



SINGING THE UNSUNG

LIBERATING THE SONG OF GOD'S PEOPLE

JOHN BELL

“What we sing shapes our faith: do we sing about God’s creation, the equality of men and women? About God’s love for justice, about our concern for other people? Or do we just sing about “me”? Ultimately, what we sing repeatedly shapes our belief, our discipleship, and our faith.”

— John Bell, *Living the Questions 2.0*

HOW TO USE SINGING THE UNSUNG

“Singing the Unsung” is a resource designed especially for music leaders, worship design teams, and pastors seeking the revitalization of worship for the 21st century. Guided by world-renowned musician and theologian John Bell, “Singing the Unsung” escorts participants through a reflection on the theology of the Church’s song as well as offering practical techniques on how we can sing and pray together with integrity.

Designed for maximum flexibility in personal, group, and worship settings, the DVDs include lecture footage, worship clips, and 30 songs from around the world. The Discussion Guide includes questions to spark conversation and explore how each session’s material applies to one’s local setting.

Use “Singing the Unsung” in a variety of settings, including:

- Individual use.
- Multi-day to multi-week workshops for choirs, worship teams, and worship leaders.

- Team building and professional development for those responsible for planning worship and liturgy.
- Teaching a worshipping community new music.

While most of the sessions feature the teaching of a variety of songs, sessions 7 & 8 are two halves of a John Bell lecture outlining the philosophy behind much of the material in the other seven sessions.

THE MUSIC

1. Why We Sing

The Lord's My Shepherd
The Lord Will Listen to the Brokenhearted
Alleluia
Prepare the Way of the Lord
The Lord is My Light

2. What We Sing

Hear Me, Lord, and Draw Near
O Great God and Lord of the Earth
We Cannot Measure How You Heal
How Can we Know How Long You Wait
Go Silent Friend

3. Congregation as Choir

Glory Be to God on High
Amen, Amen, It Shall Be So

4. Improving Congregational Singing

Sing for God's Glory that Colors the Dawn
of Creation
God's Spirit is Here
I Waited Patiently for God
Ageless God of Boundless Wonder
The Family

5. The Thin Place That Is Iona

Standing in the Need of Prayer
Wa, Wa, Wa A-mem-e-mo
Listen to the Word Which God has Spoken

Amen, Alleluia, Amen

God has Chosen Me

For Such a Time as This/ Latin American

We Walk His Way

Come, Holy Spirit

6. Christian Music Around The World

I am Glad, I am Glad I am Glad to be
Present in the House of God / The Song of
God's People (William Ramirez)
God Who Made the Earth Declared it
Good / While Earth Remains
Ka-Ma-Na' O 'I 'O

7. Why We Worship

(No songs)

8. Becoming The Body Of Christ

(No songs)

9. Living The Gospel

Sizohamba Naye

Listen Now for the Gospel

Kyrie

Because Christ Came to Enter in Our
Journey



1. WHY WE SING

“Justice is not a fancy word which we can slip in and out of prayers harmlessly. God’s justice affects the fabric of this world and the integrity of its people. And somewhere in a church is song, which is sung in response to God’s commandment: God’s kingdom of justice has to be celebrated.”

— John Bell, *Living the Questions* 2.0

1. Give an example from your life experience illustrating the claim that “singing is praying twice.”
2. “Music embellishes words with much more profound meaning” and resonance. Explain.
3. What kinds of music does your worshipping community rely on? Why?
4. What are some of Bell’s pet peeves regarding the poorly thought-out projection of words in worship? Suggest a list of considerations on a “best practice” list for churches that use projection.

5. What are some of the benefits of the “responsorial Psalm”?
6. Describe how the European approach to singing in worship may differ from the typical African or South American approach?
7. So, *why* do we sing?
8. Describe a situation in your worshipping community where you could imagine incorporating one of this session’s responses or Psalms.





2. WHAT WE SING

“The song of God’s people has to be a song praise, yes; a song of lament at times, yes; a song which expresses our personal joy, yes; a song which deals with our common aspirations, yes; but also a song which indicates that the God whom we worship is a God of justice. And sadly, from many churches in the Northern Hemisphere, not in the South, not in Guatemala, not in Mexico, not in Peru, not in Zimbabwe, not in Malawi, not in South Africa, not in Indonesia, not in Nepal, but in the north, because we presume that God is on our side. We don’t sing songs of justice.”

— John Bell, *Living the Questions* 2.0

1. “The purpose of liturgy is to allow the whole body of Christ to be presented before their Maker.” Explain.
2. How are the Psalms uniquely situated as a resource to deepen and broaden the worship experience?
3. Why is it important for liturgy to strive for its potential of “offering to God that which a minority of people might be experiencing” in the company of other people?
4. Discuss the potential of congregational song to be deeply pastoral.

5. Recall the “back-stories” of “O Great God and Lord of the Earth,” “We Cannot Measure,” “How Can we Know How Long You Wait?” and “Go Silent Friend.” How does knowing the origins of these songs affect not only your experience of singing them, but your connection with others?

6. So, how does *what* we sing matter?

7. Describe a situation in your worshipping community where you could imagine incorporating one of this session’s responses or Psalms.





3. CONGREGATION AS CHOIR

1. Discuss some of the perceived differences between a congregation and a choir.
2. List some of the ways a congregation can be enabled to sing.
3. How can you see the “bubble-up” effect being expressed in your worshipping community?
4. Describe a practical situation in your worshipping community where you could incorporate one of this session’s techniques to empower congregational singing.
5. Describe a situation in your worshipping community where you could incorporate one of this session’s songs.





4. IMPROVING CONGREGATIONAL SINGING

1. Make a list of at least six of the techniques that could add musical variety and be the first steps in improving congregational singing in your community.
2. How do these suggestions contribute to the goal of helping all of God's people to find their voice?
3. Describe a practical situation in your worshipping community where you could incorporate one of this session's techniques to improve congregational singing.
4. Describe a situation in your worshipping community where you could incorporate one of this session's songs.





5. THE THIN PLACE THAT IS IONA

There is a Celtic saying that “heaven and earth are only three feet apart” — but in the thin places, that distance is even smaller. A “thin place” is where the veil that separates heaven and earth is lifted and one is able to receive a glimpse of the mystery/glory of God.

1. How can the context in which a song is sung inform your choice of tempo, volume, and “energy-level”?
2. Describe a practical situation in your worshipping community where you could incorporate one of this session’s techniques to improve congregational singing.
3. Describe a situation in your worshipping community where you could incorporate one of this session’s songs.





6. CHRISTIAN MUSIC AROUND THE WORLD

“There is a presumption sometimes in the Western churches that our songs are the best songs or they're the only songs, and if only the rest of the world would sing in English, you know, we'd be very happy. I believe that God has given different gifts to every nation, and that different nations have insights to offer. This is particularly the case when we sing songs that come from the Southern Hemisphere, where people are much more upfront about social justice and their worship and in their singing than we are.”

— John Bell in *Living the Questions* 2.0

1. The destiny of the earth and its interconnectedness with humanity is “an aspect of Christian discipleship which we have to take seriously.” How does what we sing inform our awareness of Creation’s plight?
2. Why is it important to sing songs from outside of our cultural experience?
3. Describe a situation in your worshipping community where you could incorporate one of this session’s songs.





7. WHY WE WORSHIP

1. List some of the reasons why Bell “believes in the church.”

2. Discuss the first two of Bell’s “four alternatives” confronting the church today:
 - a. Form vs. Function

 - b. Connectedness vs. Estrangement

3. Describe examples in your worshipping community where you see these alternatives at work.





8. BECOMING THE BODY OF CHRIST

1. Discuss the last two of Bell's "four alternatives" confronting the church today:
 - c. Participation vs. Performance
 - d. Experience vs. Intellectualism
2. Describe examples in your worshipping community where you see these alternatives at work.





9. LIVING THE GOSPEL

1. If the Ten Commandments are not restrictions meant to make people feel guilty, what are they for?
2. Discuss Bell's examples of interpreting three of the Ten Commandments as gracious words of liberation:
 - a. Sabbath
 - b. Honoring Parents
 - c. Coveting
3. For Jesus, what is the alternative to law that forms the basis of living the Gospel?
4. Describe a situation in your personal life or worshipping community where the law takes priority over justice and mercy.
5. Describe a situation in your personal life or worshipping community where justice and mercy take priority over the law.
6. Describe a situation in your worshipping community where you could incorporate one of this session's songs.

