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Congregational Response to Biblical Worship
Series: Music and Worship According to the Bible
The Village Church at Shell Point
Evening Service
January 12, 2025

- I. God-Centered Worship
 - A. Three part series
 - 1. God-centered Worship
 - 2. Congregational Response to Biblical Worship
 - 3. Ministry in Biblical Worship
 - B. Follows the general outline of the document *Music and Worship Principles*
 - 1. Which I will make available to you – after the series is over!
 - C. **God-Centered Worship**
 - 1. “Worship is designed, not for our own personal satisfaction, but for God’s glory. God is the sole object of our worship. His nature and character and redemptive acts in history provide the central content of our worship. Our satisfaction is rooted in the delight and pleasure we take in Him.”
 - a. **Isaiah 42:8** (ESV) — 8 I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.
 - b. **Romans 11:36** (ESV) — 36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.
 - D. **Christ-Exalting Worship**
 - 1. God has made Himself known in His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, in His life, death, and resurrection, has provided the only means by which we might have a relationship with God and be saved. Our worship of God cannot be complete apart from exalting the person and work of Jesus Christ.
 - a. **Colossians 1:15–20** (ESV) — 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.
 - E. **Spirit-Led Worship**
 - 1. The Spirit of God, the third person of the Trinity, is the person who works in the believer, enabling us to genuinely worship God and exalt Jesus

Christ. We are born again by the Spirit, made alive from being spiritually dead, and are indwelt by the Spirit who works in us to will and to do according to God's good pleasure. This is why we are called to worship in Spirit and in truth.

- a. **John 4:24** (ESV) — 24 “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”
- b. **Ephesians 3:14–21** (ESV) — 14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. 20 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

2. So our worship is Trinitarian

- a. Father, Son and Holy Spirit
- b. We sing hymns about the Triune God
- c. We exalt each member of the Godhead
- d. We recognize the economic Trinity – the nature of the roles of each member
 - (1) Father – Creator
 - (2) Son – Redeemer
 - (3) Spirit – Sanctifier

F. **Beauty in Worship**

1. Beauty is not a relativistic quality, in spite of how difficult it may be to define and articulate. Beauty is not “in the mind of the beholder” as if we all have the right to decide what it constitutes. On the other hand, beauty is in the mind of The Beholder – the One true God. The ultimate standard of beauty is holiness. That's why we are told to worship “in the beauty of holiness.” Expressions of beauty are thus integral to true worship, whether such expressions are musical, visual, or verbal and poetic. Expressions of true beauty are to be encouraged, validated, and enjoyed for the glory they bring to God.

- a. **Psalm 96:9** (NKJV) — 9 Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth.
- b. **Exodus 28:40** (ESV) — 40 “... You shall make them for glory and beauty.”
 - (1) This latter text describes the artistic construction of the priestly garments in the OT worship

- (2) And it is the text that we had installed in the entrance to the studio wing of the Tribby Arts Center – a reminder that the beauty that people create – whether they know it or not – is meant to be designed for the glory of God who alone defines beauty

G. **Excellence in Worship**

1. Because we seek to glorify God, exalt Christ, worship in the Spirit, and celebrate the beauty of holiness, half-hearted and hap-hazard approaches to worship demean the God we seek to worship. Our worship ought to represent our best efforts, highest aspirations, and most sincere motivations. Excellence implies skillfulness, and our skillfulness varies from person to person and from community to community. Nevertheless, it is the goal of a church community to express our personal and communal best when we worship, whether we are sharing gifts of worship with others, or are responding as a congregation in response to the revelation of God's nature and character.
 - a. **Exodus 28:2–3** (ESV) — 2 And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty. 3 You shall speak to all the skillful, whom I have filled with a spirit of skill, that they make Aaron's garments to consecrate him for my priesthood.
 - (1) The first people filled with the Spirit were filled for artistic expression in the construction of the Tabernacle
 - b. **Psalm 33:3** (ESV) — 3 Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts.

II. **Congregational Singing**

A. **Singing: Mind and Heart**

- B. Central to the worship experience is congregational singing. Mere recitation of words, however doctrinally correct, are not an adequate response to the revelation of the nature and character of God. Singing enables the mind to engage the heart in ways that are not otherwise possible. Singing has thus always been central to expressions of worship throughout the history of God's people as evidenced by the central position of the psalter in the scriptures.

1. Over 100 times "sing" is used in scripture – the vast majority are imperative (commands) or cohortative moods
 - a. Cohortative mood – pleas, insistence, imploring, self-encouragement
2. Over 70 times it is used in Psalms alone
 - a. Won't even begin to list them

C. **Unpack**

1. This is taken for granted to such a degree that we often (wrongly) equate worship with singing
2. Go to a lot of churches (often contemporary churches), and they will do a number of things in the service, and then when it's time to sing, the leader will say, "Now let us worship!"

- a. That's wrong, of course! There is more to worship than singing
 - b. Worship involves the response of the whole person to the revelation of God in Christ
 - c. Everything we do is to glorify God – that is, to worship Him!
 - d. But while worship and singing are not the same thing, worship is not complete without singing
3. There is something in the human spirit, activated and influenced by the indwelling Spirit of God, that lies dormant and unexpressed apart from singing
- a. Singing is a marriage of the mind and heart, and there is no other substitute in worship for its expression like singing
 - b. That's why the call for singing is so pervasive in scripture
4. We are called upon to speak – together from time to time – the words of scripture, or the great confessions of faith (Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, etc.)
- a. Those are all important for our discipleship, edification, remembrance – and worship
 - b. But even those recitations, however doctrinally correct, don't do what singing enables us to do
5. Throughout church history there have been many different kinds of worship and musical expression
- a. From Gregorian chants, to hymns rooted in classical styles, to hymns reflecting particular periods of historical music (17th Century hymns are different than 19th Century hymns), to songs reflecting folk traditions, to even more contemporary expressions as in today's music
 - b. But whatever the style, there is always singing!
 - c. Singing has always been central to worship in the church, from the OT, to the NT, to the Patristic period, to the Middle Ages, to the Reformation (which was its own recovery of congregational singing in worship), to the revivalist movements, to the mission field
 - d. Singing has been central in the scriptures and central in church history
 - e. We cannot speak about principles of music and worship in the local church without seeing the priority of congregational singing
6. But the document goes further:
- D. **Musical Accompaniment**
- E. **Musical accompaniment to congregational singing should be just that – an accompaniment, not overwhelming the congregation but supporting the congregation, enabling the congregation's musical expressions to be heard, encouraging the church to express musical praise, adoration, and exhortation with confidence.**
- F. Unpack
- 1. When we sing we are usually accompanied by instruments

- a. Not always, of course – sometimes we sing a capella, which is beautiful to just join our voices together
 - b. But most often, our singing is helped by instrumental accompaniment
2. That accompaniment should not be the dominant feature of the music and worship experience
- a. It is to enhance our congregational expressions
 - b. It is to add beauty in the creative musical expressions through harmonic qualities and rhythmic enhancements
 - c. It is to support the melodic line to make it easier for congregants to sing out with confidence
 - d. But the instruments are not to be the dominant feature of the experience when the congregation is singing
 - e. (There are times, of course, when the focus is on instrumental gifts themselves – we’ll say more about those later; but when the congregation is singing, the focus is not the instruments)
 - f. The instruments support the congregation; the congregation does not support the instruments!
3. One of my criticisms of much contemporary worship in churches has to do with this very issue
- a. Because churches have grown technologically with sound systems and visual enhancements, audio-visual engineers have often mixed the platform musicians like they would mix a concert
 - b. And the congregation becomes an afterthought; you often can’t hear the congregation you’re singing with, not even hear the person sitting next to you
 - c. That violates this principle in which congregational singing is central to the worship experience
 - d. Happy to note that our tech staff are very sensitive to this issue
 - e. In fact, in our broadcasts Chris mixes the congregation along with the platform
 - f. You may not be aware of it – but you, in the congregation, are part of our broadcasts – you’re on TV!
 - g. And you are even included in what you hear in the sanctuary
4. Musicians who are involved in leading worship – whether playing the piano or organ or guitar or synthesizer or drums or violins or bass – are sensitive to those issues also
- a. They are all there to support congregational singing when the congregation is called upon to sing

G. **Congregational Familiarity**

H. **Congregational singing should major in familiar expressions so that the people of God in this place have a shared musical repertoire, songs sung with frequency so that the people grow in grace and in fellowship with God and one another.**

I. Unpack

1. Familiarity in the songs we sing are important in our local church musical expressions
 - a. And that is a particular challenge in a church like ours which has more than 25 different denominational backgrounds, all of which have some unique traditions in musical expressions
2. We have a hymn book, which is available in the seats, which a number of people us
 - a. That hymn book has over 500 hymns
 - b. But local churches never sing all 500 hymns in their hymn books
 - c. Not to mention all the songs that are sung in churches that are not in hymn books
 - d. Local churches generally sing between 25 and 50 hymns with regularity
 - e. They don't sing the same ones every week; but they do sing the same 50 every year!
 - f. They become familiar; known; evoking singing with confidence because those hymns are known
 - g. That's what builds a community
 - h. Community building – yes, that involves a lot of things, like small groups and shared ministry and shepherding and congregational caring
 - i. But it also involves a shared music expression
 - j. So we grow in fellowship with one another as we share a familiar repertoire
3. Probably all of us have gone to churches – contemporary churches perhaps – and not had a clue about the songs that were being sung
 - a. Can be very frustrating
 - b. And I'll say more about that difficulty later
 - c. But don't necessarily judge that congregation – that may be their own particular musical repertoire
4. So a shared musical repertoire really does work to build us up together in community
5. Now remember – the vast majority of us come from other churches from a variety of backgrounds
 - a. So coming here will never be exactly what you were used to
 - b. We may sing some songs and hymns that you're familiar with, and then sing others that are new to you
 - c. Even some of our old hymns may be new to you!
 - d. So there is always a learning curve when you come to a new church, even this one
 - e. But before long, once you sung a hymn two or three times, it does become familiar
6. Which bring us to the next statement:

J. **Congregational Growth**

K. At the same time, congregational singing should grow and expand as new musical expressions reflecting beauty and excellence are composed and become integral to the repertoire of the church at large. Contemporary music should carry the same quality and character expected of the best of the past, should be encouraged in expression and participation, and intentional ways of learning and adopting God-glorifying, beautiful new music should be practiced.

L. Unpack

1. Congregations should get stale in musical expressions either, and resist using new music or new musical expressions
 - a. We need to be willing to grow and learn some new songs from time to time
2. Now we shouldn't have to have all new, or unfamiliar, songs in a given service – familiarity is still a principle as we saw earlier
 - a. But we should be willing to receive new music that meets that standards of God-centered musical expressions that we have already established
3. I love being home
 - a. Home is comfortable, familiar – I know what to expect
 - b. I am confident in what takes place at home, what I'm expected to do (usually!)
4. But I also enjoy visiting others, getting outside the familiar from time to time
 - a. In fact, if we didn't do that, it would be healthy
5. The familiar in music and worship is home for us
 - a. But new expressions are our opportunity to grow
6. And many of those new musical expressions come to be loved and treasured by the congregation
 - a. In fact, there are songs that this congregation has come to love which we had never heard five years ago!
7. So we do seek to grow in incremental ways to learn and confidently express worship in new music with is God-centered, Christ-exalting, Spirit-led and has qualities and characteristics of beauty and excellence

M. **Generational Continuity**

N. Contemporary music should not replace the best of the historic musical expressions, but should enable the church to grow in unity as one generation speaks to another, building community not just within a time and place, but across time and place.

1. The church, and this church, is always changing
 - a. You're getting older!
 - b. There are always new people coming (and others passing on!)
 - c. And that is true of this church and of every other church
 - d. There is always a new generation
2. And expressions of worship change with the generations
 - a. And our local church worship needs to grow in that regard as well

3. Now, the same criteria that we have established in the first message need to be applied to new, contemporary music
 - a. But if we are to share our worship across the generations we need to be willing to share in new music
4. At the same time, for a new generation to dismiss the previous generation is to commit the opposite sin
 - a. And will not profit from the wisdom and truth of the prior generations
 - b. And I do believe “sin” is the appropriate word in both directions
5. We have a theological conviction in this church – and it’s a conviction that is not just for us, but for all historic, orthodox Christian churches
 - a. We believe in the holy Catholic church (Apostles’ Creed)
 - b. Not the Roman Catholic Church, but catholic used in the sense of universal
 - c. We share fellowship with believers in Jesus, not just here, in our community
 - d. And not just in our age group or generation
 - e. But with others throughout our nation, our world – which have other forms of musical expressions
 - f. And we others who have gone before us
 - g. We believe in the church militant – those who are still here fighting the good fight
 - h. And we believe in the church triumphant – those who have finished the race and are in glory
 - i. So our worship reflects those who have gone before us
 - j. It’s why we sing A Mighty Fortress – which is 500 years old!
 - k. Because we share fellowship with that great saint – even with his flaws – who came before us!
 - l. It’s why we sing the hymns of Charles Wesley, the songs of Fanny Crosby, the hymns of Isaac Watts – who have long passed from this earth
 - m. But it’s also why we compose music today
 - n. If you don’t sing the songs that span the generations, you break fellowship with the saints!

O. Texts

1. **Ephesians 5:18–21** (NKJV) — 18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, 20 giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another in the fear of God.
2. **Psalms 149:1** (ESV) — 1 Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the godly!

3. Psalm 145:4, 7 (NKJV) — 4 One generation shall praise Your works to another, And shall declare Your mighty acts... 7 They shall utter the memory of Your great goodness, And shall sing of Your righteousness.

III. Holistic Worship

- A. Worship is the holistic response of the people of God to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. “Holistic” means that genuine worship expressions are to engage the whole person – mind, will, and emotions. The following dimensions of worship are thus to be intentionally validated, encouraged and supported.
- B. Unpack
 1. Holistic – the whole person is involved
 - a. Mind, will and emotions
 - b. Even our bodies!
 - c. Love that Dave and Dianne Smith sign as they sing!
 - d. By the way, singing is a physical act
- C. Doctrinally Rich
 1. Genuine worship is to engage the mind. Mindless repetition of music and/or lyrics demeans God-centered worship. The Bible speaks disparagingly of “multiplying words without knowledge.” (Job 35.16) The central doctrines of the Christian faith are to be proclaimed, studied, meditated upon, and expressed in worship with regularity and confidence.
 2. Unpack
 - a. What we sing has content
 - b. When we sing, we think out loud!
 - c. Some contemporary music has been disparagingly referred to as 7-11 music: 7 words repeated 11 times
 - d. Now are hymns often involve refrains – it’s good to repeat central truths, cement them into our minds and souls
 - e. But when you remove biblical and theological content to such a degree that the repetition is simply meant to drive us to human-induced emotional state, that begins to rob our musical and worship expressions of truth
 - f. And we are to worship in spirit and truth
 3. Musical expressions should regularly echo and reinforce the content of the preaching of the Word, and through it more firmly establish truth in the hearts and minds of the congregation.
 4. Unpack
 - a. Grateful for our musical leaders since I’ve been here – they’ve always built our musical expressions based on the sermon themes
 - b. It’s the way we learn deeply and respond to the message of scripture
 - c. It reinforces what we teach, imbeds truths in our souls
 - d. You may not realize what goes into service planning
 - e. Pastor has to be weeks, months working in advance on sermon planning
 - f. Music then is responsive to those themes

g. What you experience on Sunday mornings has been weeks in the making

5. Texts

a. **Romans 12:2** (ESV) — 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

b. **1 Corinthians 14:15** (ESV) — 15 What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also.

D. **Missional**

1. **God-centered, Christ-exalting, Spirit-led worship is meant to spur the church on to mission. God, in His grace and with abundant supply, has called us to participate with Him in His redemptive work. Multiple expressions of the Great Commission, as well as other texts of scripture, call the church to obedience in fulfilling our privileged calling. Worship is the battle cry of the church on mission. Our response to corporate worship becomes an act of the will in obedience to His mission, which is itself an act of worship.**

2. Unpack

a. Our spirits are lifted as we sing and make music together, but it is not solely for our enjoyment

b. It is to send us out into the world with the gospel!

c. Illustration: Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 20): When faced with a horde of enemies, after prayer, he set out with his army

d. **2 Chronicles 20:21–22** (ESV) — 21 And when he had taken counsel with the people, he appointed those who were to sing to the LORD and praise him in holy attire, as they went before the army, and say, “Give thanks to the LORD, for his steadfast love endures forever.” 22 And when they began to sing and praise, the LORD set an ambush against the men of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah, so that they were routed.

e. Our music and singing is not meant as an evangelistic tool in itself – nowhere in scripture do we find that we use songs to appeal to the world or to the unbelieving community

f. But our music is meant to send us into battle!

g. “Worship is the battle cry of the church on mission”

3. Texts

a. **2 Corinthians 5:18–20** (ESV) — 18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

- b. **Romans 15:8–12** (ESV) — 8 For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, 9 and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, “Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name.” 10 And again it is said, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.” 11 And again, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him.” 12 And again Isaiah says, “The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope.” (Notice how integral praise and worship is to the proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles.)

E. **Emotionally Expressive**

1. **Opportunities for emotional expressiveness should abound in the worship of the church. Indeed, the full range of emotions are expressed in the Psalms, the hymn book of the Old Testament, from joy and sadness to grief and even anger. Worship content which provides a vehicle for such expressions ought to be regular elements of a worship service.**
2. **Even physical expressions of emotion are appropriate and ought not to be discouraged.**
3. **At the same time, all elements of worship are to be orderly and under appropriate leadership and control.**
4. Unpack
 - a. Need to encourage, not discourage, the full range of emotional expressiveness in worship
 - b. Each congregation is unique; but you only need to take a trip to a mission field to see how emotionally expressive churches can be!
 - c. Driving force behind these observations are the Psalms
 - d. There are Psalms with strong doctrinal content; but there are also simple Psalms which are emotional expressive
 - e. Both kinds of songs and hymns are appropriate in worship
 - f. And musical leaders ought to seek to provide opportunities for the full expression of emotion
 - g. We joke about being the frozen chosen; we must not be the frozen chosen
 - h. I get to watch you as you worship – not that that’s what I mainly do when I’m singing; but I’m always amazed at how come of you sing the most joyful songs with the most pained and serious expressions!
 - i. I’m no advocate of becoming a raging Pentecostal; but don’t forget what happened when David removed his outer garments and danced before the Lord when the ark of the covenant was finally returned to Jerusalem
 - j. And how Michal, David’s wife, was incensed at his extravagant, exuberant, uninhibited expression of joy in worship

k. **2 Samuel 6:20–23** (ESV) — 20 And David returned to bless his household. But Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David and said, “How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants’ female servants, as one of the vulgar fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!” 21 And David said to Michal, “It was before the LORD, who chose me above your father and above all his house, to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the LORD—and I will celebrate before the LORD. 22 I will make myself yet more contemptible than this, and I will be abased in your eyes. But by the female servants of whom you have spoken, by them I shall be held in honor.” 23 And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death.

5. Texts

- a. **Psalm 27:6** (ESV) — 6 And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the LORD.
- b. **Psalm 47:1** (ESV) — 1 Clap your hands, all peoples! Shout to God with loud songs of joy!
- c. **Psalm 47:5–7** (ESV) — 5 God has gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet. 6 Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises! 7 For God is the King of all the earth; sing praises with a psalm!
- d. **2 Samuel 6:14** (ESV) — 14 And David danced before the LORD with all his might. ...
- e. **1 Corinthians 14:31–33** (ESV) — 31 For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, 32 and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. 33 For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints... 40 But all things should be done decently and in order.

6. So – controlled exuberance in worship

F. **Validity of variety and balance**

- 1. **Music, in both congregational singing and in other aspects of worship, which is God-centered, Christ-exalting, Spirit-led and exhibits beauty and excellence, should include both traditional and contemporary expressions. A variety of musical forms is explicitly encouraged in scripture and the people of God are admonished to “sing a new song.” Great songs of the past sung along with excellent contemporary songs remind the church of our worshipful fellowship with the saints across the spans of time with the expectation that each new generation will continue to worship in Spirit and in truth.**
- 2. Unpack
 - a. Good summary of what we have been saying about our congregational response
- 3. Texts

- a. **Colossians 3:16** (ESV) — 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.
- b. **Psalm 33:3** (ESV) — 3 Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts.
- c. **Psalm 96:1** (ESV) — 1 Oh sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth!