06
Where Do You Start – Lyrics Or Melody?

When it comes to writing songs in general but writing worship songs specifically I've found there are all kinds of "yabuts" that come from new writers or those who are considering beginning to write worship songs for their church. *Yabuts* – you know what I mean.. "Yaaaa… buuuut…" Yabuts!

Yabuts can unveil some hidden assumptions or insecurities when it comes to actually beginning the process. (Sidenote: If you are an artist and have not read **The War of Art** by Stephen Pressfield, you owe it to yourself and your community to do this, now!) When new songwriters bring up concerns or questions about the process of actually writing worship songs together, it can often be a red flag that the person wants to find the perfect step-by-step outline rather than just doing the work of writing worship songs.

Although there are several concerns and questions which are raised, I've found the most common one is this: where do I start, lyrics or melody?

I *get* the question – Is it better to spend time finalizing lyrics which are accurate, helpful, inspirational, instructive? Or it is better to start with a melody which is singable, familiar and memorable? The next two chapters in this ebook will talk more about lyrics and melody specifically when it comes to writing worship songs but in a general sense here is how I answer this question.

Where do I start, lyrics or melody?

Yes.

Start. That is the important part.

I know great songwriters who start with lyric and feel like a single phrase can become the cornerstone of an entire song and they will work, work, work until they nail down that phrase, build it into a chorus and develop verses around it before they go to melody.

I know other writers who just record melody idea after idea after idea – they have a bank of melody ideas just waiting for lyrics and have spent hours and hours refining melodies, trying different notes on top of different chord progressions to come up with music their congregation will be able to sing.

The key to each of these options? Start. **You must start.**

You can spend all day debating whether it's better or more helpful to start with lyrics or melody when you write worship songs but if you debate more than you write, you're wasting your time. So write! Start!

When it comes to lyric and melody – both are very important when it comes to worship songs. The melody needs to be singable, the lyric needs to be accurate. The melody needs to be memorable, the lyric needs to teach. Both are important but both have different roles. You'll sometimes hear the phrase "the lyric is king, the melody is queen" from those who write worship songs.

The lyric is king – this is really the distinction of what makes a worship song a worship song. The lyric must be *focused* on Jesus, *accurate* in its theology, *teaching* for the believer, *instructive* for the skeptic – all of those things. The lyric is king.

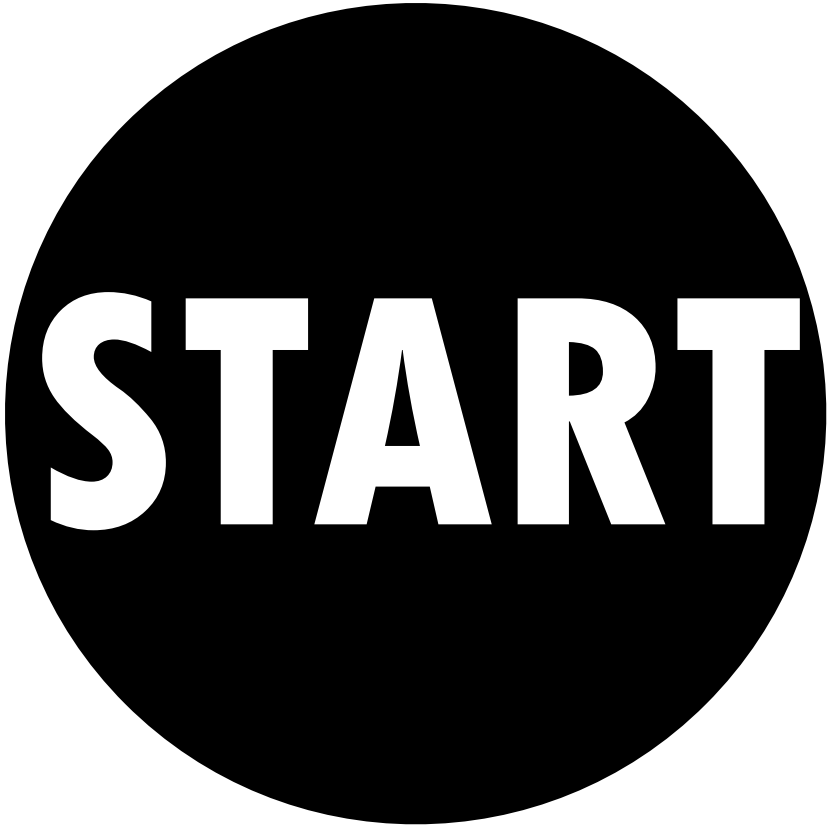
06
Where Do You Start – Lyrics Or Melody?

The melody is queen – don't neglect the role of melody as you write worship songs! The melody is actually what helps us memorize songs. We remember the notes, the hook, the phrasing of our favorite songs even if we don't remember all the words. The melody is crucial to help our congregation actually sing these songs we are writing.

So don't neglect either – both are important! But don't get so tied up in asking questions that you neglect to actually do the thing you are trying to do: write worship songs!

Where do you start, lyrics or melody? Yes!

Next up: five things to remember about lyrics as you write worship songs.



07
5 Things To Remember About Lyrics

For me, there is no question that the most meaningful part of the journey as I write worship songs is developing lyrics. The lyrics of our worship songs are what makes them unique – the subject, the object, the topic, the focus should all point towards God, glorifying and honoring Him because of who He is and what He does. The church's responsibility is to sing the praise of God with songs that speak clearly of His attributes and His activity.

Lyrics can also be a real sticking point for new songs and there is no shortage of controversy when it comes to the lyrics of worship songs. To be honest, sometimes it feels like there are songwriters who are using odd words and phrases simply for their own sake rather than for the purpose of writing a better song.

At the same time, certain words or phrases can quickly become trite, overused and lose any kind of significance for our churches as they sing.

Here are five things you need to remember about lyrics when you write worship songs:

01 Jesus is the centre
Don't run from it, don't deny it, don't hide it and certainly don't try to be tricky and clever about it. Make Jesus famous with your songs. Proclaim His goodness and mercy. Write about His compassion and His grace. Tell the story of the gospel – the whole story! - through the lyrics when you write worship songs.

Lyrics focused on Jesus is the hallmark of Christian worship and really the only distinctive that makes a worship song a worship song. And no, capitalizing You and He is not enough! Be clear, be specific!

02 Rhymes are a two-edged sword
Rhymes help your audience remember the song and give our brain some hooks to grab on to when we are learning a new song. Rhymes can be very helpful and you should learn about rhyming patterns and structure as your write worship songs. Do you have the last word of each line of your verse rhyme? The 2nd and 4th lines? The last line of each verse rhymes? The structure should serve the song but use rhymes in a way which will help your audience remember the song.

At the same time, rhymes can very quickly become cliché and every songwriter has had the experience of tearing a song apart because he just can't find a way to get out of the face/grace rhyming trap! Don't go to a familiar rhyme too quickly. Look for alternatives, find a different way to say what you're trying to say and find a better word to use.

03 Lyric ideas are everywhere
Expect words and inspiration to find you at the strangest moments. Sitting in the chair at the dentist. Waiting at a red light. Eating the first bite of a great meal. Be on the lookout for phrases or word combinations which catch your attention. I've heard Paul Baloche describe this as having your "antennae up" – always expecting that a conversation or book or movie might produce a line which could eventually find its way to a song.

Be ready for this inspiration. Don't dismiss a phrase which comes to mind after you hear it. If it's caught your attention it might be a signal that there is a deeper significance to this phrase which could be used as you are writing worship songs.

07
5 Things To Remember About Lyrics

04 No, you will not remember!
I don't know how many great song titles or ideas have been lost forever by great songwriters because they were never captured. I know my first reaction when I come across a word or phrase which grabs my attention is *"Of course I'll remember that!"* No, of course you will not. You need a way to capture these ideas quickly that will allow you to process them later.

At the end of this post I'll show you three tools you must have to remember lyric ideas.

05 Lyrics live on
The last 10 years or so has brought a resurgence of rewriting old hymns of the church. The interesting thing for me from a songwriting perspective is that when we talk rewriting we are really talking about new melody – in most cases we have kept the lyrics the same but found a way to make the melody more singable, more accessible, more memorable for a modern audience.

The point of this is not to say that this is what *should* happen but this is what *is* happening. The lyric lives on, the melody is temporary. Should you ever write a worship song which is being sung after you are dead it will probably be due to the lyric – what the song says about Jesus, how it encourages followers of Christ in their faith and how it proclaims different attributes of His character.

Here are three tools that I use to help remember lyric ideas and inspiration:

- Notebook: I have a **Moleskine notebook** with me almost all the time. I have several Moleskines filled with notes, ideas, conversations and all kinds of scribbles. I review these often and go back to ideas I'd captured years ago.

- **Evernote**: I know people who love Evernote and people who hate it. If it works for you, make it work! I have mine setup to receive new notes via email and use the iPhone app all the time to capture lyric ideas. Again, I go back every now and then to review these ideas.

- Voice recorder: This might be an app on your phone or maybe a voice recorder like the **Roland R-05**. The beauty of a voice recorder is that you can quickly explain what it is about the idea that captured your attention.

Of course the key to any tool is that it must be easily accessible all the time. If you always have your phone with you, get a voice recorder app. If you are able to always carry a notebook, do that. Any tool is only going to be as good as its accessibility.

Five things to remember about lyrics when you write worship songs: Jesus is the centre, rhymes are a two-edged sword, lyric ideas are everywhere, no you will not remember and lyrics live on.

Next up: five things to remember about melody when you write worship songs.

08
5 Things To Remember About Melody

I had a blast writing this blog series focused on helping you write worship songs and the response from worship songwriters was incredible. It didn't take long to see that there were many people passionate about songwriting and looking for some encouragement along the way. If this ebook has been helpful for you, please encourage songwriters and those who are writing worship songs for your local churches to visit the site and grab a free copy for themselves - www.writeworshipsongs.com

So far, we've talked about inspiration, co-writing, conversations and begun to talk about lyrics and melody. This chapter is going to focus on five things you need to remember when it comes to melody as part of writing worship songs.

01 Know the rules then break them
Don't run from it, don't deny it, don't hide it and certainly don't try to be tricky and clever about it. Make Jesus famous with your songs. Proclaim His goodness and mercy. Write about His compassion and His grace. Tell the story of the gospel – the whole story! - through the lyrics when you write worship songs.

02 From C to shining C
Remember that you are writing melody for your congregation not for you. How many minutes of actual singing do you think the typical Sunday morning attender does outside of the songs you are singing together? In an average week? Zero. Zilch. Nada. Zip. Not one. You are not writing songs for singers, you are writing songs for talkers who are being asked to sing.

As a general rule, the majority of your melody should remain in a one octave range "from C to shining C." For women, this is middle C up one octave. For men, this is middle C down one octave. There are definitely exceptions and there's nothing wrong with a low Bb or a high D but your melody shouldn't live up there.

03 Keep It Simple!
Stop for a second and hum the melody of "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star." Seriously. Do it. I'll wait….

How many notes in that melody? Six. Six notes in that melody. What about "Mary Had A Little Lamb"? Four. Four notes in the melody of that song. Complexity is not memorable. Simplicity is memorable.

This applies to worship songs as well. Think of the chorus of "Mighty to Save" – five notes. Chorus of "Blessed be Your Name" – four notes. Chorus of "How Great is Our God" – five notes. When is the last time you wrote a melody which includes only four or five notes? Up for the challenge? *You might create the most memorable melody you've ever written.*

08
5 Things To Remember About Melody

04 Melody serves the lyric
Earlier in this ebook I mentioned this idea that "*lyric is king, melody is queen*" – the lyric of our worship songs is what makes them distinctive. The object and subject of our worship is Jesus and this is what makes our worship songs what they are.

As you write, remember that the melody needs to serve the lyric. If the words of your song are focused on celebration, rejoicing, exalting God for His attributes and His activity but the melody of your song is a slow, droning, mournful line, you may not get the response you're looking for. Doesn't mean it's a bad melody, it just doesn't serve the lyric. If it IS a good melody, there is another, better lyric which it can serve in another song.

05 Capture Ideas
I mentioned this same thing when it comes to lyrics but from time to time you will have a melody just drop in to your brain and if you are like me you may think to yourself, "No problem, that melody is so great I will remember it!" No, you will not! Get yourself a way to remember your melody ideas in a way that makes sense to you.

I love the Evernote app for iPhone and us it to record audio notes all the time. You could also use a standard voice recorder like the Roland R-05 or any other kind of voice recording app for your phone. You could even call yourself on the phone and leave a voicemail with the melody idea to retrieve later.

Five things to remember about melody when you write worship songs: Know the rules then break them, from C to shining C, keep it simple, melody serves the lyric and capture ideas.

Next up: Share & rewrite & share