

Ministry of Music in Worship

Philosophy of Ministry

*Come, let's sing for joy to the LORD,
Let's shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation.
Let's come before His presence with a song of thanksgiving,
Let's shout joyfully to Him in songs with instruments.
For the LORD is a great God
And a great King above all gods. (Psalm 93:1-3)*

Music plays a critical role as the body of Christ meets together for corporate worship. The purpose of music as a part of the worship service is to engage the body of Christ in the exaltation of God, the edification of believers, and the prompting of a manifest awareness of God's presence for the evangelization of unbelievers. The patterns represented in Scripture are varied, but certain **Principles** for music in worship can be discerned. These Scriptural principles serve as guidelines for the **Practice** of worship in the local body. As the use of music in worship evolves, we look to Scripture to discern what is appropriate and beneficial. And lastly, we examine individual participation in worship.

The Biblical Pattern of Worship

The Principle.....

Worship in music is one of many forms of worship.

Biblical forms of worship include Scripture reading, instruction in the Word, singing, instrumentals, shouting, meditation, lifting hands, dancing, bowing, kneeling, trembling, calling on the name of the Lord, presenting offerings, and procession. The forms include both the contemplative and the celebrative.

1 Timothy 4:13; Colossians 3:16; Psalm 28:2; 33:2-3; 47:1; 48:9; 68:24-27; 95:1-7; 96:8-9; 100:1; 116:17; 138:2; 149:2-3; 150:3-5

The Practice

A variety of elements may be present in worship. Cultural norms may guide both the worship leaders and the participants in which of these elements are appropriately edifying for the worship experience.

The Principle.....

Worship is a response to both the transcendence of God and the immanence of God.

Exodus 20:20; Psalm 95:1-7; 96:8, 9; Acts 5:11; Psalm 145:8; Jeremiah 23:23; John 15:15

The Practice

Balance should be sought between emphasizing God's infinite majesty (His transcendence) with God's indispensable intimacy (His immanence). Such balance is not necessary in each worship service but should be reflected in the ongoing life of the church.

The Principle.....

Worship may include a variety of musical forms and styles: psalms, hymns, spiritual songs.

Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; ref. Psalm 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 44:9 Isaiah 42:10

The Practice

God encourages variety in worship, including new, fresh, and creative forms. Worship expressions should draw from the past to benefit from those messages in song that have stood the test of time. Worship should also draw from the evolution of music culture in anticipation of new generations of worshippers. Drawing from the past encourages younger believers to continue in the doctrinal roots of Christianity. Learning new songs and styles is an opportunity for the more mature believers to establish a cultural bridge to the future.

Cultural patterns and preferences may determine musical forms and styles that edify across the preferential spectrum of believers' individual tastes and preferences.

The Principle.....

Worship is a platform for skillful artists to use their skills in exalting the Lord.

1 Chronicles 15:22; Psalm 33:2; 68:24-26

The Practice

An appropriate variety of skilled musicians, vocalists, instruments and biblical elements of worship may be utilized in the music portion of the worship service.

The worship leader and/or team are, first and foremost, worshipers: leading, drawing and feeling the flame of passion to praise, sense and love God. The role of the Worship Leader and/or Team is to prompt the congregants into personal involvement in worship, not perform for a congregational audience in order to highlight their musical talents.

The Principle.....

Worship is experienced in an orderly manner.

1 Corinthians 14:40

The Practice

Worship should be conducted in an orderly manner, the result of much prayer, time in the Word and planning.

The Principle.....

Worship is to occur “in spirit and in truth.” That is, it is to be a genuine expression of the heart and in accordance to the Word of God.

John 4:24

The Practice

Songs should be selected that are doctrinally and scripturally true and that are musically arranged to convey the message (truth) and emotion (spirit) of the lyrics.

The Principle.....

Worship is for the edification of believers, but also should prompt conviction of unbelievers in attendance.

1 Corinthians 14:24, 25; Psalm 29:2; Philippians 2:3, 8-10; 1 Corinthians 14:25, 26

The Practice

All aspects of worship are to be done for the glorification of the Father, the exaltation of the Son through the power of the Spirit, for the strengthening of the church and the evangelization of the lost.

Unbelievers among the assembly, witnessing believers' passion and love for the Lord, are to be convicted so that they fall on their faces and worship God.

Contemporary Issues in Worship

Regarding Style (Instruments, Arrangement, Beat)

Is there a style that is offensive to God? Some would claim so, but their arguments are not biblically convincing. Scripture does not address style in worship. We conclude that style is irrelevant to God. He measures our worship by His perfect understanding of our hearts.

However, style is important to individuals. Each believer has a stylistic comfort zone that is tied to their personality, tastes, and cultural setting. The Music in Worship Ministry should be committed to the use of a variety of styles that edify the body within the cultural context.

Regarding Content (Lyrics)

Content is important to God. Christianity is a reasonable faith and therefore involves both the mind and the soul. It follows that the heart of worship is an emotional response to a biblical truth. Truth without emotion is not biblical worship. Emotion without truth is not biblical worship. Worship engages the mind and the soul. Therefore, worship songs must engage the mind as well as the soul. The lyrics of songs could possibly be categorized into four categories:

1. Biblical Theme. The exploration of a theme or truth from Scripture.
2. Biblical Passages. A specific passage of Scripture set to music in exact or approximate form.

3. Christian Experience. The exploration of a specific aspect of the Christian experience.
4. Biblical Allusions. A collection of biblical words and allusions set to music without a distinct message or theme.

Regarding category 4, Biblical Allusions, if the biblical message or theme is unclear it must be carefully scrutinized and perhaps rejected. Of particular concern is when the song consists of repetition rather than a thematic core. While somewhat Christian in content, without a message or theme it then is nothing more than a song to be enjoyed. In Matthew 6:7, Jesus cautions against meaningless, repetitive prayers like those of the unbelievers who think they will be heard for their many words. The principle might be applied to songs which consist of biblical words arranged repetitively and lacking in a message or theme. This is not to say that repetition is invalid (e.g., "Hallelujah" from Handel's Messiah). Repetition is valid if it reinforces the message of the song (e.g., Psalm 136).

Regarding Familiarity

Familiarity in songs is good in that it supports the participation of those in attendance. However, familiarity also has an associated danger for the participants in that they may sing the song without engaging their heart. While this is a participant issue, leaders may guard against this by introducing changes in the presentation of the song.

The Music in Worship Ministry should develop a dynamic body of songs that grows and changes over time but has some consistency for the sake of familiarity. By this we will both edify and disciple:

1. We edify by allowing for familiarity while guarding against overuse that may result in disengagement from the message of the song by the participants.
2. We edify by gifting to older believers the best of new musical offerings and by gifting to younger believers the best of the past. By keeping the body of songs dynamic, we are continually building a bridge from the past to the future in the flow of God's kingdom.
3. We disciple by equipping believers to be worshippers in their personal lives. This requires repetition of songs to the point that the worshipper "owns" the song as the Holy Spirit brings it to mind.

Regarding the Environment of Worship

The elements of the environment, including but not limited to, lighting and amplification should be conducive to congregational participation and not focused on performance. Scripture suggests that singing is a principal and important expression of worship. “Singing to the Lord” is identified as an expression of worship over 80 times in Scripture, in most cases in the imperative case (“Sing to the Lord”). The worship leader(s), coupled with the environment, should be focused on prompting the worshippers to engage their voices in worship through singing. Quiet personal reflection and communion with God are personal aspects of worship, and are recognized as such, yet the overriding measure of engagement in worship by the congregation is the extent to which the body participates by the use of their voice in singing. The body should be taught that it pleases God that His worshippers lift their voices to worship through singing.

Lighting can be used as a means to quieten the spirit, sharpen the sensitivities, and/or enforce the mood of the worshipper.

Amplification can be used to enhance the variety of moods across the spectrum of worship. Whether it is a stimulating volume leading the worshippers into celebration, or the quiet reflection of a soothing a cappella chorus, the worship of God can reflect the variety of human emotions reflected in worship. However, the use of amplification must be subject to limits. In Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, Paul gave instruction to the body related to corporate singing. In Ephesians 5:19 he instructed “speaking (voicing) **to one another** in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart. In Colossians 3:16-17, he instructed “[teach] and [admonish] **one another** with psalms, hymns, *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” The word translated “one another” is the Greek word *heautou*, which in the context could be translated *yourselves*, and the translators in the context of the body have translated it “one another.” This instruction should be included in the list of “one another’s” to which Scripture instructs the body (Be kind to one another, love one another, et al). The music, then, should not only be a means of worshiping the Lord, but also a means of believers’ ministering to each other.

As this instruction applies to volume in the worship environment, it is important that the “one another” element not be lost. Paul’s instruction suggests that believers are singing to one another. By application, the amplification of the worship team and the instrumentation should allow for the congregants to hear the singing of the worshippers around them. Not only is it edifying as a “one

another” aspect of the body of Christ, but it also encourages others to participate in singing themselves by those around them. Or put negatively, the amplification should find its limit at the point at which the congregants only hear the worship leaders and instruments. Amplification should not overpower the voices of the worshippers.

In summary, the worship leaders play an essential role in worship, and the measure of their success is defined by the heartfelt worship from the body, measured in large part by their participation in “singing to the Lord.”

Learning to Worship as a Participant

Participation in corporate worship is one of the basic elements of the spiritual life. Hebrews 10: makes clear the pattern of life, “Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together.” A biblically significant part of corporate worship is the singing of praises to God. Individual participation in the singing of praises is expected and even commanded of God’s people.¹ Two essentials define a true worshipper through the gift of music.

Essential #1

The first essential of the worshipper is participation. Two reasons seem to prevent some believers from participating in singing. First, their singing voice is not pleasing and they struggle to follow the melody. Second, some may simply be self-conscious about singing based on an underlying element of vulnerability associated with singing publicly. Both of these reasons are understandable. However, obedience comes into play in both of these cases. Scripture enjoins us to “sing to the Lord.” Opening one’s mouth and singing with fellow believers is not only spiritually refreshing, it is expected of you. If you don’t have a good voice, you can nevertheless voice the words quietly, thus giving up to God the sacrifice of praise (Hebrews 13:15). If you are self-conscious, you need to set aside your fear and pride and trade your reticence with obedience. Our great God and Savior is worthy of praise, and when you don’t participate with your silence, it holds back the glory God receives from the body of Christ.

¹ 1 Ch 16:9,23; Ps 5:11; 9:11; 30:4; 33:1-3; 47:6-7; 68:4,32; 81:1-2; 92:1; 95:1-2; 96:1-2; 98:1,4-5; 147:1,7; 149:1; Is 12:5-6; Jer 20:13; Eph 5:19-20; Col 3:16; Jas 5:13

Caution

Participation also carries with it a danger to be avoided. For those who have a good and pleasing voice, they must be careful not to sing in order to bring attention to their skill. This is a heart issue. If you find yourself singing not to God but to the audience of those around you, deal with it in your heart but don't stop participating. Simply confess your heart condition and reset your focus on the One you love and serve.

Essential #2

Second, your worship must involve both the heart and the head. “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). Worship is a spiritual exercise between God and you, prompted and facilitated by the Holy Spirit. Worship is not a ritual or an intellectual exercise, but rather a marriage of your affections with the truths about God.

The songs used in worship have messages drawn from the revealed word of God. They are either about the character of God (his worthiness, faithfulness, patience, etc.), the experience of the Christian life (overcoming struggles, hope for the future, spiritual battles, etc.), or the mission of the church (reaching the world, etc.). Worship takes place when these truths penetrate the core of your being (your heart) and engage with what those truths mean to you and the body of Christ. Your affections engage with the magnificence of who he is, the gratefulness of what he has done for you, or the challenge of his calling on your life.

True worship engages with the message. The lyrics may be glorifying to God for who he is. As you sing, turn the affections of your heart to him through the words of the song. The lyrics may tell of what he has done for you or will do for you in the future. As the words leave your lips, reflect on his faithfulness in specific past experiences and your trust in his faithfulness in the future. Let the message of the song resonate with your experiences and circumstances. Then during the interludes within the song or between songs, silently talk to God. Tell him how much you appreciate who he is, what he means to you, and all he has done for you.

Caution

Jesus rebuked the Pharisees about their worship, saying, “*This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me* (Matthew 15:8–9). While this rebuke was directed at the hypocritical Pharisees, it nevertheless stands as a caution to worshippers today. The music and the lyrics may come from your lips without the engagement of your heart. This may be

because of familiarity with the song, and your singing may simply be rote recitation. It is also easy to enjoy the music itself without engaging with the message of the song. If you find yourself in this mode, simply confess your lack of true worship and reengage with the message of the song.

Summary

Corporate worship includes not only teaching and encouragement but also singing, as Paul instructed:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Colossians 3:16)

Every believer should participate from the heart in all aspects of worship, including singing praises to God. Jesus declared to those who criticized his worshippers, “if these were silent, the very stones would cry out” (Luke 19:40). Don’t let the stones take your place in worshipping our Savior and King.