
CHOOSING SONGS WISELY

STEWARDING THE GIFT OF CONGREGATIONAL SONG

Ps. 40:9-10 (ESV) I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation; behold, I have not restrained my lips, as you know, O LORD. I have not hidden your deliverance within my heart; I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation; I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness from the great congregation.

I. Why What We Sing Matters

A. How we often choose songs...*(adapted from Graham Kendrick)*

1. I'm really into Sonic Boom's latest CD and these are my favorite tracks.
2. This song seemed to really click with people last time.
3. These are the only ones (a) the band can do (b) that I've learned the chords to.
4. This is a *cool* song, and being *cool*, I only do *cool* songs.
5. I know song this song has great theology in it, but it has too many words, and I'm into simple right now.
6. I know that these four songs are definitely in the overhead box, and I'm not sure about the other three.
7. I really like the way my voice sounds on this song.
8. This is the latest song that God gave me. Hope you like it. He does.

B. Songs teach.

"Show me a church's songs and I'll show you their theology." (Gordon Fee)

1. Who God is and what He's done
2. Who we are
3. How we relate to Him

C. Our culture increasingly values musical experiences over biblical truth.

Vagueness about the object of our praise inevitably leads to making our own praise the object. Praise therefore becomes an end in itself, and we are caught up in our own "worship experience" rather than in the God whose character and acts are the only proper focus. (Michael Horton, [A Better Way](#), Pg. 26)

D. The best congregational songs exalt the God of Scripture and strengthen our unity in the Gospel.

II. It All Begins with a Song

A. Lyrics

Worship of God should always involve the emotions; how can we praise a holy God who has redeemed us without getting emotional about it? But what should move our emotions is not the sonorous tones of the organ or the insistent beat of the drums, but the mind's apprehension of truth about God." (Dr. Douglas Moo, *Informed Worship*, *Tabletalk* magazine)

1. Biblical Content and Faithfulness

- a. Reflects biblical truth (Col. 3:16)
- b. Reflects biblical proportions
- c. Reflects biblical attitudes

O Father of Jesus,
Help me to approach you with deepest reverence, not with
presumption,
Not with servile fear, but with holy boldness.
You are beyond the grasp of my understanding,
But not beyond that of my love. (Valley of Vision, p. 25)

"Do we love God because he makes much of us, or because he frees us to make much of him for eternity?" (John Piper)

2. Clarity (Ps. 33:8; 2 Pet. 1:3)

3. Weight of the lyric

4. Freshness/poeticism

- a. A new perspective, connection, turn of the phrase, topic
- b. NOT a new or obscure truth
- c. Freshness alone isn't reason enough to use a song

B. Music

- 1. A melody in a comfortable range (low A to high D)
- 2. A melody that's learnable in one meeting
- 3. A melody that's memorable
- 4. Music that's complementary to the lyric

- C. Rating system
 - 1. We shouldn't use this song
 - 2. Could use personally
 - 3. Could use in congregational worship
 - 4. We should use this song

III. Planning Songs for Sunday

Eccl. 4:9 (ESV) Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil.

A. Context

Size of group, maturity level, length of existence, special occasions or events, etc.

B. Theme

- 1. The theme can come from different sources

Last week's message, this week's message, desire to teach on some aspect of worship, significant event, desire to introduce a new song, personal devotions, the pastor's burden, a theme we haven't sung about for a while, etc.

- 2. The theme should highlight a specific aspect of God's nature and works, seen through the lens of the cross.

Because Christian worship is founded on God's revelation of himself through Christ by means of the Apostles and Prophets, it should be a journey rich in truth and doctrine and should enact the story of our salvation, facilitate realization by faith of its power and meaning here and now, and generate anticipation of the future fulfillment of it.
(Graham Kendrick, *Choosing Songs and Structuring Worship*)

C. Non-musical elements

Prayer, testimony, communion, Scripture reading, confession of sin, exhortation, etc. during and around the songs.

D. Lyrical progression

- 1. Begin with objective biblical truth that will naturally lead to subjective faith-filled response.

Develop your theme in different ways

- a. choose songs that will lead up to your theme, and then songs that you can respond with
- b. come back to the theme throughout
- c. begin or end with your theme
- d. can be stated in a song, or verbally.

2. Some aspects to be aware of:

- a. how songs begin and end
- b. words repeated in different songs
- c. what a song emphasizes
- d. "heavy" vs. "light" songs
- e. familiar vs. new songs
- f. who is being addressed
- g. what person the song is in

E. Musical progression

1. There is Biblical precedent for beginning with enthusiastic celebration. (Ps. 95:1-2)
2. However, that is not commanded in Scripture. If our meetings are the same every time, we need to ask why. Other options include:
 - a. Beginning reverently and ending with celebration
 - b. Beginning and ending with celebration
 - c. A more subdued tone throughout
3. Ways to help musical flow:
 - a. Same key, tempo, and dynamic range
 - b. Build on momentum gained by minimizing long transitions.
 - c. Bring back portions of songs

F. After a message

1. Draw attention to the main theme of the message.
2. Don't assume that because a song is mentioned in a message that you should do it.
3. Intensity of the song depends on the preacher's final point.
4. Seek to direct people's focus to faith in God, not ourselves.

IV. Choosing Your Song Diet

A. Pastoral responsibility

1. Guard the Gospel (1 Tim. 6:20)
2. Shepherd the flock (1 Pet. 5:2)

B. The Bible's main theme, the Gospel, should be the main theme of our songs.

The hymnic material in the book of the Revelation...should alert us to the importance of singing God's praise in a way that is truly honoring to him and helpful to his people. Do our hymns and songs concentrate on praising God for his character and his mighty acts in history on our behalf? Do they focus sufficiently on the great truths of the gospel? There is always a temptation to focus too much on the expression of our own immediate needs. (David Peterson, Engaging with God, p. 278)

C. We should also teach songs on a breadth of topics reflective of the themes, events, and varying responses in Scripture. (See addendum) (Ps. 111:1-2)

D. Lyrical variety is good.

1. To guard against trusting in any form
2. To be ready for any situation

E. Musical variety serves God's purposes as well

1. With a stylistic center
2. Gives congregational praise a broader voice, reflecting the Gospel.
3. Keeps us from thinking any one style is necessary to worship God.

While we try to pare down His song down to a manageable repertoire, He is expanding it. While we are doing market research to decide whom we want to reach and, therefore, to whose aesthetic tastes we want to pander, the Singing Savior is distributing His magnificent voice across an increasingly wide spectrum of musical idioms. While we are dividing congregations along age lines, He is blending the songs of generations and nations and families and tribe and tongues to make sweet harmony, precisely through the differences, to his Father. (Reggie Kidd, *Bach, Bubba, and the Blues Brothers*, RTS Journal 1999)

V. Sources for Songs

1. Sovereign Grace (www.sovereigngraceministries.com)
2. Matt Redman (www.heartofworship.com)
3. Kingsway Music (esp. Stuart Townend, Graham Kendrick, Keith Getty
www.kingsway.co.uk)
4. Integrity Music (Paul Baloche, Kathryn Scott www.integritymusic.com)
5. Vineyard (esp. Vineyard UK www.vmg.com)
6. Passion (www.passionworship.com)
7. Indelible Grace (www.igracemusic.com)
8. Hymnals – Grace Hymns (from the UK), Trinity Hymnal
9. Songwriters in your congregation

I. Adoration and Praise

Adoration
Praise

II. God

Attributes of God
Creator
Eternity of God
Faithfulness of God
Fatherhood of God
Glory of God
Goodness of God
Grace of God
Holiness of God
Love of God
Mercy of God
Power of God
Provider
Refuge
Sovereignty of God
Sustainer
Trinity

III. Jesus

Blood of Christ
Cross of Christ
Glory of Christ
High Priest
Incarnation
Lamb of God
Life and Example
Lordship of Christ
Names of Christ
Mediator
Obedience of Christ
Passion of Christ
Resurrection
Return of Christ
Sacrifice of Christ
Savior

IV. Holy Spirit

God's Presence
Holy Spirit

V. Aspects of the Gospel

Adoption
Atonement
Election
Forgiveness
Justification

Reconciliation
Redemption
Regeneration
Salvation

VI. Christian Life

Assurance in Christ
Consecration
Dependence on God
Desire for God
Devotion to God
Faith
Glory in Christ
Grace
Gratefulness
Grief
Guidance
Holiness
Hope
Humility
Indwelling Sin
Joy
Knowing God
Love for Christ
Peace
Perseverance
Regeneration
Repentance
Sanctification
Suffering
Trust in God
Union with Christ
Victory of Christ/in Christ
Word of God

VII. Church

Baptism
Church
Communion

VIII. Mission

Evangelism
Missions

IX. Future

Death
Glorification
Heaven
Judgment