

HELPFUL PRACTICES FOR MUSICAL WORSHIP

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Music and song are wonderful gifts from God, and God even commands that we use these gifts as a means of worshiping him and edifying each other when we gather. Yet, as with all things under the curse of sin, our efforts to utilize these gifts and obey God's commands often seem to produce thorns and thistles instead of a robust garden. Our people seem cold and indifferent during musical worship, we don't have a qualified and gifted worship leader, we can't seem to find anyone interested in joining the music and A/V teams, technology keeps failing and interrupting our service, and on and on.

We've all attended churches, conferences, and concerts that have displayed exceptional and highly effective moments that culminated in authentic, free, and joyful worship of God through song; we know it can be done. The question is: How do we get there?

What are some helpful practices for developing musical worship in the life of the church, and primarily that of singing? Below are four categories to consider while pursuing this challenging endeavor: 1) Lead, 2) Prepare, 3) Sing, and 4) Invest. These are certainly not exhaustive but will hopefully be a spark of motivation that will lead to a blaze of thriving musical worship in our churches.



LEAD

**Lead by Teaching**

We are charged to teach Jesus' disciples to observe all that he has commanded (Matthew 28:20). This includes the commands and expectations of singing (e.g., Psalm 96:2; Ephesians 5:19). Utilize as many avenues for teaching these as possible: sermons, small groups, bible studies, classes, Sunday school, membership class, etc. If we are to abide in the freedom of the truth, we must first know the truth (John 8:31).

Lead by Example

Simply stated, Practice what you preach. Pastors, be the example to the flock God has called you to be (1 Peter 5:3). Then, set this expectation for all leaders within the church. If we as leaders (including pastors, deacons, ministry leaders, musicians on stage without a microphone, "off-week" worship team members among the congregation, etc.) are not singing fervently in times of musical worship, there will be no example for the flock to follow.

Lead by Encouragement

A few words of encouragement can have an enormous impact! Paul connects encouragement to building up the body (1 Thessalonians 5:11). Intentionally recognize and encourage your congregation when they do sing well and exhort them to keep singing well.

PREPARE

Prepare Your People

Inform your congregation about the songs, Scriptures, and theological content you will be singing and considering during your corporate gathering so they can prepare for the Lord's Day. Utilize multiple avenues for this: weekly email, weekly devotional blog, Spotify playlist, Facebook, Twitter, etc. Additionally, consider using songs planned for future gatherings as your pre/post-service house music. An informed congregation is well-positioned to worship God with greater freedom and purpose.

Prepare Your Service

Let the gospel shape your service planning. Christian worship is enabled by the gospel of Jesus Christ; therefore, it flourishes when shaped by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Let the paradigm of the gospel inform your song and liturgical element selection for corporate gatherings. A simple gospel paradigm is found in Isaiah 6:1-8:

1. **Behold God's glory (vv. 1-4)**
2. **Confess man's depravity (v. 5)**
3. **Celebrate God's grace (v. 6)**
4. **Respond in worship and obedience (vv. 7-8)**

Bryan Chappel offers a more detailed gospel paradigm based upon texts like Isaiah 6:1-8, among others (Christ-Centered Worship, 141):

1. **Adoration (recognition of God's greatness and grace)**
2. **Confession (acknowledgment of our sin and need for grace)**
3. **Assurance (affirmation of God's provision of grace)**
4. **Thanksgiving (expression of praise and thanks for God's grace)**
5. **Petition & Intercession (expression of dependence on God's grace)**
6. **Instruction (acquiring the knowledge to grow in grace)**
7. **Communion/Fellowship (celebrating the grace of union with Christ and his people)**
8. **Charge and Blessing (living for and in the light of God's grace)**

Prepare Your Delivery

Help your people understand the "why" of what they are singing and how each service element contributes to the celebration of the gospel each Sunday. This requires prayerfully, intentionally, and creatively planning the set-up of and transitions between each service element. The goal is to ensure that the congregation clearly sees the gospel both in content and form of the worship service. "The more clearly we display the gospel, the more barriers we remove from people responding in authentic worship."

SING



Sing Often

Our Sunday gatherings may be the primary place for singing together, but they certainly should not be the only place. Take advantage of small groups, bible studies, staff meetings, members meetings, business meetings, home visits, etc. to incorporate songs of worship. The more we sing together, the more natural and desirable our collective voice becomes.

Sing A Capella

As the church, we desire to sing joyfully in obedience to Scripture (Psalm 95:1) and for the benefit of others (Ephesians 5:19), but many do not naturally want to hear themselves sing for a variety of reasons (e.g., feel unqualified, fear of man, bored, etc.). “A Capella moments within corporate songs are a great way to help the congregation follow and “taste the sweetness” of Psalm 95:1 and Ephesians 5:19.” Create a culture of the church hearing themselves sing, and over time they will sing with more joy and freedom despite their initial preoccupations.

Sing Together

Use congregational songs in congregational keys. While certain songs may have wonderful, theologically rich lyrics, if they lack a melody that is readily acquired by the congregation, those songs will instantly become the “special music” time of reflection (not necessarily bad if used supplementally). Further, the professionally recorded key of a song is not always the best key to sing congregationally. Utilize songs that have easily identifiable melodies in keys that are accommodating to the majority of your people. Bob Kauflin recommends “songs with melodies between a low A to a high D that are easy to learn and hard to forget” (Worship Matters, 106).

INVEST

Invest in Your Team

Leading musical worship is highly enjoyable, but it is also highly demanding of each team member. Make sure to invest in your music team's spiritual, mental, and physical well-being. Consider sending them to conferences, giving them books, ensuring they have the online resources they need, offering avenues for theological training, making sure they are well-fed (our church currently has a band breakfast volunteer team that feeds us every Sunday!), well-rested, and highly appreciated in other tangible ways.

Invest in Equipment

As the Lord increases a church's music ministry, the need for reliable, quality equipment increases as well. According to your ability and context, invest in quality audio and video (and training people to operate these systems!), house instruments (e.g., keyboard, drums, etc.), and any other peripheral equipment (e.g., mics, direct boxes, cameras, computers, etc.) that may help aid the musical worship moment. In general, it is better (and cheaper in the long run!) to invest in the best equipment you can afford that will serve your people well for a long time, hopefully limiting necessary repairs and replacement purchases. As with all other church ministries, let the mission drive and guide this investment; your congregation is worth it!

Invest in the Future

One of the greatest needs in today's church is qualified worship leaders (better, worship pastors). We must heed Paul's charge to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2 concerning this need and raise them up! Prioritize praying for, identifying, and discipling aspiring worship leaders with both formal and informal means. Create avenues for worship leadership development such as discipleship groups, book studies, theology of worship classes, worship ministry interest meetings, establishing a year-long discipleship program for aspiring worship leaders, giving "reps" to upcoming worship leaders according to their ability (e.g., leading a song at a members meeting or staff meeting), all with the hope of eventually sending them out as qualified musical worship leaders or pastors for the Kingdom's advance.

CONCLUSION

As we press forward to make disciples of all the nations for God's glory, may we faithfully equip the saints for the ministry of music and song. May God help us to effectively lead, prepare, sing with, and invest in our people, trusting that he will build his church and further instill the new song of Christ firmly in our hearts. "He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:24, ESV).

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