

Finding Middle C in our Worship Music

The 10 C's

Like middle C is on the exact center of the grand staff, these words and phrases that begin with the letter C should center our thoughts concerning music that is to be used in corporate worship.

Our singing and music should be marked with: (10 things)

1. Cross-Centered Songs

- Our songs must have as their central theme the same theme as the Bible – the gospel.
- This is what the singing in heaven is going to be about. Those who are redeemed will sing to the redeemer about redemption.
- We need to sing often about salvation and about how God purchased our redemption.
- Colossians 3:15-17 says that we are to sing with thankfulness in our hearts. What is the biggest thing we have to be thankful for? Salvation. This should be a recurring and central theme.
- Do the songs exalt the God of the Bible who sent His Son to die for our sins or do they present a vague and incorrect view of God?

2. Content Driven Music

- The lyrics are the most important thing when selecting music. We need to ask if the Word dwells richly in this song.
- Is this content faithful to scripture and is the context faithful to scripture?
- What is the weight of the lyrics? Are they too heavy, too light or somewhere in the middle and are they appropriate for the situation?
- It is important to remember that the lyrics are not only being sung, but they are also being prayed as well. It is good to think of singing as sung prayer. Thinking about it in this way allows us to evaluate if these songs will strengthen our prayer life.
- “Show me a church’s songs and I’ll show you their theology” (Gordon Fee)
- It matters what kind of musical diet we are on as a church. Strong, God-centered, God-drenched lyrics will help produce God-centered, God-drenched Christians. You are what you eat.

3. Complementary music and lyrics

- Does the music match up with the words?
- Does the message of the lyrics sound like what the music is trying to convey?
- The songs should be theologically substantive and musically satisfying.
- The lyrics and melodies should be memorable, not forgettable.
- Look for songs that will be easily learned and sung by the congregation. Musically the songs need to be rhythmically and melodically accessible (rhythms not too complicated and melodies not too high or too low).

- Musicians need to be careful here because they can personally handle very complex music and usually have greater vocal range, but the music for congregational worship should be on a level that most, if not all, can achieve comfortably.

4. Congregational Focus

- The first choir is the congregation. All who have been redeemed have a song to sing and we are not to be sung to, we are all to participate together.
- They healthy church at worship is when the church is all singing, not just a few.
- When we fail to sing because we think others will not like our voice, we are likely living in the fear of man instead of the fear of God.
- This means that care will be given to make sure the congregation is not lost in the singing. We need to be open to singing new songs, but not all at once.
- This is why it is best to hear the new songs several times before they are sung on Sunday morning. It may be best to introduce them on Sunday evening or to have them played as offertories or preludes first.
- This also means that not every song is good for congregational use. Just because it is played on the radio does not mean it is good for us to use as a church. (Most are not good.) Here is a rating system that is used by Bob Kauflin:
 1. We shouldn't use this song
 2. Could use it personally
 3. Could use in corporate worship
 4. We should use this song
- Also, this means that the volume in the sanctuary must encourage and not discourage the congregational singing. Those leading need to be heard at an appropriate volume level that allows everyone to hear the melody clearly while not overpowering those in attendance to the point where those in the pew cannot hear themselves sing.

5. Clarity

- It is the message of the song clear? Or does it present a muddy view of God and the Christian life at best or a wrong view at worst?
- Example: In the well known hymn "At the Cross", the last line states: "now I am happy all the day". That could be sending an unclear message that the Christian life never encounters problems. I suggest changing that phrase to be: "Now I will praise Him all the day." This gives a clearer picture of what we are to do as believers – live to praise Him.
- Lest we think I am being too picky here, notice that in Colossians 3 we see that we teach through our songs. Are we teaching the right things? This is vital. Let's be 100% clear.

6. Conviction

- It is not enough to sing truth, we must believe the truth. "Without faith it is impossible to please Him" (Hebrews 11:6) Our singing must be faith filled.
- The songs are to be powerful not just because the music is well done or because of the sheer force of the music. The music becomes powerful when the gathered church is in whole-hearted agreement with the truths they are singing.

7. Comprehensive Themes

- Are we covering the Biblical themes or are we just stuck on one theme?
- There are many themes and we should cover all of them in proportion to the weight they are given in Scripture.
- Examples: *Baptism* – we wouldn't want all of our songs to be baptism songs. *The character of God* – we should sing about all aspects of His character: love, mercy, holiness, grace, goodness, faithfulness, etc.

8. Cheerfulness

- Is our music marked by joy? This comes not by just picking upbeat songs. The joy comes from when we really believe what we are singing and are engaged in the process and find the experience satisfying.
- There are times when we may have songs that engage us in reflection concerning our sins and the need for repentance. While those songs may themselves be more sorrowful in nature, when coupled with the assurance of pardon found in Christ, there is joy through the process.

9. Color

- Is all of our singing of one flavor, or are we using many different styles?
- We make style and issue when we make style the issue. However, we should be able to step back and see that there are many different styles being used in the worship of the church.
- This is not done to please some people some of the time, it is done so that we can reflect the diversity with which God made us.

10. Communal Love

- Many churches are struggling over the issues of music and worship and most discussions can be solved when we do what we are told earlier in Colossians 3:14 “Beyond all these things, put on love, which is the perfect body of unity.”