

The Role of Music and Quality Songs in Church Life

(This material is largely adapted from portions of 11 of the first 12 (out of 31) chapters of Bob Kauflin's seminal work on this subject, [Worship Matters](#).)

Preamble: the Greatest Commandment and worship that engages heart and mind

Corporate singing in church is often called worship, and those who lead it are often called worship leaders, which immediately points us to something more fundamental than singing.

Worship isn't primarily about music, techniques, liturgies, songs or methodologies. It's about our hearts and who or what we love. What we love determines what we worship. Money and time are good indicators.

It is possible to lead others in worshipping God while worshipping something else. The primary concern of one who would lead worship is the state of his own heart, and then that of those he is serving - to have their whole hearts engaged steadfastly for God.

The better (or more accurately) we know God, the more genuine our worship will be. There is no authentic worship of God without a right knowledge of God. Because the way we find a right knowledge of God is in the revealed truth of Scripture, a worship leader who barely knows the Bible can't be a faithful worship leader. Theology and doctrine have everything to do with our worship in song. Everyone's a theologian, just either a good one or a bad one.

What theology books are you reading? ([Spurgeon's quote on Paul asking Timothy to bring the books](#)). Music affects and helps us in many ways, but it doesn't replace truth about God. Music by itself won't help us understand the nature of the Incarnation or Christ's substitutionary atonement. Good theology helps us learn that music isn't an end in itself, but a means of expressing the worship already present in our hearts through the new life we've received in Jesus Christ.

But doesn't doctrine divide the church? How about the person who says he's not interested in theology because it causes divisions and therefore claims his theology is simply Jesus? When we're dodgy about our theology, what we're really saying is that we want our own Jesus. Yet, Jesus has a name, a particular history, and a specifically revealed body of teaching.

But doesn't studying doctrine just make people proud? It shouldn't. Our knowledge is limited to what has been revealed to us. When we understand a truth, it's because God's Spirit has opened our eyes and hearts. Good theologians are humbled and amazed by the God they study. *Good doctrine and theology informs our minds to win our hearts, so we can love God more accurately and passionately.*

The two go together - heart and mind. We don't want true but lifeless singing. Neither do we want fervent expression of vague or inaccurate ideas of God.

On Leading, Theology and the Gospel

- Romans 12:3-8 speaks of the various gifts that God grants to the body of Christ.

- What does the last verse say of the one who leads? With zeal.
- Leading people to praise God involve energy, intentionality, and thoughtfulness
- If our leadership focuses on musical experiences, we'll reap a desire for better sounds, cooler chord progressions and more creative song arrangements.
- If we sow to immediate feelings we'll reap meetings driven by the pursuit of emotional highs
- However, if we make God's glory in Christ the emphasis, we'll reap the fruit of people who are in awe of God's greatness and goodness.
- This requires faithfully painting a compelling, attractive, biblical picture of Jesus Christ. So where do we begin?

Psalm 145:3

- David, the psalmist, gives us an appropriate starting point here for worship. It involves thinking about, magnifying and responding to the glory and splendor of God.
- Magnifying & cherishing his greatness is at the heart of biblical worship. [J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* p.83](#)

Psalm 34:3

- David extends the invitation that every good worship leader echoes.
- The first priority of our time together is to magnify the Lord - to help them remember that God is bigger than their problems and joys, greater than their sorrows and successes, more significant than their tests and triumphs.
- Because we lose perspective so easily, God needs to become bigger in our eyes.
- The great privilege of those that would lead others to worship in song is that they get to help people see through the eyes of faith how great God has actually revealed himself to be.
- What are some examples of songs that can help us enlarge our view of God's greatness/glory
 - How Great is Our God
 - How Great Thou Art
 - [Behold our God](#)
- We must clearly and specifically remind people what God has shown us about himself.
- John Owen, a Puritan pastor of the 17th century, wisely wrote, "*We must not allow ourselves to be satisfied with vague ideas of the love of Christ which present nothing of his glory to our minds.*"
- Vague ideas of God don't serve us well. If most of our songs could be sung by Buddhists, Muslims or Hindus, it's time to look for different songs.
- The way we make this distinction is obvious. It's Jesus.
- There's nothing about our worship of God that isn't defined or affected by Jesus Christ.
- The God we worship is the one who is perfect. All good. All powerful. Sovereign. Holy.
- He is also the one whom all our sin is against.
- And he must punish sin.
- For that reason, we need to be saved from God's justice.
- And what we need has been provided in Jesus Christ. Our mediator
- He who endured God's wrath against our sins at the cross, though he was innocent.
- Our substitute who received the punishment we deserved.
- After which, God raised him from the dead, demonstrating the sufficiency of his sacrifice
- [\(At the resurrection we all cheered, because that meant the check cleared!\)](#)
- THIS is the good news of the gospel.
- This is the means by which we can now worship God.

- Each facet of this gospel is worthy of 10,000 songs on its own.
- C.J. Mahaney describes the importance of music in the church as “take home theology.”
- One man even said, “We are what we sing.”
- Based on Matthew 12:34 and Luke 6:45, I don’t think that’s an exaggeration.
- For songs to be called take home theology, they need to teach us who God is, what he’s like, what he’s done, and how to relate to him.
- Gordon Fee once said, “*Show me a church’s songs and I’ll show you their theology.*”
- Too often, it’s tempting to choose songs because of the music (how they sound) rather than theological content.
- We need to realize that when words are combined with music, we can be deceived.
- Music can make shallow lyrics sound deep, and make you want to sing it again.
- It’s not that music is irrelevant. If great words are sung to terrible music, no one will remember them or want to sing them.
- Colossians 3:16 - Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly....
- Lyrics matter more than music.
- Truth transcends tunes.

So what about music (apart from lyrics)?

- God wants us to use music to worship him.
- Psalm 96:1
- Psalm 98:1
- Here are 4 reasons why:¹
 1. Music stirs up and expresses God-glorifying emotion²
 2. Music helps us reflect the glory and activity of the triune God (Zeph 3:17, Matt 26:30)
 3. Music helps us remember truth about God (Deuteronomy 31:21) “Take home” in THT
 4. Music helps us express our unity in the gospel (corporate - Eph 5:19, Col 3:16)
- Singability (defeats all purposes if it’s hard to sing)
- Clarity (not obscure or subject to personal interpretation) Do you understand each line?
- Music that serves the lyrics
- Variety (God’s attributes, Familiar words in fresh way, God’s heart for all people)

Closing exercise in take-home theology - [The Gospel Song](#) in 24 words

¹ Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters*, pp. 98-100.

² “The duty of singing praises to God seems to be given wholly to excite and express religious affections. There is no other reason why we should express ourselves to God in verse rather than in prose and with music, except that these things have a tendency to move our affections.” (Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections* p. 44)