remainder of the message from the chosen passage.

Then, review the study questions posed about the lesson — whether by yourself or in your small group.

Finally, share your thoughts on the Galbreath Bible Study blog on the Westminster Intranet.

The bulletin notes that week as *Songs of Life's Seasons*. The hymns that Sunday were listed as follows:

Hymn of Childhood

*Jesus Loves Me*

*I Think When I Read*

Hymn of Youth

*Be Thou My Vision*

*Heralds of Christ*

A Wedding Hymn

*O Perfect Love*

A Hymn of the City

*Where Cross the Crowded Ways*

A Hymn for Our Home

*O Happy Home*

A Hymn for Times of Anxiety

*God Moves in Mysterious Ways*

Hymn of Immortality

*The Strife is O'er*

## I. Introduction

A. The songs we sing are a reflection of our interests and desires, as individuals and as a nation.

## II. We Learn of Israel

A. Our own generation has found much more consolation, strength from the Psalms than from any other portion of Jewish literature – its history, laws or drama.

1. They were the songs of ordinary people.

a) *The shepherd loved to sing out of the loneliness of his existence.*

b) *The theology of Psalms is not uniformly good – in some cases, we have the feeling that God is being used as a brick-bat to beat their enemies on the head.*

2. The intimate sense of the guidance and presence of God, fills the most profound sense of spiritual need that our generation – or any generation – may know.

B. Not all the religious psalms are found in the one book, but are scattered throughout the literature.

C. The Bible gives us some of the patriotic songs.

1. A strong sense of the relationships of God to their nation.

D. The Bible has some love songs.

1. “Song of Solomon,” a classic.

a) *A source of embarrassment to some – attempts to interpret in terms of Christ’s love for the church.*

b) *A rich oriental sensuousness.*

c) *A profound spirit:*

*“Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm. For love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave. The coals thereof are coals of fire which hath a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it; If a man would give all the substance of his house for love it would utterly be condemned.”*

**E. We know little of the common street songs, for they were not likely put to writing.**

### **III. We Learn of Our Church**

**A. To answer, “What is Presbyterianism?” we may well turn to our hymnal.**

**B. Our attitude toward worship. Our sacraments and rites. Our theology – belief in Trinity. Our social pronouncements. Our personal relationship to Christ.**

**C. Our traditions**

- 1. The early hymns: Pierre Abelard (1079-1142) and Aurelius Prudentius (348-413)**
- 2. The ecumenical spirit: Pope Alexander, Francis Xavier, Gregory Ben Judah, Daniel – Jewish Luther, Wesleys (18 hymns)**

**D. The spirit of Presbyterian hymns**

- 1. Objectivity – a strong sense of praise to God – very little whimpering**

**E. Hymnology is not dead, must be a reflection of our current religious experience.**

- 1. Hugh Thompson Kerr, page 88, “God of Our Life” -- One of our greatest hymns**

### **IV. Our Secular Songs**

**A. 15,000 people questioned in a survey**

- 1. 60% like church music, hymns**
- 2. Dance music – 59%**
- 3. Jive, boogie-woogie – 19%**
- 4. Classical – 33.3%**

**B. Our ballads**

1. **Outstandingly clean, as a whole**
2. **The inferior (morally) of them seldom become the most popular**
3. **The good judgment of publishers and entertainers is to be commended.**
4. **We have a debt of gratitude - they cost us nothing, yet are a happy and rich part of our life.**

**C. Religious ballads**

1. **Some tripe "Have you talked to the man upstairs."**
2. **Some fine "My friend"**

**Study Questions -- Part I***Bible Reading: Psalm 96*

Psalm 96:1 and 2 say: <sup>1</sup> Oh sing unto Jehovah a new song: Sing unto Jehovah, all the earth. <sup>2</sup> Sing unto Jehovah, bless his name; Show forth his salvation from day to day.

- Why do you think the psalm specifically links salvation as a key reason to sing to God?

Psalm 96:3 and 4 say: <sup>3</sup> Declare his glory among the nations, His marvellous works among all the peoples. <sup>4</sup> For great is Jehovah, and greatly to be praised: He is to be feared above all gods.

- Why do you think the opening of the verse talks about glory and marvelous works and yet the end speaks of a God to be feared?

Psalm 96:5 through 8 say: <sup>5</sup> For all the gods of the peoples are idols; But Jehovah made the heavens. <sup>6</sup> Honor and majesty are before him: Strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. <sup>7</sup> Ascribe unto Jehovah, ye kindreds of the peoples, Ascribe unto Jehovah glory and strength. <sup>8</sup> Ascribe unto Jehovah the glory due unto his name: Bring an offering, and come into his courts.

- Have you made any idols that take away from your relationship with God?
- How do you honor God in your life?
- What offerings do you make to ascribe glory to God?

Psalm 96:9 through 13 say: <sup>9</sup> Oh worship Jehovah in holy array: Tremble before him, all the earth. <sup>10</sup> Say among the nations, Jehovah reigneth: The world also is established that it cannot be moved: He will judge the peoples with equity. <sup>11</sup> Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof; <sup>12</sup> Let the field exult, and all that is therein; Then shall all the trees of the wood sing for joy <sup>13</sup> Before Jehovah; for he cometh, For he cometh to judge the earth: He will judge the world with righteousness, And the peoples with his truth.

- How do you think God's truth sees our world today?

## Study Questions -- Part II

*Sermon :*

I.A. How do you think the music of today's church reflects our interests and desires? Why do traditional hymns still speak to people today? Why do praise songs appeal to a different generation?

II.A. – Why do you think some psalms are among the things that young children are taught to memorize early in their church schooling?

II. What are your favorite psalms?

III. Are there hymns that help you to feel especially "Presbyterian"?

IV. What do you think a similar survey would show today?

V. What changes do you see in secular music since the time this sermon was written (1966)?

V. What sacred music most speaks to you? Is there one particular hymn or praise song you would share with others in helping to talk about your faith?

In the pouch with this sermon were several small notes:

*O God Beneath Thy Guiding Hand:* Bacon – born in a frontier trading post at Detroit in 1802. Father a missionary to the Indians. Returned East for education – a professor at Yale Divinity. Hymn written on 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of New Haven. God’s grace through the years – nowhere more manifest than in the life of our own people.

*The Church’s One Foundation:* One of the top ten. Used at least 18 times in six years. Great ecumenical hymn – centrality of Christ. Samuel Wesley, organist in four of the greatest cathedrals in 19<sup>th</sup> century. Grandson of Charles Wesley. Centrality of Christ in our understanding of God’s grace.

*O God Our Help in Ages Past:* Watts – father of hymnody – more hymns than any other writer. 600 in all. A radical – departed from Psalms. “Watts Whymn” “Why should Watts take precedence over the Holy Ghost?” Up to his time, Psalms were “lined out” – a dreary process. Written during the Schism Act – threatened to dispossess all non-conformists. Encompasses a profound sense of God’s providence through the ages.

*The God of Abraham Praise:* Yidgal – the Jewish Doxology – dates back to middle ages. Leoni: T. Oliver, visiting a synagogue in London, was so taken by it that with assistance of the chanter, Leoni, he made the first translation. Improved translation by Mann. God’s grace, begun in creation, revealed in the life of the Old Testament prophets.

*Be Thou My Vision:* An ancient folk hymn – Irish. A favorite of young people – it looks ahead – a profound sense of consecration.

*We Thank Thee Lord:* Calvin Laufer, American Presbyterian, Brodheadsville, PA. God’s grace calls forth our response in service.

*Rejoice Ye Pure in Heart:* Like many other hymns, makes a fine anthem. God’s grace, manifest in our own life.

*Where Cross the Crowded Ways:* Frank Mason North – a Methodist of our own century. As David saw God’s grace in the shepherd life of the hills of Judah, North saw God’s hand at work in the slums of New York where he ministered.

*Because I Knew Not When My Life Was Good:* Williams and Chadwick – unknown to me. God’s grace – not as history but present reality, calling forth confession.