

*Study Guide*

*for*

*A Song To Sing, A Life to Live:  
Reflections on Music as Spiritual Practice*

By Don Saliers and Emily Saliers

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## INTRODUCTION

Discussing a book can be a stimulating and enlightening experience. In a good conversation, we delve more deeply into the material an author has presented. Just as important, we question it and wrestle with it. We apply it to our own situation, adding our own insights to those on the pages and discovering how the ideas we have encountered can make a difference in our lives.

The books in the Series on the Practices of Faith are especially suitable for group discussion. This is partly because of the nature of practices themselves. Practices are activities that are shared with other people. We do them with and for one another. Therefore, growing in our understanding of practices is something we must do with other people too. Moreover, practices are not abstractions. Practicing our faith requires us to look hard at the everyday realities of our lives--not in general, but in the specific places where we live, work, worship, and play. We see these realities more honestly when we look with more than one pair of eyes.

So conversation is crucial. But excellent conversation is not inevitable. Excellent conversation is more likely when a discussion is carefully tended, and this takes some planning. Excellent conversations are structured to allow space for attention to the particular contexts and thoughts of participants. They are attuned to the life situations and learning styles of those who will gather in search of deeper understanding and more authentic action. They need to be set within the framework of a certain period of time, a certain physical space, and a certain commitment to persevere when tough issues emerge. It is the task of a leader to attend to these needs.

This guide is for you, the leader, as you assume responsibility for hosting such conversations. We hope that it will be helpful as you think through how specific occasions can help a specific group of people, gathering in a specific place, to explore what steps would make it possible for them to appreciate more deeply their own songlines and to see how their songlines connect them through time to creation, other people, and God. We trust this exploration can nurture hearts that know the sorrow songs as well as psalms of praise and encourage lives that

sing out justice, freedom, faith and hope. We do not intend to provide you with a set curriculum and detailed instructions, however. We hope instead to provide the kind of guidance that will help you to structure conversations that are appropriate for your own group.

Part 1 offers an orientation to your role as a leader, together with some guidelines for structuring group exploration of Christian practices for opening the gift of time.

Part 2 provides an assortment of resources that can be used to help groups draw on their own experience and explore their own context in connection with each chapter of *A Song to Sing, A Life to Live*.

The Series on the Practices of Faith began with the book *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*. It is no accident that *Practicing Our Faith* was written by a team of thirteen authors, rather than by an individual. We found that talking about Christian practices together helped us to see our way of life more clearly and to envision fresh possibilities for faithfulness more imaginatively. *A Song to Sing, A Life to Live* grew from that book's chapter on the practice of singing our lives written by Don Saliers. Widening the conversation, Emily Saliers joined her father, Don, to write this book.

Now it is a joy to invite you to discuss *A Song to Sing, A Life to Live* in your community. We are confident that readers will bring to it a range of insights wider than even Don and Emily's, because they bring wisdom rooted in other traditions, knowledge drawn from other fields, observations made in other places, and lifetimes of experience. We hope that your discussion of this book will be full of discovery and the beginning of a richer experience of the life God has given you to live and the song God is calling you to sing.

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## HOSTING THE CONVERSATION

*A Song to Sing, A Life to Live* can provide a focus for reflection in a wide variety of contexts. Many church groups--including Bible study groups, sacramental preparation classes, youth groups, retreats, and governing boards--will find it germane to their concerns. It can also be used in classrooms, within families, at the workplace, and in nonprofit organizations. Less formally, a group of friends could agree to read and discuss this book together, or an individual could partner with an other, conversing about the book face-to-face or by telephone or e-mail.

Whatever the setting, it is important that the person or persons hosting the conversation honor the hopes and longings participants will bring to this disciplined consideration of song. This person is charged with shaping a community of learning--one that may last only a few weeks, to be sure, but one whose structure will be an important factor as participants seek to help one another to learn and grow. After all, every group will not only *study* Christian practices during its time together; It will also *engage in* some of them in a preliminary way--saying yes to clearing time for reading and talking, discerning together what action will result from their learning, offering testimony about their convictions, forgiving one another for the misunderstandings that will surely occur at some point along the way, and, perhaps, honoring one another's bodies by exchanging hugs or sharing a meal. Certainly, the community will consider singing their sorrow, joy, and faith for and with one another. These are small acts in a way, but how the leader helps them to take faithful form is a crucial matter.

### ***Leading as Teaching***

When you take responsibility for leading a series of conversations or even a single session, you become, in effect, a teacher. Whether you are a solo teacher or part of a leadership team, it becomes your special charge to foster a situation in which those present can help one another grow in the practices of faith. This does not require that you be an "expert," for your role is not primarily to impart information to the participants. *A Song to Sing, A Life to Live* will provide much of the "information" your group needs--the cultural, ethical, biblical, historical,

theological, and musical material that will fuel your process of reflection. (You may want to find other resources as you and your group advance, but these are not essential as you begin.)

Becoming a teacher/leader does, however, require that you give deliberate attention to the specific nature of your group.

As a teacher/leader, you will be guiding a specific group of people on a specific day for a specific period of time. This is the "live event" of teaching. In that live event, energy will surge and recede, momentum will develop and ebb, the flow of conversation will twist and turn, and any number of planned and unplanned things will happen.

Creating a good educational design is an artistic process. It is a process that is unique to each situation--as unique, indeed, as the teacher, the participants, and the local culture are unique. A fruitful educational design will connect all of these elements--teacher, participants, and local culture--with the larger contexts discussed in *A Song to Sing, A Life to Live*.

### ***Preparing to Lead Educational Events***

The following pages offer suggestions for charting a single group session. In most cases, such a session will be one in a series--so a few words about creating a series are important as well. Many different formats are possible: a weekly study group (possibly during Lent), an intensive process of reflection during a weekend retreat, a day-long workshop, or a year-long series with meetings once each month--any of these, or others, may suit your situation.

Whatever format you choose, help the group be clear about what it promises to do over the term of the series as a whole.

These suggestions are offered to help you, the teacher/leader, as you prepare an educational design for any given session. Use it in conjunction with other sections of this Guide. More importantly, rely on your own common sense and educational experiences as you chart the educational course of your group.

**First, develop a clear sense of what the session is about.** Read carefully the relevant chapter(s) in *A Song to Sing, A Life to Live*. How do the authors define the problems people face

regarding music, and what practices does they commend? What stories, songs, quotations, and Biblical material touched you in this chapter? How is making music something that people do together, not just something a person does alone?

**Second, wrestle with the material in the chapter.** Allow your reflection to go beyond the discussion in the book. What other examples of this practice occur to you? What other Biblical stories are relevant? What questions do you have? Where do you resist entering this practice as the authors have portrayed it? Do you need to do further reading or talk with someone who is more familiar with music as a spiritual practice?

**Third, reflect on your personal and institutional involvement in this practice.** Try to identify the ways in which you are already involved in the patterns of activity described in this chapter, both positive and negative. Some may be hard to recognize because you take them for granted. What assumptions, prejudices, and passions do you bring? What yearning, pain, or experiences of new life do you bring? What responsibilities do you have regarding this practice within your own community, and what are your hopes and fears about exploring the practice in light of these? Do you have a special perspective on music that arises from your denominational, spiritual, or cultural identity?

**Fourth, think about the people with whom you will be in conversation.** Teaching only works when it is designed with these participants and all that they bring to the event in mind. As you chart an educational event, reflect on who is likely to be present. How do the communities and traditions that they represent already engage this practice? What life circumstances are you familiar with that may resonate with this chapter? Do you suspect that they have experienced pain in relation to time? Joy? Confusion? What prejudices and passions do you anticipate they will bring? What gifts and wisdom? Where do you think they need to be challenged about their relationship to time? What styles of learning and group structures will be comfortable for them?

**Fifth, identify your hopes for the session.** Try to articulate in your own mind what you hope for those who will gather. The authors of *Practicing Our Faith* had certain hopes about the

kinds of reflection that book might generate. These hopes now inform the Series on the Practices of Faith. As you identify your own hopes for the group you are leading, you might find it helpful to dialogue with the hopes of these authors.

The authors hoped that readers would develop a way of thinking about their lives and the life of the world. And we hoped that this way of thinking would lead them into a way of living. Breaking that large hope into parts, we hoped that readers would

- come to greater recognition that God is active in the world, in our communities, and in our lives;
- become more aware of their yearning for a way of life that is whole and holy;
- understand more deeply the rich resources biblical faith and Christian tradition hold for shaping a way of life that can be lived with integrity today;
- become more aware of the various forms of practices developed by faithful people in history and around the world today;
- reflect critically on the deformations of practices that exist in church and society;
- grow in the skills and language that will help them engage in these practices with greater fluidity;
- discover fresh forms of the practices that are responsive to God's activity in the changing circumstances of our world, communities, and lives; and
- be challenged and motivated to engage in practices with greater intentionality, energy, and commitment.

**Sixth, consider how you can provide a variety of ways of engaging with the practices in each session.** Reflecting on spiritual practices takes more than general conversation. It happens best as part of a process in which participants engage with this material in a variety of ways. Fruitful sessions will usually include activities, exercises, and questions that nurture various forms of personal and communal engagement. The following forms of engagement are crucial to exploring a practice fully:

- exploring participants' experience by helping them to identify formative memories, present realities, and hopes for the future;
- considering the emotions stirred by the practice--the group's yearning for it or joy in it, and the stories, dreams, and promises it evokes;
- thinking through the analysis set forth in *A Song to Sing, A Life to Live*, making sure that its main points are understood but giving participants an opportunity to affirm, question, or challenge issues raised by the reading;
- exploring the theological character of human life in time, biblically and as the authors present it, and relating this to God's activity and our faithful living;
- reflecting critically on how time can become deformed and violated in our lives and in our society; and
- encountering a challenge to live more fully and faithfully, beginning perhaps with some change the group will decide to undertake together.

**Seventh, create a design.** Arranging elements like these into a design appropriate for a particular group is one of the chief challenges of the teacher/leader. Often, posing discussion questions seems to be the easiest way to proceed. But in most education--and particularly in education in Christian practices--other approaches must also be incorporated. Creative exercises, field trips, forms of artistic self-expression, rituals, songs, writing in a journal, interpreting a piece of art, reflecting in silence, sharing in groups of two or three--all these are activities that can enhance learning when used with good judgment. The second section of the study guide offers a number of such suggestions for nurturing reflection. Look through these as you prepare a session, but don't rely on them. Develop your own ideas, attuned to your hopes, the suggestions in this Guide, and--especially--the specific character of the people and place of your teaching.

There are no firm rules about how to design an educational event. Different groups are led by their own traditions or deep convictions to prefer one starting point vastly more than another; for example, in some churches it will be important to start with the Bible, while in other

places starting with a contemporary ethical issue or an invitation to share a personal story would work better. Perhaps beginning with music—listening to a recording, singing a familiar song or learning a new one—would be best. Use your common sense, experience, and powers of observation as you determine what will be most fruitful in your situation.

Two more words of advice arise from our sense of what kind of education growth in faithful practice demands. First, be alert to the *embodied* character of practices, and actually do something together. Sing. Dance. Go to a concert.

Second, be alert to the *challenges* inherent in faith practices. It is easy to get people talking about music and the life it can express. However, we hope that discussing *A Song to Sing, A Life to Live* will evoke much more than smiles of recognition. We hope to stir up some discomfort, too, by encouraging readers to think hard about the power of music to divide, demean, and destroy persons and communities, as well as its potential to transform, deepen and unite persons and communities across cultures and through time. This requires facing the places where we or our society have reduced music making to background sound or mindless entertainment, neglecting its spiritual, communal, and cosmic dimensions. It also requires efforts to envision changes in our way of life in light of the biblical, theological, and ethical perspectives we encounter.

**Eighth, set up the physical environment.** Though it is easy to overlook, this step is a crucial one. A conversation among adults sitting in a classroom feels different than a conversation in the warmth of someone's home. Reflect with care about how the physical space available to your group can be arranged to enhance comfort and sharing. Prepare in advance whatever materials will be needed, such as markers, drawing supplies, writing utensils, paper, music and instruments.

**Ninth, create an appropriate emotional environment.** The emotional climate of any educational setting is crucial to its success. But this is especially so when the topic at hand is the life of faith. How can the life of the group that will gather reflect the quality of Christian

practices themselves? How will hospitality, forgiveness, testimony, healing, and other practices be practiced in the very shape of this small community of learning?

An atmosphere of mutuality is important. When people are treated with dignity and respect, they participate more fully in transforming and challenging reflection. Remember, as teacher/leader you need not have all the answers. Try to show respect for each member and instill in others a sense of mutual regard and gratitude for the variety of gifts and experiences members bring to the group.

An atmosphere of trust also needs to be fostered. Sharing thoughts and experiences, people expose vulnerabilities and are sensitive to how they will be received by others. Attentive listening, a supportive word, and a nonjudgmental spirit help to create an atmosphere of deeper conversation and greater growth. In many groups, it may be helpful to make these expectations explicit and to agree not to repeat personal information shared in this setting.

Directive but non-controlling leadership can also enhance your educational event. Conversation that meanders without any direction can be frustrating for everyone involved. One of the roles of the teacher/leader is to gauge the interests of the entire group and assist it in moving toward its goals. On the other hand, you should not act too heavy-handedly or feel that you have failed if the group does not address all the issues you had charted. Stifling honest and lively engagement frustrates participants too. What you are seeking is a delicate balance sustained by close attention to the needs and interests of your particular group.

Honest questioning is another aim. The questions you will pose--including the ones you discover in this Guide--should have the purpose of opening up dimensions of human experience and reflection. They should not be used to trick participants into saying something you want them to say, and they are not meant as quizzes to which people might give answers that are correct or incorrect. Ask questions in order to open, not close, discussion.

Encouraging shared participation is also important. Everyone has been in groups where one or two members dominate the conversation. If we are lucky, we have also been surprised by an unexpected insight from a person who usually remains silent. Try to find comfortable ways

of making it possible for everyone to participate, even if this means asking a dominant person to give someone else a chance to speak. Let the group be silent for a spell when that is helpful, too. Show that you think it is all right if there are some minutes when no one speaks at all.

***Encouragement: Beyond the Guidelines***

Reflecting on the practices of faith as they take shape in our lives and communities can be a generative experience. When you lead others in doing this, you are initiating a process far richer and lengthier than the group meetings themselves. As we have noted, your sessions are occasions when people practice many of the practices together. They are also times of planting, times when ideas are encountered that may lie dormant at first but later grow in unanticipated ways.

You cannot control the outcome of a single session or of the group's experience as a whole, nor should you hope to do so. But you are nonetheless offering a wonderful gift when you agree to serve as a host at the table of mutual learning. May you find this table to be one where you are a guest as well.

## QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES FOR EVERY CHAPTER

In this section we offer a sampling of material from which you might choose as you design educational events using *A Song to Sing, A Life to Live*. This sampling is not a set of lesson plans but rather a collection of suggestions from which you should select whatever may address the concerns and stretch the thinking of your group. You should feel free to ignore some and alter others, depending on the needs and rhythms of your specific group. You will also want to devise fresh questions and activities tailored specifically for your own situation, and often to invite participants to contribute to this creative process as well. In your own educational design, weave these suggestions together with other resources, including the activities suggested within the chapters of *A Song to Sing, A Life to Live* and your own sense of the issues facing your particular group. In addition, be creative about drawing on material beyond the book and this Guide. The references at the end of *A Song to Sing, A Life to Live* cite numerous recordings, books, and articles. You can also consult people in your community who possess life wisdom about the practices the book explores.

### *Chapter 1: Tracing Our Songlines*

Tracing Your Songline. What name would you give the “song” you were given when you were born? How does it connect you to your familial, cultural, or spiritual ancestors? How do you or how might you pass on this “song” to the next generation?

Using crayons, markers, or paints, try “mapping” your songline as the authors did. Identify places your songline has been broken, buried, misused, changed, recovered, or renewed.

How have you “improvised” on the songline given to you from your ancestors? Do you see this songline alive in the next generation? If so, in what ways? If not, why do you think it has disappeared?

Do you sense that part of your own songline or spiritual inheritance has disappeared? Are you interested in recovering and reclaiming it? To whom might you go to learn about what has been lost?

Song Keepers. Many cultures honor certain persons among them as “keepers of the song” or “tellers of the story.” Are there such persons in your community?

- Identify one and spend some time listening to him or her.
- Consider asking if he or she would sing or tell a story publicly; invite others to come and hear.

Jesus' Songline. Jesus was given a song at birth; his mother sang a song she has received from her ancestors. In Luke's gospel, after the angel Gabriel comes to Mary with the stunning news that she will bear a child who will be called holy, Son of God, she rushes to her older kinswoman, Elizabeth, and she sings of the greatness of God, or "magnifies" the Lord. Her song is often called the "Magnificat" the first word of the Latin translation. Read Luke 1:46-55. Mary's song is not wholly original; it is her improvisation on the song of Hannah, her ancestor in the faith, who also heard amazing news about a child to be born. Though she was well past the age of childbearing, God heard and answered her prayer and she bore a son, Samuel. When Samuel was weaned, Hannah brought him to the prophet Eli and dedicated him as a servant of God. There she sang a song full of images she received from her ancestors, including Miriam (see Exodus 15:21) Hannah sings:

My heart exalts in the Lord,

my strength is exalted in my God. . .

The bows of the mighty are broken,

but the feeble gird on strength.

Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread,

but those who were hungry are fat with spoil. . .

[God]raises up the poor from the dust;

he lifts the needy from the ash heap,

to make them sit with princes

and inherit a seat of honor.

1 Samuel 2:1a, 4-5a,8a

Music and Faith. Emily writes, “Music and faith are, for me, intimately related, even as I continue to wrestle with questions about organized religion” (p. 3). Tell your own story of music’s power to plant, sustain, or nurture faith in spite of your struggles with or questions about religious structures, organizations, or teaching.

A funny little church orchestra helped bring Don’s father home, home to his own life and to his son. Tell or write a story about how music led you home, brought you back to yourself, your community, or God.

The changing seasons of earth inspire certain music: Stravinsky’s “Rites of Spring,” George Winston’s “December”, etc. And that music, in turn, evokes the seasons. The festivals and seasons of the church year also have their own music. Name the piece of music, song, or hymn that encodes and evokes the heart of each season and feast for you or for your worshipping community: Advent, Christmas, The Epiphany, Ash Wednesday, Lent, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter, The Pentecost.

Emily observes, “Anyone who struggles with love and suffering and searches for the mystery ends up singing—or at least listening to music” (p. 13). Do you agree?

Consider your experiences of unimagined beauty, unbearable pain, or ineffable mystery brought to you through music. Share the story if you are able.

Prayerfully read the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) or Psalm 78:1-8. Begin by reading it slowly and thoughtfully until you are attracted by a particular phrase, sentence, or longer section. When it seems there is unusual power, beauty, or truth there, stop reading, and sit quietly for a moment. Read that passage over, slowly, again and again. Do not reason about the text. Do not analyze it. Just listen to the words and meaning. Let it do its work in you. Stay with those words as long as they hold your attention. When it has finished with you, simply resume reading. (This form of prayerful reading is known as *lectio divina*.)

## ***Chapter 2: A Sound Spirituality***

Visit a monastery that follows the rhythms of the Liturgy of the Hours of the Order of St. Benedict. If possible, either have a retreat at the monastery or conduct a retreat in your own setting that is ordered according to the Liturgy of the Hours.

Embodied Music. Listen to a recording or watch a music video of Bobby McFerrin in which he plays the many-voiced instrument of his body.

- Which musical instrument best describes your body?
- Which musical instrument best expresses your “song”?
- Consider how making music can honor your body and the bodies of others.

Listen to a recording of Bill Stains’s “All God’s Critters Got a Place in the Choir”; put aside adult decorum and sing along, making all the requisite animal noises and gestures.

The authors write, “The most important instrument of all—one that is used in every tradition—is the human voice” (p. 16). Go to a concert, recital or worship service (or listen to a recording of one) where you can experience communal *a capella* singing in a tradition or style not your own, such as shape note singing, medieval polyphony, Anglican chant, or Mennonite four-part hymn singing.

Learn a song or psalm in American Sign Language. Do you find that this physical translation further moves the song into your body? How do you think that happens? How does it feel?

Attend a worship service or other event in which vocal music is signed. How does this visual translation further move the song into your body?

Embodied Spirituality. In Hebrew scripture the Great Commandment begins “Hear, O Israel,” calling the people to a sound spirituality. The commandment continues: “The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). These verses are called the *Shema*, after the Hebrew word meaning “hear.” The people are instructed to keep the commandment ever before them: “Keep the words I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:6-9).

Note the active verbs in these verses: hear, keep, recite, talk, bind, fix, and write. These verbs evoke whole lives (heart, mind and strength) shaped by loving God at all times (when you lie down and when you rise) and in all places (when you are at home and when you are away).

- Consider how this “sound spirituality” becomes a way of life that involves the whole person and the entire community, from generation to generation.

Jesus takes the first and greatest commandment from this text, “Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:29).

In the Bible love is an action, not a feeling. To love God is to make God's love known in word and deed, to translate God's love into flesh and bone and breath. This is what Jesus means when he says, "The second [commandment] is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:31).

Though originally meant metaphorically, eventually the instruction to bind the law on your forehead and hand was interpreted literally, even legalistically. The *Shema* and the Decalogue (the ten words or commandments) were written on parchment and placed inside small wooden boxes that were strapped to ones wrist and forehead during morning prayer, or wrapped around the doorpost of a house.

- Consider what it might mean in your life to bind the "Law of love" on your hand and forehead, to write it on your doorposts and recite it to your children?

The people are called to live the love of God in the intimate setting of their households (write it on your doorposts) and in the midst of daily, communal, public life (write it on your [city] gates).

- Which comes more naturally to you or to your community of faith? Why?
- Can these be separated?

#### Embodied Love

- How does a life of love, the song of the *Shema* and Jesus' Greatest Commandment, become imprinted upon a person?
- Name other "songs" and other "loves" our culture imprints upon our lives and the lives our children?

- Sing a song that tells of the love that comes from God and is made visible in our lives.

The Dancer and the Dance. Don recounts an ancient story from India in which a deity “dances creation.” The song “Lord of the Dance” sings of Christ Jesus as the one who danced in the morning “when the world was begun” and “came down from heaven and danced on earth.” He danced throughout his life and ministry, even on the Friday “when the sky turned black,” and though they cut him down, he “leapt up high” for he is the life that cannot die. Now, as we live in Christ and he in us, he calls us to “dance, dance, wherever you may be.” Read or sing “The Lord of the Dance,” (Text and Tune: Sydney Carter, copyright 1963, Stainer and Bell, Ltd., London, England, administered by Hope Publishing Co.).

The Speaker and the Word. The Hebrew Scriptures tell of God speaking the universe into being: “God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light” (Genesis 1:3). In this creation story all that is comes into being through the spoken Word of God. The Gospel according to John opens with a hymn about the *Logos* or Word of God. The text of this ancient song is entwined with the story of John the Baptist. If we bracket out the verses about John, we can hear the hymn more clearly. Read aloud: John 1:1-5, 10-12, 14, 16.

The Singer and Song. Drawing on Genesis 1 and John 1, Peter Davison wrote a hymn text that images God as the Singer of the song of life and Christ Jesus as God’s Song Incarnate: “The Singer and the Song.” In this hymn our shared “sound spirituality” is singing with our lives “the Song of the Singer.” Read or sing Davison’s hymn *The Singer and the Song*:

When long before time and the worlds were begun,  
 When there was no earth and no sky and no sun,  
 And all was deep silence and night reigned supreme,  
 And even our Maker had only a dream—

The silence was broken when God sang the Song,  
 And light pierced the darkness and rhythm began,  
 And with its first birth-cries creation was born,  
 And creaturely voices sang praise to the morn.

The sounds of the creatures were one with the Lord's,  
 Their harmonies sweet and befitting the Word;  
 The Singer was pleased as the earth sang the Song,  
 The choir of the creatures reechoed it long.

Though down through the ages the Song disappeared,  
 Its harmonies broken and almost unheard,  
 The Singer comes to us to sing it again,  
 Our God-is-with-us in the world now as then.

The light has returned as it came once before,  
 The Song of the Lord is our own song once more,  
 So let us all sing with one heart and one voice  
 The Song of the Singer in whom we rejoice.

To you, God the Singer, our voices we raise,  
 To you Song Incarnate, we give all our praise,  
 To you, Holy Spirit, our life and our breath,  
 Be glory forever, through life and through death.

~ Peter W. A. Davison, copyright Peter W. A. Davison (used by permission)

- Consider which of these images—the Speaker and the Word, the Dancer and the Dance, or the Singer and the Song—best expresses your experience of God's active work in the world.

- Which invitation—to dance, to speak, or to sing—compels you most deeply into a life that embodies God’s creative, redeeming, and sustaining love?
- Which metaphor most aptly describes the life of your community of faith? Or which most fully describes your longing for the life of your community? Explain.

St. Paul describes the community of Christ as one body with many members (I Corinthians 12:12-31). Create your own description modeled after Paul’s, but using the metaphor of an orchestra, band, or choir. What new insights emerge for you?

If your memory were to fade, which single song would you hope would remain imprinted on your heart and mind? Why?

Following the guidelines in session 1 (p. x), prayerfully read Psalm 84 or Psalm 139.

### *Chapter 3: My Life Flows on in Endless Song*

Make a CD of the songs that best “interpret you” and send it to someone you love or someone whom you would like to know you more deeply. Don’t break copyright laws.

Don writes that music “encodes life, most especially shared life” (p. 7). Share a song that encodes an experience in your life, a song that when you sing, play, or hear it, the experience “all comes back.”

- Are there songs you avoid because they “encode” and evoke a painful experience?
- Which pieces of music or songs do you purposefully return to in order to remember a person, a place, an event?
- Does doing this bring comfort, joy, or healing?
- Does it bind you to something or someone in your past that is unhealthy; is it a song you would be wise to stop singing?

The soundtrack of your life

Design a “soundtrack” of your life; include the music and songs that accompanied the specific seasons, passages, and moments of your growth and movement through time. Freely mix “sacred” and “secular,” popular and classical music.

Have each member of your family or circle of friends do the same thing. Compare the similarities and differences across the generations.

With your best friend(s) or family members design a soundtrack of the story of your life together.

As a gift to someone celebrating a significant milestone, make a medley of the music of his or her life and times.

Ask an adolescent friend, a niece or nephew, child or grandchild to sing or play a piece of music that “captures” the truth of this time in his or her life. Sing or play a piece of music that “brings back” that time in your life.

- How are these songs similar and different?
- What do they say about the two of you?
- What do they say about the world and the culture in which each of you made the passage out of childhood?

Pay attention to how music moves through your day. Is it playing in the background? Is it mostly absent or unheard? Is it present in a powerful, day-shaping way?

Someone invites you to sit with him or her and do only one thing: listen attentively for an hour to music. What do you silently think? A) That sounds like a waste of time. B) I could spend the hour thinking of or planning for other things while the music plays. C) I’d love to abandon myself to experiencing the music. D) I don’t care about the music, but sitting next to this person for an hour appeals (or does not appeal) to me. E) Something else.

- What do your thoughts reveal about your attitudes toward time?

## Psalm 23

Many people inside and outside the synagogue and church have memories of the twenty-third psalm: “The Lord is my Shepherd.” It has been a patch of light across their pathways, leading them “again to a little clearing in a dense forest” (p. 30).

- Using crayons, markers, or colored pencils, map the times and places this psalm, or another significant song or piece of music, has been woven through your life.

The authors remind us that many couples have a song they claim as their own. Ask your local worshipping community to choose their “signature hymn”, one that would proclaim the very heart of your life together. You might ask these and other questions in the process.

1. Would “your song” be nostalgic, yearning for a time that was or a time you wish had been?
2. Would it be visionary, leaning into the future?
3. Would it be inward looking, celebrating the internal life of the community, or outward looking, addressing the gifts and the needs of the larger world?
4. How would “your song” connect you through time to the generations that have preceded you?

Read Psalm 23 aloud from several English translations (e.g. King James, New Revised Standard, New American, New International, Good News Bible, The Message). Note how each translation changes the pattern, tone, and rhythm of the psalm. Consider how the meaning changes for you from translation to translation.

- Which translation would you want “imprinted on your heart”? Why?
- Memorize this or another psalm or hymn.

Sing two or more paraphrases or metrical settings of Psalm 23, such as:

William Henry Baker’s “The King of Love My Shepherd Is” sung to the Irish melody *St Columba* and/or J. B. Dykes’ tune, *Dominus Regit Me*.

Isaac Watt’s “My Shepherd will supply My Need” sung to the American folk melody, *Resignation*.

Christopher Walker’s text and tune, “Because the Lord is My Shepherd.”

“The Lord’s My Shepherd” from the Edinburgh Psalter, sung to *Brother James’ Air*.

Francis Patrick O’Brian’s text and tune, “Shepherd of My Heart” or Lori True’s “You Are All I Want.”

- How does the music interpret the text?
- Is the music a help or a hindrance?

Create your own metrical version of a favorite psalm and either write music for it or set it to a familiar tune.

Jesus’ Songline. From the earliest years of the Church, Christians have heard in the four Servant Songs of the prophet Isaiah the songline that helps them interpret Jesus. Read these songs and consider how they open the meaning of Jesus’ life and death to you: Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12.

- See also the places in the New Testament where Isaiah's songline is used to describe Jesus and his ministry, especially Paul's letter to the Romans: Romans 9:27-29; 10:11, 15-16, 20-21; 11:8, 26-27 34; 15:11, 21.

Following the guidelines in chapter 1 (p. x), prayerfully read Psalm 71, the song of an old person who has trusted God for a lifetime and now prays for God's help in a time of danger and fear.

### *Chapter 4: Do You Hear What I Hear?*

Paying attention to the music around you:

- Listen to the music of your neighborhood. Rise early in the morning to sit outside and listen attentively to the song the world where you live sings as it awakens. Do the same thing at the height of the day and again as evening turns to nighttime.
- Do the above exercise in your favorite place away from the sounds of civilization. Listen for what the authors call “non-human calls and cries” (p. 42).

Paying attention to the music within you:

- Before rising in the morning, lie quietly and focus on your breath. Imagine the very breath of God entering each time you inhale, filling your lungs with life. Give thanks for the gift of breath.
- Spend an entire day paying attention to your heartbeat. Place your hand over your heart before you rise. Feel its rhythm. Repeat this throughout your day, after walking up a flight of stairs or exercising, while talking on the telephone, before eating a meal, each time you enter another building or room, when you lie down at night. Notice the changes in the pace and strength of the beat. Give thanks for the beating of your heart and the pulsing of blood through your veins.

Paying attention to melody:

- Attend a concert, recital, or worship service in which you will hear songs sung in a language not your own such as a Jewish synagogue, a Tridentine Catholic mass (where Latin is

still used), or any place where recent immigrants gather to sing or worship. Focus, not on the words, but the movement of the melody.

- Sing or listen to the same song set to different melodies. For instance, Frances Ridley Havergal's text, "Take My Life, that I May Be" appears in nearly every denominational hymnal with the tune, *Patmos*, composed by her father, William Henry Havergal. More recently, the English text and the Spanish translation have been sung widely to the tune *Toma Mi Voluntad*. How does each melody influence how you hear the text?

- Play "Name that Tune." Have one person hum or sing the opening three notes to a song and see who can first name the tune and complete the melody.

Paying attention to rhythm:

- Concentrate on breathing rhythm, lungs fill and release, fill and release.
- Choose a hymn, and read it together (no music) with no rhythm at all, all notes receiving the same length value. How does it feel? What do you get out of the poem/text? Now read it again, this time allow yourselves the rhythm of the notes (still no music). What do you get out of it this time? Now sing the hymn.

Paying attention to tempo:

- Host a poetry reading. Invite people to read aloud poems they have written or poems they love.
- Listen to a recording of a poet reading his or her own work. These are available at most public libraries. What most intrigues or surprises you about how they read?
- Read aloud poetry arising from a specific musical style, such as the jazz-influenced Beat Poetry of Alan Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and Laurence Ferlingetti; the blues-inspired poetry of

Langston Hughes, and the ballads of the Scotsman, Robert Burns, and the American, Dudley Randall (especially, “Ballad of Birmingham”).

Paying attention to silence:

- Begin your gathering with a time of silence. Note the time you begin. Invite the group into a period of silence. Wait until you feel the people getting restless (moving around in their chairs, coughing, etc.). Then bring the silence to an end. Note the time. How long was the interval of silence? Ask the persons in the group what they like about silence and what they dislike or fear about it.
- Consider trying this again at the close of the session, before the *lectio divina*. Was the group more comfortable with the silence the second time?
- Pay attention to the spaces of silence (or lack thereof) in your regular Sunday gathering. Where in the service would you appreciate a longer silence? Why?
- How might silence become a deeper part of the pattern of your individual and corporate prayer?
- When have you experienced the “silence of intensity” common to music and to contemplative prayer?
- Attend a Taize service in your town. Or plan such a service and invite people from varying faith traditions to attend. Music from Taize is available in North America through GIA Publications, Inc. (7404 South Mason Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60638, tel. 708/496-3800).

Developing a soul for hearing:

- The authors write that “deep-souled” music “requires us to listen again and again and always allows new discoveries” and reveals “new depths of silence, feeling, and insight” (p. 54).

What is “soul music” for you?

- Share a piece of your “soul music” with someone you love, inviting he or her into the rich sound and insight you experience. Ask this person to do the same for you.
- Look with others through your denominational hymnal or songbook asking of the pieces most often sung by your community whether they have “simple souls” (pleasing, but do not invite prolonged attention), “lack soul” (attractive at first but lack substance), or are “deep souled” (have a complexity and substance that can nourish a people for a lifetime). What specific role does each type of music play in the whole of worship?

Watch the video from the PBS Religion and Culture series: “Amazing Grace with Bill Moyers.”

Following the guidelines in chapter 1 (p. x), prayerfully read Psalm 119:145-152, both asking God to hear your prayer and paying attention to God’s word.

### ***Chapter 5 Becoming Who We Are Through Music***

The authors write, “The music that sounded through the house or in the streets where you grew up stays in your mind and body for the rest of your life, even when you are not conscious of it” (p. 58). Identify the music that sounded through your childhood home, in your neighborhood, at school and in church.

Consider how this music helped shape who you have become.

- What did this music “tell” you about the differences between the generations?
- To which cultures did it expose you?
- How did it shape your picture of the world beyond your home and neighborhood?

Don and Emily each speak of music that they return to, music that carries them through time, across the years. Identify the music you return to time and again.

- What draws you back to this music?
- How do you hear it differently today than when you first heard it?

The biblical stories of the wonders and works of God are like songs to which we return often to hear a word that brings and affirms life within and among us. These stories are treasures that we have received from our forbearers and that we hope to pass on. Read the opening verses of Psalm 78, as printed below, replacing the images of the spoken word with musical images:

Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;

incline your ears to the *song* of my mouth.

I will open my mouth in a parable;

I will *sing* dark sayings from of old,

*Songs* we have heard and known,  
 that our ancestor have *sung* to us.  
 We will not hide these *songs* from our children;  
 we will *sing* to the coming generation  
 the glorious deeds of the Lord  
 the mighty works,  
 and all the wonders that God has done.

God established a decree in Jacob,  
 and appointed a law in Israel,  
 which he commanded our ancestors  
 to *sing* to their children;  
 that the next generation might know them,  
 the children yet unborn,  
 and rise up and *sing* them to their children,  
 so that they should set their hope in God,  
 and not forget the works of God,  
 but keep God's commandments. (Psalm 78:1-7)

- According to the Psalmist, what is the ultimate purpose of teaching the young people in our communities the songs and stories we have heard from our ancestors?
- Identify songs and hymns that have carried the stories of God's works and wonders across time, from generation to generation.
- Name the two or three biblical stories you most hope your children's children yet unborn will know and love and sing.

Singing our way to new identities.

The authors believe that music helps us become “a larger self” when it connects us to cultures and communities not our own.

- Call to mind a place or time in which you “crossed over” into the territory of unfamiliar music.

Ask yourself: Where were you? What was “new” about this music? Were you immediately drawn to it, or disengaged from it? Is this music, once new, now part of your listening, playing, or singing repertoire?

- Would you say you became a “larger self” through this experience? Consider why or why not.

Listen to music in rhythms and languages not your own.

- Music from around the world:

Putumayo World Music CD Collections including:

African; Brasileiro; Caribe! Caribe!; Cuba; Inuit to Inca; Reggae; and Kotoja: The Super Sawalé Collection.

The Best of World Music Collections: World Dance Party; World Vocal; and World Instrumental.

Putumayo World Music  
627 Broadway, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor,  
New York, NY 10012  
212/995-9400

- Music from the World Church:  
“Global Songs/Local Voices” (CD and Songbook)

“Global Songs 2” (CD and Songbook)

“Pave the Way: Global Songs 3” (CD and Songbook)

Bread for the Journey  
 PO Box 141149  
 Minneapolis, MN 555414  
 612/362-5970  
[www.bfjmusic.com](http://www.bfjmusic.com)

- Music crossing over cultures:

Paul Simon’s “The Rhythm of the Saints”  
 Warner Bros. Records Inc., 1990.

Look through your denominational hymnal or songbook for the sources of the songs and hymns.

- List the countries and peoples represented. Who is missing?
- Find the songs printed in languages other than English
- Does your worshipping community regularly sing music from around the globe?
- Do you sing in languages other than your mother tongue?
- How does (or how might) this practice help your community become a “larger self”?

If you could give the gift of one song, hymn, or piece of music from your “home culture” written in your “mother tongue” to the wider world or the global church what would it be?

In the Gospel according to Matthew, Jesus says, “Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; otherwise the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved” (Mt 9:17).

Matthew is writing to a changing community. The first followers of Jesus were Palestinian Jews who brought the stories and songs of their faith tradition with them into the

earliest Church. By the time Matthew's gospel was written, the good news about God's love in Jesus Christ had spread beyond the "home culture" and "mother tongue" of those first disciples to Greek-speaking gentiles. As the worshipping communities became more culturally and ethnically diverse, questions, tensions, and fears arose about how the Jewish members could safeguard the treasures from their heritage while receiving the gifts brought by the "newcomers." In this context the words of Jesus about preserving both the old wine skins and the new wine takes on fresh meaning.

Consider how your faith community is like Matthew's.

- How is your community changing? Or what keeps it from becoming more diverse?
- What tensions, questions and fears does change raise in your community?
- Describe the relationships among the founders of your community and newer members?
- Which treasures and traditions, inherited from the ancestors does your community preserve and pass on?
- How do you receive and incorporate the gifts, including the songs, of others who come?
- Interpret Jesus' words about old wine skins and new wine in the context of your community.

Following the guidelines in chapter 1 (p. x), prayerfully read Psalm 96 or 98.

## Chapter 6: Music Divides Us

Look again at the map of your life's songlines. Mark the places in the line where music divided you from someone.

Think of a musical genre you dislike. What don't you like about it? Ask yourself the difficult questions: Does my dislike reveal my bias against a certain age group, class, nationality, culture, or race of people?

For one day turn your radio dial away from your favorite station to one that plays music you either dislike or do not understand.

Used or Abused?

Keep a television advertising journal for one week, noting the specific music used to sell specific goods, services, and experiences. How is music used or abused?

Consider ways music has created or reinforces religious stereotypes.

Music has the power to manipulate emotions. Think of a movie you have seen in which you were aware that the soundtrack was designed to elicit a certain emotion from you: fear, sympathy, anger, or joy. Discuss your reactions to this experience.

- Have you ever experienced "religious" music meant to elicit a specific emotion or response from you? When does this aid worship and when does it abuse worshippers?

Watch the movie "The Sound of Music."

- How is music used to express certain emotions and evoke specific reactions from the viewers?
- When does music “strengthen the tribe” in this film?
- How do the characters use and abuse the power of music?
- Note where music divides and where it unites people.

Read *Playing for Time*, the true story of a French cabaret singer forced by the Nazis to play music with other prisoner-musicians while thousands were marched into the gas chambers (Fania Fenelon and Marcelle Routier, Syracuse University Press, New York, 1997, tr. Judith Landry).

Or watch “Playing for Time”, with Jane Alexander and Vanessa Redgrave, a movie of Arthur Miller’s screenplay based on Fania Fenelon’s book.

In contrast, for a story about the power of music to draw people together across national, political, and language barriers read *Bel Canto* by Ann Patchett (Harper Collins, 2002).

Worship Wars. Consider how the songs and hymns sung in your faith community divide or unite those who gather to worship.

When Christians gather to worship, the primary musical instrument is the human voice, a gift from God, given that we might sing and share God’s word. Consider how well the human voice is evoked and encouraged when your community sings.

- Do other musical instruments lead and support the assembly’s song or overpower it?
- What is the role of song leaders, kluckers, or cantors?
- Does technology serve or usurp the voice of the people?

Music shapes who we become. The songs that a community of faith sings over time form memories, nurture faith, and shape the spirituality of the community and its members. Consider how knowing this might help worship leaders choose the hymns and songs to be sung at worship.

Hold a hymn sing in which many musical styles are represented.

- How might the best of many musical styles be heard, learned and sung in your worshipping assembly?

Following the guidelines in session 1 (p. x), prayerfully read Psalm 137, the sorrow song of exiles whose songs cannot be sung when they are in a strange land.

## Chapter 7: Singing Our Sorrow

Plan your own funeral or memorial service.

You may use the funeral rite in your denominational hymnal or prayerbook. Choose scripture readings, hymns, psalms, songs, and anthems.

- What do these say about your life and faith?
- What do they say about God?
- How might these choices help those who are gathered “to express grief and to affirm faith” in the face of your death? (p. 94).

Public Grieving. Look in your denominational hymnal for hymns and song appropriate for communal lament after a public tragedy.

Explore recent songs and hymns written for public lament.

- “O God Why Are you Silent,” (Text: Marty Haugen; Tune: J. S. Bach’s *Passion Chorale*).
- “How Long, O God,” (Text: Ralph Smith; Tune: *Land of Rest*).
- “When Pain of the World Surrounds Us,” (Text and Tune: Jim Strathdee).
- “Once We Sang and Danced,” (text: Susan Briehl; Tune: Latvian Folk Song).

Read how others have prayed and sung the psalms in times of loss and sorrow:

- In the years after Ann Weems’ twenty-one year old son, Todd, died in a car accident, she studied the biblical psalms of lament and then wrote her own for “those who weep and those who

weep with those who weep:” *Psalms of Lament* (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, Kentucky, 1995).

- Following the death of their twenty-five year old son, Eric, in a mountain climbing accident, Claire and Nicholas Wolterstorff also turned to the psalms of lament. They wove these and other biblical passages into a text for a requiem for which Cary Ratcliff composed music. The text of “Requiem: Eric Wolterstorff in Memoriam” is included in Nicolas’ book, *Lament for a Son*, (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1987).
- During her last year of life, Elsa Marty and her husband, Martin, read the Book of Psalms aloud to one another. The story of this journey and his deep grief is in Martin Marty’s *A Cry of Absence* (Harper: San Francisco, 1983; 1993).

Write a lament psalm. Remember that even when these psalms are written from a single person’s experience, the words are not private, but intended for the prayer, healing, and hope of others.

The authors cite George Dennison’s novella, *Louisa Domic*, as a description of music, while having little power to erase or abate agony, as a presence persistently saying, “I am with you, I am with you” (p. 98). What music or song most powerfully says to you in times of grief, despair, or loneliness, “I am with you. I am with you.” Who do you envision singing these words of presence to you?

Share the story of singing a loved one home.

Talk with a hospice nurse about the effect of music upon those who are dying.

Invite a practitioner of music-thanatology, a contemplative and spiritual practice developed by Therese Schroeder-Sheker, to explain and demonstrate the work he or she does with those who are ill or dying.

When you care for or visit someone who is dying consider sharing the gift of music in the ways that seem fitting: sing for or with the person, play recorded music, ask a musician to play, invite a small group of people to sing together around the bed.

Sometimes grief takes away our voices, silences our singing. Psalm 137 is the lament of a people who have lost everything dear and holy to them, their homes and their homeland, their place of worship and their holy city. Read psalm 137 aloud.

- What does the psalm say about the power and role of music in their common life?
- Notice how when they tell of being unable to “sing their song in a strange land” they express it in a psalm.
- How does this psalm speak to our lives today?

Listen to or sing a variety of settings and paraphrases of Psalm 137, such as:

- “On the Willows” from Godspell.
- “In Deepest Nights,” (Text: Susan Paolo Cherwein, copyright 1995, Susan Cherwein, Administrated by Augsburg Fortress; Tune: DEEP BLUE, Thomas Pavlechko, Sehla Publishing Company).
- “By the Waters of Babylon,” (Text: Jamacian traditional; Tune: *Jamaican Psalm 137*).

- “By the Babylonian Rivers,” (Text: Ewald Bash; Tune: *Kas Dziedaja* Latvian folk tune).

Jesus’ Songline. In his hour of deepest need, Jesus cried out in Aramaic, the language of his childhood, words passed down to him when he was young, the opening verse of Psalm 22 (see Mark 15:33-39). Christians traditionally read this psalm on Good Friday, the day that commemorates the crucifixion of Jesus. Read Psalm 22.

For a true story about the power of music to heal, sustain hope, and transform “enemies” read Helen Colijin’s book, *Song of Survival: Women Interned* (White Cloud Press: Ashland Oregon, 1997). Colijin writes of her own experience in a Japanese internment camp in Sumatra and the music she and the other women created there.

Watch the film by the same title based on Colijin’s book, also available through White Cloud Press (PO Box 3400, Ashland, OR 97520 1-800-380-8286).

Following the guidelines in session 1 (p. x), prayerfully read Psalm 130 or Psalm 13.

## Chapter 8: Sing Justice, Sing Freedom

Look through your denominational hymnal or songbook for the texts that sing justice and freedom.

- Read or sing them, listening for images that catch your attention, speak the truth, and inspire action.
- Are these much-beloved and often-used hymns in your community?
- Are they neglected? If so, why do you think this is true?

Plan and host a benefit hymnsing or songfest. Choose hymns and songs that sing justice for all of humankind and the earth itself and freedom for all those help captive to poverty, prejudice, or oppressive power. Choose poetry or scripture passages to be read by someone between the sung pieces, linking the songs one to another in a purposeful progression. Invite your faith community, neighborhood, or others to attend. Take a free will offering to be given to a group or organization that works for some aspect of justice and freedom.

If yours is an inter-generational group, ask each person to share a song from their “era” that speaks to a particular injustice or social issue of the day.

- Ask of each song: Is this still known and sung today?
- Is it still applicable to today’s world?

Do you have a story to tell about singing or hearing “We Shall Overcome”?

Watch the 2003 documentary film, “Amandla: A Revolution in Four-part Harmony,” directed by Lee Hirsch, the story of the people of South Africa “singing down apartheid.”

Mary’s Magnificat sings justice and freedom (Luke 1:46-55). Sing one of the many musical settings of this canticle.

Sing the contemporary paraphrase of the Magnificat, “Canticle of the Turning,” (Text: Rory Cooney; Tune: *Star of the County Down*, Irish traditional).

Jesus’ Songline. Through his mother, Jesus received the ancient, yet ever-new song of his ancestors who sang of God’s goodness to the poor, the hungry, the widowed and the weak. He embodied this song in his life, his suffering and death, and his resurrection:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me  
 because he has anointed me  
 to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
 and recovery of sight to the blind,  
 to let the oppressed go free,  
 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.

~ Luke 4:18-19

- Do you include this songline as part of your own inheritance?
- How might your community seek to embody more fully these words?
- What might a good next step for you be in walking the songline of your faith?

Many North American church hymnals now include songs that arose during times of great political oppression and social upheaval in the late twentieth century, for example, “*Vamos todos al Banquete*” (“Let us Go Now to the Banquet”) from Central America and “*Siyahamba*” (“We are Marching in the Light of God”) from South Africa.

- Consider what it might mean for politically powerful and socially secure Christians to sing these songs.
- Consider what it might mean for affluent, white congregations to sing African-American spirituals that express the suffering and hope of slaves in this country.

The prophet Micah reminds the people of Israel that God does not require sacrifice or offering in our worship, but mercy, justice, and humility in our living:

God has told you, O mortal, what is good;  
and what does the Lord require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)

Consider how the songs we sing and the stories we tell in our communities shape and send us to do, love, and walk as God requires.

Look again at the map of your Songlines. Mark the places and times when the songs you sang changed the course of the life you lived.

Alone or with others, write a song, hymn, or spiritual that cries out for freedom from the bondage of materialism, apathy, nationalism, or another power that holds you and your community captive.

Following the guidelines in session 1 (p. x), prayerfully read Psalm 146, Isaiah 58:6-9, or Isaiah 61:1-4.

### *Chapter 9: Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*

The reformers of the sixteenth century restored and expanded the use of congregational song in Sunday worship. Martin Luther believed music was a gift from God, a gift that found its highest use in praising God and proclaiming God's Word. While some hymn writers recovered older texts sung to Gregorian chant and others wrote new music for new texts, still others set "sacred" texts to existing popular melodies, including folk songs, love songs, and ballads. This practice continues.

For instance, looking only at Irish tunes, we find an anonymous 8<sup>th</sup> century text, "Be Thou My Vision", and Jan Struther's 20<sup>th</sup> century text "Lord of All Hopefulness" both set to the traditional Irish tune Slane; Timothy Dudley-Smith's text "O Christ the Same," set to Londonderry Air, most famously sung as "Danny Boy;" and Rory Cooney's adaptation of the Magnificat, "The Canticle of the Turning" set to the rollicking folk dance tune, The Star of the County Down.

- Look through your denominational hymnal or songbook for other examples from other folk traditions.
- Write a text or paraphrase a psalm to be sung to a popular or beloved tune.

Speaking about the Indigo Girls' song "Hammer and a Nail," Emily says, "The whole song is about getting up and building something together. It is a call to work for others, and one shouldn't do this presumptively, we all need mercy" (p. 120).

- Consider Don's question: How many of us "actually make that connection between faith at work and the need for mercy?"

- How have Christians been or how might they be “presumptuous” when working in the world for the sake of others?
- When and how in your Sunday gathering does the community plead for and receive assurance of God’s mercy?

The life of faith is a constant journey across the boundaries between “Saturday night” and “Sunday morning.” On Sunday morning individual persons come from their various Saturday nights and working weeks to become a community gathered for common praise and prayer and supplication. Most faith communities have particular “gathering rites” that welcome, receive, and unite the many persons who walk across the threshold from their daily lives into corporate worship.

- Consider how the many are gathered as one in your community. What words, songs, gestures, or symbols are used to mark this crossing? How are the realities of the world acknowledged and incorporated into your worship service?
- Consider how at the close of worship your gathered community is sent back into daily life. What words, songs, gestures, or symbols are used to mark this crossing? How does worship shape the ways you bear God’s sacred mercy, justice, and compassion into the world?

More than music crosses over from Saturday night to Sunday morning into Monday and back toward Saturday night and Sunday. Many daily activities (bathing, sharing food, offering gifts, receiving others, listening and speaking) find their deepest meaning and fullest expression in worship. In like manner, practices often seen as “churchy” (prayer, reconciliation and

forgiveness, giving testimony or bearing witness to God's presence in one's life) find a rightful home in our daily lives.

- Draw a large circle on a piece of paper, inside the circle write the names of or draw symbols for all the various activities or practices that take place during the liturgy. Draw lines from each of those activities across the boundary of the circle to the specific places in your daily life where the activity is present.
- Around the outside of the circle write some of the activities that make up your work and service to others in the world. How many of these activities or practices find their source and highest expression in God? Draw a line in another color from each of these across the boundary of the circle to the place(s) in the liturgy where God first practices these things.

Read the children's book, *Everyday and Sunday, Too* by Gail Ramshaw (Augsburg: Minneapolis, 1997) in which the author makes connections between the many activities of Sunday liturgy and daily life.

Jesus' Songline: Sacred or Secular?

Read chapters 4 and 5 of *The Song of Songs*.

This collection of love songs tucked between Ecclesiastes and Isaiah in the Hebrew Scriptures neither speaks of God nor uses any religious language. Instead it celebrates human love and beauty, sexual longing and delight. While both Jews and Christians have read these poems as metaphors for the love between God and God's people, they are wholly "secular." Or are they?

- Consider how the Song of Songs "evokes the divine" without mentioning God.

- Consider how human love and sexuality “crosses over” the boundaries between what the authors call Saturday night and Sunday morning.
- How might a deeper appreciation of the sacredness of human sexuality shape our understanding of God?
- How might knowing a God who delights in what is sensual, tender, and extatic change how we honor human bodies and sexuality?

Following the guidelines in session 1 (p. x), prayerfully read

Psalm 145 or 103.

### *Chapter 10: Music and the Search for God*

Consider these questions raised by Emily and Don:

- What music calls to your restless heart?
- Where in music does your soul encounter an aspect of reality that shatters your complacency or fear? (p.133).

Sing or listen to a recording of the hymn “Immortal, Invisible, God, Only Wise.” Note the many words the text writer, W. Chalmers Smith, uses to name the wonder, mystery, and awe of God.

Sing or listen to a recording of the more recent hymn “Thine the Amen, Thine the Praise.” Note how Herbert Brokering runs one image of the wonder of God into the next without pausing even for capitalization or punctuation, as if our praise of God must be breathless and endless. Carl Shalk, who wrote the tune Thine especially for this text, uses ascending and descending eighth notes to express the constant movement of the splendor and brightness that is “only thee, only thee.”

The first two chapters of the Gospel according to Luke is a little songbook. Everyone, everything seems to be singing: the angel Gabriel (see 1:28-37); Elizabeth, Mary’s kinswoman (1:42-45); Mary, the mother of Jesus (1:46-55); Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist (1:68-79); a hill-full of shepherds (2:20); a sky-full of angels (2:14); and old Simeon (2:29-32).

- Look at these songs. How many of them have you sung in one version or another?

Read Isaiah 6:1-3. When have you sung this song of the seraphim?

The authors write, “In a time when religious communities often settle for too little, we need the ancient full stretch of praise, lament, wonder, and hope, of truth and grateful openness to the divine” (p. 137).

- When or how does your religious community “settle for too little”?
- Which songs, hymns, psalms, or spiritual songs draw you into this ancient “full stretch”?

The full stretch of the Church’s year. The whole Christian or liturgical year draws us into the “full stretch” of God’s presence and activity among us in Christ Jesus. How closely does your congregation observe the Christian year? What place do liturgical seasons have in your congregation, if any? If you don’t celebrate them, do you know why not? How would it be to “synchronize” (get together in time) with other Christians on these feast or fast days?

On a large piece of newsprint, draw a circle of the Christian Year. Head it “How the Church Sings Time.” Begin with Advent, and fill in the circle as best you can, brainstorming as a group. When you get stuck, use the information in this chapter to fill it in. Finally, augment it with the information in a ministry manual. Color the circle with the appropriate liturgical colors. What is the significance of the colors?

What Holy Week observances are most meaningful or compelling for you? Why? What other holy days (or holidays) are most meaningful? Why?

Following the guidelines in session 1 (p. x), prayerfully read Psalm 139 in which the one who searches for God prays to the One who searches for and knows us.

How has your experience of “praying” a psalm changed from the beginning of this study to now?