

## Song Leading

### I. Introduction

- A. We spend more time singing than any part of worship (aside from listening to the sermon)
- B. Sometimes we do not really worship when singing
  - 1. We do not think about the meaning of the songs
  - 2. We sometimes go through the motions
- C. Song Leading is no less important than any other part of the service
  - 1. Often sets the tone for the entire worship service
  - 2. It is active throughout most of the worship service
  - 3. Song leaders often order the service
- D. The Song Leader must lead well in order for the congregation to have meaningful worship.
  - 1. Song leaders should be trained
    - a. Typically takes longer periods of training to reach proficiency for leading singing with excellence
    - b. There are excellent training resources for song leaders
      - 1) Books on worship and singing
      - 2) Workshops on worship and song leading
      - 3) Singing schools
  - 2. Song leaders should be prepared

### I. General biblical overview of singing

- A. Purposes of singing
  - 1. To commemorate God and his works
    - a. Exod 15:1-19 - The Song of the Sea
    - b. Jud 5:1-31 - Song of Deborah and Barak
    - c. 1 Sam 2:1-10 - Song of Hannah
      - This song also serves as an introduction to themes in Samuel and Kings
    - d. 2 Sam 22:1-15 (Psalm 18) - Song of David
    - e. Psalm 136 - God's acts through history
    - f. Psalm 104; 139 - Creation
    - g. Psalm 103 - God's character
    - h. 1 Tim 3:16 - The work of Christ (It is debated whether this was a hymn)
    - i. Rev 5:9-10 - Jesus' work of atonement
    - j. Rev 15:3-4 - For the Lord's character and holiness
  - 2. To instruct, teach and rebuke
    - a. Deut 31:19, 30; 32:1-46 - Song of Moses

- b. Isa 5:1-7 - Song of the Vineyard
    - Imagery used in Mark 12:1ff
  - c. Col 3:16 - Singing as a result of the word in you
  - d. Jews referred to the Psalter as the Second Torah
    - 1) Five fold division of Psalter probably reflects this view
    - 2) Many, many New Testament quotations of the Old from Psalms
      - a) Many familiar with it
      - b) Music aids memory
    - 3) As they commemorate God's acts, they are teaching and reminding
3. To express joy, praise and thanksgiving
- a. Psalm 47; 100 - Express Joy to the Lord
  - b. Heb 13:15 - Offer up a sacrifice of praise
  - c. James 5:13 - If cheerful, sing praises
4. To express sorrow, remorse, or even anger
- a. James 5:13 - Use of Hebrew Parallelism
    - Prayer is parallel to singing in this passage, implying in this case that singing and prayer are to be the same response to either joy or sorrow
  - b. Psalm 137 - Missing Zion
  - c. Psalm 51 - Sorrow and repentance for sinning
  - d. Lam 2 - Expression of extreme despair and sorrow
5. As a prayer of request
- a. Psalm 44; 64 - A prayer for deliverance
  - b. Psalm 25 - Numerous requests
6. To encourage and build up one another
- a. Ps 145 - The Lord will save
  - b. Psa 30 - The Lord's anger is for a moment,
  - c. 1 Cor 14:26 - All things are to be done for edification
    - This is a very distinct purpose of New Testament worship
- B. Mutual edification is the main rationale for congregational a cappella singing in worship rather than solos, concerts, instruments, and such
- 1. 2 Chr 29:25-28 - Old Testament worship used professional musicians and singers
    - a. The command was from God
    - b. They were to be Levites
    - c. Professionals offered up worship to God
    - d. The major focus in temple worship was not mutual edification, but worship

2. When the temple was destroyed, there arose synagogues as places of learning, edification, and worship
  - a. A major focus was mutual edification
  - b. Did not employ professional musicians
  - c. Congregational singing without instrumentation was employed as it was the music of mutual edification
  - d. When the temple was rebuilt, there existed two kinds of worship in Judaism
    - 1) Temple worship, performed by professional Levitical musicians with instrumentation
    - 2) Synagogue worship, performed a cappella by the congregation at large without instrumentation
  - e. New Testament worship is patterned after the synagogue, not the temple
    - 1) Churches initially worshipped as part of a synagogue
    - 2) Churches continued the emphasis on mutual edification and congregational acappella singing
    - 3) Early Christians were opposed to instruments in worship for two reasons
      - 1) They taught instruments in congregational worship were too sensual
      - 2) They believed simple acappella singing fulfilled the purposes of uniting a congregation with one voice to God
3. 1 Cor 14:26; Col 3:16; Eph 5:19 - In the New Testament, all are to sing
  - a. Unlike Old Testament, it is not done by a few professionals
  - b. There is to be teaching and admonishing of all one to another
  - c. There is to be mutual edification
  - d. Congregational a cappella singing is the music of mutual edification

### C. Results of Singing

1. God is glorified
  - a. Psalm 34:1-3
  - b. Rom 15:9-11
2. God acts
  - a. 2 Chr 20:20-24 - Jehoshaphat and worship leaders
  - b. Acts 16:25-26 - Paul and Silas in prison
3. We are edified

B. Thought Question: Why singing? Why not just pray and use words without melody?

## II. Biblical Principles for Music Leadership

- A. There is no "music model" for congregational singing specific to the assembly in the New Testament,<sup>1</sup>
1. There are no instructions on how to order the service
  2. There are no instructions on what kinds of songs to use
  3. There are no instructions on how to conduct a song service
  4. Should we sing from the psalms, psalters, song books, etc.?
  5. Should we use musical notations?
  6. Should we sing in unison or in harmony? etc. etc. etc.
- B. Even though there is very little direct instruction specific to singing in the assembly, there are some strong guiding principles
1. 1 Cor 14:6-9, 15, 19 The principle of understanding
    - a. Leaders must understand what they are doing
    - b. Leaders must lead the congregation to understand
    - c. Words and phrases in our songs should be understood<sup>2</sup>
  2. 1 Cor 14:12, 26 - The principle of edification
    - a. Leaders should be edified
    - b. Song leaders should seek to edify the congregation in the song service
    - c. This implies a certain level of competency
  3. 1 Cor 14:40 - The principle of order
    - a. There should be order
    - b. Remember that order does not mean stiff and lifeless
    - c. There can be no edification without order
  4. Eph 5:18-20 - The principle of spirituality
    - a. There is only one command in this passage, which is to "be filled with the Spirit."
      - 1) Speaking, making melody, and giving thanks are not commands, but participles
      - 2) The thrust of the passage is to be filled with the Spirit
        - a) Eph 1:13 - We received the gift of the Spirit when we were converted
        - b) The Spirit fills us when we submit to God in prayer and obedience
          - 1] Eph 3:16 - Strengthen by his Spirit through prayer
          - 2] Eph 6:18 - The Word is the sword of the Spirit
          - 3] Col 3:16 - Being filled with the word is to have the same result, singing

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<sup>1</sup> Of the few passages that deal with singing in the New Testament, only 1 Corinthians 14 deals specifically with the worship assembly. Mt. 11:17; 26:30; Mk 14:26; Lk 7:32; Acts 16:25; Rom. 15:8-12; 1 Cor. 14:15, 26; Eph. 5:18-21; Col. 3:16; Heb. 2:11-12; James 5:7-16; Rev.5, 14, 15.

<sup>2</sup> See the attachment, "Unfamiliar Words Found in Our Song Books"

- c) Like baptism, we are passive in the process, we must submit to the process in faithful obedience
  - b. In this passage, singing is to be the natural result of being filled with the Spirit
    - 1) A common denominator in instances of people being filled with the Spirit is to tell others in some way<sup>3</sup>
    - 2) Being filled with the Spirit is to result in singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to each other and to God
  - c. This passage is teaching us that singing must be spirit filled
    - 4) Those who lead in singing must be spiritual men
      - a) Like those in Acts 6:1-6, they are to be men who are filled with the Spirit
      - b) As with any area of leadership, they should be filled with the Spirit
- 5. Implications of these principles for song leaders
  - a. There is a technical dimension
    - 1) Readily seen in the song books: Musical notations, etc.
    - 2) Musical training and ability is a huge plus
      - Would be very difficult to lead singing if one cannot sing
    - 3) There is a certain level of competency needed
      - a) Knowing something about music
        - Rhythm, tempo, pitch, etc.
      - b) Knowing something about leading music
        - How to start, lead, and end well
      - c) Knowing something about planning a song service - It is a group phenomenon
        - 1] Need the ability to work with people
        - 2] Will lead people in group behavior
        - 3] Group dynamics
        - 4] Understanding congregational culture
  - b. There is a spiritual dimension
    - 1) Often times training tends to the technical, but not the spiritual
    - 2) There must be spiritual preparation for song leading
      - a) Prayer,
      - b) Meditation on the words to the songs
      - c) Attending to scriptures song are based on
    - 3) The spiritual dimension involves a level of emotional intelligence
      - a) 1 Cor 14:15 - Indicates singing with BOTH the spirit and the mind
        - a] Worship is not just an intellectual exercise

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<sup>3</sup> These passages from Luke and Acts demonstrate that those who received the Spirit were compelled to proclaim a message to others. Lk 1:15; 67; 2:25-32; 4:14-15, 18; 10:21-24; Acts 1:8, 16; 2:4, 17; 4:25, 31; 7:55-56; 10:44-46; 11:28; 13:9-11; 19:6; 28:25

- b] Worship is artful expression of the heart, using poetry and music.
- b) Emotion is not bad, but highly appropriate when guided by the Spirit
  - 1] Fruit of the Spirit involves things such as love, joy, etc., in Gal 5:22
  - 2] Many Psalms have emotion
  - 3] Acts 2:37 indicates they were "pricked in their hearts"
  - 4] God has emotion, and we who are made in God's image have emotion
  - 5] Emotionless worship is just as bad as emotionalism. One is devoid of passion, the other is emotion for the sake of emotion
- c. A song leader must tend to both the technical and spiritual
  - 1) One can lead a song, but not necessarily worship
  - 2) This is why we do not hire an unbeliever to lead our singing

### III. Considerations as a song leader

- A. Be aware of the things that hinder good singing:
  - 1. Untrained leaders and leaders who can't lead
    - a. Song leading is not for everyone
    - b. Take advantage of training opportunities for song leaders
    - c. We should also strive for excellence
  - 2. Lack of order
    - a. The song service should fit well with other parts of the service
    - b. The song service should flow naturally
  - 3. Use of the wrong songs
    - a. Don't sing "Oh why not tonight" as an invitation song in the morning
    - b. Sometimes there are songs that are devoid of any spiritual significance
  - 4. Too much formality
  - 5. Use of too many difficult songs or unfamiliar songs
    - a. This will cause the congregation to focus more on the song rather than on the God they are trying to worship
    - b. Singable songs will aid in good singing
  - 6. Lack of musical notations
    - Having only words, whether projected or in print will exclude those that do not know the song
  - 7. Ignorance of music
    - a. A congregation needs to practice singing

- b. Remember that the church is the church choir, and should practice songs to sing them well
- B. Be aware of the things that assist good singing
- 1. Spiritual leaders
    - a. Leaders that sing with the heart
    - b. Leaders that understand the purpose of singing in worship
    - c. Leaders that understand the biblical teaching of worship
    - d. Leaders that are committed to excellence
  - 2. Leaders that understand what makes a good song
    - a. Familiarity
      - 1) Congregations sing familiar songs better
      - 2) Congregations can focus on the words and meaning more than trying to sing the right notes
    - b. Songs that are meaningful
      - 1) Songs with an edifying message
      - 2) Songs with a scriptural message
      - 3) Songs that worship
    - c. Songs whose tunes match the message and mood of the lyrics
      - 1) Sad or mournful songs should have mournful music
      - 2) Happy songs should have happy music
      - 3) Example - "My precious savior suffered pain and agony..." Should have the music re-written, at least for the stanzas
    - d. Songs written with musical excellence
      - 1) Good melody
      - 2) Good harmony
      - 3) Good rhythm
      - 4) Singable by a congregation
  - 3. Leaders that are training in leading singing

#### **IV. Preparing to lead singing**

- A. Begin and end with prayer
- B. Select Appropriate Songs
  - 1. Have consideration for the younger AND older people
  - 2. Do not begin the worship with an unfamiliar song
  - 3. Generally it is inadvisable to sing unfamiliar songs in worship
  - 4. Vary song types
  - 5. Make sure the song theme is appropriate for the occasion
- C. Know the meaning of the songs
  - 1. Read over and meditate on the songs ahead of time

2. If a song has a word, theme, or subject that is unfamiliar, find out what they mean.
  3. Read scriptures associated with a song
- D. Know the Order of the Service
1. In this way, you will be able to choose songs that are both thematically and musically appropriate
  2. Always announce who will be doing what at the appropriate times
- E. Be aware of the purpose of parts of the worship service, AND the purpose of the songs
1. Open the worship service with a song of praise or worship to God
  2. Choose appropriate songs for various parts of the worship service
    - a. Songs for the Lord's Supper
    - b. Songs for the Contribution
    - c. Songs for the Sermon
  4. Be aware of not only the message of a song, but its purpose
    - a. Praise Song
    - b. Worship Song
    - c. Song of edification
    - d. Specialized Songs
      - 1) For the Lord's Supper
      - 2) Invitation Song
  5. There are topical indexes available
    - a. Most song books contain them
    - b. There are also more comprehensive indexes available
      - 1) Taylor Publishes prints indexes
      - 2) The Paperless Hymnal has a downloadable index on Exel online
- F. Practice singing the songs you will lead
1. If you have difficulty with a song, don't lead it
  2. If you have a pitch finding instrument, use it (unless you have good pitch)
    - a. Pitch too low destroys a songs joy and enthusiasm
    - b. Pitch too high can make a song unsingable
    - c. (Note: Sometimes a song pitched just a step higher can increase enthusiasm)
    - d. Keep in mind the voices of the audience
      - 1) Some congregations do not have many high voices
      - 2) Sometimes, for the sake of the congregation, songs may need to be lowered a step, or two
  3. Make sure you are comfortable with the song so you can focus on leading singing, not on making sure you get it right
- G. Communication

1. If there is a hymn board, post the song numbers in advance
2. If there is a printed order of worship, ensure you forward the song numbers to the one who prints it

## **V. Leading Singing**

- A. Establish Rapport with the congregation.  
(Without rapport, a song leader will not lead well)
  1. Be warm and friendly
  2. Be sincere
  3. Smile
  4. Be prepared mentally, spiritually, and physically
  5. Appearance should not be distracting
- B. Inspire confidence in the singers
  1. Communicate that you look forward to singing together
  2. Let them know the singing sounds good, enthusiastic, beautiful...
- C. Announcing the song number
  1. Speak slowly and clearly
  2. Speak with enthusiasm
  3. Repeat the number if it is evident people did not hear
- D. Also announce the song title as there may be those who sing from memory
- E. If using a projection system, move quickly from one song to the next
- F. Ensure you have everyone's attention before beginning the song
- G. LEAD the singing, don't be led (use both voice and hands to lead)
- H. If you are doing spontaneous singing, lead only songs everyone is familiar with and remember that most people know only the first stanza of a song
- I. Make sure you announce the invitation song before the lesson
- J. Have a definite closing (closing song, prayer etc.)

## **VI. Other considerations**

- A. Have a special time for worshippers to learn new songs
- B. Arrange times to get together and just sing for joy
- C. Arrange to have singing groups to sing for various occasions
- D. Have music training courses to help improve singing from time to time

## Some Unfamiliar Words found in our songbooks

TERM	SONG TITLE	SCRIPTURE	DEFINITION
abba	Night with Ebon Pinion	Mk 14:36; Rm 8:15; Gal 4:6	A term of endearment "Daddy"
alleluia	Alleluia		Hebrew word- "Praise Yahweh"
bane	In the Cross of Christ I Glory		destroying or ruining cause
bar	Crossing the Bar, Sunset and Evening Star, You never Mentioned Him to Me		a long ridge of solid material near the water surface at the mouth of a river or harbor, an obstruction to navigation, or a place a judgement
Beulah (land)	Beulah Land, Dwelling in Beulah Land	Is 62:4	Poetic name for promised land, from Hebrew, meaning, "Married"
boatman	Christ's Love is all I need, Standing by the River		a figurative person who conducts souls across figurative river after death
bourne	Crossing the Bar, Lord Dismiss Us in Thy Care		realm, domain, or limit
bowers	He Leded Me, In the Kingdom of the Lord		places enclosed by boughs of trees, a shaded retreat
Bright & Morning Star	Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross, Everybody Ought to Know, Lilly of the Valley	Rev. 22:16	Reference to Jesus
brooded	Night with Ebon Pinion		covered, dwelled morbidly
bulwark	A Mighty Fortress		Wall for defense, protection
cherubim	Holy Holy Holy		Heavenly creatures that are God's attendants
city foursquare	Beautiful City of God, In the Land of Fadeless Day	Rev. 21:16	Heaven, the New Jerusalem
crystal fountain	Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah, Wonderful Story of Love	Ex 15:22ff; 17:3-6; Num 20	Miraculous water supply God
crystal gleam	There's a Fountain Free		see crystal river
crystal river	In the Land of Fadeless Day	Rev. 22:1	River of water of life, clear as crystal from throne of God
crystal sea	I will sing the Wondrous Story, Holy Holy Holy, Home of the Soul, I Know that My Redeemer Lives, Sweet by and by, The Great Redeemer, Victory in Jesus	Rev. 4:6	Sea of crystal before the throne of God
diadem	All Hail the Power of Jesus Name		a Kingly crown, not the crown of life which is a victory wreath
double cure	Rock of Ages		reference to doctrine of "2nd work of grace", the receiving of the holy spirit (holiness or Pentecostal doctrine)
Ebenezer	O Thou Fount of Every Blessing	I Sam 7:12	Hebrew meaning, "Standing Stone." Name given to the stone that Samuel set up as memorial after God gave them the victory over the enemy

ebon pinion	Night with Ebon Pinion		Ebon(dark). Reference to a black wing covering the valley. Dark forebodings
ensign	There's a Royal Banner		A flag or banner indicating allegiance
ether-plains	Tis Midnight and on Olive's Brow		The sky, heavens
ethereal	The Spacious Firmament on High		celestial, heavenly
ever-vernal	Beulah Land		always green (springlike)
fain	Beneath the Cross of Jesus		gladly, willingly
guerdon	Beautiful Isle of Somewhere		a reward
guild(ing)	Father and Friend thy Light, Give me the Bible, Watchman Tell us of the Nigh		to make bright & attractive
guilty pair	The Love of God		Adam & Even & their offspring
hoary	When the Crimson Sun is Set, The Love of God		Ancient, gray, old
hosanna			a cry for deliverance, Hebrew meaning, "Save I ask!" Also used in praise of Christ or God
I AM	On Zion's Glorious Summit, Our God He is Alive	Ex 3:14; Jn 8:58	Name for the everlasting God
Immanuel	Hark the Herald Angels Sing, Our King Immanuel, We're Marching to Zion	Is 7:14; Mt 1:23	Title given to Jesus meaning "God with us"
Jordan	On Jordan's Stormy Banks I Stand, Give me the Bible, Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah, He Leadeth Me, I am Bound for the Promised Land, Our Heavenly Father Understands, I won't have to cross Jordan alone, Sing On Ye Joyful Pilgrims		Symbolic of passing in death over into heaven. Other words used to convey the same meaning include: river, chilly tide, narrow sea, dark stream, shining river, gulf, death's chilly waters...
lays	In vain in high and holy lays, Rejoice in the Lord		short narratives or poems to be sung
Lilly of the Valley	Everybody Ought to Know, Lilly of the Valley	Song of Sol 2:1	Originally a beautiful plant surrounded by sweet fragrance used as a description of the beauty of a loved one. Meant as a reference to Christ
Lord Sabaoth		Rom 9:29; James 5:4	Hebrew word meaning, "Lord of Hosts" or "Lord of Armies"
Lower Lights	Let the Lower Lights be Burning		Christians Lights are not as crucial or bright as Gods, which is the lighthouse. Christians lights are the ones along the shore
Macedonian Call	Send the Light	Acts 16:9	Call received by Paul in a vision, a man from Macedonia said come over here and help us spread the Gospel
meet	Into the heart of Jesus		suitable, fitting, proper
moaning of the bar	Sunset and Evening Star,		Sound which ship makes when it scrapes against a sand bar. Difficult transition from harbor to sea, or from life to death

panoply	Soldiers of Christ Arise		a complete suit of armor
pinion	Night with Ebon Pinion		a wing
proffer	Heaven Came Down and Glory		offer
respite	Rock of Ages		interval of rest or relief
Rock of Ages	Rock of Ages	Is 24:6	Reference to Jesus as a pillar of strength
robe	Beautiful, Beulah Land, I am Praying for You, I'll Be List'ning, Mansions Over the Hilltop, O Think of the Home Over There, Shall We Gather at the River?, When He Comes in Glory By and By, Have You Been to Jesus, Lead Me to Calvary	Rev. 6:11; 7:9, 13	Garment worn by martyrs, or those who had their robes washed in the blood of the lamb
seraphim	Holy Holy Holy, Our King Immanuel	Isaiah 6:2	Winged creatures, taken together with cherubim, God's heavenly attendants that serve and worship Him
Siloam's fountains	Footprints of Jesus	Jn 9:7	Pool of Siloam, where Jesus healed a man
silver cord	Some Day the Silver Cord will Break	Eccl. 12:6	Cord which figuratively attaches soul to body, it's breaking signifies death
Song of Moses and the Lamb	Awake and Sing the Song, The New Song, On Jordan's Stormy Banks	Rev. 15:3-4	Those who conquered the beast sing a song of praise to God. This signifies song of victory or deliverance in heaven
supernal	I'll Live in Glory, Won't it be Wonderful There, Heaven Came Down and Glory Filled My Soul		Being or coming from Heaven
strand	Beautiful City of God, I Have Heard of a Land, Jesus Hold My Hand		the land bordering a sea, lake, river, or shore. Figuratively the far shores of the Jordan, or Heaven
trysting place	Beneath the Cross of Jesus		a meeting place, especially between lovers
un feigned			genuine
waft	We Have Heard the Joyful Sound, When all of God's Singers Get Home		To carry lightly or smoothly over water

**Exercise: Choose one of the following**

1. Choose a couple songs and lead them according to the principles learned in this lesson.
2. Choose five songs that might be used in a worship service, then
  - Identify how each song would be used in a worship service
  - Identify the purpose of each song (what does the song do?)