

Worship and Music, I

We are going to look at music today. We will start by talking about the relationship between pastors and musicians. Most churches of any size, from small to large, have somebody who is a key music person. The person may be a volunteer, an accompanist, or a paid staff person who is part time or full time. Because music is such a key element of a worship service and because it carries content, it is important that the pastor and the musician be well coordinated in approaching, planning, and being able to carry out the service. They should not have to stop in the middle of the service and ask questions about how the music should be done. The service needs to have the Gospel progress through it without distraction. With that introduction, let me pray.

Father, we thank You for this day. We pray that as we continue to look together at the different components and elements of worship that Your Holy Spirit would lead, teach, instruct, and change us. We ask this not only in our views but in our practice of worship and our capacity to be faithful underservants of Christ in serving and shepherding Your people. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

We are happy to have Claudia Wootton with us today. She and her husband are here at the seminary. They just finished their first year. Claudia is going to tell us a little bit about what she did before she came to Covenant Seminary:

Claudia: I got my degree in music at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) in 1994, and I taught for a little while. Then in 1998 I was part of a church plant in Norfolk, Virginia. I ended up leading worship there until we came here in 2005. I led worship there for seven years and did worship and arts. It was a combination of leading the musicians and arranging the music. I also worked on the aesthetics of the bulletins, fliers, and anything else that went into the worship service. My pastor was Jack Howell, who graduated here in 1998. He and I were a team as far as public worship went. He and I met once a month to plan the worship for that month. We talked about all the components of the liturgy, not just the music. We talked about what we would want to use for the Scripture for the call to worship. We wrote the confessions together. He helped me choose the music as much as I did. We worked on Gospel-centered, content-driven worship services. I would implement them with the team on Sunday morning.

I asked Claudia shortly before they moved here if she would serve in the student services office in helping with the chapel program particularly. One of the things we have tried to do at Covenant Seminary is to make the chapel worship services actual worship services and not just another opportunity to hear a professor speak or give a lecture. We have several students who are very gifted musically. But we did not have someone coordinating the efforts of finding musicians, building teams of them, rehearsing with them, and getting them to commit to various chapel services. That is the assignment that I gave Claudia: move forward in that area of helping us with chapel at the seminary. We have worked together over the last year, planning two chapel services a week. I have benefited very much from her seven years of work with Jack Howell. That is combined with my own experience of working with different music people and pastors over the years. We have seen that the potential for how we approach things and the resources we draw on are partly the fruit of those other places we have been, and we are now able to apply those experiences in the seminary context.

Claudia is going to tell us about why it is important for the pastor and musician to communicate well and be on the same page with things. She is also going to address some of the dangers of not doing this:

Claudia: One of the things that is important for pastors to remember is that whoever is coordinating your worship is implementing your vision and the vision of the session. It is imperative that whoever is up front on Sunday morning is drawn into the vision. That happens in fellowship with the pastor and musician, discipling of the musician by the pastor, not only in the vision but also in spiritual growth, leadership skills, and growing in their gifts. The real benefit to me has been my spiritual growth under pastors who have poured their lives into me as somebody who was leading this aspect of the service. For a church plant, public worship is very important. So it was an honor for me to have pastors love on me, care for me, and help me grow in my gifts. They helped me grow in my understanding of theology and the Word enough that I would want to come here and get a degree. Sometimes the pastor lays out the formula for worship and gives the musician three blanks. The musician has to come up with the three songs to fill in the blank on his or her own. I see a real breakdown in partnership, loyalty, and vision with this. When people in the congregation approach the musician, he or she cannot express the vision to the congregants. Likewise the pastor cannot express why the music has been chosen. After the sermon, the music is going to be the most criticized thing in a church. Therefore it is important that a pastor take that responsibility seriously. For his own sake, he should not just allow a musician to work apart from him. I have grown because my pastors have taken the time to meet with me. This has also benefited the churches that I have been a part of, and it has benefited the chapel services here.

One of the things I have found to be important is that pastors need to grow in their understanding and appreciation of music and the role that it has in worship. Previously we discussed that Calvin understood that music has power to stir the heart in worship of God. Because it has such power, it cannot just be raw power out there on its own. It needs to serve the Gospel purposes, as we have talked about. Musicians can help disciple and train pastors in music appreciation and in understanding when to use what song in a service. A song may have great words that serve what is going on in that place in the service, but musically it may not fit or work. Maybe a song would be better for special music because it is too difficult for a congregation to learn. A song may have an association with other kinds of things that in this context would not work very well. It can be very important to help a pastor gain understanding and insight as to how music works in worship and what expectations are realistic. As Claudia has mentioned on the other side, sometimes you have musicians who think that what they bring to the table is just their musical gift. They do not want to be bothered with theology. The more pastors learn about music without trying to usurp the role of the musician, and the more the musician learns about theology without trying to usurp the role of the pastor, then the more overlap, interconnectedness, and togetherness in planning that takes place. There is error on both sides of that in the church. One of the things that I find myself wanting to urge future pastors to do is to care for, love, appreciate, learn from, and encourage their music people.

I know from years in pastoral ministry that probably the most difficult time was Sunday afternoon and Monday morning. I felt like I did not do all I could have done. I could have preached that sermon better. All it takes is one or two people to tell you that on the way past you or to ignore you, hug the wall as they walk by, and not even make eye contact. You wonder what is going on with that person and conclude that it had to have been you. I am very self-critical in those situations. Musicians also feel this way. They put themselves out there. A word of encouragement is very important. Everywhere I have gone, even at wedding receptions where someone is just playing background music, I have tried to make a point of going up and expressing appreciation to the musician. Often they are missed if they are not there, but they are not noticed when they are there. I like to try and give an encouraging word, as anyone would appreciate when leading other aspects of worship.

Claudia: The importance of the pastoral relationship with me is that when I am feeling really vulnerable it is my fellow staff that I need to hear from. I appreciate congregants who are very nice or sometimes quiet about the music, but I also need to hear from that really trusted ear. Mark is going to really tell me how worship was and how it pulled off. I need that criticism, and I trust him. That is because we have met together. We have a relationship, and we have established rapport and commitment to one another.

What has been your experience when there has been disagreement between you and the pastor or conflict over what to do or what not to do? How do you handle that?

Claudia: One of the things that I run into a little bit as far as worship goes is the amount of subjectivity in worship. That has led to many conflicts with the pastor. He might like a song that I do not like. My friend Mark really likes some songs that I do not like! There are some songs that I do not want to do in my postmodern, artistic subjectivity. But I realize that I have to be flexible in that. I find that those conflicts tend to be more about my own personal preference or personal preferences of the pastor. They are not about broadening our scope to the needs of the congregation, the themes, or the really positive aspects of certain music. I will say one of the things that I have really appreciated from the pastors whom I have worked with is the ability to dig in and engage in real conflict. We have been able to really argue it out. I like that. If we want to talk about a song, I am not going to hide my feelings and easily give in. I need you to really sell me on why this song is good enough to do in public worship 20 years after it was written. And I will tell the pastor why I think it is bad now.

I will not name the songs, but there is a president's welcome reception that has a worship time related to it. I am now in the eighth year, and the two songs that were always done in that I continued to do. One was a hymn and one was a chorus. Claudia came last year, never having been to one of these before. She looked at the chorus one and said, "Are you kidding? Why would we ever do that, now, 20 years after it was written?" It is one of those classic choruses that I do happen to like. I think it has withstood the test of time. The thing I appreciated about Claudia is she said, "For incoming students, that would not connect as well as some other songs might. Do you really want to set this as your initial experience of the students in terms of what you are trying to do in the chapel?" So she came up with an alternative, which is "Before the Throne of God Above." It is a wonderful song that is an old hymn with a great tune. The combination of doing that song with "Be Thou My Vision" really improved the service. All I was doing was carrying over, somewhat uncritically, what had come before. Claudia had a fresh set of eyes as an incoming student herself who was willing to challenge me. She knew that I was not going to fire her that day for challenging me on something. The goal was not to get her way but to make something more honoring to God and edifying to the congregation.

Claudia: In that regard one of the ways that we protect each other is that in working together we keep it from becoming a cult of personality. People cannot blame me for the music because my pastor and I have worked on it together. The session may have said what they want us to do. In that way I am protected. I really appreciate that. In that story, Mark can attest that I said, "If you ultimately want to do that song, I will do it." I made my opinion known with the caveat that I still valued his opinion as the authority. If he wanted to do it, we would sing it. But I appreciated that he let us change it.

What is helpful to a musician from a pastor regarding the sermon and the vision for the service? How far in advance is it helpful to get that?

Claudia: I will start by saying, as a musician, it was really helpful for me to read Bryan Chapell's book, *Christ-Centered Preaching*. My pastor had me read that right from the start. When he gave me something that said FCF, it helped me understand what that meant. It was the fallen condition focus of the passage. He would give me the text of the Bible passage, the FCF's, the proposition, and the points in a blurb. From that we would start working on the whole service. He usually did sermon series from books, so I knew the passages well in advance. As much as I would like to say that he got me the information about his sermons well in advance, I never find that that really happens. Usually that day at the meeting we get it, and we start brainstorming together. It is a big collaborative moment. Because I was busy, even if he got them to me earlier, I am not sure I would have looked at them. Part of the fun was getting to the moment and seeing what we were going to do. I always read the Scripture ahead of time because I knew where we were going. It was logically through the Scripture. The other thing that I used to do for pastors, which I would suggest, is help my pastor remember testimonies, baptisms, and other vows or oaths that we had going on. I kept the calendar for that so that he did not have to worry about it. When we came in that morning I would tell him if we had a baptism that week, a testimony, a mission's moment, or if we needed to do an announcement about a women's retreat. Those things all became part of the liturgy. The overall flow of the worship was well thought out before Sunday.

Something has come up in some discussions among pastors and worship leaders recently. The dynamic we are talking about between pastor and musician also includes a third party in most churches, which is the session or the elders. Sometimes the struggle is not necessarily between the pastor and the musician. It is between the pastor and the elders who are not necessarily agreeing. There may be back-door pressure on the musician to try and get at the pastor. Can you speak to the importance of all three of those entities having some communication and being in unity?

Claudia: That is part of being Presbyterian. One story in my past is that the pastor and I had been working closely on developing my new contract. I worked 30 hours a week, and we were talking about the salary and all of the information about that. He and I came to a place of agreement, and he wanted me to come to the meeting with the session about the budget. We had come up with one figure, but the pastor was not talking. One man on the session started to speak up. He came in with a figure that was way below and said, "This is what we have decided on as a session." I burst into tears, looked at the pastor, and said, "I cannot tell you how betrayed I feel right now by you. Why are you not saying anything?" Right in that moment I realized that I had to have a relationship with these men. I want to submit to them, to know them, and to know their vision. And I want them to know me and to care for me. That cannot happen only through the gateway of the pastor. After that I met quarterly with the session to debrief worship. How was public worship going? How was I doing in my job? What did they think about me? How was I feeling? How was my relationship with the pastor? All of that was laid out on the table every three months. Ultimately that benefited the church. Again, in a church plant, vision is so important. It became not just Jack and I doing the vision gate keeping. The session better knew what we were trying to do in worship. It is better to collaborate with the pastor and the session rather than just the pastor.

How do you figure out what to pay a music person, especially if he or she is part time? What is the process of deciding that, and what are some principles to go by?

Claudia: I have worked on a music contract several times. What is so great for pastors is that

they have salary ranges that are publicized. So when a church calls a pastor, they know what the normative range is for their church size and location. With worship, that is not the case. This was also a learning experience for my pastor. He had me call other churches, gather all the information, and put together what I thought was a fair package. I would not suggest that. I think it is better if the pastor or the session does that. It does require the research, though. I was in Virginia doing worship for 30 hours a week. I had started off at 10 hours a week and each year the job and the hours grew. The job expanded to include women's ministry and other things. One worship director in Virginia was making \$65,000 a year. And another one was making \$5,000! At that point as the worship person, I said, "For my family's sake, here is what we need, and here is what I think is really fair." I felt like it was not a negotiating deal. It was the bare minimum that my family could afford. We loved the church, we loved the plant, and we had been part of it from the beginning. We were not trying to milk it for anything. Ultimately, after the big conflict they came up way over what I even asked for. That was a nice gesture.

There are a lot of variables in this. In a church that I pastored, the person doing music was paid a very small amount to be an accompanist. Then the job started growing. She became a choir director, formed an ensemble of musicians to play weekly, and did all kinds of things that kept growing the job to the point where it was almost 20 hours a week. But she was still being paid pretty much the accompanist wages. She was glad to do it and loved to do it, but it grew into something in which if she moved away the church would have a big hole to fill. She was a gifted person doing this work 20 hours a week, but there was nothing in the budget to pay anybody else to do it. You can all figure out your own standard to go by. It seems that every committed member of a local church is willing to work 3-5 hours a week in something they really love doing and want to do. In that case, it probably is not something for which you want to put them on the church staff and pay them. Once it begins to go above that 5 hours and it requires a certain skill set that needs training and gifting, you really need to build that into your budget. You have to call around and figure out what people are doing. Usually in my experience in the smaller part-time jobs, it is well under-compensated, under-appreciated, and under-valued. That is something that should grow as the job does. Some people work hard and love working hard; they do not mind volunteering. Then someone else may be doing a job somewhere else in the life of the church for which they are getting paid. But the music job may really be far more important. It is hard to deal with disappointment when you know you are doing something that is worthy of more compensation. But you do not want to complain; you do not know who your advocate is. You might bump up against a session that is talking about tight budgets and cutbacks. Yet they want this program to expand. We have to be careful, or we will presume upon people where it moves from legitimate volunteering to a real staff position.

Claudia: That is right. As a rule of thumb in our church we asked whether a person is doing above and beyond what God has called them to do in the church. It will come up, not just with your worship leader, but with others. For example, are you paying your guitarist? How often are they playing? We tried to do an average of how many hours our lay people were doing to see if this person was really doing above and beyond what God has called them to do in the church. Likewise, as the worship and arts director, I realized that I was not getting paid for every hour that I was working for the church. I am still a church member. Part of that requires that the Lord has asked me to serve the church. It is not just a vocation. So I would always ask if this person was going above and beyond the normal. If so, can we cut back? Are we not allowing other people to serve because this person is serving too much? The sound technician is a good example of this. Sound is very complicated. If you have somebody who is really good and knows what he or she is doing, it may be worth paying a sound person to run your soundboard every week. That way the church does not have a different volunteer every week. If the people

cannot hear what is happening, then nothing is happening. Sound is really important.

I was also going to mention what Mark said about the different gradients of what this job could look like. There are some people who are in an accompanist role. Some are choir directors. Some churches have chief musicians, which means they do not arrange music or conduct choirs. It is the lowest level of doing worship as a director. They are in charge of the musicians. This person is a skilled musician who does not want to work for the church as far as theology or vision. Some people who have chief musicians also have a worship director. Under them there are some churches that have multiple people in the worship department. One may be the worship director or coordinator. This person does the liturgy planning, overseeing, arranging of teams, leading, shepherding, gifting, and discipling. Under that person there might be a chief musician who practically helps lead the Sunday mornings. Those would be different kinds of pay scales. There are also people who are ordained pastors who also do worship and arts. There are different levels.

Let me talk about some ways I got to know the session better. I met with them quarterly. We had a very small session made up of the pastor, the assistant pastor, a guy who was a friend of ours, and an older man. He was part of that earlier meeting that I mentioned before. My family came to a place where we needed mature wisdom and advice, so my husband and I went to them as congregants. I had come to a place in which I had to get to know the session as a congregant and not just as a worker. They really became our parents. They are the ones who funded my CD and helped us do a budget. They are supporting us to be here. That relationship really changed, not just at the staff level, but in what it looked like for a shepherd to shepherd. And I was willing to be shepherded by the session. That is when that relationship started to change, when I went to them willing to be shepherded.

Thank you for joining us, Claudia. I look forward to ongoing work with you, including the redemptive conflict that inevitably will arise. Let me just speak to that briefly. There are people with whom you have conflict and it never gets resolved. There is always tension, and you are always cautious in your approach to them. What I mean by redemptive conflict is that there is a love, acceptance, trust, and desire to resolve the tension. There is a willingness to push through and realize you can have conflict and still get along because you are serving a vision that is bigger than both of you. That is important, not just in this relationship, but as you work with other staff. This applies to working with elders, deacons, and with your wife and kids. It is a principle of facing things honestly in the light of the Gospel and saying, "Lord we all need to be shaped to be more like Christ. Where am I missing it? How does this conflict force me to look at something in my own life? I do not just want to make him or her not cause this tension in my life." We should push through, especially if you keep bumping into a problem area. Love covers a multitude of sins, but if you have to keep covering it and it keeps getting bigger, then you need to find a way to address it gently and lovingly.

Claudia and I talked a lot about vision and what we wanted to do at chapel. We also talked about a level of implementing things and found that we were on very similar pages. That looms large, so the little things, like a choice of song, remain little. We know we share a vision. We want the incoming students to be engaged and drawn in by that first experience of something sung in chapel. We were on the same page, so we just asked how to get there. When you put it in that larger context, sometimes the things we fight for are pretty petty.

Claudia: Conflict is always a good opportunity for repentance and growth. As Mark and I talk

about our conflict together, that is what has happened. We come to the table willing to repent and ask how the Lord is trying to teach me or grow me. As Dan Allender says, “Do not waste your pain.” In some of the churches, I have friends who are in really tough relationships with their pastors. I would encourage pastors to lead in repentance. The pastor seems like the untouchable authority. Many musicians are wrongly silently growing in bitterness. They feel that they have lost their voice with the pastor. They have lost a voice in the vision, in the implementation, and even in fellowship and love. It is important for the pastor to be willing to be wrong. It helps for everybody to have a voice, be heard, and grow in more love for each other.

Thank You, Claudia. We are continuing to talk about worship and music. One of the things that Luther and Calvin in particular felt strongly about is that music would be used of God to help reform the church. They wanted the restoring of song to the people, singing the Word of God, and singing Word-centered and Christ-centered hymns. There is a quote from *World Magazine* years ago by George Grant. He is one of the pastors at Christ Community Church. He said, “Ours is a singing faith. At every turn on every occasion and on every age, the Christian church has been marked by a prolific love of music. Wherever the Gospel has been preaching, it has simultaneously been sung. Wherever the praises of our God have been expressed in words, they have simultaneously been expressed in melodies. As a result, some of the most glorious music ever produced has been the fruit of faithful worship. According to Martin Luther, next to the Word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in this world.” That sums up well the value, importance, and phenomenon of music accompanying the movement of the Gospel in the history of the church. Usually when there is revival and reformation, there is an outpouring of new musical expressions of song for worship.

Music is ultimately a creational gift from God. God gave the command to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, subdue it, and rule over it. This includes all kinds of development, discovery, and innovative putting together of resources that God has made. This is to be done in ways that can be harnessed to glorify God and be a blessing to people. That was God’s intention for music. It is interesting that music was developed in the line of Cain. Genesis 4:20-22 says, “Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. His brother’s name was Jubal; he was the father of all who play the harp and flute. Zillah also had a son, Tubal-Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron.” The Scripture shows us that the development of the creation (be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, subdue it, and rule over it) is still taking place. This is in spite of the fact that the people in the line of Cain develop creational giftedness and resources in a way that was not necessarily to the glory of God. It is an interesting dynamic. They are described as those who raise flocks, play music, and make tools. There are three large categories that summarize ways that the culture mandate, despite rebellion and sin, is nonetheless being fulfilled in these areas. Musical gifts are to be offered to God in both corporate worship and all of life. Different kinds of music fit different settings and contexts of life. They are not all the same.

Music is a heightened expression of the spoken word. John Frame says, “Music is closely related to the spoken word. Human speech has natural music about it. Rhythm, timber, and pitch play important roles in verbal communication and not only in tonal languages. In one sense, then, all language is musical. When we enhance the natural music with well-crafted melodies, harmonies, and instruments, our words often take on a new kind of vitality.” My analogy is telling my wife, Beth, that I love her. If I say that I love her with little enthusiasm, I will not get a great response. But if I say it through writing a song for her, it will be special even if it is corny. There is something about music being able to carry an expression in a way that more fully engages us.

Let us talk about the power of music. There is a quote from Calvin that says, “The psalms could insight

us to raise our hearts to God to move us with such ardor that we exult through praises the glory of His name. And truly we know through experience that song has great force and vigor to move and enflame hearts to invoke and praise God with a more lively and ardent zeal.” In the book by Larry Roff called *Let us Sing* he says, “Music has the power to create and intensify emotions to engage the memory.” The only song I ever wrote my entire life was while driving a long trip with two of my children from Pennsylvania to Indiana. I was trying to teach them to memorize Galatians 5:22. It says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” So I created a simple little tune that helped them to memorize it. It is not worthy to even be sung, but it accomplished passing the time while learning a Scripture verse. It was committed to memory because music has a way of engaging the memory. I find a lot of times in working with older people who have some form of dementia or Alzheimer’s that they cannot even remember their name. But in a worship time if you are singing a well-loved hymn from years ago, all of a sudden they will break into song. They will sing all four stanzas of a song, yet after it is over they still do not remember their name. There is something about music that touches us deeply and emotionally. It activates the imagination and comforts the soul. A lot of times in hospital rooms with people who are in a coma it is good to sing to them, read Scripture to them, and pray with them. We should not just assume that there is nothing going on there. Sometimes song is what can break through to people in those challenging times.

It is important to harness the power of music to the glory of God and the Gospel. It is not just to feel good about what a great song that was. We should not seek to be moved by music as a goal in itself, which would tend toward emotionalism. It would be like saying our goal is to go to worship so we can have certain feelings. Instead music should move us toward God and His Word. It is a movement of the Spirit that uses music as a means toward a greater goal rather than being an end in itself. That is an important thing that we need to keep in mind. The excellence of music carries the message more powerfully. Excellence is not the ultimate goal, but it is an important means toward the ultimate goal of the glory of God. Excellence has a measure of subjectivity to it. It is valued and understood to be excellent differently in different settings. If you have never heard a French horn and then somebody plays it, you might initially think that it is a strange-sounding instrument. But if you learn what it takes to play the French horn and hear it with other instruments and song in a way that is done beautifully, then you have come to appreciate the excellence that is there to serve something greater.

There is an a cappella men’s chorus that I sing in called Ambassadors of Harmony. At our Christmas show last year we did five shows, and Saturday afternoon and evening were two of them. We have a great arrangement of “Go, Tell It on the Mountain” with 150 men singing four-part harmony. A quartet comes out partway through, sings, and then we join with them. When you are singing a cappella, excellence is partly defined by maintaining the pitch and not going flat, which normally is what happens when you sing a cappella. The energy of the song is carried by the excellence of the singing. In the afternoon show, we flatted “Go, Tell It on the Mountain” by almost a half step. People politely responded and expressed appreciation. In the evening show we sharpened it by about a quarter step. That is actually a good thing in a cappella, choral singing. It was the same words and same notes, but it had greater excellence of musicianship. At the end of the song, the people responded by standing up and cheering in response to the communication of the message. The message got across better because of the excellence. They did not have pitch meters to know whether we flatted it or not. A response like that just happens. The carrying of the power of the music with the excellence of musicianship is something that is there. To strive for that is important. The level to which you can accomplish that is going to vary from place to place. It is based on who your musicians are and how gifted they are.

There is a great musical story of a man who was a missionary to Alaska; he planted a church there. He ended up gathering a lot of people who came to his church because he was willing to care for the

downcast and the outcast. One of their Sunday school teachers was a former prostitute, and the piano player was a former alcoholic blind man. There were a lot of downcast people who had been rescued, by the grace of God, from devastation. They were not engaged in sharing the Gospel and living out their lives to the glory of God. There was a family whom they discovered who had a daughter who had some sort of disease that made her wheelchair-bound. She could not speak except to make some grunts and groans. She had a chalkboard hung around her neck that she would write on to try to communicate to people. Her family did not want to have much of anything to do with her because of her condition. They gave her minimal care physically. The pastor and his family would pick her up and bring her to the evening worship service on Sundays. She loved that and responded to the Gospel. Though she could not do much for herself, she loved being there and was engaged in worship to the degree that she could be. One Sunday night in the period of time during which the pastor asked if anyone had a testimony to share or a song to sing, she raised her hand. She was able to communicate that she wanted to sing as a solo the song "Amazing Grace." The pastor did not quite know how this was going to come off. He turned to the blind pianist and asked if he could play "Amazing Grace." He played it, and with grunts and groans as best as she could, to the sound of "Amazing Grace," she sang a solo. Talk about worshipping in Spirit and truth to the glory of God. There was power of music in that moment to convey the message in a way that transcended almost any other way of doing it. It was not from a raw musicianship and excellence; you could not even understand the words she was singing let alone the notes being anywhere near the pitch. But it did not matter whatsoever. It was a heart of love for God that was expressed in that music. You may not have amazing musical talent in your church, but to have people sing from the heart with as much musical excellence as they are capable and willing to work toward improving in is really the most you can ask for. God will take that and use it in great ways.

I heard another story of a chaplain in a state park for a summer. He would never know who was going to come to the worship service on any given Sunday. He was not musically trained himself. He would prepare the devotional and ask if there was anyone there who could play the piano. One Sunday the only volunteer he got was someone who said she could not play very well but she could pluck out the melody line on the piano for the congregation to sing. So the chaplain asked her to come up and use her gift to aid them in their worship of God. He found out after the service that there was a concert pianist who was in attendance who was unwilling to volunteer to use his gifts. There was greater excellence in the room by far. But it is not just being excellent; it is having the willing heart to serve. This other person knew she was not very good, but she could do something. As far as anyone knew, she could do the most of anyone in the room. So excellence is important in the way that it powerfully carries the message, but it is not the whole thing in our worship.

There is an article in the Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society in which a guy named Steven Guthrie makes a case that music itself as music, by God's design, has a role to play in our sanctification. He does an historical study of music and Augustine's view of it. He also does some exegesis of the Ephesians 5 passage to make his point. I find it fascinating, though I am not sure I completely understand or agree with it. I think he makes a valid point that is worthy of consideration. In Ephesians 5:19-20 we read, "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Part of what he is saying here is that the content is the psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. But there is something about taking those words and making music in your heart with them that has an impact in shaping and forming you to be more like what you are singing about. It is in the context of being, in a sense, an outgrowth of the answer to drunkenness in verse 18. "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart." In many of Paul's letters, he talks about putting off one aspect of the sinful nature and putting on another aspect of being in Christ and filled with the

Spirit. If you look at the context, there is a relationship between drunkenness and the rest of the passage. “Do not get drunk on wine [...] instead be filled with the Spirit.”

One of the ways and means of being filled with the Spirit that God has given us is the singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. I knew a pastor who spoke to a youth retreat that I was at one time. He said when he is called and has to go to the hospital in an emergency room, not knowing what he is going to face, he would sing a little song that said, “Fill me Jesus, fill me now.” It was a crying out to be filled. It was a simple little chorus that he would sing on the way to the hospital. He found that God used the singing of that song, making music in his heart, to remind him of his dependence upon God and his need to be an instrument of God as he went into an unknown crisis situation. It was part of what God used to make him what He wanted him to be. If this is true, even to a small degree, think about the importance of the songs we select for the congregation to sing in corporate public worship. We want to encourage them to understand the shaping and sanctifying dimension of what the music itself does in connection with the Word. Guthrie is almost giving a quasi-sacramental means of grace dimension to the music of singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. He says, “Music makes its own distinctive contribution to Christian life and worship. Whatever support music may offer words, however it may highlight, reinforce, or enhance the text, music itself, the music of music, is used in the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.” That is a high view of the role of music in worship. It is consistent with some of what Calvin said. This is something God wants us to do in worship. We are not doing it; we need to be doing it because of its power to stir our hearts to love God. In a sense, Guthrie is standing in a Calvinistic tradition against Zwingli. What Calvin said about that may be against some others later in the history of even Presbyterianism that diminished the role of music.

The part of Guthrie’s statement that makes me pause a little bit is the idea of music as music. He is not saying it is disconnected from the words; they are inseparably related. But in trying to make his point of the power, use, and sanctifying work of music, at times the article tends to almost separate it from the content. I do not think he means to do that. It is one of those things where I cannot find anything wrong with it. If it is true, it is a tremendous thing that reinforces a whole lot of things I believe. It is almost like it is too good to be true. So I wonder if some exegetes would look at that and understand it differently. We want to make sure we keep content with music. I think Guthrie would completely agree with that, but he is isolating the music of music. Then you have to reconnect with the context of worship. The music in the heart and the psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are inseparably linked in the passage. We have looked before at Colossians 3:16, which says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.” This passage, starting at verse 15, talks about the peace of Christ ruling in your hearts, the Word of Christ dwelling in you richly, and there is gratitude in your hearts. It is a peace, Word, song in the heart combination that comes together. I agree with Guthrie that it is a means that God uses to powerfully shape us when serving the purposes of Gospel-centered worship and Christ-centered content. But the content must have primacy over expression. I do not want to accuse him of saying something other than that. But he is separating out also alongside of content the very vehicle through which that content is going. It is as though you separate things to analyze them, but sometimes people take that and keep them separated. So the rejoining of content and music is important.

The purpose of music is to sanctify us, not just to make us feel good about enjoying music and making an idol of it. It has a role as a tool and means that God uses toward a greater goal. Similarly, the goal of worship is not the sermon; the goal of worship is greater Christ-likeness and glory to God. The sermon is a vital part that is used toward that goal. The sermon is a means of grace toward the goal of greater Christ-likeness to the glory of God. Music, the sacraments, prayers, and the reading of Scripture are all means, not ends. As worship planners and leaders we have not accomplished what the purposes of

worship are by just selecting things and doing things. We cannot say we have honored the regulative principle because we have not gone to the right or to the left of what God wants in a worship service. If so, we have forgotten that these are means of grace toward Christ-likeness and the glory of God. We need to think about this as we prepare sermons or a pastoral prayer. And how we end a service is important, too. The commissioning side of the worship service often gets short-changed in most services I go to. There is a quick benediction at the end, but not necessarily a lot of sending out. One of the things I try to do at the end of the Lord's Supper is to have a Scripture passage of exhortation. I often will use Ephesians 4:32, saying, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." I urge people toward one another in forgiveness as we have now received it. Or I will say from Ephesians 5, "Be imitators of God, therefore, having come to His table and been renewed in the grace of the covenant. Now go and be imitators of God as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." We send them out the other six days of the week to live worshipful lives in every area and dimension of their lives. We need to carry them forward and into life.