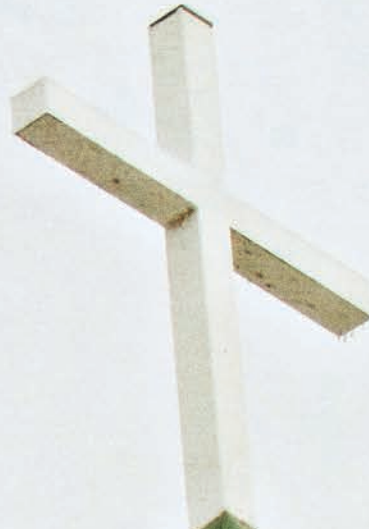


Theoacademy

BEING PRESBYTERIAN PREPARATION FOR ORDERED MINISTRY

Session 13: Prayer & Song in Worship



Theocademy

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Getting started

Before watching the video, consider the following questions.

- How does your congregation incorporate music within worship? What types of music are commonly used? (What are your preferences?)
- The Apostle Paul admonishes us to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). How is this similar to/different from the kinds of praying we do within corporate worship?

During the video

As you watch the video, answer the following questions.

- How does music draw us into the community of faith?
- How do songs help us to express our faith?
- How does music draw us into deeper worship?
- How does Dr. Gary Rand compare prayer and living out a relationship?
- What role does language play in prayer?

- Why are there so many different kinds of prayers?
- How should we take diversity into account within (and as we plan out) our worship?

Prayer

At this point, we've explored both *why* we worship and *how* God equips and empowers us to do that. Now, let's turn to two key elements of *what* our worship looks like: prayer and song. Both are ways of responding to God, but they're also more than that – they express our ongoing relationship, primarily with God but also with one another.

Far too often, the easiest way to silence a room is by asking, “Who’d like to lead us in prayer?” Any number of reasons go into this – we don’t know what to pray, we’re afraid that we might sound foolish, we are out of practice, etc. But the irony of it is that when Jesus taught about prayer, he specifically advised us *not* to get all wrapped up in “crafting the perfect prayer:”

⁷ When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. ⁹ “Pray then in this way: *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰ Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread. ¹² And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.*¹ *Matthew 6:7-13, NRSV*

What’s so striking about what we know as the “Lord’s Prayer” is its utter simplicity – it uses everyday language and recalls everyday symbols like bread and unpaid bills. However, it encompasses just about all of our lives, both physical and spiritual. Lots of theologians have studied prayer and have come up with general categories of prayer – and the great part is, they’re all right here in these six sentences.

Adoration

¹ You might be thinking to yourself, “Where’s the last line of the prayer?” According to most biblical scholars, the “For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever; Amen” was an addition of the early church, rather than an original part of the gospel accounts.

When we pray prayers of *adoration*, we are showing our love and praise to God for who God is.

- Where do you see adoration of God in Jesus' prayer?

- How can you express your adoration of God?

Confession

In confession, we admit the fact that we have lived in a way that runs counter to God's plan, both for our lives and for the world at large.

- Where do you see confession to God in Jesus' prayer?

- What sins or debts do you need to ask forgiveness of?

Devotion

When we pray prayers of devotion, we affirm and celebrate God's ownership of our lives.

- Where do you see Jesus expressing devotion to God in his prayer?

- Over what areas of your life can you allow God to claim full ownership?

Intercession

When we pray intercessory prayers, we ask God to step in and take control of a situation we (or others we know) are facing.

- Where do you see Jesus asking God to intercede in his prayer?

- What situations and experiences in your life need God's redeeming, reconciling touch?

Supplication

Our prayers of supplication ask God to provide us with what we need.

- Where do you see Jesus asking God to supply our needs?

- What needs in your life can you ask God to fulfill?

Thanksgiving

Prayers of thanksgiving praise God for what God has done, both in our lives and in the world.

- Where do you see Jesus expressing thanks to God in his prayer?

- What has God done in your life that you can be thankful for?

Like Dr. Rand says, in today's American culture church is one of the few places people can still go to sing together. Yet perhaps no other form of communication is quite like it – for when we sing corporately, our minds are all focused on the same idea, we actively listen to one another, and when we add alternate voicing (i.e., harmony) it is for the express purpose of enhancing communication of those involved. Plus, it's a powerful way that we can reflect the beauty of our Creator. But why do we use music in worship? In his essay "Voicing God's Praise: The Use of Music in Worship," David P. Nelson describes three of music's purposes.² Let's take a look at them in the context of one of the most popular hymns of the twentieth century as we explore the role of music in worship.

"How Great Thou Art"

Swedish folk song, English translation of a poem by Gustav Boberg

O Lord my God! When I in awesome wonder consider all the works Thy hand hath made:
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder, Thy power throughout the universe displayed.

Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee; How great Thou art, how great Thou art!

When through the woods and forest glades I wander, and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur, and hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze:

Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee: How great Thou art, how great Thou art!

And when I think that God, His Son not sparing, Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in;
That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing, He bled and died to take away my sin:

Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee; How great Thou art, how great Thou art!

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation and take me home, what joy shall fill my heart!
Then I shall bow in humble adoration and there proclaim, my God, how great Thou art!

Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee; How great Thou art, how great Thou art!

Doxology: ministry to God

Probably most obvious, when we sing in church we're singing to God. We can express adoration, confession, devotion, intercession, supplication, and thanksgiving through song – in fact, our Directory for Worship has two sections (W-2.1003 and W-2.1004) that specifically describe how we can use music as prayer.

- In what ways is "How Great Thou Art" an expression of adoration, confession, devotion, intercession, supplication, and/or thanksgiving?

- Is there a difference for you between a sung prayer and a spoken one? If so, what is that difference?

² In Bateman, Herbert W., ed. 2002. *Authentic Worship: Hearing Scripture's Voice, Applying Its Truth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications.

Edification: ministry to the church

The medium and message of music can serve to build up the body of Christ. Songs can teach us important truths about our faith, often in a way we might not otherwise be receptive to. Likewise, they can encourage believers to keep the faith when times get tough, or exhort us to return to the faith when we've strayed.

- What truths about our faith does “How Great Thou Art” teach us?

- How might it spur us on to hold/return to the faith that we profess?

Proclamation: ministry to the world

Not only can music minister to those of us who have already fostered a relationship with Christ, but it can also serve as a call to those who have not yet come to follow him. As Nelson argues, “...worship has a genuinely evangelistic purpose. This reality should cause us to consider how well the content, clarity, and intelligibility of the music we use in worship communicates the truth of the gospel and the glory of God to the unbeliever” (p. 155).

- How does “How Great Thou Art” carry the message of the good news in Christ?

- How might it serve as a conversation starter about what a relationship with Christ is like?

