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Worship 101: Principles and Practices for Song & Discipleship

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Calvin Symposium on Worship 2016

Session C: Worship 101: Principles and Practices for Song & Discipleship
with Paul Ryan, Eric Mathis, and students
Location: Calvin College Chapel Undercroft

Fri/Sat Session C: Worship 101: Principles and Practices for Song & Discipleship ||

with Paul Ryan, Eric Mathis, Nate Glasper, and students from Calvin College & Samford University.

Learning to lead worship encompasses what you do and who you are. It entails spirituality as much as it requires skill. In this seminar, we will explore a vital practice of worship leadership: choosing songs. Along the way we will discuss how we engage this practice as a matter of discipleship, identifying cultural trends that resist our efforts and recommending habits for faithful and healthy leadership.

INTRODUCTION ||

TESTIMONIES ||

1. What challenges or unhealthy temptations have you faced in choosing songs?
2. What healthy and faithful practices have you learned?
3. What advice can you share with someone learning to choose songs?

EXPERT INSIGHT ||

EXERCISE ||

“Salaam / Peace” by Manal Samir (*Lift Up Your Hearts* 298)

1. What does this song say about God and/or his people?
2. What action in worship does this song serve (praise, confess, assure, etc.)?
3. How would this song be encouraging for your community?
4. What might be musical trouble spots for congregational singing?
5. What steps would you have to take to learn this song or prepare it for congregational singing? What would you need to learn? What fears do you have? What excites you about leading this song?

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Complementary Prayers for Lift Up Your Hearts

Prayers to Accompany the Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs of Lift Up Your Hearts.

By: [Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.](#)

When choosing music to be sung by a congregation, worship planners naturally fit it within the church year, or alongside the sermon theme, or inside the celebration of the sacraments. Especially, they fit singing inside the movement of the service itself. Accordingly, planners keep their eye on moments of gathering, confessing of sin or of faith, reassurance, preparing for preaching, receiving the sacraments, and sending.

Worship leaders live off the work of the planners and add touches of their own, sometimes celebrating in prayer the power of what the congregation has just sung or, in a prayed line or two, anticipating what the congregation will sing in a moment. They tie their prayers into the congregation's song.

To help in the tying process CICW has asked several of us to write prayers that fit the 965 psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs of *Lift Up Your Hearts*. (*Lift Up Your Hearts* is a new hymnal, published by Faith Alive Resources in 2013, that includes songs and hymns from and for a variety of traditions).

The idea is to give planners and leaders prayers they may use verbatim or in part—or take simply as suggestion for composing their own prayers, written or extemporaneous.

In 1997, the worship leader Paul Baloche was pondering Isaiah 6, where Isaiah sees “the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne,” with seraphim flying and calling to each other, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty.” Baloche was pondering this hair-raising vision along with a simple prayer used in teaching sessions by Bruce Morgan, a mentor to Baloche. Before beginning to teach, Morgan would pray, “O Lord, as we look into the mysteries of your Word, open the eyes of our hearts”.

Baloche's pondering flowed out into his song “[Open the Eyes of My Heart](#),” a lyrical prayer with great depths of yearning. *Lift Up Your Hearts* places it as #537 in the section titled “Opening of Worship,” and it belongs there.

So placed, it invites, just before or after it, an opening prayer:

Gracious God, Master of the Universe, you who are holy beyond human thinking and glorious beyond human telling, lift us now toward your holiness and point us toward your glory. Open the eyes of our hearts, Lord; we want to see you shining in the splendor of your light, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

But what if the worship planner/leader is thinking of a place in worship to confess sin and receive assurance of pardon? Baloche's song works there too, because God's holiness reveals and measures the depths of human sin. So placed, it invites a prayer of confession:

Wonderful God, radiant in your splendor, we confess how often we avert our eyes from your glory, seeing instead what we want to see and watching whom we want to watch. We choose to watch what is shameful, or vengeful, or disdainful, gradually becoming more like what we watch. Before it is too late for us, open the eyes of our hearts, Lord, so that we may gaze on your holiness and be healed, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Or, again, think of Baloché's song used as his mentor used it, just before teaching or preaching. Then, perhaps, it invites a spoken prayer something like this:

We turn now to your Word, gracious God, praying that you will illuminate it through the radiance of your Holy Spirit, that, drawn to the light, we may spot a part of your glory. Open the eyes of our hearts, Lord; we want to see you through your perfect image, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Or, finally, think of the song used at the close of worship. So used, the song is gratitude for illumination already received in worship or a plea for it to continue in the lives of worshipers.

An accompanying prayer of closing gratitude might be this:

Eternal God, shining in glory like a thousand suns, you have shone on us in this time of worship, lighting up your work and Word, lighting up the faces of our brothers and sisters, drawing us toward the splendor of your presence, which is otherwise too high for us. You have opened the eyes of our hearts, Lord, to see your glory and we thank you. We pray in the powerful name of Jesus, the light of the world. Amen.

In attempting to tie prayers into songs and hymns, I have found that phrases repeated in hymns easily become echoes in the prayers to accompany them. So, in "Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty" the repeated phrase (besides the title) is "merciful and mighty, God in three persons, blessed Trinity," which may be echoed at the end of an opening prayer:

Lord God Almighty, our prayer rises to you in all your mercy and power. Your inner life is a dazzling mystery of glory and love, and we have beheld your glory in the One incarnate. You are merciful and mighty, God in three persons, blessed Trinity, and we worship you in the power of the Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

But a hymn as famous as this one contains lots of lines, unrepeated but still well known, that make fine echoes: "all the saints adore thee," "all your works shall praise your name in earth and sky and sea," "were and are and evermore shall be."

I have also found that with songs of high emotion and sensitivity ("Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling . . . Come home, come home, you who are weary, come home") it is difficult, and maybe unseemly, for the one who prays to try to match the emotion within the song. Too many of us who try this will sound like ham actors. So how about an accompanying prayer that is emotionally pretty straight:

O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on us. You are the one who calls not the righteous but sinners. You call through our defiance, through our confusion, through the first turning of our hearts toward you. Softly you call, tenderly you call, always you call, waiting to renew our hearts and bring us home. In Your wonderful name. Amen.

What the Experts Say: Choosing Music for Worship

Compiled and edited by Eric Mathis

Nicholas Wolterstorff //

Four Principles for Thinking about Music in Worship¹

- Christian worship calls for music. This is more significant than “needing” music.*
 - ❖ How would our worship gatherings be different if there were no music?
 - ❖ If I asked you to create a worship gathering without music, what would it include?
 - ❖ From biblical times, Christians have used music to celebrate God’s faithfulness.
 - ❖ Assemblies consistently find themselves using music to carry the Christian message.
 - ❖ Music intensifies our common expressions such as “I love you.”
 - ❖ It helps us express things we might not be able to say ourselves.
- While Christian worship calls for music, music is primarily understood as a servant to worship.*
 - ❖ We must exercise caution not to define music as *the* worship event.
 - ❖ Worship is not a concert of religious music (Bach *b minor Mass* or Hillsong Concert).
 - ❖ Music helps the people speak to God, one another, and the world.
 - ❖ Music helps people better praise, pray, lament, and give thanks.
 - ❖ Music is not “preliminaries” to the sermon.
 - ❖ The focus of worship is God, the church, and the world.
 - ❖ Music should highlight these points.
- Music should serve an action of worship, and the character of the music should fit the action of worship.*
 - ❖ Music must match what is happening in worship.
 - ❖ A song of confession need not be rousing and upbeat.
 - ❖ We need not talk about lament and then sing a song of celebration.
- Perhaps “fittingness” and not style, is the basic consideration for thinking about music in worship. However, once the requirements of fittingness are satisfied, then certain considerations of style do become relevant.*
 - ❖ The music must be fitting upon the ears of the worship participants.
 - ❖ Worship and its music are contextual.
 - ❖ In some congregations, a band is most fitting. In others, an organ. In others, no instruments.
 - ❖ Hospitality is important in worship! Wolterstorff adds: “I will sing hymns in the style that fits comfortably with your ears and suits your tastes, and I will ask and hope that you treat me likewise.”

¹ Adapted from Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Thinking about Church Music,” in ed. Charlotte Kroeker, *Music in Christian Worship* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), 11-16.

Greg Scheer // Evaluating Song Quality²

Singability

- ❖ Is the range of this song suitable for congregational song?
- ❖ Is the tessitura of this song suitable for congregational song?
- ❖ Are the rhythms in this song suitable for congregational song?
- ❖ Is the form of this song simple enough for the congregation to sing and remember?

Lyric Quality

- ❖ Does this song express truth?
- ❖ Is the message communicated by modern expression that is lyrical?
- ❖ Does the text trivialize the Christian message?
- ❖ Does the text have inappropriate imagery?

Music Scalability

- ❖ Can I teach this song to the congregation?
- ❖ Can the melody be sung immediately by children and non-musicians?
- ❖ Is this song flexible enough to allow for increased musical contributions with ease?
- ❖ Does this song have a “hook”?

Overall thoughts

- ❖ Does this song have thematic coherence?
- ❖ Does the text match the tune?

Paul Ryan and John D. Witvliet // Practicing Discernment: Music as Food for the Soul³

These four questions are helpful for thinking about particular pieces of music in worship.

1. What action of worship is this music enabling?
2. What happens before and after the music?
3. Does this music evoke a mood appropriate to the liturgical action?
4. Does this music echo specific scripture references?

Instead of asking, “Do I like this music?” or “Is this music popular?” consider these questions.

1. What gap does this music fill in the congregation’s repertoire?
2. How will this music solidify our faith?
3. How will this music contribute to the worship gathering?
4. Will this music help the congregation grow spiritually?
5. Will this music help us cover an affective expression of our faith?
6. Is the music used over a long period of time balanced theologically?
7. Does the music tell some part of the entire Christian story?

² Greg Scheer, *The Art of Worship: A Musician’s Guide to Leading Modern Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), Chapter 3.

³ Adapted from John Witvliet and Paul Ryan, “Music as Soul Food: Designing a Balanced Menu,” unpublished.

Many Voices // The Spirituality of Music in Worship

Music teaches us to pray.

“Music making is a way of shaping prayer. It is a way of enabling the corporate church to pray more effectively and completely. Music making, indeed artistic expression in general, becomes the relational currency between the congregation and the Christian tradition - past, present, and future.”⁴

Music engages our entire being.

“Music requires full kinesthetic engagement. Most, if not all of our senses have the potential to be employed. The body remembers shared music making long after the mind may be dimmed.”⁵

Music forms the worshipping community.

“There is something about human beings that needs to make music, something that insists on song. Every culture sings about the world it experiences, in its own distinctive sound. In fact, we come to know about a people by listening to what they sing and bring to expression in their music. What we sing and how we sing reveals much of who we are, and entering into another’s song and music making provides a gateway into their world, which might be much different from our own. Sharing our song with others who do not know us is sharing a gift, akin to the sharing of food at a common table.”⁶

Music teaches us hospitality.

“When one enters the sanctuary ... one encounters music and plenty of it. The congregation sings and plays musical instruments, and music holds the gathering together from beginning to end. The music is selected out of alertness to the moment in worship - a vigorous hymn of praise here, a reflective lament or a hopeful chorus there. The styles vary, and music from all eras of the church’s history is employed. People need to be willing to sing music they do not necessarily like for the sake of the unity of the body.”⁷

Music leads us to the mystery of God.

“We do, as human beings, need music. Check yourself. You need those times when you are fully taken up by something not yourself: by seeing a single rose in a jar on a pew where someone now deceased once sat and worshiped. Perhaps it is just that moment when all of your life is interpreted in a single sound, the sound of a bell, the sound of a drumbeat. Ah, the sound of the voices, the sound of the voice of the congregation. Those are hints and guesses. We have so much to offer one another and the people who are seeking, in their own idioms, what human beauty points toward, namely, the glory of God; the beauty of God; the terrible beauty of God; the creating, redeeming beauty of God that is part of the intrinsic life of the Trinity.”⁸

⁴ Michael Hawn, *Gather Into One Praying and Singing Globally* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publications, 2003).

⁵ Don Saliers, *Music and Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 4.

⁶ Don Saliers, “Singing Our Lives,” in *Practicing Our Faith*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 182.

⁷ Thomas Long, *Beyond the Worship Wars: Building Vital and Faithful Congregations*, 64.

⁸ Don Saliers, “Sounding the Symbols of Faith,” in ed. Charlotte Kroeker, *Music in Christian Worship* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), 25.