



PLAYLIST

▶ Gospel on the Radio

Taylor Swift

JUNE 23 | 9:30AM

Sunday, June 23, 2024

Playlist: Gospel on the Radio – Taylor Swift

“Gospel (Taylor’s Version): We All Got Crowns” | Ecclesiastes 3:1-15 | Jess Scholten

¹ “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

² a time to be born, and a time to die;

a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

³ a time to kill, and a time to heal;

a time to break down, and a time to build up;

⁴ a time to weep, and a time to laugh;

a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

⁵ a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;

a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

⁶ a time to seek, and a time to lose;

a time to keep, and a time to throw away;

⁷ a time to tear, and a time to sew;

a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

⁸ a time to love, and a time to hate;

a time for war, and a time for peace.

⁹ What gain have the workers from their toil? ¹⁰I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with. ¹¹He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover, he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

¹²I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; ¹³moreover, it is God’s gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil. ¹⁴I know that whatever God does endures for ever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has done this, so that all should stand in awe before him. ¹⁵That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already is; and God seeks out what has gone by.”

A little trivia from TikTok: Taylor Swift or the Bible edition:

<https://www.tiktok.com/@sunvalleycc/video/7324843765422705963? r=1& t=8j7wtv8JSXu>

Is it a line from Lamentations or Taylor Swift?

“No amount of freedom gets you clean.” (TS)

“I gave up on life altogether. I’ve forgotten what the good life is like.” (Lamentations 3 The Message)

“And if you never saved me from boredom, I could have gone on as it was. But, Lord, you made me feel important.” (TS)

“Have you ever seen anything like this, ever seen pain like my pain, seen what he did to me.” (Lamentations 1:12 The Message)

“You’ll find out what it’s like to get drunk and wake up with nothing.” (Lamentations 4:21 The Message)

“Oh, oh, oh.” (Lamentations 2:1) In fairness to the Swifties, Oh, oh, oh, oh is also from You Need to Calm Down.

“I remember it all. O how well I remember – the feeling of hitting the bottom.” (Lamentations 3 The Message)

I was 30 when Taylor Swift released her first album at 16. And while I do keep up with popular music most of the time, I wasn’t tuned in much beyond a few radio bops. And then about ten years ago, I ended up on some sort of social media rabbit hole where there was a video of Taylor wrapping Christmas presents for a few of her fans. I learned about what came to be referred to as Tay-lurking – a process where Taylor researches fans, so that she can buy them some perfect holiday gifts. It was sheer magic – if you want a fun rabbit hole, look up Taylor Swift Christmas gift videos, and you will see some amazing joy. It’s charmingly called Swiftmas.

That’s part of the reason Taylor Swift is so popular – she has an ability on small and large levels to bring joy and community. Our passage this morning is that well known passage from Ecclesiastes on the ebbs and flows of life: “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.” Plant, pluck, break down, build up,

heal, weep, laugh, hug, seek, lose, keep, throw away – through the now 11 eras of Taylor Swift, she touches on them all.

We're kicking off our summer series today: Playlist: The Gospel on the Radio. Over the next few weeks, you're going to hear about several bands and genres, not because many of them are overtly religious, although even Metallica sings about being surrounded by the light, but because everything belongs to God. All of it.

Music has this way – even when it's labeled secular – to touch our very souls. And all of us have been to concerts on Friday or Saturday nights that have felt as much if not more like church than Sunday mornings. So why not share that joy and be reminded of the gift that God is present not only here and not only here (points to heart) but all around and everywhere.

And I love that we're starting this summer series with Swiftie Sunday. Not all of you – maybe not even a majority of you – are fans. I hope you can still hear some good news.

But some of you really are big fans. Some of you have three generations of fans in your family that can name favorite bops. One of our new members – not from the confirmation class, I might add – has come forward as a Swiftie – and lots of you sent in songs, especially loved lyrics, and cool connections.

So why pick an artist who might not be nearly as connected to the age-range of the congregation as say... well, you tell me – who are your favorite artists on your playlist? (Give time for shout outs)

That is exactly why we're starting with Taylor Swift – because this eras tour is epic! Like... Elvis on the Ed Sullivan show epic. I can't even play you a clip of that, there is so much teenage screaming in the background. The same kind of gaga you and my mom might have been over the Beatles is the kind of gaga I was when I got my first cassette tape – Michael Jackson's *Thriller* – or why I just *had* to be Madonna for Halloween when *True Blue* came out.

Whatever era of music we personally love, we would do well to pay attention at least a bit to the current era. And with twelve number one hits and three times in three decades having at least one week where ONLY Taylor Swift songs were top ten, she's pretty epic.

The beauty is, it's also pretty easy to have some great overlaps in Taylor's values she lives out in the world and the Gospel: community, kindness, and authenticity.

While Taylor first drew me in with Swiftmas, she continues to do this on a much grander scale these days. Her concerts are sheer gifts to her fans, just in the act of singing for four hours, sometimes in the pouring rain. But even more than that, she does such special things for her fans. All the Easter eggs she puts in her songs and media are ways people feel clued into a deeper connection with her and with other Swifties. Her Eras tour includes light-up wrist bands – special ways to make entire stadiums more magical. She does indeed make the whole place shimmer. And there are so many clips of her paying attention to fans' t-shirts and signs – personal interactions because she's paying personal attention.

There's a time for everything under heaven, and Taylor Swift makes time for it all with her fans. She knows the value of community. In her NYU commencement speech in 2022, Swift reflects:

“Not a single one of us here today has done it alone. We are each a patchwork quilt of those who have loved us, those who have believed in our futures, those who showed us empathy and kindness or told us the truth, even when it wasn't easy to hear. Those who told us we could do it when there was absolutely no proof of that. Someone read stories to you and taught you to dream and offered up some moral code of right and wrong for you to try and live by. Someone tried their best to explain every concept in this insanely complex world to the child that was you, as you asked a bazillion questions like “how does the moon work” and “why can we eat salad but not grass.” And maybe they didn't do it perfectly. No one ever can.

“Maybe they aren't with us anymore, and in that case I hope you'll remember them today. If they are here in this stadium, I hope you'll find your own way to express your gratitude for all the steps and missteps that have led us to this common destination.” (<https://www.billboard.com/music/music-news/taylor-swift-nyu-commencement-speech-full-transcript-1235072824/>)

Fan or not, community and gratitude are deeply held values we can all appreciate.

Canadian writer and professor Melodie Roschman reflects in her 2023 article, “When Taylor Swift Took Me to Church,” on how French sociologist Emile Durkheim coined

the phrase “collective effervescence” in his 1912 book, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. “When members of a society come together as a group to all participate in the same ritual, Durkheim argues, they often experience a powerful sense of euphoria and connection to each other. This effervescence is vital to meaning-making, whether you’re singing “Amazing Grace” in a church choir or shaking it off with a bunch of teenagers in a suburban movie theater. The absence of those collective experiences is one of the things that made the pandemic so difficult and why so many were eager to return to church in person as soon as possible. We long for community. We feel our deepest emotions when we feel them together.” <https://spectrummagazine.org/culture/when-taylor-swift-took-me-church/>

It might be why Swift has herself talked to fans in concerts about how she sings out her experiences and feelings in her songs, and when the crowd sings them back, she doesn’t feel so alone. We need each other. Individual spiritual-but-not-participating-in-a-faith-community doesn’t cut it. Thanks be to God we have a church community with whom to share our joys and concerns each week – so that the joys can be made even more celebratory, and the concerns can be easier to bear in community.

Another value we hold as people of faith is kindness – purposeful ways we cheer each other on, encourage others, and work on having gentleness and patience, so that we can foster kindness. I can’t even track down where it’s said, because Swift talks about kindness so much. “No matter what happens in life,” she’s frequently quoted, “be good to people. Being good to people is a wonderful legacy to leave behind.”

Taylor has not been quiet about how she’s been bullied – in her early school years and throughout her career. One of the favorite songs someone sent me in the last few weeks is “Mean” where she has a whole ballad about her future and reflects on those who have been hurtful: “Someday I’ll be living in a big ol’ city and all you’re ever gonna be is mean.”

When she stepped forward in her music to be an ally for the LGBTQ+ community in, “You Need to Calm Down,” she again called people out on their meanness. “Can you just not step on his gown? You need to calm down.” She balances it out with the reminder to be less judgmental about others and ourselves: “We all know now, we all got crowns.”

The world needs so much more kindness and encouragement these days. That’s some Taylor Swift Gospel we can all get behind.

And maybe my favorite aspect of Taylor that is an echo of so much of Jesus and the New Testament is her call to be our authentic selves. She well knows there are times to mourn – to lament and reflect and express the hurt of dreams dashed and relationships broken. And there are times to dance and celebrate and express the sheer joy of living.

As she says, “Our tears become holy in the form of ink on a page. Once we have spoken our saddest story, we can be free of it.” (Taylor Swift)

From “Christmas Tree Farm,” a one-off Christmas inspiration from her growing up... complete with clips from her childhood... to “Antihero” where Swift addresses such deep reflections of our false selves and our true selves... to my absolute favorite for the sheer bop and good therapy, “Shake It off,” Swift is not afraid to face her own foibles and insecurities while still embracing all eras of herself.

May we too know this rhythm of weeping and laughing, mourning and dancing, embracing our awkward and beautiful selves. Because we are beloved children of God – our names are written on God’s very heart. And it is God’s desire for us to know joy.

So even if you’re not a big Taylor Swift fan, I wish you joy. Go make a friendship bracelet after worship regardless of your age and capture what it means to be a community full of joys and concerns we bear together, kindly and authentically sharing God’s love with those around us.