The Role of Music in Worship:
Striving for a Balanced Approach to Music in Corporate Worship

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PART ONE: SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES FOR WORSHIP

A. PURPOSE OF A MUSIC MINISTRY

1. To worship God through music.
Psalm 27:6 (All Scripture quotations are from the NASB.) "And I will offer in His tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the Lord."

2. To praise God through music.
Psalm 150:3–4 "Praise Him with trumpet sound; praise Him with harp and lyre. Praise Him with timbrel and dancing; praise Him with stringed instruments and pipe."

3. To lift the emotions of the heart.
James 5:13 "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises."

4. To learn Scripture and spiritual truths by singing.
Psalm 32:7–8 "Thou dost surround me with songs of deliverance. I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go."

5. To encourage one another with biblical truth through music.
Ephesians 5:18–19 "be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord."

6. To instruct and convict by the scriptural texts of the songs.
Isaiah 55:11 "So shall My Word be which goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it."

7. To introduce others to Jesus Christ through special concerts which can be an outreach to the unsaved.

Psalm 40:3 "And He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God; many will see and fear, and will trust in the Lord."

B. SPIRITUAL MUSIC COMES FROM SPIRITUAL PEOPLE

The Levites separated themselves from the world, renounced their earthly inheritance, and consecrated themselves to God and His service for a lifetime.

1. The Old Testament musicians were very skilled.

1 Chronicles 15:22 "And Chenaniah, chief of the Levites, was in charge of the singing; he gave instruction in singing because he was skillful." Second Chronicles 34:12 also speaks of the Levites who were skillful with musical instruments.

2. Not only were they skillful, but there were many of them.

1 Chronicles 23:3–5 "And the Levites were numbered from thirty years old and upward, and their number by census of men was 38,000. Of these, 24,000 were to oversee the work of the house of the Lord; and 6,000 were officers and judges, and 4,000 were gatekeepers, and 4,000 were praising the Lord with the instruments which David made for giving praise."

3. God used this combination of sanctified, skilled, and unified men in meaningful worship.

2 Chronicles 5:12–14 "And all the Levitical singers, Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, and their sons and kinsmen, clothed in fine linen, with cymbals, harps, and lyres, standing east of the altar, and with them one hundred and two priests blowing trumpets in unison when the trumpeters and the singers were to make themselves heard with one voice to praise and to glorify the Lord, and when they lifted up their voice accompanied by trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and when they praised the Lord saying, 'He indeed is good for His lovingkindness is everlasting,' then the house, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God."

4. However, music offered from a wrong heart is unacceptable to God as worship.

Amos 5:23 "Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps." God tells His people that their hearts were far from Him. In Amos 6:5, God sends a judgment against those living luxuriously "who improvise to the sound of the harp, and...have composed songs for themselves," instead of worshiping and living for God.

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C. THE ACTIVITIES OF BIBLICAL WORSHIP

1. Praise and adoration based on the nature and work of God as revealed in His Word. The Psalms illustrate at least two characteristics of this:
   a. Our praise is to be expressed through vocal and instrumental music (Psalm 33:2–3).
   b. Our praise is to review the attributes of God and doctrines of the Word (Psalm 51:14, 59:16, 89:1, 119:172).

2. Thanksgiving (for the work of God in our lives).

3. Reading of Scripture.

4. Confession (repentance, submission).

5. Prayer.

6. Intercession.

7. Ordinances of baptism and communion.

8. Giving.

9. Instruction in the Word.

10. Application of the Word.

D. HOW CAN WE KNOW THAT THE MUSIC WE USE IS WORTHY OF WORSHIP?

Are the words doctrinally sound? Is the text biblical? Does it stimulate spiritual thought? Does it properly instruct? Does it inspire high spiritual ideals? Does the music fit the text? Is it excellent? Does it fit the need? Does it produce a wholesome response? Do harmful associations come to mind because of the musical style or the composer's name?

In setting standards it is essential to avoid making traditions or personal preferences take precedence over the Word of God, for that would be to "exceed what is written" (1 Corinthians 4:6).

A good verse to determine the value of a musical piece is found in Philippians 4:8: "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things." A good verse to determine the appropriateness of a musical piece for corporate worship is 1 Corinthians 14:26: "...Let all

things be done for edification." Well-chosen music will build up the church through edification, without giving offense or causing any to stumble (Romans 14:7–21).

Please see Part Four for additional discussion concerning appropriate music choices.

E. ESSENTIAL QUALITIES IN A MUSIC MINISTRY

1. Sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's direction and soundness in Christian doctrine and its application in the personal, daily lives of the leadership and musicians.

2. Driven by biblical content. This will be evidenced by the lyrics and appropriate musical styles, as well as the musicians' attitudes, appearance, and conduct. Over time, excellent biblical teaching will produce godly musicians who will, in turn, reflect that teaching in how they minister. The spiritual depth of the musicians is largely determined by the teaching of the senior pastor and the spiritual commitment of the music pastor.

3. Enhancing, but never overshadowing, the teaching ministry, always mindful that the teaching of the Word of God is central in the church.

4. Breadth in its range of musical content and style; always tasteful, but designed to speak to all in a diverse congregation.

5. Consistence in high quality so that the Lord is glorified, the heart is blessed, and the message is reinforced, not diminished, by the art that conveys it.

6. Offering a broad range of opportunity for those whom the Lord has gifted with musical ability, using instrumentalists as well as vocalists.

7. Encouraging those in the church who are not involved in the music ministry, but are musically gifted, to become involved.

PART TWO: HOW TO DEVELOP A CHURCH MUSIC MINISTRY

Essential to the mechanics of developing a music ministry is that someone *must* be in charge—someone who is a natural leader and very musical. This individual usually is a paid staff member but could be a volunteer. Others who help in the ministry may be either staff or volunteer.

A. STAFF PERSONNEL

1. Minister of Worship or Music Director
   a. Spiritual Qualifications
      1). Must have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.
      2). Spiritually sound in Christian doctrine (2 Timothy 2:14–19; 3:16–17).
      3). A life that demonstrates the character of an elder (1 Timothy 3:2–7).
      4). Sensitive to the Holy Spirit's direction.
      5). Supportive of the pastor's teaching ministry (not isolated in music alone).
      6). Demonstrates the Fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control—Galatians 5:22–23).
      7). Shepherds the musical "flock" through prayer, the Word, counseling, hospital visits, phone calls, etc.
   b. Personality Qualifications
      1). Enjoys working with people.
      2). Good teaching skills and communication level.
      3). Ability to administer and organize.
      4). Has a servant's heart.
   c. Musical Qualifications
      1). Experience in choral and instrumental conducting.
      2). Experience in planning and leading congregational worship.
      3). Integrity in musical taste (pastor and music minister must have similar musical tastes).
      4). Additional abilities that would enhance the music minister's ministry (but is not essential):
         a). Keyboard or instrumental proficiency.
         b). Ability in arranging choral, orchestral, and instrumental music.
         c). Vocal or instrumental soloist.

2. Accompanist (organ, piano, keyboard)
   a. Spiritual Qualifications: a life that demonstrates the character of a deacon/deaconess, (1 Tim. 3:8–13).
   b. Personality Qualifications
      1). Able to take direction; not self-willed.
      2). Flexible.

        3). Even-tempered.
        4). Dedicated.
        5). Punctual.
    c. Musical Qualifications
        1). Proficiency on instrument.
            a). Willingness to spend the necessary practice time.
            b). Good sight-reader.
            c). Capable of improvisation.
        2). Able to follow director, vocalist, instrumentalists, etc.
        3). Has musical tastes similar to music minister and pastor.
        4). Has a good repertoire of church music.

3. Additional Personnel
    a. Music secretary.
    b. Other choir directors: Children's, Junior High, High School, College, Senior Adult, Handbells.
    c. Instrumental Director.
    d. Worship leader who puts together and rehearses worship teams.

B. LAY MUSICIANS

1. Vocalists
    a. Let your needs be known (church bulletin, newsletter, telephone, or announcement).
    b. Set a time for an audition with the worship pastor and/or music committee.
        1). Determine spiritual commitment.
        2). Keep records on all who audition.
            a). Vocal quality.
            b). Reading ability.
            c). Pitch.
            d). Vibrato.
            e). Diction.
    c. Note those of solo quality, or proficient to sing duets, in small ensembles, etc.

2. Instrumentalists
    a. Let your needs be known (church bulletin, newsletter, telephone, or announcement).
    b. Set a time for an audition with the worship pastor and/or music committee.
        1). Determine spiritual commitment.
        2). Keep records on all who audition.
            a). Proficiency on instrument.
            b). Reading ability.
            c). Pitch.

        d). Tone quality.
    c. Note solo or ensemble quality.

3. Some suggestions in handling those who do not qualify vocally or instrumentally.
    a. Encourage additional study with a private teacher or at a college (community, private, etc.). When some proficiency is achieved, ask the individual to return and reaudition.
    b. Suggest another ministry in the church. For those who are tone-deaf or monotone, liken the situation to a person who is color-blind, but who wants to be an artist. Explain that in rare occasions the basic ability to see color or to hear pitch is missing. Therefore, it is wiser for the person to choose a ministry for which they have a natural talent.

C. MUSICAL GROUPS

The number of groups and what they are is determined by the amount of musical talent in your church.

1. Suggested vocal groups.
    a. Adult choir, children's choir, youth choirs.
    b. Worship teams.
    c. Select choral group (8–16 people).
    d. Vocal solo, duet, trio, and quartet.
    e. Men's and women's choruses.

2. Suggested instrumental groups. MIDI sequences/keyboards can be a part of any ensemble.
    a. Instrumental solo, duet, small ensembles (e.g. string quartet, brass choir).
    b. Orchestra.
    c. Blend different instrumental combinations together for special numbers or to accompany vocal solos or groups.
    d. Rhythm group/praise band.

D. REHEARSALS

1. Set a different time for each organized group.

2. Make the rehearsals long enough to accomplish your objectives.

3. For those groups or soloists who normally practice on their own, the Minister of Worship should be involved in at least one rehearsal before their ministering in a service.

a. Ask the soloist or group to submit three musical selections. If you do not like a particular number because of style, lyric content, range, etc., one of the other two numbers may be selected.

b. If you do not carefully monitor special music, the appropriateness and content will fall short of your expectations.

4. Sound system rehearsal.

    a. Before the service, rehearse all musical numbers using the sound system.

    b. The person scheduled to run the sound system for that service should also run it for the rehearsal.

    c. Even if a musical group rehearsed with the sound system earlier in the week, they still should rehearse before the service. This enables technical problems with microphones, cords, amplifiers, monitors, etc., to be corrected before the service begins. Otherwise, the problems will take place during the service.

E. BUILDING NEEDS

1. Corporate worship area (sanctuary, worship center, etc.).

    a. Large enough for growth.

    b. Comfortable (pews or seats).

    c. Good sight lines.

        1). Floor slopes upward from front to back.

        2). Platform high enough to allow visibility from every seat.

        3). A fan-shaped auditorium is better than a long, rectangular-shaped room. The advantage with the fan shape is that the congregation is closer to the pulpit.

    d. Easily darkened for multi-media presentations such as display of lyrics, video, etc.

2. Platform area.

    a. Choir loft.

        1). Tiered seating with a rise high enough between rows so choir members do not sing into the head of the person in front of them.

        2). Slight curve to the loft to help choir members hear one another.

    b. Platform should be large enough to accommodate a large group of instruments.

    c. Seating for ministerial staff, participants, etc.

    d. Baptismal area in a position that allows its use with little or no physical changes to the platform (e.g., baptismal near back wall, on the side)

    e. Organ chambers for pipes or electronics.

    f. Pulpit.

        1). Raises and lowers and/or is easily removed.

        2). Clock permanently installed.

        3). Computer monitor built in for viewing of media or PowerPoint presentations.

g. Lighting systems.
    1). Pulpit area bright.
    2). Fixtures accessible for adjusting and changing of bulbs and on dimming system.
    3). House lighting (ceiling lights) bright and on dimmers.
h. Acoustics.
    1). "Live," reverberant sound (not a "dead" acoustical environment). This improves congregational singing, instrumental sound, etc.
    2). Shape of room: curved or varied surfaces (non-parallel) at back and sides to prevent the reflected sound from having a distinct echo or "slap."
    3). Heating and air conditioning system: compressors, blowers, fans sufficiently removed from the building so machinery rumble and rushing air is not heard in the room. Vents also should be selected carefully for a low air noise level.

3. Choir room and/or robing room.
  a. Large enough to accommodate choir and instrumentalists for rehearsal.
  b. Seats on risers the same as the choir loft.
  c. Choir folders and robes assigned to individual slots for each member.

4. Music Office.

5. Storage (files, music stands, instruments, anthems, etc.). This area often is slighted, but very important!

F. EQUIPMENT NEEDS

1. Sound system that is adequate for the building.
  a. Full sounding and wide-range, not just light reinforcement.
  b. Usable for all needs (speech, music, tape playback, etc.) and with a variety of musical styles.
  c. Professional sound consultation is essential in this area.

2. Quality piano kept in tune.

3. Quality organ (e.g., pipe or Allen Digital) kept in tune and in good repair.

4. Synthesizer/keyboard/sound module/sequencer.

5. Acoustic or electronic drums.

6. Computer, which is used for department organization, communication (letters, e-mail, and Internet), music notation programs (e.g., *Finale* from Coda Software), worship planning

tools, MIDI sequencing, sound editing, CD recording, and media creation (such as lyrics in PowerPoint).

7. Optional equipment.
   a. Video projection for congregational singing (or an overhead projector).
   b. Music stands and orchestra lights (Manhasset).
   c. Handbells.
   d. Other musical instruments (second piano, timpani, chimes, other percussion instruments).

G. OTHER NEEDS

1. Church hymnal. We use *The Hymnal for Worship and Celebration* published by Word Music, Inc. Advantages:
   a. Completely orchestrated.
   b. Topically arranged.
   c. Brief services with readings and medleys that are better than those of other current hymnals.
   d. Responsive Scripture readings.
   e. Indexes for scriptural resources.
   f. Index of descants, reharmonizations, and choral endings.
   g. Index of copyright owners and addresses.
   h. Metrical index of tunes.
   i. Index of hymns by key.

2. Copyright laws: copyrighted materials cannot be projected, recorded, or reprinted in any form, including bulletins and songbooks, without written permission of the copyright owner. To avoid endless paperwork requesting copyright permissions, there is a company that will do this for you for a yearly fee: Christian Copyright Licensing, Inc. in Portland, Oregon. Phone: (800) 234-2446. Internet: www.ccli.com. Their music license covers only congregational usage, and service recordings must be used only by the church family. An additional, separate video license covers the public presentation of videos, whether they are clips shown in a service or videos shown to Sunday School classes, etc.

PART THREE: PLANNING WORSHIP SERVICES

A. PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP PLANNING

The first step in planning a worship service is to have a quiet time with the Lord, asking Him to lead and direct you as to what should be accomplished (James 1:5). After this, spend some time thinking through the service in an orderly manner. We are encouraged by the apostle Paul who said, "But let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner" (1 Corinthians 14:40).

The flow of the service should be determined before putting the program together. Emotional peaks occur naturally (and should not be artificially manipulated). These peaks either can be stifled or enhanced by what is programmed next in the service. Sensitivity in programming is essential to produce a cohesive and meaningful service. The substance of the service is extremely important, as well as its arrangement. A carefully programmed service can be greater than the sum of its individual parts, while a poorly programmed service can diminish the effect of the individual parts. Many times a familiar format for the service is more effective than a program that is different merely for the sake of variety. (Even secular entertainers see the wisdom of this. Johnny Carson's *Tonight Show* kept the same format for 30 years—and he was on every night, not once per week!) By mixing up the elements of the service, they may have a lesser impact than in a service with a tried-and-proven order.

Another important priority is to keep a record of your services. Know what music you have used in the past, when it was used, and which musicians were involved. At a later date, re-use the best music.

B. APPROACHES TO PLANNING A SERVICE

1. **Thematic planning.** All congregational hymns, special numbers, anthems, Scripture reading, sermon, prayer, and any special events are related to one theme. For example, missions: all hymns and special numbers have a missionary emphasis. Even the offering appeal can be related, and the message also can be related to missionary work.

Other examples include praise to God, the name of Jesus, love, joy, etc. It is easier to start with the theme of the message and work your music from that. Or, start with a special holiday or event and work from that (for example, communion, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Independence Day, baptism, parent dedication).

2. **Partial thematic planning.** Everything except the message is planned around one theme.

3. **Similar type of music.** If you have too much variance in style from one musical selection to another, your service may not be cohesive (although carefully chosen contrasts of style

may also be effective). Keeping the style of music similar helps to create a unified service. Common elements may include musical periods, harmonic structure, instrumentation, key relationships, and rhythmic patterns. Musical periods or styles can be mixed either with a verbal introduction before the next number or an instrumental interlude bridging the gap.

Experiment by playing the ending of one piece and the beginning of the next. Do they go together well?

4. **Musicals.** These are usually written with one theme, and some with congregational involvement. By planning the close of the service to coordinate with the theme of the musical, the entire service can be thematic. This also includes classical presentations such as oratorios (Handel's *Messiah*) and cantatas (Bach wrote over 200).

5. **Concerts.** Individually selected anthems, songs, and musical arrangements from a variety of different sources many times will be stronger than a musical or collection performed in its entirety.

6. **No theme with musical transitions.** When there is no central theme to the service, the instruments, organ, or piano can bridge from one song to another, beginning with the texture of the previous song and changing into the style of the next one. This can be entirely improvised by a gifted person or by taking excerpts out of each song, putting them together, and coming up with a composite. Keys should be coordinated ahead of time between the organist, pianist, and the Minister of Worship. Excellent transitions can enhance any service whether or not it has a theme.

7. **Same musical group.** By using the same musical ensemble for all numbers, there is a similarity of vocal sound, instrumental sound, etc. There also is very little physical movement between numbers since there is no need to change positions on the platform from song to song.

8. **Worship leader.** A worship leader unifies and enhances the service by introducing songs and hymns with relevant background or Scripture. However, these introductions should be profound as well as succinct.

C. MECHANICS OF A SERVICE

1. **Custodial:** Let this department know what you need for setup. Also, decide what temperature the worship area should be.

2. **Lighting:** This is handled by either a custodian, an usher, or a special lighting person. If changes are required within a service, give the lighting person clear instructions as to what and when they are. When having a multimedia presentation, if the speaker needs to refer to notes,

make sure there is adequate lighting. The same applies for musicians that will be playing in a darkened auditorium.

3. **Audiovisual**: Have a clear understanding of what is needed. If it is necessary to run audio from a projector or computer through the sound system, make sure all necessary arrangements are made ahead of time. If PowerPoint is used with a video projector, make sure it works and has a competent operator. If major changes have to be made during the service to include an audiovisual presentation, try to restructure the service so that all the equipment can be in place ahead of time.

4. **Sound system**: Let the sound crew know ahead of time what will be needed. For musical portions, have at least one rehearsal before the service with the sound crew. People involved in running the sound system should have a good musical ear.

5. **Ushers**: There should be a head usher who informs the other men of the order of service and what is expected of them. See that there is a good supply of bulletins, visitor packets, registration cards, offering envelopes, etc. Their main concern should be the comfort of those who have come to the worship service, including a warm greeting as people enter.

6. **Counselors**: A good training program is necessary, with handpicked individuals under the guidance of a senior counselor. Identify them with name tags.

D. PROGRAM PERSONNEL

Contact all personnel involved in each service ahead of time. Good communication with people by notes and programs can make a service really work and run smoothly. Make sure those involved
 1. Arrive well before the service.
 2. Have a copy of the program.
 3. Know how much time they are allowed for their parts.
 4. Are close to or on the platform.

1. **Pastor**: He can either decide the format himself or delegate this responsibility to another staff member such as the Minister of Worship.

2. **Non-musical participants**: Those who pray, read Scripture, give announcements, etc., should be contacted ahead of time and informed as to what is expected of them.

3. **Minister of Worship**: He is responsible for the coordination of the entire service.
 a. Inform those involved with the mechanics of the service as to what is needed.
 b. Arrange the platform for specific needs of that service (microphone stands, furniture, seating arrangements, plants, etc.).
 c. See that all musicians are informed about the order of the program.

d. Have all the music ready.

e. Arrange sufficient rehearsal time for special numbers.

f. Inform the musicians from what location on the platform they will present their selections.

g. Think through the traffic patterns of people coming from and going to the platform.

h. Inform the choir, pastor, and any others who participate when to enter and leave the platform.

i. Instead of the organist, pianist, and director carrying large stacks of loose music, place all music in loose-leaf notebooks in the order in which it will be used.

4. **Organist**: He or she can enhance the flow of the service by
   a. Choosing appropriate preludes and postludes.
   b. Adding musical interludes from one selection to another.
   c. Adding background music.
   d. Reharmonizing a congregational hymn, usually for the final stanza.

E. CREATIVE WORSHIP PLANNING
FOR THE BLENDED CHURCH SERVICE

1. PRESERVICE OPTIONS
   a. Prelude.
      1). Organ, piano, or instrumental music.
      2). Recorded music.
   b. Congregational singing.
   c. Prayer.
      1). Corporate.
      2). Silent.
      3). Meditation.
   d. Instruction or announcements. (Be aware that on-screen announcements can seem cold, and latecomers will miss out on these opportunities.)

2. CORPORATE WORSHIP
   a. Call to Worship
      1). Brief Scripture reading and prayer
      2). Choral call to worship
   b. Congregational singing.
      1). Hymns, choruses, responses.
         a). A cappella.
         b). Descants.
         c). Rounds.
         d). Counter melodies.
         e). Women- or men-only verses.

f). Free harmonization.
g). Modulations.
h). Instrumental fanfares.
i). Various instrumental combinations.
2). Memorized hymns and choruses.
3). Lyrics printed in bulletin.
4). Song sheets.
5). Projected lyrics.
6). Hymnal (valuable for part-singing).
c. Special Music.
1). Vocal.
a). Choirs.
b). Select vocal groups or ensembles.
c). Solo, duet, trio, quartet.
2). Instrumental.
a). Acoustic instruments.
b). Electronic instruments.
c). Combination of both.
d. Scripture reading by pastor or congregation, separate from the sermon.
e. Confession.
f. Prayer.
g. Testimonies (if implemented carefully).
h. Interviews.
i. Baptism.
j. Communion.
k. Fellowship or greeting.
l. Recorded messages (e.g. from missionaries). These must be of sufficient quality to be clearly understood when played over the sound system.

3. MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES (Don't call them "announcements" because you're informing people of how they can be involved in ministry the rest of the week or in upcoming weeks.)
a. Praise for specific ministries.
b. Upcoming church events.
c. Offering (with special music for offertory).

4. MESSAGE
a. Teaching.
b. Preaching.
c. Exhortation.
d. Multimedia.

5. CLOSING
a. Invitation.

b. Prayer.
c. Ordination of pastors.
d. Commissioning of pastors and special ministries.
e. Hymn.
f. Choral benediction.

6. POST-SERVICE OPTIONS
    a. Instrumental postlude.
    b. Recorded music.
    c. Counselors and prayer room available.

PART FOUR: APPROPRIATENESS, DISCERNMENT, AND EDIFICATION—FINDING BALANCE IN CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP

A. INTRODUCTION: COUNTERING THE PHILOSOPHY OF TODAY'S CULTURE

1. Prerequisite: An authoritative view of Scripture. Foundational to substantial corporate worship is a pastor committed to teaching the whole counsel of God, and instruction that guards the flock against intrusions such as superficial fads, subjectivism, postmodernism, and every wind of false doctrine that would otherwise undermine the Bible and the Reformation principle of *Sola Scriptura*.

2. Prerequisite: Whole-life worship. God's intention is that worship is to be a whole-life focus (Rom. 12:1), since in all of life "we live and move and have our being" in Him (Acts 17:28). The Father doesn't seek merely Sunday worshipers but those who worship Him "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23–24) all week long.

3. Prerequisite: Music and Scripture is a God-ordained marriage. It is God who ordained the marriage between music and His Word for the church when He spoke through the apostle Paul, commanding us to speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:18–19; Col. 3:16). Singing God's praises is a future heavenly activity as well (Rev. 5:9) and was a central part of Israel's worship (e.g., the Psalms, and 1 Chron. 15:16–22).

B. SIX GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR MUSIC MINISTRY

1. Content-driven worship. Colossians 3:16 sets forth two functions for music: "teaching and admonishing" and worship—singing to God out of gratitude. Both are predicated on one crucial priority, that the Spirit-controlled believer is richly indwelt by the "word of Christ." The greatest value of music used in worship generally should be found in what it *says*. What is at stake here in having a mind filled with Scripture and knowledge of the truth is not only corporate worship, but a God-pleasing lifestyle. (See Ps. 16:7; Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 14:15; Eph. 4:23; Phil. 1:9; and Col. 3:2.) This upholds the standard of worshiping "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Such is the essence of whole-life worship.

Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 indicate that music of differing content should be used in communicating the Word of God within the body. While the difference between "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" may not be precisely definable, we believe that "psalms" refers to the psalms and canticles in the Bible, "hymns" likely are songs of praise with deep theological content, and "spiritual songs" could be the personal testimonies of believers.

2. Let all be done to edify. In the context of spiritual gifts and specifically the use of tongues, 1 Corinthians 14 speaks to several issues regarding corporate worship. Two of these have

significant implications for music. The first is in verse 26, "Let all things be done for edification." If this principle is applied on a musical level, personal preferences about music style fall below the greater priority of what builds up the body, while at the same time recognizing that some kinds of music may be more desirable than others if they more readily help to edify. If it is applied on a personal level, it takes the emphasis off what some individuals come to *get* (emotions, experiences, healings, what they *like* to hear, and so forth) and places it back on what the individual comes to *give* (exaltation of Christ and spiritual service to the church). That principle alone would turn the way some churches do worship on its head.

Second, we are admonished in verse 40 to do "everything decently and in order," which can have implications about everything from the substance of a service to its demeanor and logistics. Anything that is disorderly or connotes an element of chaos in corporate worship is inappropriate. God is not a God of confusion (v. 33), nor are visitors or nonbelievers observing the service to be given an opportunity to think that the church body is lacking in sound judgment or is outright crazy (v. 23). The standard of what edifies is a good safeguard against such distractions.

3. Do not use worldly music (define what is appropriate). Musical preferences are often sharply divided along generational or even church denominational lines. However, it would be wrong to make personal preference or traditions sound as though they're as authoritative as the Bible because that would be to "exceed what is written" (1 Cor. 4:6). Also, sound exegesis won't support the blanket condemnation of a particular music sound. Doing so encourages legalism, a danger that Jesus denounced in Mark 7:6–13. This is not to say that the sound of the music doesn't matter, nor dare we say that music is entirely "neutral." It is a moot question to ask whether or not music is amoral, because music has a unique and potent ability to bring to the mind particular thoughts and emotions by learned association. (See Phil. 4:8–9 and Rom. 12:2.) Also, there are undeniable physiological responses to sound, most noticeably when it is loud. Due to these things, music can have profoundly strong meaning in the mind of a hearer, which has the power to motivate thought patterns and even behaviors. If people in your congregation confuse what you do on Sunday with something that they consider worldly, there is going to be a conflict of opinions. James 1:27 speaks of keeping oneself unspotted from the world, and James 4:4 says that "friendship with the world is enmity with God." 1 John 2:15 commands, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (NKJV). How is music appropriate for worship if our brother hears in it that from which he was "delivered from [in] this present evil age" (Gal. 1:4)?

We believe that each local church, with godly discernment, must define what is appropriate for worship and what is perceived as worldly. The answer will vary according to the musicians God has brought to the local church, the makeup of the congregation, and its geographical location. It also may vary between the main services of the church and youth meetings or fellowship groups because of different target ages and groups.

4. Do not offend your brother or sister. This principle speaks to the same issue, but the approach is from the perspective of the believer rather than the culture. How has the Lord gifted the congregation? Can some play hymns skillfully? They should. Can others form a proficient praise band? They should. Again, all must be done to edify. It would be wrong to cause one to stumble, to "put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way" or to "destroy with your food him for whom Christ died" (Rom. 14:13, 15) because of a music style that is perceived to be sinful.

On the other hand, this is an issue of maturity. Styles and preferences may have strong relevance, but they should not become such a strong priority as to negate the principle of "in honor preferring one another" (Rom. 12:10). And the music preferences of one person shouldn't be allowed to put a stranglehold on *true* ministry. Jesus' words to the apostles should also be heeded in this context, for "if anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all" (Mark 9:35). Discipleship and maturity should bring an understanding that others (and their preferences) are more important. The greater priority is to have a servant-hearted concern about the Lord's work and His body.

5. Show reverence and awe in corporate worship. Respect, awe, and honor are to be ascribed in our lifestyle and worship attitudes (Heb. 12:28–29). Two of the great worship scenes in Scripture (Isa. 6, Rev. 5) strongly emphasize God's holiness and loftiness. Not only should our worship reflect this, it should also be carefully conceived so as not to generally "dumb down" the worship of God.

6. Include the mature and elderly in the life of the church. Passages such as Titus 2:4–5, 1 John 2:12–14, and the greetings of 2 and 3 John attest to the importance of seasoned saints teaching and leading younger believers. If a local body caters only to a specific (e.g. younger) age range, how can this occur?

C. SEVEN WEAKNESSES TO BE WARY OF WHEN CHOOSING WORSHIP RESOURCES, PARTICULARLY FROM CONTEMPORARY SOURCES

1. Lyrics of dubious quality. Nearly all of the great classic hymns were not written by musicians, but theologians, but today most lyrics are penned by musicians. Charismatic and experience-driven theology is now widespread in new congregational, choral, and solo music, even from publishers that have traditionally catered to non-charismatic denominations. Other lyrics are so generic in content that they say essentially the same thing as any number of other choruses. Still other lyrics use the words "I" or "me" so frequently that the emphasis no longer seems to be on the Lord but on what "I" get out of worship.

Evaluate the content of every lyric used in your services. Is everything in a song doctrinally sound? Does it contain a small or significant amount of truth? Is the message a helpful addition to the music you already use, or redundant? For example, the majority of contemporary songwriters overlook central doctrinal themes or the redeeming work of Christ in their lyrics. Singing only praises from psalm texts would be biblical, yet incomplete. Discerning choices can circumvent this. Look for wrong or utterly weak theology and avoid those songs.

2. Emotion-*driven* worship instead of emotion-*filled* worship. True biblical worship is to involve the emotions (for example, Ps. 33:1; 100:1–2), and a right understanding of the Word shows that emotions are to follow in response to biblical truth. However, corporate worship is not to be ecstatic for the sake of ecstasy or divorced from the use of the intellect, where *emotions* overshadow the biblical truth and *become* the experience. This makes the "worship experience" the consuming focus to the detriment of equipping for whole-life worship. In other words, many churches are now worshiping worship rather than God because people are *addicted* to the experience. This emotionalism is referred to in the lyrics of an ever-increasing quantity of contemporary songs, so once again the principles of appropriateness and discernment need to be the standard.

It isn't hard to find a lot more froth than substance in Christian bookstores because publishers and retailers market for what people will buy, as opposed to what is necessarily good for us. The grocery store sells a lot more desserts than spinach, too. So too, some of the worship music is musical, theological, and emotional candy that tastes great and is enjoyed by all, yet offers no nourishment to live by.

3. Experience-driven worship and feeling God's *presence*. This goes far beyond the relatively mild subjectivism purported in Henry Blackaby's *Experiencing God* materials. Read the corporate mission statement of one of our music publishers: "helping people world-wide experience the manifest presence of God and develop a lifestyle of worship." How is one to define the "manifest presence of God?" This is merely subjective if the presence of certain emotions or tongues or being "slain in the Spirit" is the indication of God's presence or a greater outpouring of the Spirit. On the other hand, if we magnify God in true worship, confess sin, pray, hear and understand His Word, fellowship with one another, and so forth, how can we possibly not experience Him on some level? God is present at all times indwelling us through the Holy Spirit; believers have already been blessed with "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3) and have been fully given the Spirit "so that we may know the things freely given to us by God" (1 Cor. 2:12). To those sent of God is given "the Spirit without measure" (John 3:34). If we are unable to "experience" God, it isn't for lack of His presence, power, or provision, but is due to our callous insensitivity and sin.

4. Spiritual warfare: storming the gates of hell instead of standing firm. Some leaders and lyricists flaunt themselves before the forces of darkness almost as if they are the ones responsible for the victory, acting as though the strongholds we are to tear down in 2 Corinthians 10:4 are the actual domain of Satan himself. This is incorrect. This passage is yet

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another call to be armed with the knowledge of God's Word and use it to tear down worldly philosophy and wisdom—any knowledge raised up against the things of God. This passage, along with Ephesians 6, indicates that the only offensive weapon of our struggle is the truth of the Word of God. Furthermore, when putting on the whole armor of Ephesians 6, nowhere does it say to run headlong into battle, but merely to "withstand" or "stand" (vv. 13–14). Therefore, we need to carefully examine how spiritual warfare is presented in our music.

5. Seeker services: redefining redemption and pleasing the pagan. First Corinthians 14:23–24 shows that the apostle Paul expected unbelievers to be present in a normal functioning Sunday service of the church. This implies that turning the main Sunday service into a pragmatically-determined strategy for attracting the lost should be avoided. The unsaved come to salvation by the supernatural regenerating work of God through the Word alone (1 Corinthians 1:21; Romans 10:17). Therefore, one ought not to sanction any main service catering to the unchurched.

6. Market-driven motives. The fact that Christian publishers are for-profit businesses and rely on marketing and sales is a "necessary evil" because it is the only way that many resources we enjoy can be made available. However, commercialism grants credibility and "success" to products merely because people like them, not necessarily because they are of enduring value or are substantial. People *should* enjoy and appreciate the music they hear at church, but winsomeness should not be the primary determinant in what is suitable. The first priorities should be content and musical excellence.

7. Vain repetition. Someone has coined the stereotype: "7-11 choruses," which are songs with seven words repeated eleven times. Few things "dumb down" worship and emphasize the emotions over the mind like mantra-like repetition of the same thing over and over, which has become increasingly commonplace. While teaching about prayer, Jesus condemned this practice (Matt. 6:7). Many of the overly-repetitious choruses *are* prayers.

This principle also applies to the church liturgies of old. When the texts of worship are based on long-standing tradition so that the entire service is "scripted," the same error occurs if the people are merely *reciting* liturgical forms.

D. EIGHT SOURCES FOR A DIVERSITY OF NEW MATERIAL

1. Borrow the *very best* ideas from others. There is nothing like knowing what it tried-and-true. Ask those in music leadership at other churches—ministers of music, worship leaders, and choir directors—what their favorites are, as well as what their musicians like best. Find out what people in your congregation are listening to that they find rewarding. Pay attention to Christian radio and top-selling Christian CDs or downloads. Also, note what receives Dove or Grammy awards. Because its notoriety is based mainly on popularity, this is often not the best music, but *some* good material will rise to the top.

2. Choral workshops and subscriptions. Music retailers will routinely hold seminars where choral directors can get together and sing through new publications. A number of publishers (e.g. Word, Brentwood-Benson, Praise Gathering, Lifeway, Lillenas, Integrity Direct) have subscription plans where preview packets of new releases are sent several times per year complete with demonstration recordings. Much of this material is actually poor in quality, but occasional "gems" that are both substantial and memorable will be found. Searching for new material in this manner can be both time-consuming and rewarding.

3. CCLI's Top 25 (http://www.ccli.com/WorshipResources/Top25.cfm) or Top 100 (for SongSelect subscribers). Since they license many thousands of churches with copyright privileges, CCLI knows what praise music is used most often. Due to charismatic theology, other lyric issues, and musical issues, only a fraction of these may actually be found to be appropriate.

4. Soloists, trios, and quartets can suggest their own selections and submit it to the worship pastor or committee for approval.

5. Artists' CDs. Many times the best material is on an artist's first release. It is also common to find only one or two outstanding songs in a whole collection.

6. Major names in Christian music and church music publishing. Know some of the better arrangers, writers, and artists by name, and watch for their new publications. For example: Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir (sometimes), Michael Card (sometimes), David T. Clydesdale, Steve Green, Camp Kirkland, Bob Krogstad, Don Marsh, and Jay Rouse. Only a small fraction of material from any one of these individuals may be of excellent quality, but these names keep rising to the top again and again.

7. Classic repertoire (unknown to many young worship leaders). This includes not just older church anthems and songs that have stood the test of time, but selections from oratorios and the classical masters in general. Very select music from the following composers is heard at Grace Community Church: Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Handel, Haydn, Mendelssohn, and Mozart. Care must be exercised here because a lot of the old classic masters wrote for Catholic services and masses, and the music itself will not sound compelling to the ear of the typical church member. Again, careful text choices should be made and the music should be interesting to the hearers.

8. Original material. Today it is common to see directors and worship leaders and others in the church using their own material. Unfortunately, this will often lower the general quality of corporate worship. How do you know if original material is professional quality? At least one publisher won't return it with a form letter when it is submitted to them!

E. PRACTICAL TIPS FOR THE "BLENDED" WORSHIP SERVICE

1. **Put all musical styles into one service.** There is no biblical justification for conforming the body of Christ to a cultural preference. However, there is strong biblical justification for creating a cross-generational ministry environment, which typically is compromised when a church divides its services by style. Essential to this is tolerance from contemporary-minded musicians for the traditional, and tolerance from classic-minded musicians for the contemporary. This only happens when both styles are placed together in one service (and your musicians are sanctified!). Otherwise, the result will be two churches meeting at different times in the same building.

2. **Don't abandon hymns.**
   a. Benefits of singing hymns.
      1). Unmatched theology and doctrine in the lyrics of the best hymns.
      2). Creates an appreciation for God's work in the church though the centuries and profound theologians of past generations.
      3). Creates a bridge between the older and younger generations.
   b. Suggestions regarding the use of hymns.
      1). Do not always modernize them.
         a). Liken great hymns to great art. We don't re-dress the Mona Lisa to keep her in style. Allow hymns—presented excellently, of course—to stand on their own ground.
         b). Preserve the cultural bridge to the seasoned saints by using traditional music in the manner in which people are accustomed to it.
      2). If your church uses a praise band, tacet the drums and electric guitars for hymns.
      3). Should you stylize a hymn in a contemporary manner (e.g. Maranatha Praise Band), preserve your bridge to the older generation with a traditional hymn as well.
      4). It is preferable to use something new that musically achieves what is desired than to change traditional music that is already good.
   c. Dangers of eliminating hymns.
      1). Corporate praise and worship easily becomes shallow in content or lacking in scope. For example, profound lyrics that rehearse theology or focus on the cross work of Christ are more difficult to find in contemporary praise and worship music.
      2). A church that divides to separate contemporary and traditional services often finds the traditional service gets left to "die on the vine."
      3). Those who grew up on good traditional church music may look elsewhere for it.
      4). Weak congregational singing. People sing best the songs they know well.
      5). A completely contemporary church tends to not use and/or lose its classically trained musicians.

6). Destruction of the church budget: a completely contemporary church, particularly one that has "shifted" its styles, tends to lose its mature givers.

7). If the pastor doesn't preach the Word well, the easiest way to get a crowd is to put on a contemporary service, which could well attract a great many quasi-spiritual unbelievers who will infiltrate, and ultimately poison, the body.

3. Use good contemporary music. A balance is needed between *cultural relevance* and *substantial art*, which must be conducive to delivering a profound message.

    a. Benefits of singing choruses and contemporary songs.

        1). Many excellent lyrics consist of direct praise or prayers to God.

        2). Creates a sense of intimacy, as opposed to formality, due to the familiarity of the musical styles that most people hear all week long.

        3). Creates a bridge from the younger to the older generations.

    b. Evaluating praise music.

        1). Look at the lyrics first for biblical accuracy, for substance, and for the quality of the poetry.

        2). Is the music memorable? Examine the structure, melody, harmony, and rhythm of the song. It must be sophisticated enough that it creates a unique interest, while being accessible enough for people to readily participate. The songs that are memorable enough to stay with us for a long time tend to be both substantial *and* interesting.