

Planning a Song Service⁴

I. Introduction

- A. Principles applicable for planning a song service is applicable to planning worship in general
- B. More about planning and shaping a worship service will be in the next section
- C. Often, there is not a "right" way or a "wrong" way, but perhaps a more "suitable" way to plan a song service or worship service.

II. Considerations in preparation for the song service

- A. Planning a Song Service - Two typical approaches:

- 1. Traditional Approach

- a. Song introduces the next part
 - b. Song before the prayer, song before the Lord's Supper, etc
 - c. Evaluation of this approach?
 - 1) Suggests the purpose of songs are merely to introduce the next part of worship
 - 2) The purpose of singing is more than just to serve as transition points in worship
 - 3) What about singing strictly for the purpose of worship, thanksgiving, praise, edification, etc?

- 2. Intellectual Approach

- a. The songs in the service fit a particular theme
 - b. Songs about prayer, or resurrection, giving, work, etc., depending on the theme of the service
 - c. Evaluation of this approach?
 - 1) This is perhaps better than the traditional approach
 - 2) This can have a tendency to turn song leaders into music preachers
 - 3) Songs "about" a particular topic usually are to teach
 - 4) But there should also be songs that actually perform functions of worship, such as thanksgiving, praise, etc. because worship is not merely an intellectual exercise

- B. Another approach: A balanced approach

- 1. Remember the purpose of the assembly

- a. Not merely to worship, New Testament does not teach

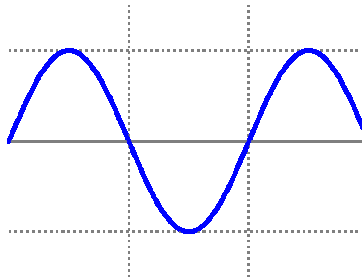
⁴ Much of this material comes from the instruction from the Singing School at Abilene Christian University and from unpublished printed material authored by Joe Ed Furr.

- anywhere that we assemble in order to worship
 - 1) One does not need to assemble to worship
 - 2) Worship can be done any time (Rom 12:1)
- b. Unique purpose of the assembly
 - 1) Heb 10:24-25 - Encouragement
 - 2) 1 Cor 14:26 - Edification
 - 3) 1 Cor 11:17, 22 - Is assembly a success or failure?
 - a. It is possible to come together for the worst
 - b. Assemblies are a failure when there is no building up of each other
 - 4) What is encouragement or edification?
 - a. Can define by what it is not
 - b. Opposite is discouragement
- 2. Several things to keep in mind about the power of music
 - a. Touches the heart strings in a unique way
 - b. Involves both intellect and emotion
 - 1) Intellect has to do with lyrics
 - 2) Emotion has to do with the dynamics of the music itself
 - c. Examples:
 - 1) Music enriches the emotionality of a movie, excitement, love, sadness, etc., movie producers will spend millions of dollars on a musical artist
 - 2) Prayerful songs are much more than spoken prayers, the music adds another dimension
 - 3) Singing with others is rich in emotionality
- 3. Plan a service that fits the unique nature of songs
 - a. Example
 - 1) Offer a prayer based on words only
 - 2) Offer a prayer based on both words AND music
 - a) One example is "Be with Me Lord"
 - b) One is expressive with a different dimension
 - b. Difference between mere saying and singing
 - 1) Prayerful songs are much more emotional
 - 2) Music touches emotions in a unique way
 - c. Since songs are rich in emotion, planning a song service should keep this in mind and utilize it appropriately
- 4. A good song leader has a certain level of emotional intelligence
 - a. Definition of emotional intelligence - The awareness a person possess of the emotional context of one's personal and social life
 - 1) It means you are in tune with the audience's mood
 - 2) It means you are aware of their tolerance levels

- 3) It means you have the ability to attentive
- 4) It means you have ability to be yourself and not fake
- b. Helps to make a better song service
- c. Essence of emotional intelligence
 - 1) Self awareness
 - a) How do I feel?
 - b) How should I feel?
 - 2) Can I alter it if necessary?
 - a) Be aware of it
 - b) Able to articulate it
 - c) This helps attentiveness to others
 - d) A good song leader has a certain amount of vulnerability in leading others to worship
 - 3) How do others around you feel?
 - a) Groups sometimes have a common emotional feeling
 - b) Happy, energetic, sad, mourning, etc.
 - c) Need to sense the collective feeling of a congregation
 - 4) How should the people feel?
 - a) A wedding is not the place for mourning
 - b) Funeral not the place for great joy
 - c) Assembly is place for mutual edification
 - 5) Is there anything I can do to develop the emotional feelings the church is to have?
 - You help shape emotions of the assembly

5. The emotional curve

- a. Under normal circumstances, emotions are never constant; they change over time
- b. Constant excitement or sorrow is not sustainable for an emotionally healthy person
- c. Emotions rise and fall in cycles through the day, like a sine wave



6. Tend to the emotional curve in worship

- a. Remember there are two dimensions to music
 - 1) Rational

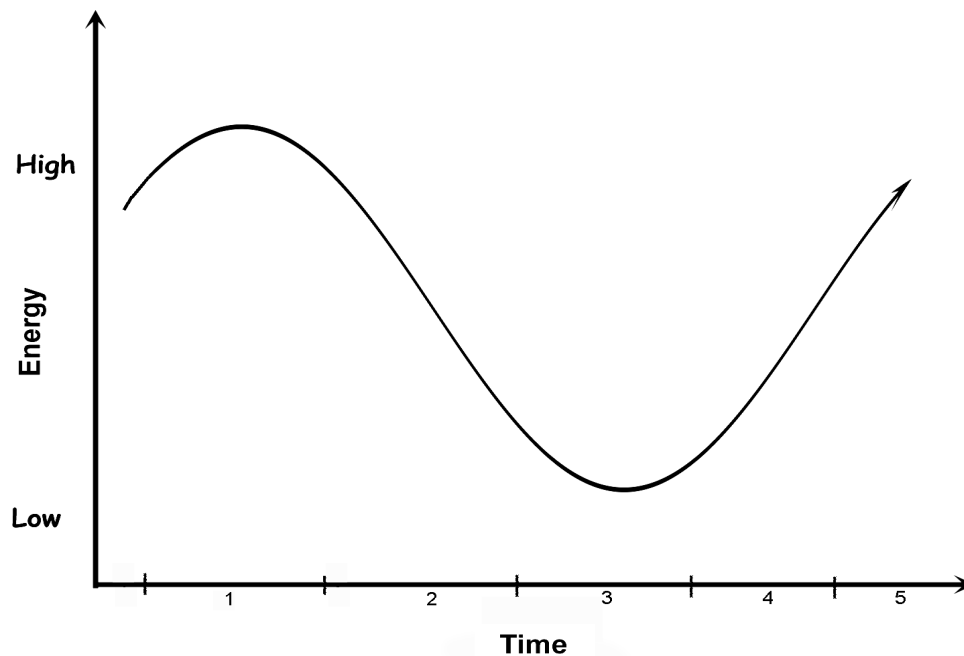
- 2) Emotional
- b. Our church culture
 - 1) Which is it strong and weak in?
 - 2) Typical in conservative, bible-based churches:
 - a) Strong in rational communications
 - b) Weak in emotional communications
- c. Emotion is an integral part of worship
 - 1) If we don't want emotion, throw away the music
 - 2) You could just read or chant the lyrics
 - 3) Remember that singing songs is not 2D, it is 3D

III. Emotionally Intelligent Song Planning

- A. A song service should fit in with biblical goals and objectives for assembling together
 - 1. Heb 10:24-25 - Stimulating to love and good deeds, encouraging
 - 2. 1 Cor 14:26 - Edification
 - 3. 1 Cor 11:17, 22 - The assembly can be a failure
 - a. It is a failure if it fails to meet its God-given purpose
 - 1) If people are bored, sleepy, apathetic
 - 2) If people are angry
 - b. If people are edified and encouraged in their faith, the assembly has been a success
 - 1) If people are motivated for greater service to God
 - 2) If people are motivated to be more godly
 - 3) If people are moved to love and good deeds
- B. Recognize the emotional curve
 - 1. A congregation usually cannot stay high the whole time
 - 2. It may not be suitable to stay low the whole time
 - 3. There will be peaks and valleys as appropriate
- C. Recognize the purposes of songs
 - 1. The praise song
 - a. Direct praise to God
 - b. Higher energy songs
 - 2. The worship song
 - a. Direct worship to God
 - b. Songs of more eloquence and beauty
 - c. Medium to low energy
 - 3. Petitions
 - a. Songs of confession or prayer to God
 - b. Usually lower energy
 - 4. The edification song
 - a. Songs addressed to one another

- b. Songs that teach, encourage, and motivate
- c. Usually medium to higher energy, but not always
- 5. Special Songs
 - a. Songs with special purposes or themes
 - b. Examples - Lord's Supper, Invitation Song, etc.

D. Here is a strategy using a single sine wave to mark various "phases" in worship (two to three songs in each phase depending on time)



1. Phase one: Songs of Praise

- a. Why praise?
 - 1) Praising the Lord fits in with the purpose of edification because the Lord is the source of our hope and strength
 - 2) Beginning with praise sets the tone for the worship
 - 3) The level where you start generally sets the upper limit for the entire service
- b. What is a praise song?
 - 1) Energetic focus on God and his deeds
 - 2) Two types of songs called praise songs
 - a) Songs directly addressed to God
 - b) Songs to one another
- c. On the sine wave
 - 1) Emotional mood takes time to develop, it is usually not instantaneous
 - 2) It starts medium high and builds momentum till it peaks
 - 3) Two to three songs, depending on the length of the service

- d. Usually better when standing for these songs
- e. Examples of some praise songs:

- Firm Foundation
- Great Are You Lord
- Hallelujah Praise Jehovah
- Nobody Fills My Heart Like Jesus
- O Lord Our Lord
- Shine, Jesus Shine
- You Are the Song That I Sing
- We Bring the Sacrifice of Praise
- We Praise Thee O God
- Worthy Art Thou

2. Phase Two: Songs of Worship

- a. Emotional intensity gives way to emotional richness
- b. High energy songs give way to slower richer songs
- c. Worship songs are emotionally intense in a different way
 - 1) Praise songs are exciting and enthusiastic
 - 2) Worship songs are more serious and reflective
- d. Examples of Some Worship Songs:

- As The Deer
- Blessed Be the Lord God Almighty
- Fairest Lord Jesus
- Father, I Adore You
- Highest Place
- How Great Thou Art
- Holy Holy Holy
- Majesty
- My Jesus I Love Thee
- Sacred Head

3. Phase Three: Petitions

- a. Petitions is where we can sing about our needs and bring them to God
- b. This is a good time to have a congregational prayer
- c. Songs need not be songs "about" prayer, but can be songs of prayer, or songs that remind us of God's attentiveness
- d. Emotionally, this phase is at the bottom of the sine wave as we are focusing on needs, not victories
- e. Examples of petition type songs:
 - Be With Me Lord
 - Create in Me
 - Dear Lord and Father of Mankind
 - God is So Good
 - God will make a way
 - I Need Thee Every Hour

- Jesus, Hold My Hand
- Prince of Peace! Control My Will
- Purer in Heart, O God
- Remind Me Dear Lord

4. Phase Four: Songs of Thanksgiving

- a. After sharing our burdens, it is appropriate to thank God for our blessings in life
- b. On the sine wave, the emotional level is building again
- c. After singing a couple of thanksgiving songs, it is appropriate to take the Lord's Supper
 - 1) The Lord's Supper is not to be a time of mourning
 - 2) It is a time of communion, and blessing
 - 3) We do so with expectation at the Lord's return
 - 4) Early Christian's referred to this as "thanksgiving"
- d. Examples of general thanksgiving songs
 - Father, We Thank Thee
 - Heavenly Father We Appreciate You
 - He has Made me Glad
 - Thank You, Lord!
 - We Bring the Sacrifice of Praise
- e. Examples of songs focused on Christ for the Lord's Supper
 - Come Share the Lord
 - Come to the Feast
 - I Stand Amazed
 - Jesus, Name above all Names
 - I Love the Lord

5. Phase Five: Encouragement Songs

- a. These are songs of "direct" encouragement
 - 1) Praise and worship songs encourage, but indirectly
 - 2) Direct encouragement songs are addressed directly to one another
 - 3) They may teach, encourage, remind, or motivate
- b. Examples of encouragement songs
 - Have you seen Jesus My Lord
 - Heavenly Sunlight
 - How Beautiful Heaven Must Be
 - I Love to Tell the Story
 - Nothing But the Blood
 - Paradise Valley
 - Send the Light
 - Sing and Be Happy
 - Sing On, Ye Joyful Pilgrims
 - Sing to Me of Heaven
 - Soldiers of Christ Arise

- Soon and Very Soon
- Trust and Obey
- c. Specialized encouragement songs
 - 1) Song before the lesson
 - a) Most like to try and find a song that matches the theme of the sermon
 - b) Many themes do not have songs
 - c) Songs of general encouragement are appropriate
 - 2) The invitation song
 - a) Two hundred years ago, there was no such thing as an invitation song
 - b) Invitation songs became popular in the American frontier for evangelistic preaching
 - 1] It was an emotional appeal for a decision
 - 2] Designed to move people to the "mourner's bench"
 - c) Invitation songs should be appropriate
 - 1] Sad, mournful invitation songs are not the best candidate for the conclusion of an upbeat encouragement lesson
example: "O heart bowed down with sorrow" after a lesson on Heaven
 - 2] Any song can potentially be a candidate to sing after the lesson
 - 3] If the appropriate song after a lesson is to praise God, then a song of praise would be appropriate
 - 3) The closing song
 - a) The climax of the assembly
 - b) Generally a high energy song
 - c) Typically an encouragement song or benediction song

IV. Some considerations to keep in mind

- A. The beginning sets the standard
 - 1. The energy level you start the service will usually set the ceiling on the energy level for the service. The ceiling is usually a little higher than the point where you start
 - 2. Beginning with low energy and finishing with high energy usually does not happen even with good song leaders
- B. Song leaders should free themselves to express the emotionality found in songs, this will help to free others to do the same

- C. Some song leaders are not comfortable with high-energy songs, or have difficulty with low-energy rich songs. A suggestion:
 - 1. Song leaders comfortable with high energy songs should lead singing during that phase of the service
 - 2. Song leaders comfortable with slower more meditative songs should lead singing during that phase of worship
 - 3. A "team" of song leaders in this way can attend to the emotional curve
- D. Too many breaks
 - 1. In order for the emotional curve to flow naturally there should not be a lot of breaks in the song service
 - 2. Too much editorializing between songs, or inserting something between each song chops up the continuity of the song service and the curve
- E. Songs with multiple parts
 - 1. Some songs have multiple parts and may be difficult to sing
 - 2. For songs such as this, having a song leader for each part will help to keep the congregation together on the song

V. Planning a service thematically

- A. There will be times when you want to plan the song service around a theme or a topic
 - 1. It is good to meet with song leaders and speakers
 - 2. Everyone needs to know where and how they fit in
- B. This does not mean there is no emotional curve
 - 1. Remember that singing is both rational and emotional
 - 2. All songs have both a rational message and an emotional appeal
- C. For the song service, make a list of all songs that fit with the theme.
 - 1. The list should be larger than the number you need so you can be selective
 - 2. The songs can be ordered according to their emotional intensity on the emotional curve and their theme

VI. Final note

- A. As in everything else, we should strive for excellence
- B. While it may be true that someone did not get anything out of worship because they put nothing into it, let us not allow this to be an excuse for poor or mediocre worship leadership

Exercise: Planning a Song Service

- Plan a song service using the emotional curve.
- You may do so thematically or not.
- The time allotted for singing in the service is about twenty minutes, so the length of the song service should fit in that time frame.
- Identify where each song falls on the curve and why you chose to use that song
- Identify the "type" of song used
- You may work individually, or with others as a "team"

