



Publishing Peace

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“Behold on the mountains the feet of him who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace!...” (Nahum 1:15)

Church Singing

Andy Robison

Often good preaching has rightly explained what New Testament church singing must *not* be—not accompanied by mechanical instruments of music, respecting God’s law of silence. Since He specified what *to* do (i.e. sing), His people must limit themselves to following that specific command. What might lack in some places is the proper positive teaching of what singing’s purpose is for the church. Singing is a vital component to the life and worship of a Christian (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Heb. 13:15). Though the world focuses on the talent of soloists, God demands the willingness of congregants to “speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” (Eph. 5:19). Talent is not the consideration; a heart willing to praise God with vocally articulated words is.

Does the quality of singing matter? Here one must tread carefully. Some go to one extreme in order to defend those who “can’t carry a tune in a bucket with a handle on it”, saying, “Only the words matter.” If only the words matter, would not God have rather told His people to “*recite* to one another...”? There must be something to the intonation of words at different pitch levels and varying tempos that pleases God. Some on the other extreme leave the “praise” of the worship service for only those most talented, in choirs, soloists, and such. Truth and common sense often lies in the middle of two extremes.

The balance is that congregants and congregations use whatever talents they have available (cf. Matt. 25:14-30; Rom. 12:6-8) to do the very best they can at this and every aspect of worship. Would that not be a part of “consider(ing) one another...to provoke to love and good works” in the “assembling of ourselves together” (Heb. 10:24-25)?

Churches of Christ used to busy themselves with singing schools. While learning music-reading met some opposition, most felt the study was important to improving the worship to the pleasing of God and uplifting of the brethren. Thus people learned, and sang. They felt it was also important to have quality singing so as to hold at bay the temptation to add instruments.

Caution again needs exercised. God is indeed pleased with one who “makes a joyful noise” when that is all the capability one possesses (he likely is talented in many other areas). Yet, is this a part of worship than can be disregarded with subtle, implied disdain? How many congregations are there where the good, trusted song-leaders, who had a vibrant rapport with the congregation, have passed away, leaving the untrained to lead? To their everlasting credit, they step up the best they can, and are to be commended for doing so. Their leading is pleasing to God, and the following by the congregation is pleasing to God.

Yet, one wonders if more effort could be expended by the congregations as a whole to improve in some cases.

In this treading on dangerous ground, please allow confirmation of intent with an analogy—one regarding another act of worship—preaching. A lot of churches like their preachers to be formally trained. Just as with song-leading, there is no biblical requirement for such. Any faithful male Christian who would like to present a lesson from God’s word is allowed to do so in the assembly, so long as Scriptural principles are respected (i.e., an eldership could allow or refuse access to the pulpit). One may do a great job without any formal schooling. Most readers probably know some preacher who has so succeeded.

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Lectureship
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Even though that be the case, most want ads for preachers specify they would like him to have a preaching school or Christian college degree in Bible. Why?

Perhaps it is because of the systematic training he receives. In most of those programs a curriculum is divided into several facets that prepare the young man for his life as a preacher. There are biblical text courses. There are Bible-related subjects (topical studies, historical studies, marriage studies). Then are courses in communication, such as English grammar and Homiletics, wherein the arts of writing and public speaking are studied as tools to be used by the Gospel preacher. Classes may include sections on the art of rhetoric and the science of logic, all to be employed in making the Gospel clearer to the listener. Are these studies wastes of time? No.

Why would it then be the case with song-leading? What would be wrong with consistent, formal training in reading the musical language and practicing vocal techniques to aid the leader and maybe other worshipers to improve in this area of worship? Does not the Christian want to do the best he can in all he does, especially in praise to God?

Some congregations make good efforts; it is wise then to evaluate outcomes. This author has held singing workshops over weekends where a few hours are spent with those willing to attend and a few more hours with song-leaders willing to learn. Does it help? Perhaps for a while. The most success this teacher has had, though, is over long periods of time, when potential leaders make themselves available for weekly drill and instruction. Meeting with young song-leaders a half-hour before services over the period of a couple of years proved the most effective.

There are likely better teachers, with perhaps better experiences in workshops. Nevertheless, most students of music recognize that neither singing nor song-leading can be taught in a crash course. It involves the training of muscles and muscle memory. It involves some knowledge and lot of drilling that just cannot be accomplished quickly.

Why make such a fuss about the singing? Because of observed extremes. Some places sing vibrantly with new worship songs, but may also go too far, employing praise teams and other phenomena not found in Scripture. On the other end of the spectrum are churches who sing the same twenty or thirty songs with seemingly dying fervor. (Care should be taken not to judge the hearts of those worshipers even while one legitimately observes the impression.)

Here's the troubling, admittedly subjective impression this author has formulated: "Where the singing is dying, the church is dying." *If* that be true, which one prompts the other is a mystery. Where does the vicious cycle begin?

It is hard to know. Nevertheless, it is not wrong to make this plea to congregations: Please give work and attention to the quality of singing! Even if individuals do not improve in ability, the church will be better for the time together and the focus on the hymns which teach and admonish!

How that is accomplished is another matter of question. If short workshops won't work, how could churches get their members to give extra time for extra meetings to focus on extra instruction? After all, in many places folks don't go to Bible class and only appear for the Sunday morning worship hour, with no intent to return even at regularly scheduled Sunday and Wednesday evening services. They are too busy with secular activities.

Maybe there is the answer to where the vicious cycle begins. If people don't care enough to worship with the saints at regularly appointed times, how will they care enough to give extra time to work on worship?

It is a busy world. Singing seems like the last thing that needs attention. Yet the omniscient God made it an integral part of worship for all participants. If preachers study preaching, why shouldn't singers study singing?

Questions are easy; answers are hard. When that is the case in any venue, it is hopeful at least to start discussing the problem. Perhaps singing improvement can kickstart church growth. Speaking broadly of Christendom, one church music historian observed, "It would be difficult, indeed, to estimate fully the role that sacred song has played in the growth and spread of the Christian faith. It is hardly a coincidence that every great spiritual movement in the history of the Church has been accompanied by a fresh outburst of song" (Ryden, *The Story of Christian Hymnody*, vii.)

If that be the case, perhaps the Lord's church needs a renewed focus to accomplish a fresh outburst of zealous, vibrant singing.

2021 Victory Lectureship
“When I Study the PSALMS...” (Vol. IV)
Enumerating My Blessings – Enduring My Sorrows
October 24-28, 2021

Sunday Morning Bible Study: 9:45 a.m.
 Sunday Morning Worship: 10:40 a.m.
 Sunday Evening Worship: 6:30 p..

“The Man of Sorrows”
 “In The Cross of Christ I Glory”
 “God from Whom All Blessings Flow”

Mike Vestal
 Mike Vestal
 Emanuel Daugherty

| TIME | MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY |
|----------|--|--|--|--|
| 9:00 am | “The Blessings of Prosperity” Psalm 1 Ed Melott | “The Blessings of Provision” Psalm 65 Stephen Hart | “The Blessings of Peace” Psalm 124 Don Schuler | “The Blessings of Protection” Psalm 129 Steve Smithbauer |
| 10:00 am | <i>Enumerating My Blessings:</i> “God Is My Restorer” Psalm 6 Bruce Daugherty | <i>Enumerating My Blessings:</i> “God Is My Redeemer” Psalm 26 Mike Vestal | <i>Enumerating My Blessings:</i> “God Is My Refuge” Psalm 142 Andrew Beasley | <i>Enumerating My Blessings:</i> “God Is My Rock” Psalm 144 Rick Kelley |
| 11:00 am | “The Blessings of Comfort” Psalm 79 Robert Oliver | “The Blessings of Citizenship” Psalm 87 Paolo DiLuca | “The Blessings of Confidence” Psalm 108 Caleb Conley | “The Blessing of Compassion” Psalm 136 Aaron Burch |
| 1:15 pm | “Rejecting God’s Blessings” Psalms 14 and 53 Charles Pugh III | “Recounting God’s Blessings” Psalm 77 John Brown | “Rejoicing in God’s Blessings” Psalm 128 Mark Tonkery | “Remembering God’s Blessings” Psalm 137 Andy Robison |
| 2:15 pm | <i>Enduring My Sorrows:</i> “In Times of Distress” Psalm 4 Terry Jones | <i>Enduring My Sorrows:</i> “In Times of Disease” Psalm 30 Joshua Ball | <i>Enduring My Sorrows:</i> “In Times of Darkness” Psalm 18 Sam Bartrug | <i>Enduring My Sorrows:</i> “In Times of Danger” Psalm 31 Mark Weaver |
| 3:15 pm | <i>Enduring My Sorrows:</i> “In Times of Defeat” Psalm 44 Dan Kessinger | <i>Enduring My Sorrows:</i> “In Times of Destruction” Psalm 74 Dale Parsley | <i>Enduring My Sorrows:</i> “In Times of Deliverance” Psalm 116 Steve Haguewood | <i>Enduring My Sorrows:</i> “In Times of Deceit” Psalm 120 Mark Day |
| 6:30 pm | Congregational Singing “The Friendship of God” Psalm 15 Mike Vestal | Congregational Singing “The Forgiveness of God” Psalm 32 John Moore | Congregational Singing “The Fear of God” Psalm 103 John Moore | Congregational Singing “The Faithfulness of God” Psalm 107 John Moore |

At Tuesday, October 26’s 4:30 p.m. **Lectureship Dinner**, we will honor **Keith and Brenda Ball**. Keith passed from this life while on a mission trip in India in 2019. **Please RSVP by October 10 to attend.**

News

School Year: The school year is off to a good start! The second-year class has one young full-time student and one retiree who is taking almost all the classes. The first year likewise has another young student and another retiree who is almost full-time. We have other part-time students who are taking different classes during the week. It all makes for a good atmosphere of a busy school building and lots of learning.

Lectureship: We hope you can join us for the lectureship this fall, October 24-28! A full schedule is inside. We look forward to, Lord willing, seeing our precious brethren again.

Lectureship Books are Available!

We ask a \$20 donation for book and shipping.

***Call 304-845-8001 or e-mail:
secwvsop@aol.com***

We are most grateful for all donations, which are our only income.

They may be made by check or online at wvsop.com (SUPPORT button at the bottom right of the page).

Thank you!

