

Participant Guide for Study 5: Music (Leader Version)

Introduction:

Music is the sound of the church. Dogs bark, cows moo, and churches sing. Impressed into the mind of nearly everyone who has walked into a church is the way that the church sings. Depending on where you're from, the sound of a church is different for everyone. For some, that familiar music is the sound of a choir and an organ singing in a room with high, painted ceilings. For others, it is the sound of a full band, passionately and loudly praising the Lord. Or perhaps the sound of church most familiar to you is only a few voices in a small room, singing God's praises unaccompanied by any instruments at all. But no matter your background, we can see throughout the history of the church and the history of God's people as shown in Scripture that God's people have always been singing people. We carry on that torch today at Canyon Creek, and the music of our Sunday Worship is our focus of study today.

At Canyon Creek, music is an important and prominent part of our service. Each week Steve Miller, our music director, leads us through multiple songs that we sing along with (currently from each of our respective homes). While it might seem like the concept of church music is relatively straightforward, we should also recognize the strangeness of it. What other place in our culture do people get together and sing songs with one another? In order to properly appreciate what it means to sing and enjoy music as a church, we should have a proper understanding of what exactly we're doing when we come to worship.

Part 1: What Does it Mean?

Let's start with some broad strokes. Music is familiar enough that we don't need to start from scratch. Instead, we just need to fill out what we already know about music when it comes to church. First, we'll take the most accessible definition of music and apply it for our purposes: Music as artful self-expression. There are a whole host of good reasons why we sing the lyrics to our Sunday songs rather than simply recite them. There is something inherent in the musical process that communicates a higher degree of emotion and expression. When you want a baby to sleep, you do more than command them to sleep; You lullaby them.

When you miss the one you love, you do more than say out loud what you're feeling; You sing sad songs in the car on your way home from work. We all have different contexts where music is, somehow, more appropriate than words. God's people have had this in their worship throughout history.

Read Psalm 95:

Let Us Sing Songs of Praise

- [1] Oh come, let us sing to the LORD;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
- [2] Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
- [3] For the LORD is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.
- [4] In his hand are the depths of the earth;
The heights of the mountains are his also.
- [5] The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands formed the dry land.
- [6] Oh come, let us worship and bow down;
let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!
- [7] For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand.
- Today, if you hear his voice,
- [8] do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,
- [9] when your fathers put me to the test
and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.
- [10] For forty years I loathed that generation
and said, "They are a people who go astray in their heart,
and they have not known my ways."
- [11] Therefore I swore in my wrath,
"They shall not enter my rest." (ESV)

It might be surprising to some of us that the Old Testament was not just read, but *sung* by ancient Israel. Psalm 95 is a good example of this. You have a

straightforward invitation to sing and give praise (verse 1-2), followed by a reason for this praise (verse 3), and then a testament to the power of God (verse 4-5). This pattern is repeated in the next six verses. Another call to worship (verse 6), another reason for this praise, although this time with a command (verse 7-8), and another testament to God's power (verse 9-11). Let's spend some time talking about Psalm 95.

Discussion:

1. Share a moment in your daily life where music is more appropriate than words. Why does music speak more to you in that moment?
2. What do you think the "main point" is in Psalm 95? What is the author trying to say?

Leader: Think back to those three parts of the pattern. Psalm 95 calls us to come and sing because God is good and here's what He has done!

3. What is poetic or musical about Psalm 95? In other words, what was better sung in this Psalm than said?

Leader: Look at the imagery and metaphor used. We are not really sheep, but we are like them before God. This artistry is something we see in our own music and poetry all the time.

Part 2: Why Do We Practice It?

Music can be a tricky thing to define because it affects all of us differently. We each have different tastes and preferences, even when it comes to the music we play in church. But one thing we all hold in common when it comes to music is that artistic expression that does what words can't do. While this is not to say words are in any way unimportant or insufficient, we have to recognize that music does something that only music can do. Just like speaking words normally would be insufficient for our Sunday music, playing guitar and singing wouldn't count as a Sunday sermon. So if music is our artful expression to the Lord, what exactly are we expressing and why?

It's likely pretty obvious that almost all worship music talks about the same thing: Jesus. We ask him for help, we praise him for his goodness, we express our love for Him, and we even sing about our sadness to Him. Remember the importance of singing these things rather than just saying them. Let's explore some questions together:

Discussion:

1. Why do we bring all these emotions to God?

Leader: Because not only is He our God and King, but also our beloved Father, our elder Brother, and our Comforter and Counselor. We bring them because He knows and He cares for each of His children.

2. Why do you think we do it in song?

Let's turn back to Genesis for a minute, specifically back to the Creation narrative in Genesis 1-3. We're just going to focus on one verse, but it would be helpful for someone in your group to read Genesis 1 and 2 if anyone doesn't feel well acquainted with the story of Creation. Let's look at Genesis 1:27:

Read Genesis 1:27

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

Think about that word image for a minute. It's meant to give us a task: reflecting God. But if we think about what surrounds this verse we can see something amazing. We are made to reflect the God who created all of heaven and all of earth. We are, therefore, creators after the original Creator. All we do is done in imitation of our Lord, and that includes the art, music, and literature we make! It is in our nature to artfully and beautifully create. So thinking back to music, we can see that what we are doing when we sing is imaging God; We are creating beautiful noise for the one who created the first beautiful noise. So the answer to why we sing is twofold: First, our Lord deserves all of our praise. He is our redeemer and our savior. Second, we do it artfully because we were made to be artful. There is a joy and beauty that fills worship that simply can't be expressed unless through beautiful noise.

Discussion:

1. What broader application or further thoughts do you have upon the idea that we are "creators after the Creator?"
2. What other ways do we glorify God through creativity?

Leader: Open up discussion freely on these topics, but if people are stuck, think of other art forms. Also think of the command that God gives Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and multiply."

Part 3: How Do We Practice It

With the knowledge of what worship music is and why we sing it, we finally move to *how* we do music. It shouldn't surprise us that this is where the most controversy arises. Some people think that we should only ever sing the Psalms. Others think that hymns are too old fashioned, and others think that a drum kit is too loud. It's important to recognize that the *how* of music varies enormously between history and location. There is no one *right* way to sing in church. The staff and elders of every church have to approach their context and culture with wisdom in deciding what style of worship they will practice every Sunday.

Discussion:

1. What "style" of worship did you grow up with or are most used to hearing in Church?
2. What do you appreciate about different "styles" of worship that you aren't as accustomed to?

However, this doesn't end our discussion of *how* to worship. While there might not be one *right* style of worship, there are practices in worship that don't honor the definition of what worship music is and does that we discussed earlier. While it is the job of church staff and elders to wisely choose the music played for worship, it is important for all believers to know the reasons behind these sorts of decisions. **Music is our self-expression of praise and love towards God that takes the form of beautiful noise done together as the body of Christ, which is His church.** However, if our music stops being that, serious problems arise. First, if our music has stopped being an expression of praise, love, and worship after the model of Scripture, something has gone wrong. Some songs include lyrics that contradict Scripture, elevate mankind and human emotion, and emphasize the believer in salvation rather than the Lord. These type of errors come from a misunderstanding of mankind's relationship with God. Second, if worship stops being something that the church can sing as one body, then another problem arises. While an individual can sing at home and worship God, we come together as the Church to worship God with one voice as the bride of Christ. Therefore, it is vital that all who are able, believing members of the Church community be able to join in worship. If the music played is inaccessible or too complex for the community to join in with, then we have forgotten what Sunday music is all about. Let's discuss:

Discuss:

1. What is the definition of worship music?

Leader: See bold text above

2. What types of music don't fulfill this definition?

Leader: Those that contradict Scripture about God and our relationship with Him and those that refuse people in the church the opportunity to join in song for being too complicated or musically inaccessible.

3. What are helpful, constructive responses for us to have when/if we ever encounter the errors spoken about?

Leader: We shouldn't be angry or wrathful, but eager to ask questions. When we hear lyrics we might think are contradictory to Scripture, we can peacefully ask leaders what the lyrics mean and how they might apply. When we find it hard to join in song, we can ask what the difficulty or disconnect might be. Is the key too high? Is the melody too complex or culturally unfamiliar? Overall, we ought to avoid self-righteous anger.

Conclusion:

At Canyon Creek, our music is vital. We joyfully sing each week because we love our Lord. This week, try and remember what we studied today. Remember that music is more than just sound or something to repeat week after week. Music is our self-expression of our relationship to Jesus. When we sing, we are creators after the Creator, mirroring God in His beautiful creative power. With this in mind, maybe this Sunday we might feel the urge to sing a little louder and to stand a little taller, knowing that we are glorifying the God who made us with beautiful noise.