

Principles of Worship

Dr. Jerry Nelson

The Biblically mandated elements of worship include prayer (1 Timothy 2:1,8), the reading (1 Timothy 3:13) and preaching (2 Timothy 4:2) of the Word, Giving (1 Corinthians 16:2) and the sacraments (Matthew 28:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24-26) in the context of the people of God.

Principle #1 Unity in Diversity – Many Members yet one Body.

An important way to express our oneness in Christ is in our worship – all ages worshipping together (“Unified” worship).

Galatians 3:28 “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

1 Corinthians 12:12-14 “For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many.”

For several years there has been a trend to tailor worship to meet the expectations of various age groups. But we are guided by a principle that says worship will not be about Builders, Boomers, Busters or Millenials but about the people of God, of all ages. Our worship should not be driven by what music or style or loudness or softness we like best. Mark Horst wrote, “As soon as we come to worship looking for and expecting an experience, we have violated the most basic principle of (worship). We easily become religious aesthetes capable of judging the entertainment value of a church service while remaining unaware of the reality it can open us to. Unfortunately for us, when our worship becomes self-conscious rather than God-conscious, it points not to God’s reality but (only to) our own.”

There are many places in the life of a church where groups based on age or life experience are both appropriate and necessary. We think there is value in our youth congregating separately for the purpose of study and fellowship that is unique to their age and place in life. Likewise, there are times when men meeting with men or women meeting with women are helpful ways to minister. **But where do we meet together as the diverse yet unified people we are by God’s grace?** Where do we experience the young and the old, men and women, married and singles, new believers and mature believers coming together? When the people of God are seen worshipping in both the Old and New Testaments, it is not by age grouping, marital status, spiritual maturity, or any other division – it is all of God’s people, regardless of differences, coming together to worship the Lord.

"While by nature "birds of a feather flock together," Christ's body invariably includes an unusual combination of quite disparate individuals, who have in common only their faith in and love for Christ. But that is the whole point! In order for corporate worship (unarguably the most important thing the church does together) to accurately reflect the nature and the unity of the body, it must include the people of God in all of their diversity, unified in the worship by the common focus of that worship: the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of glory... It is in our corporate worship of all places, as the most purely God-directed activity of the church, that our unity should be *most* in evidence. (From Ron Mann in "Blended Worship – Good for the Body")

When you read of the worship that will happen at the throne when Christ comes again, it is quite apparent there will be unified worship focused on who God is. We want our worship here and now to reflect the unity that is ours in Christ. *"Enthralled in the presence of the living Lord and Savior, we can expect to engage in the most glorious worship service of all time. No one has any sense of an "order of service." No one is conscious of any worship "style." The Father has set matters in order. The Son is the focus of all eyes. The Spirit prompts the singing of songs. From the lips of sinners saved by amazing grace come Hosannas to the King of kings and Lord of lords..."* (p155 [The Journey Home](#) Bill Bright)

Psalm 148:12-13 "Young men and maidens, old men and children. Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted"

Principle #2 Diversity in Unity – One Body yet many Members

An important way to express our diversity in Christ is in our worship – appreciating the richness and variety of God's people worshipping together and honoring one another in doing so ("Blended" worship).

"Praise the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the Lord (Psalm 150)

Might I call our God variegated? When I think of the variety God has given his universe, when I think of the colors, textures, sounds, creatures, and all else God has created, I begin to capture something of the infinity of our God. Our worship requires great variety to give it the richness our God deserves. No one of us is capable of expressing the worship that is due our God. No one of us has had all the experiences that reflect his goodness. Not any one age group or any other group of us can adequately remember and adequately express with sufficient creativity the worship our God deserves. But we forget that too easily.

Opposition to the way others express their worship is not new to the church. One group saw fit to express their disapproval of the new music entering the church in these words: *“There are several reasons for opposing it: It’s too new. It’s too worldly, even blasphemous. The new Christian music is not as pleasant as the more established style and because there are so many new songs you can’t learn them all. It puts too much emphasis on instrumental music rather than on godly lyrics. This new music creates disturbances, making people act disorderly. The preceding generation got along without out.”* Those comments were made in 1723 and they were made in criticism of Isaac Watts who wrote “Joy to the World” and “I sing the Mighty Power of God.” They were made because Watts was encouraging congregations to sing hymns in the church. (from David Hocking *The Joy of Worship* –23-24) These are the people who have forgotten that the infinity of our God deserves an ever-changing, ever-creative expression of worship.

No one music style, not several music styles, can possibly express all the glory of our God. C.S. Lewis wrote: *“I very much disliked (the church) hymns, which I considered to be fifth-rate poems set to sixth-rate music. But as I went on I saw the great merit of it. . . . I realized that the hymns (which were just sixth-rate music) were, nevertheless, being sung with devotion and benefit by an old saint in elastic-side boots in the opposite pew, and then you realize that you aren’t fit to clean those boots. It gets you out of your solitary conceit.”* Is God more pleased with hymns than choruses, more pleased with Michael W. Smith than Charles Wesley? When I look at Psalm 98 or Psalm 150 I see worship with a variety as great as: “harp, singing, trumpets, ram’s horns, rivers clapping, mountains singing, tambourines, dancing, strings and flutes and crashing cymbals. The issue isn’t “What kind of music do I like”, but what kind of worship does God like. And God likes worship from the heart – and worship from the heart will be as creative and varied as we are able.

One church has captured well the attitude that we desire: “Because we value *increasing in a humble willingness to support others whose tastes are different than ours*, we will put understanding above accusation, forbearance above faultfinding, and Biblical unity above the demand for uniformity. We will create opportunities for God’s reality to be conveyed more powerfully by learning to affirm the forms and styles that edify our brothers and sisters. Our relationships of love for each other will lead us to patiently support and rejoice with those who appreciate other styles, believing that God is able to meet us in the context of any Christ-exalting worship style.” (From Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, MN)

We need each other to bring the richness and variety to the worship our God deserves. Psalm 95:6 “Come, let **us** bow down in worship.

Philippians 2:3-4 “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Principle #3 Worship is for God

*Psalm 95:6 "Come, let us bow down in worship,
let us kneel before the LORD our Maker."*

Too often we think of worship mostly or solely in terms of how it impacts us rather than how it impacts God. And we are the losers when we do that. When we seek an experience we may get it but it will be empty and fleeting. Don Carson wrote, *"If you seek peace you will not find it; if you seek Christ, you will find peace. If you seek joy, you will not find it; if you seek Christ you will find joy. If you seek the experience of worship you will not find it; if you seek to worship the living God, you will experience" Him.*" (Carson p15) If we think of ourselves as the necessary beneficiaries of worship we won't truly worship. If we think of God as the beneficiary of worship, we will also benefit. One of the major reasons people argue about worship today is that they have the wrong person (themselves) in view. Worship is not about us; it is about God. We want to help people come into the presence of God and allow them time to interact with Him. We want people to consciously, intentionally think about God and engage Him in singing, praying, listening to His word, and vicariously interacting with Him through the testimonies of other.

We want to meet God together. We want to know his presence - to be reminded of his greatness and grace. We want to be with him, to enjoy his closeness – to know the security of his love. We want to express to him our affection and admiration and exuberant adulation. And we want to do this together. What would we do if Jesus chose to physically appear here this morning? We would stop talking – you and I would not be needed to speak his word. I think we would also instinctively kneel – only the truly infirm would not go to their knees. We would ask his forgiveness. And when he pulled us to our feet, we would delight in hearing him tell how much he loves us and that it was his love for us that took him to the cross. We would ask him to remind us about the future and he would. Then we would be unable to contain ourselves as we told how much we respect and love him. And the longer we spent in his presence the more likely we would tell stories about his provision for us in the past. Like the family gathered at Grandma's and Grandpa's 50th wedding anniversary - Everyone could hardly wait to tell why they appreciate him. "I remember when..." The stories of the past would be told and retold with the subtle but important differences that were each person's experience with Jesus. Somebody would remember a song that expressed our thoughts and love so well and we would gladly sing it. The style, instruments, and tempo would make no difference because these are personal expressions of love and thanks, which we are using as our own. Little kids would be allowed to sing or read even though the words or melodies weren't all that sophisticated or even that well done. No one would be judging the music for its quality but for its intent. And all of us would be saying, "Yes, that's what I feel too, Jesus." And it would happen because: Worship is about God

Read Leonard Payton "Congregational Singing and the Word of God" **AND** Robert Godfrey's "Pleasing God in our Worship" **AND** Charles Spurgeon's "Our Own Hymnbook" preface along with principles 4 & 5.

Principle #4 Worship is a response to revelation.

Our worship, including our songs, must be so biblical that they reveal God as he has revealed himself so that we may respond to him and not to a caricature of him. The church has a rich history of such creeds, readings and songs and by God's grace new expressions of the timeless truths of God are being written in each generation

Colossians 3:16-17 (NASB)

*"Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom **teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.** And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."*

I think Colossians 3:16-17 captures an idea that is expressed throughout the rest of the Bible that our songs should do two things, they should teach us and they should allow us to express our heartfelt emotion to God. Any song will be judged not by how it makes us feel but by how well it expresses the great truths about our God and how well it allows us to thank our God for them. It seems that the Psalms and the other songs of the Bible are at least a model for us of what our songs should be. Singing was to be a means of teaching us about God and expressing our response to him. In my study I haven't found one Psalm of praise (with the possible exception of Psalm 150) that did not spell out specifically what it was about God that caused the praise. Not every song can convey everything about God **but every song should convey something** – something that will elevate our understanding of God's person or work.

Jesus touches on the same idea when he says to the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4:23-24 "... a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and truth." The "spirit" here is not the human spirit but the Holy Spirit. "Spirit and truth" is one inseparable concept. It is worship empowered by the Spirit and **informed** by truth, the Revelation of God himself. But as I said, our songs should not only teach us about God, they should allow us to express our emotion to God. Again see Colossians 3:16: "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, **singing with thankfulness in your hearts** to God."

Worship is heartfelt! I don't mean it must necessarily be showy but it must be authentic. Praise is not so much an action as a reaction. Just as we pity those who are in love with love, so we would pity those who are enthralled with praise. I want us to encounter God, he will enthrall us and we will respond. Praise is not a product but a by-product. Just as we pity those who are in love with love, so we would pity those who are enthralled with praise. I want people to encounter God, he will enthrall them and they will respond. That is why I say I

want our worship leading to put people into the presence of God and leave them there. “Sir, we would see Jesus!” (John 12:21 KJV)

Our worship, including our songs, must be so biblical that they reveal God as he has revealed himself so that we may respond to him and not to a caricature of him. The church has a rich history of such creeds, readings and songs and by God’s grace new expressions of the timeless truths of God are being written in each generation

Psalm 96:2 “*Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day.*”

Principle #5 Our Worship Themes each week are determined by our doctrine.

Because we believe worship is response to revelation (God reveals himself in his word and we respond to him – see Principle #4), our worship each week will center on a particular aspect of God’s person and/or work. In order to teach and respond to the broad range of truth about our God, our worship themes are drawn from our doctrinal statement, which reflects our understanding of the essential biblical truths about God’s person and work. The songs we sing should convey enough truth about God to be worth memorizing and singing both privately and publicly. They should reflect the fullness of our God’s person and work. Not necessarily on any one Sunday but over many weeks, the songs should reflect the breadth of our God’s character and grace.

“I once examined the entire worship music repertoire of my congregation, most of which I had inherited, placing each song under one of three biblical categories: (1) “teaching”; (2) “admonition”; and (3) singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” Of some four hundred praise choruses and hymns, I found that most of them fit within category three, with about thirty in category one, and fewer than ten in category two. This may reflect our American spirit—the notion that we are free and that nobody can tell us what to do, least of all a worship leader. A new gnosticism has crept in, convincing us that feeling good is an inextricable component of orthodoxy. Admonition just does not fit “orthopathos,” an orthodoxy of shared feelings and experiences.

Having stumbled onto this feature of my own congregation’s worship music diet, I then went to the 150 Psalms to see what the proportions of these categories would be. I read the Psalms with three colored highlighters in hand. I used one highlighter to mark teaching, one for admonition, and one for gratitude to God. More skillful Bible scholars I will anticipate what I found: There was simply no way to separate the categories. Consider Psalm 103. The way we “bless the Lord” is to reel off a *long* list of blessings:

- He forgives all our iniquities
- He heals all our diseases
- He redeems our lives from destruction

- He crowns us with lovingkindness and compassion
- He satisfies our years with good things, and so on

Later in this psalm, it becomes clear that these blessings are given to those who fear the Lord. Taken together, we have a song of gratitude to God that teaches us about God's provision and further admonishes us to fear the Lord. This is the nature of true biblical worship music. The glorification of God and the edification of the saints occur concurrently. Worship music functions as an integral part of the teaching ministry. Pulpit preaching has greater power to explain the text more logically, but music has greater power to *inculcate* the text, to take the text more profoundly into other parts of the hearer's being. (Page 2 of "How Shall we Sing to God?" by Leonard Payton)

The words we take upon our lips to sing to God must be true and pleasing to him. The Cambridge Declaration reminds us that one of the problems we face today is what we sing: "Pastors have neglected their rightful oversight of worship, including the doctrinal content of music." How can we be sure that the words we sing please God? God has given us direction by giving us in the Bible a whole book as a model for what we are to sing. The Book of Psalms (which in Hebrew is entitled the Book of Praises) provides us with songs that God himself has inspired. The Psalms should at least function as the model for what we as Christians sing to God.

Principle #6 Worship is both for the head and from the heart.

Worship is not only correct thoughts about God but correct thoughts expressed to God. Some of the heat generated in the worship wars is over the issues of substance versus style. Some will argue that the old hymns are stuffy and lifeless. Others will argue that the new songs are trite and shallow. Some want content while others want energy. Almost every Psalm in the Old Testament combines passion with content. The Psalmist uses emotive words of excitement or reverence to express specific things about the Lord. He wrote, "My heart yearns for you" (emotion) because you are shelter and you are strength (content). Knowledge without emotion is sterile. And emotion without knowledge is futile.

"A young man falls in love with a young woman. He begins to whistle a tune as he walks down the sidewalk. Then he sings. He believes that he has never seen a day more beautiful than today the sky, the trees the people. Now he is skipping, almost dancing down the sidewalk. "Young man, do you know what you are doing?" someone asks. "What good will all this singing, dancing and joy do you?" What a silly, impertinent question to ask of someone who is in love. Of course he doesn't know what he is doing, and that's just the fun of it... If it is only thought it isn't good worship... Worship is a way of being in love, of glorifying and enjoying the One of whom we can say, "We love, because he first loved us." (Willimon p63)

On the other hand imagine the young man saying to his girlfriend, "I love you, I love you, I love you." And then she asks him what it is he loves about her. He responds, "I don't know, I just love you!" She would have

every right to say, “Go away – that is nonsense.” Some people fear emotionalism, others fear deadness. Bishop Moule of England was supposed to have said he finds it easier to tone down a fanatic than to resurrect a corpse. Do you know why we sing so much in church? Because music expresses a range of emotions better than almost any other activity. Or as William Willimon said it, *“Prose is usually too confining for the joyful business” of worship.* (With Glad and Generous Hearts p60)

We are able to take our thoughts (content) and express them to God from our hearts (emotion). Expressed emotions of wild enthusiasm are every bit as valid as emotions of quiet adoration. And conversely, expressed emotions of speechless awe are every bit as valid as dancing before the Lord. Worship has content and emotion. C.S. Lewis wrote, *“The most obvious fact about praise, whether of God or anything, strangely escaped me. I thought of it in terms of compliment, approval or the giving of honor. I had not noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise... I had not noticed that just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it... Delight is incomplete until it is expressed...”* (Reflections on the Psalms p 93-95 in Piper p37) John Piper added, *“There is the solution! We praise what we enjoy because the delight is incomplete until it is expressed in praise... So if God loves us enough to make our joy full, he must not only give us himself; he must also win from us the praise of our hearts – not because he needs to shore up some weakness in himself or compensate for some deficiency, but because he loves us and seeks the fullness of our joy that can be found only in knowing and praising him, the most magnificent of all Beings.”* (Desiring God p37)

Principle #7 We want to provide, over time, for the full range of biblical emotions to praise our God.

“Joy and reverence reflect the character of God, who is just and merciful, holy and loving. Worship that is only joyful serves a God stripped of half his attributes... It severs Law from Gospel and repentance from faith.” (W. Robert Godfrey “The Reformation of Worship” in Here We Stand by Boice and Sasse, 1996)

Using the Psalms (the Bible’s hymnbook) as our guide, we discover the wide range of moods that form appropriate responses to our God. Thanksgiving, celebration, awe, contemplation, lament, anger, fear, and repentance among others are expressed in the Psalms. Our desire is to provide for a range of emotional responses to match the themes. (e.g. The holiness of God presented in reverential tones while the second coming of Christ is presented in celebrative tones.)

What do the Psalms teach about song? First, they remind us of the rich variety of songs that we can and should present to God. The Psalms contain joyful praise and thanksgiving. The Psalms are called the Book of Praises because they not only contain but also culminate in the praise of God (see especially Pss. 146—150.) But the Psalms contain more than praise. Some Psalms reflect on creation (for example, Pss. 19 and 104); others recount the great saving work of God in Christ (Pss. 2, 22, 24, and

110); still others meditate on the perfections of God's revealed Word (especially Ps. 119). There are Psalms of lamentation and repentance (Pss. 32, 51, and 137) as well as Psalms that express the confusion and frustration that God's people sometimes experience living in this fallen world (Pss. 44 and 73). John Calvin rightly observed about the Psalter, "There is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here presented as in a mirror." In some churches today it seems that only happy, joyful songs are sung. But joy is not the only emotion that Christians experience. Christian worship needs to provide times when sad or reflective emotions are expressed as well as happy ones. A variety of song texts, as we find them in the Psalter, are crucial for that purpose. Second, the Psalms also model for us the substance of our singing. A few Psalms are short and have repetitive elements, but most are full, rich, profound responses to God and his work. Singing praise to God, the Psalter reminds us, is not just emotional expression, but a real engagement of the mind. Songs that are very repetitive or shallow and sentimental do not follow the model of the Psalter. The command to love God with all our mind must inform our singing. Mind and emotions together are the model of praise presented to us in the Psalms, and the modern church must work at restoring that union where it has been lost. (Robert Godfrey, *Pleasing God in our Worship*)

Principle #8 The music should fit the lyrics.

Not every song can match the music to the words as well as the "Hallelujah Chorus" or "A Mighty Fortress is our God," but it should be our aim. **"What tunes shall we sing?"** We may use any tune that is singable for a congregation and that supports the content of the song. The tune should reflect the mood and substance of the song in light of the joy and reverence that are appropriate to worship. With those guidelines in mind (and a sensitivity to the congregation's difficulty with change), the issue of tunes for songs should be resolved smoothly. (From *Pleasing God in our Worship* by Robert Godfrey)

Principle #9 The primary instruments in worship are the voices of the people.

"What kind of musical accompaniment is biblical?" In Old Testament worship a wide range of instruments was used in the worship of the temple. Yet in the worship of the church it appears that for almost the first thousand years of its history no instruments were used in Christian worship. Today most churches use one or more instruments. But where instruments are used, **the instruments should aid the singing of the congregation, not overwhelm it.** They should contribute to a deep spirit of reverence and joy, not undermine it. (From *Pleasing God in our Worship* by Robert Godfrey)

Principle #10 The music and lyrics should be sing-able by a congregation.

The lyrics of songs are usually in the form of poetry, which enhances their beauty and enables easier memorization. But care must be given to not use overly unfamiliar or stilted language, which inhibits the understanding and expression. Likewise the music can be too complicated or awkward making it hard to follow or learn. Creativity and even ‘beauty’ will sometimes be sacrificed to allow for singability.

Principle #11 The music and lyrics should be easy to remember.

What songs will our children and we know from memory in the years to come? What songs will inform their and our thoughts and be the basis of our private worship? I want our worship to become unself-conscious.

C.S.Lewis wrote, *“As long as you notice and have to count the steps, you are not yet dancing but only learning to dance. A good shoe is a shoe you don’t have to notice. Good reading becomes possible when you need not consciously think about ...print or spelling. The perfect church service would be one we were almost unaware of; our attention would have been on God.”* (Letter to Malcolm, 4)

Principle #12 Musical genre matters.

Just as contemporary music is to be presented in a contemporary fashion so historic music is to be presented in historic fashion. Much of contemporary music would not sound “right” sung to classical instruments in classical styles. Likewise some of the stately hymns of the past would not sound “right” sung to jazz instruments or distorted guitars and trap sets.

Principle #13 An established repertoire of songs greatly aids in reflecting on, responding to and remembering the fullness of God’s person and work. (Also see Principles #5 and #7 above)

Because singing is an important expression of worship, because songs ought to convey truth about God and **because songs are a primary means of teaching the truths of God**, it is important that we have a basic repertoire that covers the major aspects of the gospel. **Songs and singing are primary means of discipleship.** Luther, Spurgeon, and many others have commented that the hymnal is the second most important book in a Christian’s experience because biblical truth set to music is such a powerful tool of instruction.

For these reasons we have developed a “core” list of hymns and other songs that we will sing with greater frequency so that they can hopefully be learned and remembered and become part of the internal spiritual repertoire of the people of SGC.

Charles Spurgeon wrote: *“Our congregation has distinctive features which are not suited by any hymnal known to us. We thought it best to issue a (hymnal) which would contain the cream of the books already in use among us, together with the best of all others extant up to the hour of going to press; and having sought a blessing upon the project, we set about it with all our might, and at last have brought it to a conclusion. Our best diligence has been given to the work, and we have spared no expense: may God’s richest blessing rest upon the result of our arduous labours! Unto His glory we dedicate “Our Own Hymn-Book.” The*

*range of subjects is very extensive, comprising not only direct praise, but doctrine, experience, and exhortation; thus enabling the saints according to apostolical command to edify one another in their songs. **If any object that some of the hymns are penitential or doctrinal, and therefore unfit to be sung, we reply that we find examples of such in the Book of Psalms, which we have made our model in compiling or work; there we have Maschils as well as hosannahs, and penitential odes as well as hallelujahs. We have not been able to fall in with modern scruples, but have rested content with ancient precedents. We have not cast about for models suggested by the transient fancy of the hour, but have followed the indications given us the word of God and in the long-established usage of the universal church; desiring to be obedient to the sacred precept, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom: teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."** Charles Spurgeon from preface to "Our Own Hymnal."*

Principle #14 The Word of God will be central in our worship.

In Preaching: Preaching will be thoughtful exposition and explication of the word. Paul wrote to Pastor Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:2-5 "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

In Nehemiah's day we read, Nehemiah 8:8 "They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read."

It is true that sermons should be true, clear, interesting and relevant but they must also be substantive. We will not cater to the idea that people today cannot listen to intelligent speech, cannot understand the English language, cannot learn except through pictures or movies, and that everything must be a felt experience.

"The unspoken but increasingly common assumption of today's Christendom is that worship is primarily for us – to meet our needs. Such worship services are entertainment focused, and the worshipers are uncommitted spectators who are silently grading the performance. From this perspective, preaching becomes a homiletics of consensus – preaching to felt needs – man's conscious agenda instead of God's. Such preaching is always topical and never textual. Biblical information is minimized, and the sermons are short and full of stories. Anything and everything that is suspected of making the marginal attendee uncomfortable is removed from the service, whether it be a registration card or a 'mere' creed. Taken to the nth degree, this philosophy instills a tragic self-centeredness. That is, everything is judged by how it affects (the person). This terribly corrupts one's theology." (Kent Hughes, [Disciplines of a Godly Man](#), 106)

In Reading: We will read significant portions of the Holy Scriptures as part of our worship. Nehemiah 8:2 is descriptive of the place of scripture reading in

worship. “Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly... (and) He read it aloud from daybreak till noon...in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.” This second text is prescriptive: 1 Timothy 4:13 “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.

We will not succumb to a sound-byte culture. Just as in a pre-literate culture the Bible had to be read aloud to meet the needs of the people, so in a post-literate culture, when people no longer are willing to read, the Bible needs to be read aloud so that we hear the Word of God.

In Singing: As stated in Principles # 4 and 5

Principle #15 Offerings are a part of corporate worship.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, 1 Corinthians 16:2 “On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income...” We want to give opportunity for God’s people to publicly express their gratitude for God’s grace by giving sacrificially from what God has given us. Thus we will encourage regular giving in the public worship services as the best expression of the worship of giving.

Principle #16 Corporate prayer is an essential part of worship

In 1 Timothy 2:1 we read, “I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone-- for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.” Prayers will not be kept short to accommodate the short attention spans of people nor will they be inordinately long just to prove a point and lap over into vain repetitions. Such prayers will often include adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication or petition.

Principle #17 We are part of the people of God from history past and need to be reminded of that connection and learn from it.

We learn from God’s people of the past through the creeds, confessions, hymns and writings that have enriched the church for centuries. The Apostles used such material in the very writing of the New Testament. We find them in several places such as Philippians 2 and 2 Timothy 2:11-13.

It seems evident that not only in Scripture but also throughout the ages, short summaries of the faith have been important to God’s people to capture the essence of their faith and make it easily remembered. I desire for all of us to have at least some of these summaries committed to memory. Many have asked why we recite the Apostles’ Creed, the Ten Commandments, the Great Command and the Lord’s Prayer. It is because we need a ready answer for certain fundamental questions that get raised by every generation.

Emmanuel Kant asked:

1. What can I know? (Creed)

2. What shall I do? (Commandments)
3. What may I hope? (Prayer)

Thomas Aquinas said we must know:

1. What to believe.
2. How to live.
3. What to pray for.

These are the core issues of life and they are answered in the Creed, the Commandments and the Prayer – answers that come from the love of God to His “cross”-loved people. (See Peter Kreeft in [Knowing the Truth of God's Love](#) 1988 p44-47)

As noted above, the hymns of the church (past) are a significant part of that literature with which the church (present) needs to connect. Our worship is enriched by the worship of the past.

Principle #18 The Lord's Supper is central to our worship

The Lord's Supper is a central expression of the Gospel message on which our lives depend and for which our praise is greatest. Luke 22:19 “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.” Cf 1 Corinthians 11 A preacher cannot preach all the important themes and texts of the Bible and still adequately address the cross and resurrection in every sermon. Therefore, by celebrating communion more often we can more often focus our attention on that great central theme of the gospel.

Communion is also an important means of grace. As we participate in the Lord's Supper, humbly seeking the Lord Jesus in faith, he comes to us in the bread and cup. No, he is not **physically** present, but he is really, truly and personally **spiritually** present.

Pastor and theologian, Robert Letham, wrote, “Thus in the (Lord's Supper) the Holy Spirit unites the faithful (people) to the person of Christ as they eat and drink the signs, the physical elements of bread and wine. There is an inseparable (joining) of sign and reality. As truly as we eat the bread and drink the wine, so we feed on Christ by faith... The role of those who take the bread and cup is, therefore, to believe and receive. (Robert Letham, [The Lord's Supper](#), 28-29)

When we eat the bread and drink the wine, Jesus says it is like eating his flesh and drinking his blood. In other words, by faith we are taking him in, trusting him, reaffirming our faith, declaring anew our belief and trust in him. And in that he ministers his grace to us to believe. There is a mysterious synergy in this that we cannot fully explain. He offers us himself in the bread and cup. We obey and eat and drink, believing him. He ministers his grace to us to trust him more fully.

Other Notes:

Resources:

"Blended Worship Good for the Body" by Ron Mann
"Congregational Singing and the Ministry of the Word" by Leonard Payton
"Pleasing God in our Worship," "The Reformation of Worship" by Robert Godfrey
"Biblical Worship" Douglas VanDorn
Worship by the Book by D.A. Carson
Discipling Music Ministry by Calvin Johansson
A Royal Waste of Time and Reaching Out without Dumbing Down by Marva Dawn
The Ultimate Priority by John MacArthur
In Search of Wonder by Anderson
Christ, Baptism and the Lord's Supper by VanderZee
Keeping the Sabbath Wholly by Marva Dawn
 Other books by Harold Best, Robert Webber, Ray Ortland, Warren Wiersbe, et al.

"Genuine worship is a response to divine truth. It is passionate because it arises out of our love for God. But to be true worship it must also arise out of a correct understanding of his law, his righteousness, his mercy and his being. Real worship acknowledges God as he has revealed himself in his word." (John MacArthur, "How Shall We Then Worship" in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, 184)

A song that contains revelation and response:

O Worship the King

O worship the King, all glorious above
 O gratefully sing His wonderful love
 Our Shield and Defender, the Ancient of Days
 Pavilioned in splendor, and girded with praise

You alone are the matchless King
 To You alone be all majesty
 Your glories and wonder, what tongue can recite?
 You breathe in the air, You shine in the light

O measureless might, ineffable love
 While angels delight to worship above
 Thy mercies how tender, how firm to the end
 Our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and Friend.

The following is one that, from my perspective, **doesn't** include "revelation" and response – it is all response, but to what?

LET MY WORDS BE FEW

You are God in heaven
 And here am I on earth
 So I'll let my words be few
 Jesus I am so in love with You

And I'll stand in awe of You
 Yes I'll stand in awe of You
 And I'll let my words be few
 Jesus I am so in love with You
 The simplest of all love songs
 I want to bring to You
 So I'll let my words be few
 Jesus I am so in love with You
 (Chorus)(Chorus)
 And I'll let my words be few
 Jesus, I am so in love with You.

Here's another song that doesn't match the above principles.

Draw Me Close

Draw me close to you, never let me go,
 I lay it all down again,
 To hear You say that I'm Your friend.
 You are my desire, no one else will do,
 'Cause no one else can take Your place,
 To feel the warmth of Your embrace
 Help me find the way, bring me back to you.
 You're all I want,
 You're all I've ever needed,
 You're all I want,
 Help me know You are near.
 (repeated several times)

Who are we talking about in the above song, God or some lost lover?
 What I have discovered is that many "praise" choruses are only response. They put response into words but they don't tell us what we are responding to – they don't tell us much about our God. **My contention is that we won't have to tell people as much how to respond if we show them God.** The words of a worship song should follow the biblical pattern that praises God **for** something – for his character and his works.

Let me show you two other songs that illustrate the unfortunate difference between songs that say something and those that don't.

WHAT A FRIEND I'VE FOUND

What a friend I've found,
 Closer than a brother;
 I have felt Your touch,
 More intimate than lovers.
 Jesus, Jesus,
 Jesus, friend forever.
 What a hope I've found,

More faithful than a mother;
 It would break my heart,
 To ever lose each other.
 (chorus)(verse 1-instrumental)
 (chorus)(chorus)(chorus)
 What a friend I've found,
 Closer than a brother.
 (chorus)

Our Great Savior

Jesus! What a friend for sinners
 Jesus! Lover of my soul
 Friends may fail me, foes assail me,
 He, my Savior makes me whole.

Jesus! What a strength in weakness!
 Let me hide myself in Him;
 Tempted, tried, and sometimes failing,
 He, my strength, my victory wins.

Jesus! What a help in sorrow!
 While the billows o'er me roll,
 Even when my heart is breaking,
 He, my comfort, helps my soul

Colossians 3:16 "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with **psalms and hymns and spiritual songs**, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Psalms quite admittedly refers to the Older Testament Psalms

Hymns might be a synonym for the Psalms (The word is used that way in the LXX and in such passages as 2 Samuel 6:5; 22:1) but just as likely is a reference to Christians songs, some of which we find in the NT – e.g. Philippians 2:6-10

"Who, being in very nature God,
 did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
 PHP 2:7 but made himself nothing,
 taking the very nature of a servant,
 being made in human likeness.
 PHP 2:8 And being found in appearance as a man,
 he humbled himself
 and became obedient to death--
 even death on a cross!
 PHP 2:9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
 and gave him the name that is above every name,
 PHP 2:10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
 in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

Cf. Colossians 1:15-20; 1 Timothy 3:16; Ephesians 5:14; Luke 1 Magnificat and Benedictus. It is apparent from church history that hymns other than the Psalms were used in the church.

Spiritual songs might be unpremeditated, spontaneous, words sung “in the Spirit”.

Eg. Revelation 4:11 ““You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”

Revelation 5:9,12,13 "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"

"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"

And in all three kinds of songs, singing it is to be done in gratitude, thankfulness to God. It expresses and elicits praise of God. It doesn't praise “praise” or just make the singer feel good; it flows out of gratitude and expresses it to God. And that it is “in your hearts” means it is rooted in personal experience – it is heart worship not just lip service.

The **instructional and meditation** value of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs has been recognized throughout the generations. The Levitical musicians of the Older Testament wrote the songs, led the people in worship in the Temple but the rest of the year they were scattered throughout Israel very likely teaching the great truths of God through their music. A levitical musician didn't reach maturity until age 30 (unlike the unspecialized Levite) as we see in 1 Chronicles 23:3, 5, and 24. Every revival of spiritual life in the past 2000 years has been accompanied by songs that spoke of who God is and what he has done. The monastic orders of the middle ages, the reformation, the revivals of Whitfield and Wesley, even the Jesus People movement of the 60s and 70s. Every major movement of the Spirit of God has been accompanied by music that taught the truths of God. Luther, Wesley, Spurgeon and others knew that the Hymn book (meaning the body of songs that the people sang) was second only to the Bible in importance to spiritual vitality of the people.

D. G. Hart in an article entitled, “Post-Modern Evangelical Worship”

“Indeed, contemporary worship – and church life for that matter – depends increasingly on the products of pop culture... Rather than growing up and adopting the broader range of experience that characterizes adulthood, evangelicals...want to recover and perpetuate the experiences of adolescence.”
(Calvin Theological Journal 3- (1995) 454)

“To great sections of the church the art of worship has been lost entirely, and in its place has come that strange and foreign thing called the ‘program.’ This word has been borrowed from the stage and applied with sad wisdom to the type of public service which now passes for worship among us.” (A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, 9)

Two personal preferences:

1. My personal preference is that disproportionately we use songs of the church from history past.

Thousands of songs for worship of God have been written throughout history. The OT suggests there are many songs that are not recorded in the biblical Psalter. Apparently only relatively few of them survived. Throughout church history since the resurrection of Christ, thousands more have been written. But again only relatively few have remained as part of the church’s music literature. History and God’s people have been the means over time of selecting and retaining, for the most part, only the better songs from the past. But those relatively few are solid both lyrically and musically. They both express great truth about God but also allow for great expression to God. In addition, as noted above, they are a good connection with the people of God of the past.

Thousands of songs have been written by each generation including our own. Of those “contemporary” songs, of our own generation, only relatively few will survive into the next generation or generations beyond.

If we are going to select the “best of the best” of the songs of all generations, it seems to me that more (but certainly not all) of those songs will come from the past than from the present. **Thus I believe our music should be “anchored in the church’s historic worship and seasoned with the fresh winds of the Spirit’s movement in the present.”**

2. The music (in contrast to the words commented on elsewhere) should reflect the character of God. There is music that better reflects the character of God and thus is better suited for worship than other music.

I do not believe that all music or forms are neutral. For example, some music is unfit for worship in the present because of its current connections to ungodly lifestyles and themes. I suggest that “rock” music initially fit into this category, as would “hip-hop” today. The genres were so associated with ungodliness, at least for a period of time that it is unsuitable for worship for many people.

Another reason I do not believe all music forms are neutral is because I also believe there is music that is more beautiful than other music (even if such beauty is only determined by popular consent). Our

God is worthy of the best we can do. In addition, I suspect that beauty is not only in the eye of the beholder or in the ear of the listener but located/defined objectively in the created order.

For centuries, church music, though constantly changing, was a distinctive music not just lyrically but musically. It was recognized by all that different kinds of music fit best in different contexts and church music was a genre of its own. Now it seems that the criterion driving new church music is how closely it can approximate the music of the other contexts. Thus many church musicians are apparently intentionally “chasing” the latest styles of music to bring them into the church. I contend that this is largely driven by the “church-growth mindset of the last 30 years. We began to see the church gathered not as God’s people meeting for worship and edification in connection with the people of God historically and universally but as gathered for outreach to the non-Christian. Such a church would do nothing (including music) that would seem strange to the non-Christian.

If the primary purpose of music is worship and edification and the worship and edification of all ages (unified worship) then we must select music (as well as lyrics) that can best encourage such worship.

Public Worship in the Bible is set on the first day of the week:

The resurrection was on the first day of the week. The followers of Jesus met on the first day of the week.

Acts 20:7 “On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight.

John refers to this as “The Lord’s Day”

Revelation 1:10 “On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit,

1 Corinthians 16:2 “On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.

We don’t think of how we can get worship “over with” but how we can set aside a day to reflect on our God, gather with his people, and do acts of service. A Sabbath is a privilege not a chore.

“The true, the genuine worship is when (people), through their spirits, attain to friendship and intimacy with God. True and genuine worship is not to come to a certain place; it is not to go through a certain ritual or liturgy; it is not even to bring a certain gift. True worship is when the spirit, the immortal and invisible part of (the person) speaks to and meets with God, who is immortal and invisible.”

(William Barclay, [The Gospel of John](#), Vol 1, 154)

“It is not very sound theology to confine a man’s thoughts so much to himself, and not to set before him, as the prime motive of his existence, zeal to illustrate the glory of God. For we are born first of all for God, and not for ourselves.” (John Calvin, Reply to Sadoleto , 58)