

CORPORATE WORSHIP AS PASTORAL CARE

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I. Introduction

- A. The pastor's influence has changed significantly in recent decades.
1. The rise of the "worship leader" role has diminished or replaced the role of the pastor in many churches.
 2. Time once given to preaching, prayer, or the Lord's supper, is now given to singing.

- B. The rock concert culture has influenced us more than we're aware. We tend to value:

1. Performance vs. participation
2. Skill vs. character
3. Musical experiences vs. truth experiences
4. Singer-songwriters vs. pastor-theologians

- C. God has given pastors the responsibility to feed, lead, care for, protect, and be an example to their flocks.

So I exhort the elders among you...shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. (1Pet. 5:1-3 ESV)

Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions. (2 Tim. 4:2-3 ESV)

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. (Acts 20:28 ESV)

- D. The meetings we lead and the songs we sing are but one more way to pastor those the Savior has purchased with his own blood. But wisely and faithfully led, they can be a significant means of grace for a congregation.

- E. Pastors are responsible to lead. Delegated leaders are responsible to serve diligently and follow joyfully.

II. Application of Pastoral Roles in Congregational Worship

A. Feed

“preach the word” (2 Tim. 4:2)

“those who labor in preaching and teaching” (1 Tim. 5:17)

“Feed my sheep.” (Jn. 21:17)

1. Songs teach. “We are what we sing.”
 - a) Songs teach us what God’s Word says
 - b) Songs teach us about God, ourselves, and our world
 - c) Songs teach us how to relate to God
2. Even songs we use for expression leave an impression. Our songs reflect and shape what we believe.
3. Singing is similar to preaching. Both seek to magnify God’s glory through the word of Christ.
4. Make sure your congregation is getting a theologically balanced diet – sound the right notes.
 - a) Trinitarian, exalting the Son by the power of the Spirit for the glory of the Father
 - b) Primary emphasis on the Gospel, God’s works, God’s acts, God’s promises.
 - c) Equal but derivative emphasis on our grateful, faith-filled response.
 - d) Evaluate each week and over time.
 - e) Include some simpler, shorter songs for younger Christians. (For more on this topic, listen to *Choosing Songs Wisely* from the WorshipGod 2004 conference.)
5. Know what songs really say as well as what they emphasize.
 - a) We sometimes choose songs because of a word, a style we like, or their current popularity. “That song always goes well.”
 - b) Note what the chorus emphasizes.

What am I doing to ensure a balanced theological diet in the songs we sing? How well do I know the content of our songs? In what areas or emphasis are our songs deficient?

B. Lead

“exercising oversight” (1 Pet. 5:2)

“the Holy Spirit has made you overseers” (Acts 20:28)

1. Plan before meetings

- a) Carefully, to insure theological weight and balance
- b) Expectantly, because God wants to bless His people
- c) Humbly, with a dependence on God’s Spirit
- d) Purposefully, so that people know what to focus on

2. Lead during meetings

- a) Directly or indirectly
- b) Lack of musical gifting is no excuse for not leading
- c) Well-timed transitions are key moments to exercise wise, godly, pastoral leadership

EX Why are we doing this song next?
Why are we even singing this song?
Why are we reading that Scripture?
What should we be focusing on?
How should we respond?

- d) The pastor or delegated leader is responsible for what takes place during the entire meeting.

- (1) Spontaneous elements must be monitored.
- (2) Spontaneity isn’t always the best choice.

3. Teach on worship and the role of music

- a) Teach your people that worship is our God-enabled participation in the Son’s exaltation of the Father in the power of the Spirit.
- b) Music should be an offering of worship, but is not meant to “produce” worship.
- c) Don’t expect music to do what only the Gospel and the word of God are meant to do by His Spirit.
- d) Expose your congregation to different styles of music when possible.

How much time do we put into planning our gatherings? Where is pastoral leadership evident or lacking in our meetings? What can we do in the short and long term to help the church better understand what is happening as we gather?

C. Care For

“shepherd the flock” (1 Pet. 5:2)

“care for the church of God” (Acts 20:28)

1. We must help people connect the promises and works of God with the challenges they face. The key is faith.
2. People need to see their problems in light of the greatness and goodness of God.

*Increase my faith in the clear knowledge of
Atonement achieved, expiation completed,
Satisfaction made, guilt done away,
My debt paid, my sins forgiven,
My person redeemed, my soul saved,
Hell vanquished, heaven opened, eternity made mine.
(from The Spirit's Work, The Valley of Vision)*

3. We serve our people best by helping them apply the Gospel to their lives.

- a) Many of our people's problems result from a deficient or inaccurate understanding of the Gospel.
- b) We can't sing too much about the cross of Christ.
- c) We must explain what it means and accomplishes.

- (1) Reconciliation to God (Rom. 5:10)
- (2) Adoption into God's family (Rom. 8:15)
- (3) Security in God's love (Rom. 8:37-39)
- (4) Freedom from sin's power (Gal. 5:24)
- (5) Victory over death (1Cor. 15:54-55)
- (6) Release from condemnation (Rom. 8:1)

4. Hope for change during struggles against sin

- a) There is a difference between being moved emotionally and changed morally
- b) It is not singing, per se, that changes us, but trusting in God's word and the finished work of the Savior
- c) Faith in the finished work of Christ and repentance from dead works and self-trust are the priority.

5. Comfort and strength during trials
- a) We need to emphasize both.
 - b) Trials reveal the roots of self-sufficiency and idolatry.
- EX What do we sing after 9/11? After a teenager dies?
After the tsunami?
6. Faith during fear or discouragement

Blessed Be Your Name
My Hope is Built
God Moves
It Is Well

I was very much affected by worship this past Sunday...I am in the midst of a potential layoff at work. The indications look as if I will be let go. The songs spoke to my heart in preparation/anticipation of future events. How good God is to prepare my heart and to direct my attention back to his wonderful undeserved salvation of my soul. I was wondering if you'd be able to send me the song list and lyrics from Sunday's worship? I'd like to keep these songs in my heart and mind over the next few weeks. Thanks again for making our worship time a time where God is experienced on a personal level.

How well do the songs we sing specifically address the needs of our congregation? What areas are we deficient in? How can I make connections for people more obvious?

D. Protect

“fierce wolves will come in” (Acts 20:29-31)

“people will not endure sound teaching” (2 Tim. 4:3)

1. From the errors of the world by singing songs with rich, theological, Christ-exalting truth
2. From the vices of the world by reminding them of God's holiness, righteousness, purity, justice, and wrath against sin
3. From the pleasures of the world by doing all we can to present Christ as “dazzling” and infinitely superior to the temporary, deceptive joys this world offers

***How well do our songs teach the cardinal doctrines of the faith?
How much do our meetings communicate God's standards of purity
and holiness? How often do we draw our people's attention to the
goodness, sweetness, and pleasure of worshipping God?***

E. Model

"being examples" (1 Pet. 5:3)

"pay careful attention to yourselves" (Acts 20:38)

1. The uninvolved or distracted pastor doesn't communicate that singing is unimportant, but that exalting God is unimportant.
2. People are unimpressed with the leader whose faith and joy in God is only evident on Sunday mornings.
3. Our quality of our private devotion to God will be most evident in public.

How would people in the congregation evaluate my participation in and enthusiasm for parts of the meeting I don't lead? Is there any inconsistency in my private devotion to God and my public devotion? If so, what explains the difference?

III. The Result of Effective Pastoral Congregational Worship

- A. If our people are beholding God's glory in our meetings, they should experience true and lasting change.

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2Cor. 3:18)

- B. Evidences of fruit include:

1. Humility
2. Holiness
3. Security
4. Unity
5. Gratefulness

- C. Meetings can't provide everything our people need to follow God. But let's make sure we don't give them any less than they can provide, by God's grace.