

STRAIGHT FROM THE UTE: A PASTOR'S OPINIONS ON WORSHIP

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Let me come clean right from the outset. I am not a musician. In fact, I must confess, I am a pastor – and therefore have an opinion!

Regarding music, I have it on good authority that the music I like listening to is by *100 Portraits, Jack Johnson, and Norah Jones.* I say it is on good authority because I don't actually know who is who (although I suspect Norah has the slightly more high-pitched voice). These people just happen to be the CDs littering my female-dominated household.

Before you feel too sorry for me let me hasten to add that I do have one point of refuge. It is my 1992 Mazda Bravo four-wheel drive ute ("ute" = "pickup truck" for you North Americans). My ute is my vehicle – it is a man's vehicle. **Boy + ute = man. Man + ute = mighty warrior.** In my ute, Norah doesn't get a moment; no sir-ee. In my ute it's just me me and The Cat – *Cat Stevens* that is.

Having established my credibility on matters of music, I want to do my "pastor thing" and express a few opinions, specifically about worship. Please take them simply for that – opinions. I'll let you know when I have decreed that they have become law.

OPINION 1: WE ALL HAVE MUSIC AND SONG "IN" US.

Who do you know that does not, at some time, hum, tap, whistle, jig, or in some other way betray the fact that something musical or rhythmic is happening inside of them? I suspect that no one is exempt from this impulse. I think we all are guilty of music. We always have been. In fact I suggest the whole of creation has a song in her. The Chronicler writes:

"Sing to the LORD, all the earth; proclaim his salvation day after day. Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let them say among the nations, 'The LORD reigns!' Let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them! Then the trees of the forest will sing, they will sing for joy before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth." (1 Chron 16:30-33)

I believe the Chronicler has tapped into a pre-Fall condition of mankind and creation, that had song alive and well in her soul. That does not mean that the song has gone away since the Fall, but like everything else, it has been greatly marred. That good old doctrine known as "The Doctrine Of The Total Depravity of Man" tells us that since the Fall every part of our being has been corrupted. Every part of our life is lived at a level less than what God intended for us. The song is still there, but it has become a whisper. What the Cross accomplishes for us is to restore the song, and its ally – *joy.*

OPINION 2: MUSIC AND SONG ARE GIFTS GIVEN BY GOD.

God invented music and song. He did it for a purpose, and He did it for our enjoyment. Music is a tool. It is something God has given us to help us in the activity of expression. Music can convey how we feel – our gratitude, our joy, and other "uppies" in the area of feelings that words cannot express. Music can be an efficient carrier of expression. A hum, a whistle or even clapping can bypass our brain and therefore communicate to us in an unadulterated way.

Song is a subset of music in this same task of expression, and is a great tool also. The use of words – our own or other people's words, can often bring clarification to us about how we feel and what it is that is erupting out of us. Song also brings an added dimension to our ability to give expression to the more "down" side of our feelings. Yet, biblically, it is clear that song's closest partner is joy.

OPINION 3: MUSIC AND SONG ARE DESIGNED FOR WORSHIP.

I raise this point because it is a good excuse for me to talk about my Mazda Bravo Four-Wheel Drive again. I drive my ute to work each day. Three kilometres of bitumen, no hills, no deep rocky ravines – not even a speed bump. That is hardly a good use for a four-wheel drive. My Mazda Bravo, like me, is built for action – we are both best used where we can be wild.

We hear music on our radios every day, and often allow ourselves to cruise along joining in the song or engaging in some other response. Yet music and

SONG'S CLOSEST PARTNER IS JOY





song were designed for so much more. Don't get me wrong – secular music is okay. However, I believe that music is at its best when it can plummet the depths, when it can scale the highest peaks, and when it can take us to a place far removed from earthly routine – when it takes us to God.

OPINION 4: THERE ARE OTHER TOOLS AS WELL AS MUSIC AND SONG.

We have a creative creator God who made us in His image. We too are called to be creative. I love the freedom that postmodern culture is bringing to the church, and the quest to reclaim creativity in Christian living. I love the fact that there is a new sense of adventure in exploring the way we bring ourselves before God to worship Him.

However, I want to say this about these other tools – they will never replace music and song. Songs are our staple, our base for worship expression. In my opinion, they are the tools that God designed, and has given to us, to best cross the human-divine divide.

OPINION 5: THE EMERGING CHURCH IS IN DANGER OF MISSING OUT.

In the western world, postmodern culture is having great impact on the local church and the way in which we offer our worship to God. This culture is more eclectic, in touch with their feelings, creative, expressive, educated, and consumer-based. What amazes me is that many emerging churches, in rejecting the previous norms of doing church, are rejecting the important role of music and song in worship.

The missional thrust of the postmodern church is exciting. Who wouldn't want to meet in a pub, or a coffee shop, or on a non-Christian's territory. Yet in accommodating the needs of unbelievers we must not let go of what many of us would consider the most critical corporate activity of the Church – worship – best expressed in music and song. The church "sent" still needs to be the church "gathered," and in that gathering we must bend our knee and offer the praise of our lips to a great and awesome God. Music and song will always rise up in that place of gathering and offering.

Beyond Words

Well, I've run out of opinions. Funny how that happens around dinner time. To sum it all up, let me just say that music and song are God's special gifts to us, so that we may express what is deep in our being. The result of that song expressed from within us is that we come to a new depth before God, beyond rationality, and beyond mere words. I encourage you to keep this core activity central in our worship of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.



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[1] See also Ps.96:11-13; Ps. 98:8-9

[2] Ps. 28:7; 98:4; Is. 55:12