

Purposeful Praise: How We Sing

INTRODUCTION

We've been in a study for a couple of weeks called "Purposeful Praise."

- **We've discussed WHY we sing.** Looking at the reality that songs are expressions of love, gratitude, thanks, and praise in response to who God is and what He has done. The importance here is that we don't sing to and for ourselves but to magnify, praise, and remember God. It was Satan who made "self" the center of music, wrapping music in pride, but when the people of God redeemed music, it was used to magnify and glorify him.
- **Last week, we discussed WHAT we sing.** The words and content of our songs matter because they teach us and emotionally connect us to God and Who He is.
 - We talked about singing things that engage both of motions and our intellect, our spirits and our minds.
 - I discussed concerns about mixing worship and praise with mystic practices or spiritual patterns that are designed to create a trance-like state that empties the mind rather than filling it with truth.
 - I know I took a jab at some of the modern worship that tends to choose **repetition** over **theological clarity**.
 - As I mentioned, I'm not against repetition. It's how we memorize things and how specific ideas can be established in our minds. Don't feel like I was saying there is some biblical prohibition of repeating certain phrases or choruses. My greater concern is that many songs today are written in order to sell and top the charts, not communicate important truth and engage the mind.

- Easter religion tends to use chanting and mass repetition to create a state of disconnection from thinking, and I think Christians ought to be cautious about using patterns that encourage mindlessness of mindfulness.
- Dr. Herbert Benson, a Harvard Medical School professor, researched the effects of repetitive meditation in Eastern religious traditions. He made an interesting reservation: "**Repetition, whether of a sound or word... is key to activating the body's relaxation response. However, this often requires a passive attitude—something more closely aligned with Eastern practices than with active, engaged thought.**"
- One neuroscientific study using EEGs to study brainwaves during chanting revealed that, "**repetitive chanting lowers brainwave frequencies, which can induce a state of detachment or calm. This effect can decrease the need for critical thought, sometimes encouraging passive mental states.**"
- Additionally, I meant no disrespect or judgment of people's hearts in their expressions of worship in the modern worship movement. I did want to point out that sometimes music can be so powerful that one can create emotional, sincere engagement from people merely through music and melody, often using lyrical content that is incredibly shallow or conveying ideas that may or may not be consistent with biblical truth.
- But, just in case it came across as too critical, I want to emphasize the importance again of being fully engaged, emotionally, spiritually, and mentally, in worship. If anything, most of the hard-ground worship for corporate worship should be done behind the scenes by pastors and worship leaders so the congregation can feel safe in the worship environment without having to constantly worry or be overly critical of every song they sing.

So today, we will move to our next subject and discuss HOW we sing. Don't worry; we aren't giving any vocal or instrumental lessons today but we are going to discuss music, instrumentation, as well as the spiritual posture that should follow our songs.

SURVEY

Before we begin, I'd like to run a few survey questions. Ryan used this tool at the hands of Grace Sunday. I certainly realize not everyone will be able to engage or have a voice, but this might be revealing to many of us, myself included. This is entirely anonymous, but you can prepare your phone to scan this QR code or go to this website to answer the questions. Some of these questions will inform some of the content we'll cover in today's sermon.

1 Our songs should be musical

APPLICATION

Whether it's a vocal melody, a full band, or a full orchestral arrangement, melody and music are clearly biblical prescriptions for the praise of God.

At least 47 passages in the Bible call the people of God to instrumentation in their corporate praise and worship.

- There are some who try to argue that because those passages are contained in the Old Testament, they were merely symbols of Old Covenant worship that were fulfilled in Christ and, therefore, are no longer relevant. Not only that, but they have gone as far as issuing prohibitions on musical instrumentation in worship. There are several problems with this:

1.) The New Testament never prohibits instrumentation in praise and worship: The NT doesn't specifically deal with musical instrumentation, but silence differs from prohibition. It's clear that the NT emphasis in worship is the sincerity and position of the heart and that true worship can occur whether music is present or not. There is no indication that Paul, or any other Apostles, were interested in banishing musical instrumentation from Christian worship. It could be argued that, as Jews, Paul and the Apostles assumed continuity of musical expression in Christian worship.

2.) The early church recognized the Psalms as authoritative: Jesus, Peter, and Paul all quote from the Psalms to support various doctrinal positions in the New Covenant. It could be argued that the early church assumed the Old Testament's call to musical instrumentation was authoritative.

3.) Musical instruments are used in the heavenly worshipscape. Four passages in Revelation include harps, trumpets, and flutes in praise of God.

All of that to say, we have good reason to use instrumental music in our praise.

APPLICATION

we can identify at least 10 distinct instruments in the Bible, with slight variations depending on translation and interpretation of terms. Some sources suggest there are up to 15 unique instruments if distinctions are drawn between different types of flutes, lyres, and horns (e.g., shofar vs. trumpet).

BIBLE PASSAGE

Ephesians 5:19 (NKJV - New King James Version)

¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,

MAKING MELODY = PSALLO

To play music on a stringed instrument; to twang.

Hey, the Lord wants us to make a twang on a stringed instrument and have it come from a place of heartfelt love and worship to Him.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Ephesians 5:19 (NIV - New International Version)

¹⁹ speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord,

A. MUSIC IS IMPORTANT BUT NOT PRIMARY

The Bible is clear, both OT and NT, that the heart and obedience is more important to God than our music.

[Amo 5:23-26 NKJV] 23 Take away from Me the noise of your songs, For I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments. 24 But let justice run down like water, And righteousness like a mighty stream. 25 "Did you offer Me sacrifices and offerings In the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? 26 You also carried Sikkuth your king and Chiun, your idols, the star of your gods, which you made for yourselves.

Jesus quoted Isaiah speaking about one of his biggest problems with the systematic worship of the Pharisees:

[Mat 15:7-9 NKJV] 7 "Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 8 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. 9 And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' "

We must be careful not to deceive ourselves into thinking that *quality music equals true and right worship*.

QUOTE

“ Music is a tool for God's praise and glory, but it is not a substitute for a soft heart, a sincere faith, an engaged mind, and an obedient life.

Pastor Josh

B. MUSIC IS A POWERFUL TOOL IN ENGAGING PEOPLE

First, it engages people who are gifted in music in the ministry. I don't believe God entrusts musical talents and gifts to people only to turn around and tell them they're not allowed to use them to bring Him glory and praise!

Second, music connects to a unique part of our being that nothing else does. It awakens certain powerful emotions and mental connections. There's a reason why we teach children scripture verses—those verses will never leave their memory once they've been attached to melody. We ought to sing and learn more scripture songs as adults!

Do you remember when King Saul was tormented by a spirit that the Lord permitted to cause him agony? What was the one thing that brought him comfort?

[1Sa 16:16-17, 23 NKJV] 16 "Let our master now command your servants, who are before you, to seek out a man who is a skillful player on the harp. And it shall be that he will play it with his hand when the distressing spirit from God is upon you, and you shall be well." 17 So Saul said to his servants, "Provide me now a man who can play well, and bring him to me." ... 23 And so it was, whenever the spirit from God was upon Saul, that David would take a harp and play it with his hand. Then Saul would become refreshed and well, and the distressing spirit would depart from him.

The harp was an instrument in David's hand to bring peace and comfort, just as David was an instrument in God's hand.

- It's incredibly beautiful to me when people use the talents and gifts God has given them to bless the body of Christ.
- Like David, there are certain people anointed by God... apart from their natural talents or abilities, when they start to play and sing, God begins to work in and through the music to heal, restore, set free, and reveal Himself. It's extraordinary to see that happen, and I believe it's part of what God desires when His people gather to worship him together corporately.

LET'S TALK VOLUME!

One of the most hotly debated subjects regarding music in the church is whether it should be loud or quiet, and what is too loud or too quiet. Unfortunately, there aren't many ways to

make everyone happy on this issue, but I can help explain some standards that are going to help us determine the levels we use here at Grace moving forward.

Four leading organizations have established guidelines on hearing safety. It's important to note that these organizations mainly deal with workplace environments, but the standards and research are helpful in determining healthy standards.

1. **OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration)**
2. **NIOSH (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health)**
3. **WHO (World Health Organization) - we all trust them...**
4. **EPA (Environmental Protection Agency)**

They have certain standards for the acceptable amount of SPL (Sound pressure levels) measured in decibels that are safe for the human ear over variable amounts of time. This measurement is an average of decibel levels over time, called **LAeq**. So, let's look at some of their recommendations.

MEDIA

OBSERVED LIMITS OF SPL		
TIME PERIOD	OSHA	NIOSH
8 Hours	90 dB LAeq	85 dB LAeq
4 Hours	95 dB LAeq	88 dB LAeq
2 Hours	100 dB LAeq	91 dB LAeq
1 Hour	105 dB LAeq	94 dB LAeq
30 Mins	110 dB LAeq	97 dB LAeq
15 Mins	115 dB LAeq	100 dB LAeq

SPL Chart

MEDIA

1 MINUTE AVERAGE: 100 dB LAeq, 1 min
15 MINUTE AVERAGE: 91 dB LAeq, 15 min
60 MINUTE AVERAGE: 85 dB LAeq, 60 min

Desired SPL goals for a Sunday worship service

2 Our songs should be skillful

BIBLE PASSAGE

Psalms 33:3 (NKJV - New King James Version)

³ Sing to Him a new song; Play skillfully with a shout of joy.

APPLICATION

Again, music is not necessary for powerful worship to occur, but when we utilize music, we want to do so in a way that enhances beauty. Music can be an incredible enhancement to praise, enabling people to connect in unique ways, but it can also be a distraction if executed poorly. When it comes to those who lead worship, certain gifts and talents are required, as well as a heart to grow in those gifts. Why?

1. Because God is worthy of our best efforts for His glory -

1. [1Co 10:31 NKJV] **31 Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.**
2. Remember this principle: ***"God doesn't need the best there is, but he always deserves the best we have."***

3. Our church's best may not be as good as the mega-church down the street or the Brooklyn Tabernacle choir, but what we have should be done to the best we can.

2. Because God gifts people for specific tasks in the body.

1. Not everyone is a musician or vocalist. You can love to worship but not be called to be a congregational worship leader.
2. **[1Co 12:16-20 NKJV] 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? 17 If the whole body [were] an eye, where [would be] the hearing? If the whole [were] hearing, where [would be] the smelling? 18 But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. 19 And if they were all one member, where [would] the body [be]? 20 But now indeed [there are] many members, yet one body.**

BIBLE PASSAGE

1 Chronicles 25:6-7 (NKJV - New King James Version)

⁶ All these were under the direction of their father for the music in the house of the Lord, with cymbals, stringed instruments, and harps, for the service of the house of God. Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman were under the authority of the king.

⁷ So the number of them, with their brethren who were instructed in the songs of the Lord, all who were skillful, was two hundred and eighty-eight.

BIBLE PASSAGE

2 Chronicles 34:12-13 (NKJV - New King James Version)

¹² And the men did the work faithfully. Their overseers were Jahath and Obadiah the Levites, of the sons of Merari, and Zechariah and Meshullam, of the sons of the Kohathites, to supervise. Others of the Levites, all of whom were skillful with instruments of music,

¹³ were over the burden bearers and were overseers of all who did work in any kind of service. And some of the Levites were scribes, officers, and gatekeepers.

3 Our songs should be reverent

BIBLE PASSAGE

Hebrews 12:28-29 (NIV - New International Version)

²⁸ Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe,

²⁹ for our “God is a consuming fire.”

4:52



APPLICATION

We must understand that we are approaching a Holy God when we worship.

- Demons tremble at His name
- Angels cover their faces in His presence.
- Man, in his sinful and carnal state, could not stand in the fullness of His presence or gaze upon the full glory of His person without being utterly consumed.
- He is the creator of all that exists.
- Without His initiation and intervention, you and I would be dead in our sins, enemies of God without a leg to stand on, and destined for an eternity of rightfully earned judgment in a terrible place created for the devil and His angels.
- He took the penalty of sin and conquered death.
- Every time we approach Him, praise Him, and enter into His presence by the blood of Christ, we ought to do so with a sense of His worth.

There's a story found in 2 Samuel 6 that always serves as an illustration of this concept.

BIBLE PASSAGE

2 Samuel 6:3-8 (NKJV - New King James Version)

³ So they set the ark of God on a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill; and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drove the new cart.

⁴ And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill, accompanying the ark of God; and Ahio went before the ark.

⁵ Then David and all the house of Israel played music before the Lord on all kinds of instruments of fir wood, on harps, on stringed instruments, on tambourines, on sistrums, and on cymbals.

⁶ And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled.

⁷ Then the anger of the Lord was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for his error; and he died there by the ark of God.

⁸ And David became angry because of the Lord's outbreak against Uzzah; and he called the name of the place Perez Uzzah to this day.

BIBLE PASSAGE

2 Samuel 6:12-15 (NKJV - New King James Version)

¹² Now it was told King David, saying, "The Lord has blessed the house of Obed-Edom and all that belongs to him, because of the ark of God." So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David with gladness.

¹³ And so it was, when those bearing the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, that he sacrificed oxen and fatted sheep.

¹⁴ Then David danced before the Lord with all his might; and David was wearing a linen ephod.

¹⁵ So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of the trumpet.

APPLICATION

1. David's Initial Lack of Reverence, Despite Musical Accompaniment

- In 2 Samuel 6:1-5, David sets out to bring the Ark to Jerusalem with a large assembly and a grand display of music, including lyres, harps, tambourines, castanets, and cymbals. However, despite the enthusiastic music, the Ark is placed on a cart, violating God's specific command that it be carried by Levites with poles (Numbers 4:15; 7:9).
- **APPLICATION:** This first attempt shows that simply having music does not mean worship is being offered with true reverence. Musical expression can enhance worship, but when it's disconnected from obedience to God, it risks becoming superficial or even irreverent. David's failure to approach God's holiness with the proper respect illustrates that reverence requires more than outward celebration—it requires aligning our actions with God's instructions.

The new cart is the way the other nations parade their gods. We must be careful not to imitate our culture in our approach to worship.

Early church history reveals that many church fathers were cautious about music in Christian worship because of the attempt to liken Christian worship to secular entertainment. We must remember that:

"There is a difference between redeeming culture and imitating it."

[2Co 6:16-18 NKJV] 16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among [them]. I will be their God, And they shall be My people." 17 Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you." 18 "I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty."

We should be distinct in that we are mixing secularism or sin into the worship of God. But music within itself is amoral. It can be used for good or for evil.

- It's always boggled my mind when churches decide to open the music portion of their services with some billboard top 40 hits that was written and recorded by a secular artist who doesn't know or care about honoring God.
- The church should be writing its own music entirely for the praise and worship of the Lord.

2. Uzzah's Death as a Consequence of Irreverence, Even Amidst Joyful Music

- As the Ark is transported, the oxen stumble, and Uzzah reaches out to steady it, resulting in his immediate death (2 Samuel 6:6-7). This tragic event occurs even though music is being played. Uzzah's action might have seemed reasonable, but it violated God's command not to touch the Ark, demonstrating a lack of reverence for His holiness.
- **APPLICATION:** The presence of music here highlights that worship is not sanctified by music alone; a right heart and respect for God's holiness are paramount. Uzzah's death is a sobering reminder that worship must involve a deep, heart-level reverence for God's boundaries and commands. Music cannot substitute for a holy, reverent approach to God.

3. David's Corrected Approach: Reverent Worship, Now with Obedient and Joyful Music

- After Uzzah's death, David pauses for three months, likely reflecting on God's holiness and the importance of approaching Him rightly (2 Samuel 6:8-9). When David tries again to bring the Ark to Jerusalem, he follows God's instructions precisely (1 Chronicles 15:13-15). This time, David offers sacrifices and dances with joy, accompanied by music, but now it's within the framework of obedience and reverence.
- **APPLICATION:** Music is once again part of the worship, but this time it accompanies a heart and approach rooted in humility and obedience. The second attempt shows that reverent music flows from a heart that respects God's commands and honors His presence. Joyful musical expression, when paired with true reverence, becomes a fitting tribute to God's holiness.

4. Application: Music as a Reflection, Not a Replacement, of Reverence

- The story illustrates that music is a powerful expression of worship but does not inherently make worship reverent. True reverence in worship is grounded in a heart that honors God's character and commandments. David's initial approach was

musically enthusiastic but spiritually careless; his second approach balanced joyful music with an obedient heart.

- **APPLICATION:** This story serves as a reminder that worship today, while often enhanced by music, must prioritize a heart posture of awe and submission to God. Instruments and songs are not inherently reverent; they are made reverent by the heart of the worshiper and the alignment of worship practices with God's will. Music becomes reverent worship when it flows from a heart that is fully surrendered to God's holiness.

APPLICATION

So how do we sing?

- By engaging the beauty of music, melody, and instruments to praise and glorify God.
- By using those talents excellently and skillfully to honor him.
- By approaching God with reverence, humility, and honor, not treating His praise lightly or introducing secularism or carnality into our praise.