

Improving Worship #2 Singing

There are ten scriptures in the New Testament which reference singing, including Paul's words to the church at Ephesus. *“Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord”* (Eph. 5:19). God made man with a love of singing and then graciously made singing one of the acts of worship whereby He is praised for His greatness, goodness, and benevolence. It behooves us, then, to not only sing with the spirit and with the understanding (1 Cor. 14:15), but to make our song service as good as it can be.

Obviously, some people are blessed with great singing voices, a better sense of timing than the rest of us, and some even with what is known as perfect pitch. These latter ones know when a note is sung just right or if it is off just a very little bit. Fortunately, God has not restricted the singing only to those with the best voices, but rather instructs all to sing, because He is more concerned with the expression of our hearts through our lips than he is with tonal quality.

The above being said, we still desire our song service to be the best it can be. Accordingly, there are practical suggestions for both song leaders and the other worshippers that can help improve our song service. Leaders, for instance can find out beforehand what the sermon topic is and choose songs accordingly.

There are times to practice new songs, but the Lord's day worship services are not the best time for that. Leaders need to announce the hymn numbers loud enough for everyone to hear, and it is a good idea to repeat the number. Song leaders, if you want the congregation to stay with you announce which verses you intend to sing, or indicate the next verse by holding up the appropriate number of fingers at the end of a verse. You do not have to be an expert in the field of music to learn the hand signals. Those who are more knowledgeable than I am may not agree, but learning the basic signals for each time signature, practicing those at home in front of a mirror, and actually using them will help everyone sing together better, even if you are not an advanced student of music.

Another thing that helps is to announce the number of the invitation song before announcing the number of the song preceding the sermon. That method seems to have everyone ready to sing when you start that last song. If you wish to lead singing, and can attend one of the singing sessions taught by different brethren, it would be well worth your time. If nothing else, you can learn the proper use of a pitch pipe to start the song at the right pitch. Nothing makes it harder on the congregation than singing a song that is started way too high or too low. Above all things, make sure the songs you sing are faithful to New Testament teaching.

The congregation can do several things to help improve the song service.

- Pay attention when the number is announced. This may sound unnecessary, but a lot of people are not paying attention and are not ready to sing until everyone else is half way through the first verse.
- When the leader starts the song try to join in no later than on the third word of the song.
- Posture is important to voice quality. Sit up straight and hold your book just below eye level so you can easily shift your attention from the book to the leader. Some people

never look at the song leader. Since most of us are not music experts and our timing is not perfect, look at the song leader at the end of each verse. It helps to start in unison with him on the next verse.

- Open your mouth when you sing, and sing from your diaphragm not through your nose.
- Don't try to take over the song leader's job. If he needs help he will usually ask. If he sings the song slower than you think he should, sing it slow with him, if you think it is too fast, try to keep up.
- Gum does not belong in your mouth during worship, and certainly not when singing.

Since the first act of worship we engage in at a service is usually singing, it can do much to get the service off to a good start or a poor one. For that reason, both the leader and the members in the pews should do all they can to enhance the song service

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