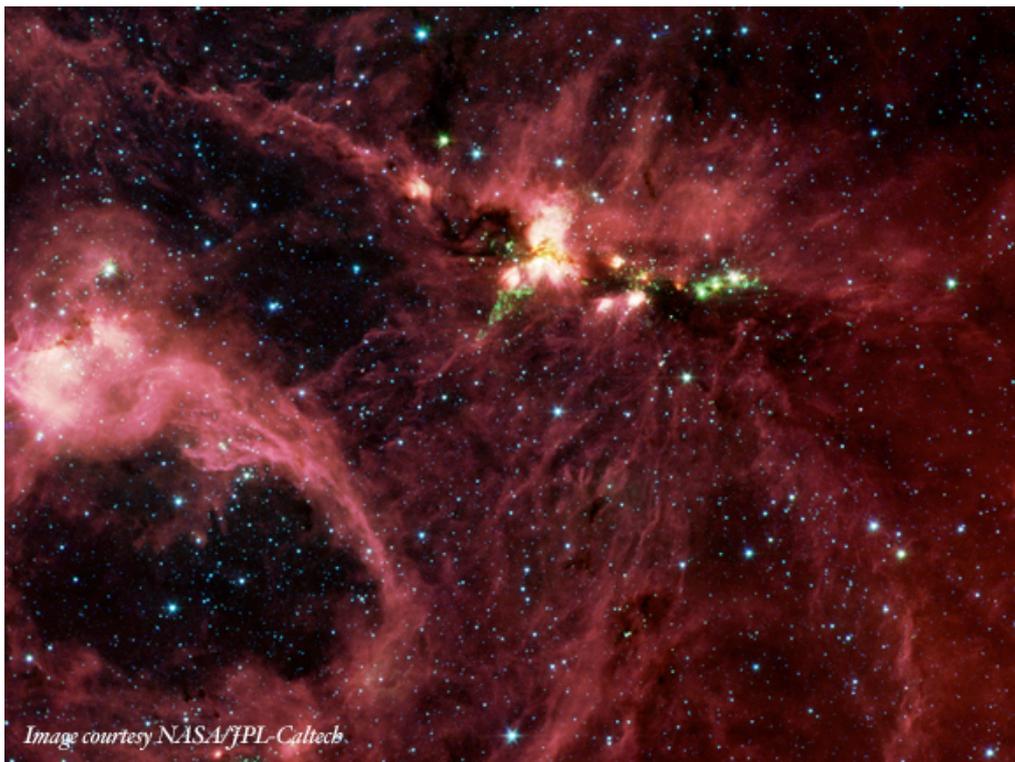


# TOWARDS A WORSHIP MINISTRY FRAMEWORK

*Love God. Love your neighbour. Everything else follows.*



James Boswell  
September 2010, February 2011

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## Introduction

It is sometimes said that the world is made up of two types of people - those who divide the world into two types of people, and those who don't. I am a big picture person. I view the world through principles and abstraction, rather than lists of rules and detail. Intellectually, this is one of the reasons I am drawn to Jesus. When he can reduce all the law and the prophets to just two commandments ([Matt 22:34-40](#)), I sit up and take notice. He's put something hard to understand and nearly impossible to remember, into something I can carry around in my head and use to assess any situation and my response to it.

This document is an attempt to distill many of my thoughts about worship, not as an exhaustive list, but as a set of principles that can be used to base decisions upon. I make no pretence that I can do this with as much efficiency as my Lord's example above. This is a work in progress and may appear more like a list of topics than a unifying theory. I am not seeking to justify every principle through scripture, however God's word is the lens through which I view the world, and it is the backdrop against which all the principles I live by are constructed.

I admit that I am no theologian, nor a great musician. I am sure that many men and women greater than I have written more insightful words on this than I will be able to, and yet debate rages on and ever will. So why would I even begin such an exercise?

There is a need for a common underlying framework from which decisions about worship ministry can be made and from which worship team members can operate. We should avoid changes or decisions driven more out of the style preferences of key individuals than any theology of worship. This is not to say that decisions based on style are wrong, but rather that not knowing whether or not there is a higher principle driving decisions is a concern.

## Understanding “Church”

Before endeavouring to assemble some kind of theology to guide us in how we should “do” worship, let me first address what “church” is, and why we gather together, since worship and church are bound tightly together.

Looking at the Old Testament notion of worship, we see that the people of Israel only had access to God through the Levites as the priests of Israel, and even the priest were limited in coming before God. Only the high priest could enter into the Holy of Holies once a year on the day of atonement, and only then, with blood.

While the people of Israel could praise God, ritualistic worship in the Old Testament was through an intermediary. Interestingly, even the musical worship of God in the old testament is performed by the Levites. In this way even musical praise, was accessed via the priesthood.

Jesus changed all that.

Unlike the Israelites in the Old Testament, we have direct access to God. Unlike the high priest of the Old Testament, we do not need to ensure that we only come before God with blood at the appointed time. For Jesus died once, for all. A perfect sacrifice, clearing the way for us to come directly to God. When He did, the symbol of the unreachability of God was destroyed as the curtain in the temple was torn from top to bottom ([Mark 15:37-38](#)).

We now have one mediator with the Father. Jesus is our great high priest allowing us access to the most holy place ([Hebrews 10:19-25](#)). Yet even though we have direct access to God through Jesus, we are instructed by the writer to the Hebrews in verse 25, not to give up meeting together. Indeed, in coming together we are coming into the presence of God in the person of Jesus. For he promises that “where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them” ([Matt 18:20](#)).

Even in this we really just receive a foretaste of our divine purpose. For God’s eternal plan, crafted before the foundation of the world, is to unite all things in Christ, to gather for himself a vast assembly of people for his very own, from every nation, tribe, people and tongue, to the praise of his glory ([Eph 1:3-14](#); [Eph 3:1-12](#); [Rev 7:9-12](#)).

And so the liturgical roots of Old Testament worship come full circle and meet completion in Christ. Or as Edmund Clowney puts it “as Christians gather to worship, they gather not to Sinai, but to the heavenly Zion, the festival assembly of saints and angels, where Jesus is ([Heb 12:18-29](#)). This heavenly assembly defines the church”.<sup>1</sup>

As we come together, to encourage one another, to sing praises to Him, to sit under the teaching of His word and to proclaim the Lord’s death in communion, we enter into His presence because He is there with us and we are to glorify Him.

This is why we gather together.

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<sup>1</sup> Clowney, Edmund P. 1988. ‘Church’. Pages 140-43 in *New Dictionary of Theology*. Edited by Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright and J. I. Packer. Downers Grove: IVP.

## What is worship?

This topic alone could fill an entire book. No doubt it has filled many. I do not intend to embark here on a dissertation about the difference between praise and worship, or all the different senses of worship in the Bible, however there is one observation I will note. There are several different words used in the New Testament which are translated as “worship”. Two of those are key to understanding what I mean here by “worship” and “worship ministry” - *latreia* meaning “service” especially “service to God”, and *proskuneo* meaning “an expression of profound reverence, by kneeling or prostration to do homage to God” .

While it is clear that our every act should be one of worship, [Rom 12:1](#), uses the Greek word, *latreia*, having sense of *service*. This verse might be more clearly translated as “*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of service*”. It is a particular facet of worship.

In this document, I am primarily concerned with music within a church service, and most often this will mean songs for congregational singing, as “corporate worship”. In this sense I am far more interested in worship as adoration and praise. That is *proskuneo* - to adore and praise Jesus the Christ and our heavenly Father.

These two concepts are not opposed but closely related ([Heb 13:15-16](#)), rather *worship through service (latreia)* is an all of life attitude (with all our heart, mind, soul and strength). *Latreia* and *Latruo* are used twenty six times in the New Testament in this sense. *Worship in adoration (proskuneo)* is a specific expression of that attitude, in specific circumstances. *Worship in this sense appears sixty-one times in the New Testament.*

By *Worship Ministry*, I mean all that is involved in *servicing* the congregation (*latreia*) with music so that the congregation may *worship* God (*proskuneo*) through that special medium. I recognise that all areas of ministry, (including other areas of the creative arts and beyond) are about worship, because ministry is service. I am not trying to exclude them from being part of “worship ministry”, I am just trying to have a clear focus for this discussion. While these are my primary concerns, the principles involved spill out to other areas of a church service and indeed life. This is the purpose and the power of God’s word as the starting point for a framework for how we live.

The key message is this: the *Worship Ministry Team*, must simultaneously worship God in adoration (*proskuneo*) **and** worship God by their act of service (*latreia*) to the congregation. The worship team are servants, seeking God’s glory, in humility and service, putting the congregation before themselves. Every act and decision must therefore reflect this priority. It is not enough to ask “how good is our music?”. We must instead ask “how good is our congregational singing?”. Great music that impedes the congregation worshipping God is not great, and it completely misses the worship as service and a living sacrifice.

## ROLES IN WORSHIP MINISTRY

Before leaving this topic a few more definitions are in order. In my experience there is a lack of appreciation of different roles or at least different aspects of leading and singing roles within the worship ministry. Again for the purpose of clarity I wish to set out some definitions. In doing so, I hope that all may gain a greater understanding of the nuances of each of these roles, and understand that they are not the same and the gifts required for each role are not necessarily interchangeable.

*Vocalists*, or sometimes “*backing*” *vocalists* sing with the band (often singing harmonies) as part of leading the congregation in worship.

The *Lead Vocalist* sings the lead part in a given worship song. The lead part is not just the melody, but also the main voice for the congregation to follow. The *lead vocalist* may include ad lib embellishments in their singing but they should be mindful that their role is to lead the congregation, not demonstrate their vocal ability. This role may change for each song. The *lead vocalist* is not the same as the *Worship Leader*, though they are often the same person.

The *Worship Leader's* primary role is to relate to the congregation. They introduce songs, reflect on the songs and how they relate to the sermon or other service elements, and most importantly, set the tone for congregational worship. A good *worship leader* invites the congregation to move to a particular place in their worship, and gives them permission to go there.

The *Band Leader* leads the band, runs rehearsals, and if necessary, under the music director, makes the final call on musical decisions for the band in a given service. While the band leader can be any member of the band (vocalist or other musician) it is also common for this to be the *worship leader* in the band.

It should be apparent from these descriptions that each of these roles may be filled by different people, or as is often the case all by a single person, and roles like *lead vocal* may change from one song to the next in a service.

## God's great gift - Music

Have you noticed how God underlines great moments with music, from creation to re-creation? Did you know that there was singing

- when God created the universe ([Job 38:1-7](#))?
- when our Saviour is to be born ([Luke 1:46-56](#))?
- at the last supper, before Jesus gave Himself for us ([Matt 26:26-30](#))?
- at the end of all time when the redeemed are given harps by God to praise Him ([Rev 15:1-4](#))?

And God himself sings!

[Zephaniah 3:17](#)

The LORD your God is with you,  
he is mighty to save.  
He will take great delight in you,  
he will quiet you with his love,  
he will rejoice over you with singing."

Music in our church services is not just a time filler to give the late comers a gracious entrance without disturbing the service. Nor is it a chance to have a break and a stretch before settling in to concentrate on the sermon.

We sing to God because He wants us to, He commands us to, and we are made in His image.

Not only are we to sing to God directly, but also to one another. [Col 3:16](#), tells us we are to teach and admonish one another through psalms, hymns, and songs. [Eph 5:19-20](#) likewise tells us to speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit.

## Music and the greatest commandments

Jesus' great summary of all the law and the prophets provides a simple framework for how we should live, not in order to gain salvation, but in response to it.

It is interesting to note that both Luke and Mark, when they record Jesus quoting the Shema ([Deut 6:4-6](#)) add in the word *mind*, which is not in Deuteronomy.

[Deut 6:4-6](#) Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.

[Mark 12:30](#) Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your **mind** and with all your strength.

By adding in the word *mind*, the New Testament writers remove the possible confusion caused by the word "heart", which in Greek thought takes on an emotional function, as distinct from the Hebrew understanding of the "heart" as primarily a rational organ, and the centre of intellectual processing.

Music offers an almost unique vehicle to express our love to God in each of the capacities of man in this commandment - rational thought, inner-most self, and physical strength. Like few other media, in song we can engage in all three at once, connecting our minds to God through the words that we sing, our innermost being through the power of music to connect with our emotions and spirit, and our physical strength, as we lift our voices, raise our hands, or dance or jump for joy.

This one commandment speaks to all of life at the highest level, and therefore should influence our music in style, expression and song selection. What we do and what we choose not to do. Our love of God should be our motivation for playing skillfully *and* humbly, that God, not us, should be glorified ([1 Cor 10:31](#)).

But Jesus didn't stop there.

[Mark 12:31](#) The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'  
There is no commandment greater than these.

The heart of Christian ethics is being other person centred. This is what Christ not only taught, but lived, and died. ([Phil 2:1-11](#)). This commandment must drive the servant heart, and will influence many choices remembering that those in worship ministry serve the congregation not themselves. Serving in any ministry is not about the servant but the served.

It is essential that all decisions, the big strategic ones, and the smaller week by week ones about song selection, form, key signature, style, are subject to this attitude of service. If decisions big or small are made more with the interest of the music team or individual musicians in mind than those of the congregation, then we have lost focus and are in need of repentance.

***Love God. Love your neighbour. Everything else follows.***

## In spirit and in truth

While “all the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments”, Jesus also speaks directly about worship to the Samaritan women at the well.

[John 4:21-24](#) Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet 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 in truth."

Again we see both a spiritual and intellectual element to our worship (*proskuneo* - adoration). Our worship must be in spirit, from our innermost being. Sincere not ritualistic ([Amos 5:21-23](#)), but sincerity is not enough, it must be true. This carries a sense of in accordance with God's truth, his word ([John 17:15-19](#)), as well as a fulfilment, "and has now come", or completeness of worship rather than the Old Testament shadow of worship. We can now draw closer to God through Jesus' act of worship on the cross, when the curtain in the temple was ripped in two!

## Application

In some ways, I could stop right here. Job done, now go apply it. The real work though is only just beginning. What does this, or should this look like, in our church? How do we apply it?

Below, are a number of topics which discuss how this concise theology of the two great commandments and "worshipping in spirit and in truth", affect corporate worship. It is not the justification for every principle. While some find validation in other parts of scripture, some are simply based on experience and seem right. All however are consistent with loving God, and loving your neighbour.

## MUSICAL STYLE

Scripture does not ordain one musical style over another, (praise God!) rather it is rich with descriptions of the extravagance with which God is to be praised. We can however draw some conclusions from our concise theology.

In a sinful world, no worship style of any culture or sub-culture can be considered sacrosanct or inherently superior. Moreover, the world around us must not be allowed to dictate how Christians live or express themselves. In loving and serving the congregation, we need to take care that we are strengthening the church ([1 Cor 14: 26](#)). Musical style should be based on what will be edifying to the congregation *as a whole*, not a narrow demographic within it.

Attempts to constrain corporate worship to a narrow style definition are flawed on two levels. Firstly they have more in common with secular brand management and marketing of a club, than with the lavish and extravagant praise of God found in his Word or the other centred service of God's people. Secondly, they ignore the fact that God loves all people and died for them in all their rich diversity. A narrow focus on one style, which for example might have the melancholics happily wringing out their souls before God in tears, may also leave the more choleric and phlegmatic members of God's people disengaged and looking for some spiritual and intellectual meat. Clearly this can be extended in many dimensions such as different age groups, cultural background or socio-economic strata. Perhaps we need to ask as the expert in the law did, "who is my neighbour?" ([Luke 10:25-37](#))

We must also be cautious not to try to justify questions of style as “pursuit of excellence”. Such a confusion is ultimately self seeking. A solitary acoustic guitar can be played with excellence. A full pipe organ gallery can be played with excellence. While many would say that a basic rock line up (drums, electric guitar and bass guitar) would be an “improvement” over either of these, it would be a subjective improvement of style rather than objective improvement of standard. All styles should be played for the glory of God, and played to the best of our ability.

Whatever style we aim for should assist congregational singing, and not be a performance. We must *not* model our worship ministry on a rock concert ([1 John 2:15-17](#)), not even on contemporary Christian artist’s performances nor even on other churches who have great music. We can and should look for inspiration in many places, but we must test everything against God’s word with our intellect and mind, not base our approach solely on our musical taste or style preferences.

## SONG SELECTION

Choosing songs for congregational worship is a challenging task. It is an unavoidable fact that you can not make everyone happy (diversity!), especially when congregations get to a size of two or more. So how can we apply this concise theology to provide assistance to those blessed with this task?

Firstly, we are to love our God with our heart, soul, mind and strength. Our songs should allow us to worship God with our intellect, our innermost being and our physical strength. This means that lyrics and music (genre, composition, arrangement and style) are both important.

Secondly, we are to love our neighbour. That is, the music is for the congregation and not the musicians, and song selection is not to be based on what the musicians enjoy playing. Nor is key signature for the lead vocalist’s range but for ease of congregational singing. This also implies variety, as we serve the whole congregation, across all ages and personality types.

We are to sing both to God and to one another. Lyrics allow us to employ our mind when we worship our God, learn biblical truth, and encourage one another. In [Deuteronomy 31:19-21](#) God had Moses write down a song and teach it to the Israelites to communicate truth to them. Lyrics with good theology serve to teach and instruct God’s people. They are also useful for encouraging one another in our walk, and remind us of the promises of God. They can help us learn God’s scripture to be able to call his promises to mind.

Sadly a great deal of the currently popular worship music has lost this ability to teach truth, and commit God’s word to mind through song. Much is instead full of experiential triumphalism. Notice that these songs have not lost the ability to teach. What they have lost is teaching the truth. We simply should not sing these songs. His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth ([John 4:23-24](#)).

Songs have always been a powerful teaching mechanism, and song writers would do well to heed the warning in [James 3:1](#) “Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.” By extension, those choosing songs for worship are choosing also what truths or subtle deceptions to fill the minds and hearts of the congregation with.

For this reason we must guard jealously a standard which lyrics should pass before they enter our repertoire. This test should be applied first, *before* any musical considerations about how good a song is. Unfortunately, as musicians it is common to filter on the artistic elements of a song before we consider its lyrics, and this can lead to being more tolerant of lyrics if the song itself is particularly appealing. Obviously clear heresy is unlikely to get an airing in most churches, but we also want to look at a number of more subtle concerns and understand what value a song brings.

Some things to consider when choosing songs for our repertoire:

- Does the song glorify God? Which God? Could it be to any god? Does it name the name of Jesus?
- Does the song teach scripture or the promises of God? Does it “teach” concepts not truly consistent with scripture?
- Is the focus of the song the singer? Is it focused on what we can get? Is it self indulgent focused solely on feelings or “special” experience?
- Does the song paint a false picture of the Christian life? An overly victorious or materialistically prosperous life? Or a pocket sized God puppet who serves our needs or responds to our wishes.
- Is the worship of God cast as a feminine expression of romantic affection for God rather than the reverent adoration of a holy and righteous saviour.
- Is there a balance in our repertoire of personal and corporate? Of “I”, “we” and “you”?
- Is there a balance in our repertoire of style to allow us to serve the whole congregation? Are the choleric and phlegmatic catered for as well as the sanguine and melancholic? Does the narrowness of the repertoire isolate some age groups?
- Is it easy for the congregation to sing? Is it memorable? Catchy? Do the lines scan well, or are they awkward or unpredictable in phrasing or timing?
- Is it performance oriented with a large vocal range, or impressive but difficult passages?

Of course this list is not exhaustive, but rather just some of the things we need to be aware of, especially with much of the more popular contemporary worship songs.

While there are many considerations for whether an individual song should be included in the repertoire, we must also consider the question of how big the catalogue should be and how much change or stability there is within it. A narrow repertoire on high rotation can be stifling and doesn't allow for the kind of variety implied in being able to serve the whole congregation.

It is good to introduce new songs and allow people to connect with God in a fresh way, but there is also security in familiar songs of praise. Too much change too often (like a new song every week) is uncomfortable and stressful for both congregation and musicians, and doesn't allow the opportunity to learn them well, and fully assimilate them. (There is a reason that those "Hits and Memories" radio stations are so popular.)

Perhaps the most helpful approach is a rolling repertoire, where new songs are introduced at a rate which is not unsettling, and become part of an ever expanding catalogue to be drawn upon. Overall, different songs will be used with different frequencies, and there will be a distribution of songs such that a small core will be used regularly, a larger set are used a little less often, and a great number are available for occasional use. The core set that are used with some regularity slowly morphs with seasons and years, as songs dissipate outwards to make way for new favourites.

There are other considerations when selecting songs for a service. Paying attention to where songs are placed in a service is important. It is important to be aware of the "shape" of a service. Opening songs on the whole should be "up" and inviting, drawing people in. Likewise the closing song is sending people out and more often than not, will want to be uplifting. Sometimes a more sombre reflection and response is required. A closing song can also have gravitas where warranted though a practical alternative is to use more songs towards the end, and build back towards sending people out on an uplifting note. Songs used throughout the service, not just at the start and end, can help shape the service, and take the congregation on a journey through the use of light and shade, with variety of song contexts.

There is significant value in songs that tie in thematically with the sermon, though this is a less common practice than it used to be with a full hymnal to draw upon. Thematic songs are particularly helpful directly after, and in response to the sermon. This is not always possible, especially in a church which faithfully and systematically addresses all of God's word. Worship leaders should seek to know the one "take home" thing that the preacher wants to leave with the congregation, so that they can if possible link the following or closing song to that thought in response.

While our musical ministry is a key part of our service, and one of our reasons for meeting together, it should sit in support of, not in competition with, our coming together to sit under God's word and receive teaching and encouragement from it. All elements in a service should be in support of the sermon as the focal point of our gathering.

## CHOOSING A KEY SIGNATURE

With much contemporary Christian music being in a key to suit its composer or performer, it is sometimes necessary to transpose a song. This may benefit musicians and singers, but our first concern should be how singable a song is for the congregation. We are serving the congregation so they can worship God. Obviously songs presented as an item are different, and the song can be placed in a range that best suits the singer, however, if a worship leader's vocal range requires moving the song outside the singable range for the congregation, then a different person should lead that song.

Below are some practical guidelines for choosing a key signature<sup>2</sup>.

1. Most people can handle an Octave, C to C, or a tone either side (B flat below middle C to D a ninth above)
2. Avoid extremes of the range for
  1. Most notes
  2. Starting notes of verses or choruses
  3. Held notes
3. Instrument friendly keys
  1. Guitarists like keys with sharps but not in the name (G/D/A/E and even B)
  2. Pianists / Keyboardists / Organists may tend towards flats, as do wind instruments
4. Higher keys for more energy - high energy songs will permit a brief excursion above the C-C range if not many and not held for long.
5. Generally older people need lower keys
6. Smaller groups do better with lower keys
7. Save higher stretches until after voices are warmed up

For those working with a choir or arranged harmonies, the choral ranges are generally:

*Sopranos:* middle C to A an octave and a sixth above

*Altos:* G below middle C to D a ninth above middle C

*Tenors:* C an octave below middle C to G a fifth above middle C

*Basses:* F an octave and five notes below middle C to middle C

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<sup>2</sup> A good reference is <http://hubpages.com/hub/Finding-the-Best-Key>

## VOLUME

This is a fairly straight forward and yet often challenging issue. Like song selection it will be hard to get agreement. Unlike song selection, it can't really be solved by providing a mix of settings in each service. While there are generalisations that can be made (louder for youth services, not so loud for family services, not at all loud for seniors) there are other dimensions to this issue as well. Two issues to consider both come under "love your neighbour as yourself".

The first is our duty of care. Noise damage is cumulative. Exposure to loud sound, including music, at high levels (85 dB A or greater), will cause hearing impairment. Much can be done to prevent noise-induced hearing loss but little can be done to reverse it. As a rule of thumb without noise-measuring equipment, if you have to shout to be heard, above the music, your hearing is at risk. As a church, we must ensure that we are not harming those that join with us to worship.

Well before we reach those sound levels though, we need to consider the second, slightly more subtle issue. Congregational worship means participation. Loud music encourages listening, not singing. It reinforces a performance over participation culture, making worship a spectator sport. If music from the platform, or through the PA is so loud we can't hear the people around us singing, we are missing out on one of the great aspects of coming together to praise God. We become consumers of, rather than collaborators in worship.

## EXCELLENCE

[1 Corinthians 10:31](#) exhorts us, "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.". If it is for God's glory then we ought to strive for excellence, and not be ashamed to do so. Right?

When I began writing this document I was convinced that God wanted us to *pursue excellence* when we serve Him in worship ministry, but although I searched, I found no biblical injunction for that at all. I know that this will come as somewhat of a shock to some. It seems to be taken as a Biblical truth that excellence is required in everything we do. As far as I can tell, pursuing excellence is actually more of a worldly notion than a Biblical one. Just about every school motto, business mission statement or vision statement has some variation on this theme. But nowhere in the Bible are we commanded to *pursue* excellence or even to be our best. Rather we are commanded to pursue God and His glory, to seek first His kingdom, and to be holy because He is holy.

Excellence *is not* the goal.

The goal is the glory of God and for us to love him with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. Or as the prophet Micah puts it "to walk humbly with [our] God" ([Micah 6:8](#)).

I believe it is possible for our excellence to actually detract from worshipping God. Our prayer as we play and sing should be that we are invisible, and that neither our virtuosity nor mediocrity will draw attention of the congregation, but rather that our music would help them draw closer to God in worship.

It is natural for the artist to want to pursue excellence. The danger in striving for excellence rather than striving for God's glory is that we draw people to how great we are instead of how great God is. For isn't that why God had Gideon send away thirty thousand men, and saved Israel with just 300?

[Judges 7:2](#) The LORD said to Gideon, "You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her."

If God told us to "just play adequately, not excellently, so my people can sing", would we listen? Or would we play our way, to glorify him, and then say like Saul that we have done what God desires? Could all our excellent music cause Him to ask "What then is this bleating in my ears?" (Cf. [1 Samuel 15:12-23](#)). To be clear, this is not to say that we must *not* be excellent, and it is certainly not saying we must not play well. [Psalm 33:3](#) calls for musicians who will play skillfully.

It should also be stated clearly that Christ is worthy of our best.

[Col 3:23-24](#) Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Leaving aside the question of context and that this passage addresses Christian slaves and the way they should conduct themselves under secular masters, it does assume that the reader understands that in serving the Lord, we should be diligent, and do it with all our heart. This is no surprise. We must love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind and with all our strength.

The careful reader will note however that this is *not* a command to pursue excellence! It speaks to motivation and attitude not skill. We must pursue God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

We should not kid ourselves that the *pursuit* of excellence is commanded by God. It is not. He commands us to love Him and love our neighbour and do everything to His glory. *Excellence therefore must be subservient to these things, not given precedence over them.* It may be therefore that we consider loving a brother or sister whose heart is to serve, more important than whether they meet our standards for excellence. Indeed I am convinced that musical talent, ability or excellence is not what God looks at.

[1 Samuel 16:7](#) The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

Should we then simply get by on a “she’ll be right” or “near enough is good enough” attitude? By no means. God expects us to use the gifts He has given us ([Matt 25:14-30](#)), and as Calvin puts it, *“But whatever gifts the Lord has bestowed upon us, let us know that it is committed to us as so much money, that it may yield some gain; for nothing could be more unreasonable than that we should allow to remain buried, or should apply to no use, God’s favours, the value of which consists in yielding fruit.”*<sup>3</sup>

Note that the gain is for the master (cf verse 27), and we are to use our gifts for His gain and His glory. This is not a parable about pursuing excellence, but using the gifts we are given, in the measure they are given, for God.

The same caution should be observed in our musical creativity, we must test it always against whether it glorifies God or us. We must guard against feeding our own sense of worth and ego in our creativity. We must take every thought captive ([2 Corinthians 10:5](#)) and bring His gift of creativity under the Lordship of Christ.

This also applies to how we wish to appear to visitors to our church. We do want people to have a great experience of our church and see a high standard, not something mediocre or worthy of mockery. In doing so though, we must guard our hearts and our pride that we do not pursue excellence to impress the visitor for the sake of our church’s reputation or our own egos. Like Paul, we should do what we can to relate to all people for the sake of the gospel and that by all possible means we may win some ([1 Cor 9:19-23](#)).

## Conclusion

While I set out to distil my thoughts on worship and worship ministry, and provide a framework for decisions, I also found that the exercise helped me refine and even change my thinking in some areas. And yet the change is in many ways consistent with my starting position.

As we shape or reshape our worship ministry we must seek first the kingdom of God. We must love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength, and we must love the congregation whom we serve. Everything else follows.

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<sup>3</sup> John Calvin, Commentary on a Harmony Of The Evangelists