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PUTTING SONGS TOGETHER

Seven Things to Know

I. Introduction

- A. What principles should guide us as we select songs to sing in our congregational gatherings?
- B. More songs are available to us than any time in history.
 - 1. We can be grateful.
 - 2. We can be choosy.
 - a. Don't use.
 - b. Private use.
 - c. Could use.
 - d. Should use.
- C. These are guidelines, not iron clad rules.

II. **Know why NOT to choose a song. (not wrong to consider these, just not final determiners as to what truly builds a worshiping community)**

- A. This song always ministers to me. (personal preference)
- B. We've been doing this song for decades. (tradition)
- C. Most people in my church like this song. (popular opinion)
- D. My favorite worship artist just released an album and this is the song everyone is doing. (popular opinion)
- E. I can play it without having to check my chord book. (laziness)
- F. It's in the CCLI top 100. (lack of discernment and intentional care)
- G. I wrote it. (self-centeredness)
- H. This song always get people into a worshipful mood. (lack of theological understanding)
- I. Great beat, really gets people engaged. (misunderstands worship)
- J. It's in the same key as the other songs we're doing. (incomplete idea of flow)

III. Know Your Goals

Not aiming to simply move people emotionally, offer an appealing performance, or have a satisfying experience personally.

- A. To remember, proclaim, and celebrate God's worthiness, works, and word.

They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds, and I will declare your greatness. They shall pour forth the fame of your abundant goodness and shall sing aloud of your righteousness. (Ps. 145:6-7)

Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works! (Ps. 105:2)

My tongue will sing of your word, for all your commandments are right. (Ps. 119:172)

- B. To magnify God's glory in Jesus Christ in people's minds, hearts, and lives. To inform minds with gospel truth, move hearts with gospel implications, and motivate lives worthy of the gospel.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Col. 3:16-17)

IV. Know Your Songs (Recommend Choosing Songs Wisely from WG04)

- A. Be well acquainted with the lyrics of the songs you sing.

- B. Different ways to determine what a song communicates.

1. Chorus lyrics (How Great is Our God)
2. Verse lyrics (In Christ Alone)
3. Phrases
4. Repeated lines
5. Bridge (You give and take away)
6. First and last line (My hope is built on nothing less; His wounds have paid my ransom)
7. Music

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- C. Leading songs is a pastoral function before it's a musical one (Col. 3:16-17). To care for people's souls specifically, we need to move beyond thinking of songs in general but vague terms.
1. slow, medium, fast
 2. praise, worship
 3. hymn, chorus
 4. traditional, contemporary
 5. rockin', reflective, alt vibe, etc.
- D. Develop a "hymnal" approach to song themes:
- E. Learn the distinguishing aspects of songs with similar themes.
- EX CROSS:
When I Survey
Before the Throne of God Above
Amazing Grace
- EX PRAISE:
Everlasting God
How Great is Our God
How Great Thou Art
- EX SUFFERING/TRIALS:
My Hope is Built
Blessed Be Your Name
In Christ Alone
- F. Don't be restricted to what you've always thought a song said.
1. In different contexts songs can say different things. (Blessed Be Your Name done slower, hymn done more joyfully)
 2. Many songs say more than one thing, even while communicating an overall theme. (Praise to the Lord, the Almighty; In Christ Alone)
- G. If we're unsure what a song is saying, maybe we shouldn't sing it.
- H. Seek to broaden the categories and themes of the songs you sing.
1. indie ministries
 2. churches
 3. worshiptogether.com
 4. gettymusic.com
 5. igracemusic.com
 6. au.emumusic.com
 7. good hymnals
 8. writers in your church

V. Know Where to Start (after praying)

- A. What has already been decided?
 - 1. Your pastor wants to sing a specific song
 - 2. You follow a formal liturgy
 - 3. Your skills are limited
 - 4. Your instrumentation is limited
 - 5. Your church is limited
- B. What has God already been saying?
- C. What is the theme of this week's message?
- D. What might be on everyone's mind?
- E. What song do you want to teach, repeat, or bring back?
- F. What areas or themes is the church weak in?
 - 1. Lament
 - 2. Celebration
 - 3. Physical expressiveness
 - 4. Awe, etc.

VI. Know Your Progression

- A. Throughout the history of the church, coherency and progression have been the norm.
- B. If you don't know why your songs go together, don't expect the Holy Spirit to fill in the gaps, although often He does.
- C. Start with looking for a progression in each song.
 - 1. When we lead people in singing we are putting words, emotions, thoughts, perspectives, and responses into their mouths. It should make sense.

The Dadaist poets used to practice random poetry; they would cut up a book into separate words or sentences, throw them in the air and paste them together how they landed. Sometimes I suspect that many worship song writers use a similar approach. Throw a load of scripture verses in the air, let them land and then just glue them together. It's fridge-magnet poetry; not really lyric-writing, just rearranging verses to fit. (Nick Page, *And Now Let's Move Into a Time of Nonsense*, 89)

- D. Factors to consider when putting songs together
1. The gospel (adoration, confession, assurance of pardon, thanksgiving)
 2. Overall lyrical flow.
 3. Last line – first line
 4. Who the song addresses (Father, Jesus, Spirit, God, each other)
 5. Emotional progression (reflective, celebrative, reassuring, awe)
 6. Surrounding non-musical elements
 7. How much time you have

VII. Know Your Transitions

- A. Spoken comments (from WG09 seminar, “What Are You Talking About?”)
1. Magnify
 2. Apply
 3. Clarify
 4. Inspire
- B. Prayer (sincere, biblical, corporate)
- C. Scripture reading
- D. Musical
- E. Testimony
- F. Communion/Baptism/Offering
- G. None

VIII. Know Who You’re Leading

- A. Don't just think about songs - think about people.
1. A great group of songs may not serve the people you're leading.
 2. A song can be popular but not good for your congregation.
 3. Imagine yourself in the congregation being led in these songs.
- B. Some questions to ask:
1. How well do people know each song?
 2. How diverse is the congregation?
 3. How mature is the congregation?
 4. What does the congregation need to hear?
 5. What songs do you want the congregation to know well?
 6. What musical styles is the church used to?