

# Key Life

Are you afraid?  
Me too. Do  
you some-  
times struggle  
with sin?  
Me too. We  
don't have  
to worry.



STEVE  
BROWN REVEALS

# Kingdom Secrets







had limped pretty far off the interstate, there were no Holiday Inns in sight. My surroundings reminded me of the then current movie *Deliverance* (released 1972), about outsiders' misadventures in Southern backwoods. Even so, the only thing I could think to do was to stay in the car overnight. The road was dark and narrow, and headlights kept whizzing by. It was unsettling. Late into the night, my guitar and I explored psalms: "As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear him" (103:13 RSV). . . "Whether shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" (139:7 RSV). In the midst of the words—sung out into what Simon and Garfunkel had mistakenly called "darkness, my old friend"—God showed up. And I knew for myself what David meant when he praised God as One who was "enthroned on the praises of Israel."

Would God have been there without my songs that night? Of course. But his presence would have been lost on me. That's my point. Song shapes our love for him and makes us "there" to his "thereness." That's why he asks, "Do you love me?" Not because he doesn't know but because he delights in our pleasure in him.

### THE "FIFTH VOICE"

Barbershop quartet singers claim that when their voices blend just right, they hear a "fifth voice." That aural illusion created by harmonies is, I believe, a divine whisper of something that is absolutely true of our singing when we gather in worship. For the Bible says that in the church Jesus is singing hymns to the Father (Heb. 2:12) and that, in fact, he is our Worship Leader (Heb. 8:2, literally "Liturgist"). It is im-

portant for us to sing so we can hear that "fifth voice."

We sing because song is a gift that connects us to God—when we sing our theology, we own it more personally. But it's not enough to say that our singing connects us to God—somehow, it connects him to us too. We also sing because to do so fits reality—song is an appropriate, even an unavoidable, response to the Christian story line. But there's more: God has written his Son



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into the story line as lead Singer. It's as though we were the congregation in a cosmic call-and-response spiritual, where the Leader's voice lays out a line, and we the congregation sing it back. This means we sing so we can sing with Jesus.

The Bible has been called "the greatest story ever told." It could also be called "the greatest song ever sung." It's a song of a Warrior-King who is intent on winning back his beloved from her false suitors and exulting over her with loud singing (Zeph. 3:17). It's a song of a Son-King who wails, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" as he goes into exile for his beloved-turned-barlot. It's a song of his rising to claim a purified bride and leading a jubilate Deo to the Father of all (Heb. 2:12).

When Paul tells his churches to "let the word of Christ dwell . . . richly" among them by means of "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" (Col. 3:16 NIV), he's inviting them to do more than use music as a "warm-up" to the sermon. The song is not ornamentation; it is participation in the very redemption of all creation. It plays its own role in God's showcasing his saving power before humans and angels (Eph. 3:10).

The singing Paul talks about is more than a duty. It's more than a warm-up. It's a sacred activity, by which God's life and ours interpenetrate. When we sing, we are not alone. We join a song our Savior is singing, and our singing is a sharing in his reclamation of our lost race.

I believe that much of the difficulty we face in the church stems from the fact that we think it's all about us—our tastes, our preferences, our principles. So we debate styles, genres, levels of participation, and levels of volume. When we factor in the other Singer as well—this Singing Savior—our conversations, I submit, will take on a different tone. *[Signature]*

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