

CHAPTER EIGHT

Music: A Gift We Use

EXERCISE

In chapter 6 we learned about different kinds of worship language. They were:

Adoration – We say to God, “I love you.”

Confession – We say to God, “I’m sorry.”

Thanksgiving – We say to God, “Thank you.”

Supplication – We say to God, “Help me.”

Lament – We ask of God, “Why?”

Commission – We ask of God, “What can I do?”

Take a few minutes to write down a song that exemplifies each one.

Introduction

The typical dialogue about kinds of worship music focuses on whether a church sings “traditional” or “contemporary” music. These two categories of music are not adequate for the conversation. In this chapter we will look at a better framework for types of music, how to define each, and why we include them in our worship. This is not an exclusive nor is it an all-encompassing list but will hopefully give us a broader and richer musical language with which to communicate with each other and God.

Discussion

Service Music

Service Music is essentially the elements of the liturgy set to music. Many churches sing instead of simply saying the Doxology, the Gloria Patri, and the Prayer for Illumination each week in their services. These songs can be used to mark the great occasions of our worship service. We lift up our prayers together and sing the Doxology. Before we open up the Word we sing together the Prayer for Illumination. God sends us out and we sing the Gloria Patri.

1. *Useful for the Formative Power of Memorization and Embodiment*

Service music has a formative purpose in our worship lives. These songs give us words to memorize with the hope that these words will shape us into the kinds of people who personify or embody the ideas they express. Service music may also provide us a means of expressing our love for God at times when we don’t have words of our own.

ILLUSTRATION

I direct a children’s choir at our church. Often after practice when the parents come to pick up their children and the kids are stomping out in a big hurry, the parents say, “Go thank Maestro Isaac before you go.” The kids come up to me, often fidgety and sweaty, and say quickly, “Thank you, Maestro Isaac,” before flying out the door. I could ask them, “Was that really an authentic expression of thanks that you gave me just now?” But that’s not necessarily the point. We have our children say “thank you” and “you’re welcome” and “hello” with the hope that it will shape them into the kinds of people who are thankful and gracious.

2. *Useful for Connecting Us to the Church Around the World*

These songs are also ones that are shared by believers from all over the world. When we sing them, we join the one holy, apostolic, and catholic Church. We are lifting up our voices with Protestants, Roman Catholics, Americans, people in the Southern Hemisphere, Northern Hemisphere, and all over the world.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Does our church include Service Music in its service? Why or why not?

Hymns and Anthems

Hymns and anthems are songs written with a versified form, to be sung to worship God for who he is, what he has done, and what he will do. Hymns and anthems have a lyrical, poetic quality where a certain theme is developed throughout so the climax of the song happens with the lyrics rather than the instrumentation.

1. *Useful for Turning Us from Ourselves to Praising God for Who He Is*

Most hymns and anthems begin with or focus on an aspect of God's character, such as his kingship, his holiness, or his love. Because they take this theme and look at it from various perspectives, they allow us time to meditate on who God is and what he has done in this area as we sing multiple verses about it.

ILLUSTRATION

The hymn "All Creatures of Our God and King" recounts how each part of creation gives glory to the Lord, and at the end it climaxes with, "Let all things their creator bless, and worship him in humbleness." "In Christ Alone" starts out by saying that our hope is found in Christ alone. Then it reminds us that Jesus died, but we can hope in that. It ends with, "No guilt in life, no fear in death, this is the power of Christ in me." It has its own momentum. These songs allow us to turn for a few minutes from ourselves and reflect on our God's character.

2. *Useful for Turning Us from Ourselves to Praising God for What He Has Done*

Even if we don't believe or feel in that moment that God is who the hymn says he is or does what the anthem says he has done, the truth isn't any less true. So these songs provide us with a connection to what God is doing and remind us of what he has done as we sing the true words regardless of how we feel. This is true even for the unbeliever.

ILLUSTRATION

The woman who played the piano at the church I grew up in told me that there were times she went to church when she couldn't even sing. On some days she felt that if she sang the words to the songs she would be

telling lies because she did not feel them in her heart that day. That troubled me, even at age fifteen. She implied that there are times when we believe what we sing completely and without doubt. It also seemed to mean that if we only believe the words a little bit, maybe we should only sing a little bit. It occurred to me that the best things we sing in church are true no matter how we feel.

If the best songs we sing are true regardless of how much we believe them, then even unbelievers can sing these hymns and anthems. They can sing the words and it gives them a chance to reflect on these truths and be connected to who God is and what he is doing as well.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Does our worship include hymns and anthems that praise God for who he is and what he has done in its service? Or do we only sing songs about how we feel?

Psalms and Scripture Songs

These songs are either a Psalm or other Scripture verbatim—or close to it—put to music, such as "Create in Me a Clean Heart," which is simply the words of Psalm 51 put to music, or "All People That on Earth Do Dwell," which is Psalm 100.

1. *Useful for Memorizing and Internalizing God's Holy Scriptures*

All worship songs should reflect truths from the Scriptures. But Psalms and Scripture songs start with the Scriptures in a way that helps us to learn and memorize its language. These songs can be useful to children and adults in internalizing scripture to be used when we need to remember the words.

2. *Useful as an Act of Obedience*

Ephesians 15:19 tells us to *address one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*. We obey God's injunction to do this with these songs.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Which of our songs are the Scriptures set to music?

Devotional Music

Unlike hymns, devotional songs are not so much about who God is and what He has done, but rather about our reaction to what God has done in our lives. They are songs about what we do, what we feel, and our reaction to who God is.

1. Useful for Better Contextualizing God's Work into Our Life Experiences

We have an opportunity to meditate on God's work in the world when we sing hymns and anthems. Devotional music gives us the opportunity to express what we think and how we feel about that work.

ILLUSTRATION

I went to a formal church for a couple of years after college where we sang with the organ from the hymnal. At the new members meeting, the pastor explained that this church sang all hymns because hymns tend to be more about God while choruses are more about us. That disturbed me. First, because we can open the hymnal and find many hymns that are about our response to God. Hymns like "Just as I am" are songs that are about what we bring to God. He also seemed to be saying that there is no biblical precedent for us praising God for what he has done in our lives and how we feel about that. But we can open the Psalms and find many subjective, emotional, and deeply personal prayers to God.

1. Useful for Following David's Model of Singing a New Song to Our God

We have seen how the Psalms give us a precedent for coming to God and bringing our feelings to him. David frequently told his story. He said he waited for the Lord, God inclined to him, heard his cry, brought him up, and at the end David sang a new song. This is a beautiful part of Christian worship. Worship isn't only a place for expressing our theology and doctrines about God, it is also a place for telling God about our complete and real selves and all of our emotions.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Does our music include opportunities for us to bring our full range of reactions to God before him?

Lesson

In Christian worship, we use the gift of music in its many forms to glorify God. (1 John 4:7-12)

Exercise

We talked about different kinds of worship language in chapter 6. As a reminder they were:

- Adoration** – We say to God, “I love you.”
- Confession** – We say to God, “I’m sorry.”
- Thanksgiving** – We say to God, “Thank you.”
- Supplication** – We say to God, “Help me.”
- Lament** – We ask of God, “Why?”
- Commission** – We ask of God, “What can I do?”

Take a few minutes to write down a song that exemplifies each one.

Discussion Question

1. Does our church include Service Music in its service? Why or why not?
2. Does our worship include Hymns and Anthems that praise God for who he is and what he has done in its service? Or do we only sing songs about how we feel?
3. Which of our songs are the Scriptures set to music?
4. Does our music include opportunities for us to bring our full range of reactions to God before him?

Lesson

In Christian worship, we use the gift of music in its many forms to glorify God. (1 John 4:7-12)

What are obstacles in our path to applying this lesson?

O Savior,
We are slow to learn, prone to forget, and weak to climb. We are in the foothills of faith, rather than the heights. Make it our chiefest joy to study You, to gaze on You, to sit like Mary at Your feet, to lean like John upon Your breast, to appeal like Peter to Your love, and to count like Paul all other things rubbish. Let not our faith cease from seeking You until our faith vanishes into sight. Amen.