

Sing Liberation

EXODUS 15:1–21; PSALM 96

1



GOAL

Through the song of Moses and Miriam, youth explore how singing has played a role in movements for liberation throughout history and continues today.

- A Art
- AM Active/Movement
- AT Abstract Thinking
- C Conversation
- CT Concrete Thinking
- D Drama
- G Game
- M Music
- QC Quiet/Contemplative
- S Service
- T Technology
- X Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Loving God, help me to sense your liberating Spirit present among us today. Amen.

THIS SESSION

The “Song of the Sea” in Exodus 15 is the “new song” of this session. Sung by Moses and his sister Miriam as they triumphantly escape Egyptian persecution, this song has been passed down through countless generations. The great hymns and songs of the church today are like the grandchildren of this biblical song. Many of them were composed in similar situations of struggle and rejoicing, whether in the history of the church, movements for liberation, or the lives of the hymn writers.

THE BIBLE STORY

Exodus 15:1–21 recounts Moses’ and Miriam’s song of liberation after the ancient Israelites crossed the Red Sea. At this moment, the people stand on the threshold between slavery and freedom, marking the end of centuries of captivity and beginning their pilgrimage to the promised land. This singular event must be sung. In singing, the story lives on.

Moses strikes up the song. The Israelites join in, praising God’s majesty and might. This is not a sentimental ballad, not a love song or a lullaby. It is a battle hymn, the song of those who have come out of a great ordeal. The song spills over into dancing as Miriam picks up the refrain.

The Psalms are the songbook of the Bible. Psalm 96 is a song of praise to God, which is to be offered by all creatures of the earth. Everything God does, has done, and will do is worthy of our thanks and praise.

CONNECTIONS WITH YOUTH

Young people will likely be aware of various movements for liberation throughout history. During this session, they look specifically at how the practice of singing has helped countless generations evoke and express emotion while seeking liberation for all. They consider songs of liberation and freedom they might sing today.

SESSION PREPARATION

- “Favorite Songs” (p. 6): Prepare newsprint sheets with the prompt: “What songs are you currently listening to on repeat?” Display around the room. Consider making a music playlist of liberation songs including a mix of sacred hymns, spirituals, and contemporary types of music to play as youth arrive. An internet/music app search can offer suggestions. Depending on the options you choose:
- “Reading a Hymn” (p. 6): Obtain the *Sing a New Song* infographic poster (bit.ly/FMInfographicPosters, Year 2 Set).
- “Exploring a Hymnal” (p. 7): Read Resource Page 3 and prepare to orient youth to use a hymnal to find a thematic song.

GETTING STARTED

- ☐ Posted prepared newsprint
- ☐ Markers
- ☐ Music playlist and speaker (optional)

FAVORITE SONGS

C M X

Play music as young people arrive (optional) and welcome them. Point out the displayed newsprint and markers, and invite them to respond to the prompt while others arrive.

Gather participants and reflect on the prompt. Ask:

- ➔ What is it about the music you named that you love? (*lyrics, tune, style, singer, or band*)
- ➔ What memories or experiences do you associate with it?
- ➔ What messages or feelings do you communicate through it?

Explain that, in this practice, they will explore songs and singing as essential elements in the prayer and praise of the people of God. Today's session looks at how singing has played a role in movements for liberation throughout history and continues to do so today.

- ☐ Copies of Resource Page 1
- ☐ Internet-connected device (optional)

OPENING RITUAL

M T

Tell youth that the person who wrote the foundational essay about this practice is a current minister and professional musician, David Gambrell. He wrote words to the tune of "Morning Has Broken" to be used in each session. Distribute copies of Resource Page 1 and invite youth to sing the first verse together of "Sing a New Song" to the familiar tune, either a cappella or with accompaniment using music from either bit.ly/FMBunessanTune (one verse) or the YouTube video "Giovanni Marradi—Morning Has Broken" (bit.ly/FMBunessanMusic, 3:39), stopping at :50 for one verse.

Alternatively, use the verse as a responsive reading, saying each line and having the youth repeat after you.



Keep copies of Resource Page 1 to be used in all sessions.



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

- ☐ *Sing a New Song* infographic poster (Year 2 Set)
- ☐ *Glory to God* hymnals or other hymnals containing "When Israel Was in Egypt's Land" (Go Down, Moses)

READING A HYMN

C

Display the *Sing a New Song* infographic poster. Point out the information on the poster detailing how to read a hymn. Point out the boxes and summarize the information in each.

Distribute hymnals and have youth locate "When Israel Was in Egypt's Land" (*Glory to God* hymnal, #52). Assign the infographic boxes "Music Matters," "Tune and Text," and "Context Matters" to partners or small groups. Have them read the hymn using information in their box. Gather the group to tell one another what they learned about the hymn's music, tune, text, and context. Pose the first four questions in the infographic box "Text Matters" to discuss the hymn. Ask:

- ➔ From what you find in reading this hymn, what makes it a song of liberation?

EXPLORING A HYMNAL



Many hymnals include indexes or guides that help users identify hymns and songs that relate to themes and Scripture. Show the Table of Contents, topical index, and Scripture index in a hymnal. Use suggestions from Resource Page 2 to assist youth in locating hymns.

Form pairs or small groups and have participants look through a hymnal and note the way it is organized. Have them locate and choose three hymns with a liberation theme. Encourage them to notice which of the hymns are familiar, are sung regularly in your congregation, or are new to them.

Gather the group and have participants name the hymns they chose. List the titles on newsprint. Discuss:

- ➔ As you looked for liberation hymns, what songs were familiar to you?
- ➔ From what you find in reading these hymns, what made them songs of liberation to you?

Keep copies of the hymn list for “Hymns of Liberation” on page 9.

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- ☐ Hymnals
 - ☐ Newsprint and markers
 - ☐ Resource Page 2

LIBERTY, LIBERATION, AND FREEDOM



Write the words *Liberty*, *Liberation*, and *Freedom* across the top of a newsprint sheet. Have youth call out words that can be made using the letters of these three words. Record their words on the newsprint. Review the list:

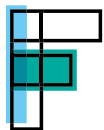
- Notice the shortest word and the longest word.
- Circle words that are similar in meaning or that build upon a similar root word.
- Invite volunteers to explain the meaning of *Liberty*, *Liberation*, and *Freedom*.
- Wonder together how these words are related.

Tell the youth that, in this session, they will explore songs and singing about liberation as a practice of faith. Display the word list throughout the session.

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- ☐ Newsprint and marker



Introduce a fun competition to this activity by distributing paper and pens and having each person write as many new words as they can using the letters of the three given words. Review all lists and continue the activity as suggested.



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or both options.

HEARING SCRIPTURE



Use information from “The Bible Story” on page 5 to describe the context of Exodus 15. Invite volunteers to take turns reading aloud Exodus 15:1–21 verse by verse while the others read along. Ask:

- ➔ Why would this community put into song something they recently experienced?
- ➔ Why might this song be important to later generations?

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- ☐ Bibles

- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ Musical instruments: tambourine, drums, bells (optional)



The same group can prepare the skit twice, once with spoken word and once using musical instruments.

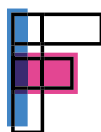
ENACTING SCRIPTURE

AM D C M

Form two groups. Have both groups read Exodus 15:1–21 and create short skits depicting this story. Group 1 is to tell the story by speaking only, without any singing or dancing. Group 2 tells the story using singing, dance, and musical instruments (if available.) Have the groups present their skits.

Discuss:

- Describe the feelings you had as you told the story.
- ➔ What feelings were expressed when music and dancing were included?
- ➔ How does the song of Miriam and Moses capture the emotion of their moment of liberation?



FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

- ☐ Copies of Resource Page 3
- ☐ Highlighters or markers
- ☐ Colored pencils



This activity can be done at the beginning or end of this section in each session.

PSALM 96 C A

Distribute copies of Resource Page 3 and highlighters or markers. Explain that the group will read aloud the psalm and look for how the session theme (“Sing Liberation”) appears in it. This activity will be repeated in all sessions.

Read Psalm 96 aloud and have participants highlight words or phrases that remind them of the theme, “Sing Liberation.”

After the reading, have participants show what they highlighted and explain what made them think of liberation. Distribute colored pencils and ask them to elaborate on their thoughts, drawing words or pictures in the margins of the psalm. Have them write their name on their Resource Page and gather the papers to be redistributed in the next session.

Choose one or more options.

- ☐ Internet-connected device

FANNIE LOU HAMER T C

Explain that Fannie Lou Hamer was a civil rights activist in the 1960s who became well known for not only her courageous spirit and prophetic voice but also how she used the power of song to lift the spirits of her fellow activists as they faced persecution. Show the YouTube video “brainPop: Fannie Lou Hamer” (bit.ly/FMHamer, 7:49). Discuss:

- ➔ How did Hamer sing liberation throughout her career as a civil rights activist?
- ➔ Why might singing have been a particularly powerful way of lifting spirits and offering encouragement to her fellow activists?
- ➔ Can you think of examples in today’s society where those working for liberation are encouraged through song?

- ☐ Internet-connected device
- ☐ Hymnals that include “Lift Every Voice and Sing” (*Glory to God* hymnal, #339)

BEYONCE KNOWLES—LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING T C M

Provide hymnals that include “Lift Every Voice and Sing” (*Glory to God* hymnal, #339). Have youth read together the *Glamour* magazine article about Beyonce’s 2018 performance at Coachella (bit.ly/FMBeyonce).

Discuss:

- ➔ Why was Tina Knowles (Beyonce’s mother) concerned about her including this song in her performance?

- ➡ Why did Beyonce feel that it was important to not only include this song but also use the performance as an opportunity to introduce a predominantly white audience to this aspect of Black culture?

Show the YouTube video “Beyoncé Homecoming Lift Every Voice (HQ)” (bit.ly/FMCoachella, 1:42) that shows a segment of Beyonce’s 2018 Coachella performance. Discuss what youth like or dislike about this performance.

Distribute hymnals and locate the hymn “Lift Every Voice and Sing.”

Have volunteers take turns reading aloud the words. Discuss:

- ➡ How is “Lift Every Voice and Sing” a song of liberation?
- ➡ Why do you think this song has been labeled “The Black National Anthem”?
- ➡ Why might it be valuable for churches, even predominantly white churches, to become familiar with this hymn or song?

HYMNS OF LIBERATION

Refer to the list of hymns identified in “Exploring a Hymnal” on page 7. If you did not choose this activity, distribute hymnals and copies of Resource Page 2, “How to Search for Hymns,” and lead the youth in finding a liberation-themed hymn.

With partners or in small groups, have each group select one hymn, locate it in the hymnal, and read the hymn lyrics. Have them identify specific lyrics about liberation and what the hymns says about God and God’s people. Gather the youth and discuss:

- ➡ Why did you choose the hymn?
- ➡ How is your hymn about liberation?
- ➡ What does it say about God and God’s people?
- ➡ Why do you think it is important for worshiping communities to sing songs like this?

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- ☐ Newsprint list of hymns from “Exploring a Hymnal” (p. 7)
 - ☐ Hymnals
 - ☐ Copies of Resource Page 2



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

SONGS OF LIBERATION



Display the newsprint lists from “Favorite Songs” on page 6. In partners or small groups, ask youth to look through the list and identify a current popular song that might also be a “song of liberation.” Have them use an internet-connected device to look up specific lyrics and note:

- ➡ Who sings the song?
- ➡ What people is the song about or for?
- ➡ What language about liberation is used?

Have volunteers play their song and explain why it is a “song of liberation.” After each song is discussed, ask the group:

- ➡ How does it feel to hear/sing this song?
- ➡ Do you consider this to be a “church song”? Why or why not?

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- ☐ Newsprint lists from “Favorite Songs” (p. 6)
 - ☐ Internet-connected devices

SINGING LIBERATION TODAY

C

Invite youth to brainstorm the moments in their daily lives when they might hear music. Discuss:

- Where or when in a day might you hear music that would be considered “songs of liberation”?
- Do you think it is important to hear and sing songs of liberation? Why or why not?

Encourage youth to be mindful of hearing songs of liberation as they listen to music on their own in the week ahead. Challenge them to notice how music they might not have associated with liberation can, in fact, serve this purpose.

Explain that, when the group gathers again, they will be asked to share if they noticed new songs of liberation in their midst.



FOLLOWING JESUS

☐ Hymnals

CLOSING RITUAL

Participants have spent time reflecting on Moses' and Miriam's song of liberation, songs of liberation they find in their congregation's hymnal, and songs of liberation in the civil rights era as well as in the movement for racial justice today.

In closing, choose one of the hymns of liberation referenced in this session. Open the hymnal to that song. Say the lyrics out loud as a closing prayer.

Sing a New Song

Tune: BUNESSAN (“Morning Has Broken”)

Lyrics: © 2022 David Gambrell

1

Sing liberation! God is our savior.
To our redeemer we all belong.
Blessing and honor, glory and power.
God is our savior! Sing a new song.

2

Sing tribulation! God will deliver.
Cry out in sorrow; name what is wrong.
Blessing and honor, glory and power.
God will deliver! Sing a new song.

3

Sing transformation! God does a new thing.
Lift up the lowly, humble the strong.
Blessing and honor, glory and power.
God does a new thing! Sing a new song.

4

Sing new creation! God reigns forever.
We have been hoping, praying so long.
Blessing and honor, glory and power.
God reigns forever! Sing a new song.

How to Search for Hymns

1. Open the hymnal to the table of contents page and peruse the headings for each section in the contents for ones that might contain hymns of liberation. (For example, in the *Glory to God* hymnal, hymns 49–82 are the section on “God’s Covenant with Israel.” Because this section includes songs about the exodus from Egypt, there would likely be some hymns of liberation in it.)
2. If you see a section that you think could have some hymns of liberation, flip through the section, scan the words to the different hymns, and see if you can identify any hymns of liberation.
3. Check to see if your hymnal has a topical index in the back. Scan the topic headings for liberation or something related. (For example, the *Glory to God* hymnal does not have a *Liberation* topic but it does have *Freedom*. Most of the hymns under the topic of freedom would likely be hymns of liberation.) Other topical headings that might include hymns of liberation are *Deliverance* and *Salvation*. As you look through the topic headings, see if you can identify any headings that are related to liberation.

The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want (Psalm 23)	801	O God in Whom All Life Begins	308	Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness (Spirit)	291
Thee We Adore, O Hidden Savior, Thee	495	Praise to the Lord (하나님을 찬양하세)	615	The Foolish in Their Hearts Deny (Psalm 14)	335
There in God's Garden	226	The Play of the Godhead	9	You Are My Refuge, Faithful God (Psalm 31)	214
Tremble, O Tremble (Psalm 99)	57	We Gather Together	336	You Who Dwell in the Shelter of the Lord (On Eagle's Wings) (Psalm 91)	43
Where Charity and Love Prevail	316				
FREEDOM		GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT		GRACE	
Arise, Your Light Is Come!	744	See: GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT 278–294		Abide with Me	836
Come Like Driving Wind, O God (Psalm 68)	55	A Prophet-Woman Broke a Jar	201	Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed	212
Come, You Faithful, Raise the Strain	234	Because You Live, O Christ	249	All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name!	263
Every Time I Feel the Spirit	66	Blessed Jesus, at Your Word	395	Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound	649
For the Healing of the Nations	346	Come and Seek the Ways of Wisdom	174	As Dew Falls Gently at Dawn	461
Freedom Is Coming	359	Come, Thou Almighty King	2	O Bless Are They Who in Their Love (Psalm 41)	208
Give Thanks to God Who Hears Our Cries (Psalm 107)	653	Eternal Father, Strong to Save	8	Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands	237
Lift Every Voice and Sing	339	God Is Calling through the Whisper	410	Come Down, O Love Divine	282
Live into Hope	772	God the Spirit, Guide and Guardian	303	Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing	475
My Country, 'Tis of Thee	337	Great God of Every Blessing	694	Fight the Good Fight	475
O Beautiful for Spacious Skies	338	In Christ Called to Baptize	297	For the Troubles and the Suffering (Pelas dores deste mundo)	764
Our Help Is in the Name of God (Psalm 124)	330	Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying	469	Forgive Our Sins as We Forgive	444
Sign Us with Ashes	433	Lord, Prepare Me (Sanctuary)	701	Give Us Light (Jyothi dho Prabhu)	467
Steal Away, Sweet Chariot	358	Lord, When I Came into This Life	691	Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken	81
Swing Low, Sweet Chariot	825	Love Divine, All Loves Excelling	366	God, How Can We Forgive	445
We Are Marching in the Light of God (Sigambu)	853	O Christ, the Great Foundation	361	God of Compassion, in Mercy Befriend Us	436
We Shall Overcome	379	O for a Closer Walk with Thee	739	God of Grace and God of Glory	307
When God Delivered Israel (Psalm 126)	73	O Sing to the Lord (Cantata ao Senhor)	637	God of the Sparrow	22
When Israel Was in Egypt's Land	52	O Splendor of God's Glory Bright	666	Gracious Spirit, Heed Our Pleading	287
FUNERAL		Praise God for This Holy Ground	405	Healer of Our Every Ill	795
See also: Death		Sound a Mystic Bamboo Song	323	Heaven Shall Not Wait	773
A Mighty Fortress Is Our God	275	Spirit of God, Descend upon My Heart	688	How Firm a Foundation	463
Abide with Me	836	Standing on the Promises	838	How Lovely, Lord (Psalm 84)	402
Blest Be the Tie That Binds	306	The Risen Christ	257	I Greet Thee, Who My Sure Redeemer Art	624
For All the Saints	326	There's a Sweet, Sweet Spirit	408	If Thou but Trust in God to Guide Thee	816
God Weeps with Us Who Weep and Mourn	787	Though I May Speak (The Gift of Love)	693	In Silence My Soul Thirsts (Psalm 62)	790
Goodness Is Stronger than Evil	750	We Will Go Out with Joy	539	Jesus, Lover of My Soul	440
Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah	377	When Hands Reach Out and Fingers Trace	302	Lead On, O King Eternal Lord, Dismiss Us with Your Blessing	546
I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light	366	Womb of Life and Source of Being	3	My Faith Looks Up to Thee	829
Love Divine, All Loves Excelling	366	GOD'S COVENANT WITH ISRAEL		My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less	353
My Faith Looks Up to Thee	829	See: GOD'S COVENANT WITH ISRAEL 49–81		Now Thank We All Our God	643
Precious Lord, Take My Hand	834	Arise, O Lord Our God, Arise (Psalm 132)	381	O Christ, the Great Foundation	361
Shall We Gather at the River	375	God's Word Is Upright (La palabra del Señor) (Psalm 33)	40	O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing	610
The King of Love My Shepherd Is (Psalm 23)	802	Light One Candle to Watch for Messiah	85	O God, Show Mercy to Us (Psalm 67)	341
The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want (Psalm 23)	801	Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming	129	O Sacred Head, Now Wounded	221
GATHERING (THE CHURCH AT WORSHIP)		Lord, to You My Soul Is Lifted (Psalm 25)	420	O Save Me, God, and Hear My Cry (Psalm 54)	812
See: GATHERING 385–414		Lord, Why Have You Forsaken Me (Psalm 22)	210	O Savior, in This Quiet Place	794
Heleliyan, We Are Singing	642	O My Soul, Bless Your Redeemer (Psalm 103)	439		
Here, O Lord, Your Servants Gather	311				
O Come, All Ye Faithful	133				

736 TOPICAL INDEX

4. Scan the hymn titles under any of these related topical headings and see if you can identify possible hymns of liberation from the hymn titles. Look up some of the hymns.



Psalm 96

¹Sing to the LORD a new song!
Sing to the LORD, all the earth!
²Sing to the LORD! Bless his name!
Share the news of his saving work every single day!
³Declare God's glory among the nations;
declare his wondrous works among all people
⁴because the LORD is great and so worthy of praise.
He is awesome beyond all other gods
⁵because all the gods of the nations are just idols,
but it is the LORD who created heaven!
⁶Greatness and grandeur are in front of him;
strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

⁷Give to the LORD, all families of the nations—
give to the LORD glory and power!
⁸Give to the LORD the glory due his name!
Bring gifts!
Enter his courtyards!
⁹Bow down to the LORD in his holy splendor!
Tremble before him, all the earth!

¹⁰Tell the nations, "The LORD rules!
Yes, he set the world firmly in place;
it won't be shaken.
He will judge all people fairly."
¹¹Let heaven celebrate! Let the earth rejoice!
Let the sea and everything in it roar!
¹²Let the countryside and everything in it celebrate!
Then all the trees of the forest too
will shout out joyfully
¹³before the LORD because he is coming!
He is coming to establish justice on the earth!
He will establish justice in the world rightly.
He will establish justice among all people fairly.
—Psalm 96 (CEB)

