How Much Is Enough? by Sheri Gould

So you love to sing. In fact, you sing on your team at church. Maybe you sing in a band on the weekends. Perhaps you sing for an occasional wedding or funeral. How much should you practice to stay in shape (or get into shape!)? Let's take a look at what you need…

The Weekend Warrior

Let's face it: unless you're a professional singer you most likely have a "day job". That "day job" could mean you leave your house daily to work out in the world or perhaps you're a stay at home parent. Either way, you don't spend the vast majority of your time thinking about singing. Instead, singing is more like a hobby to you, something you enjoy doing but haven't managed to pay the bills with just yet.

However, if you are like so many other singers I know, you likely sing-a lot-on the weekends. The weekend is the time when most churches hold the majority of their meetings that include music. The weekend is the time when you're most likely to sing if you are dabbling in music outside the church as well. So how can you best prepare yourself physically to be able to maximize your vocal capabilities when the time *does* come for you to sing?

Growth or Maintenance?

The first thing you have to decide is what your goals are vocally. Are you trying to maintain what you have and keep yourself healthy vocally? Or, are you trying to move forward and grow as a vocalist? That will determine how much time you really need to spend in preparation and conditioning. At a minimum, you need to put yourself in a position where you can continue to sing and serve for as long as God gives you breath and a voice right? So…

Maintenance

To maintain your current vocal level and to provide the right amount of practice and conditioning we first need to assess how much you are singing (on a stage or platform). Tally up the amount of hours you typically sing in each 24 hour period when you perform or take part in a team. For example, if you typically sing on Sundays, what does your day look like? Do you start out with a rehearsal in the morning from 7:30-8:45 and then sing for two consecutive services each requiring you to sing approximately 30 min each? Then you would say that you typically sing for two hours on that day. This is an important number for you to determine. If you sing for two hours on any given day, then you need to condition your vocal cords to be able to withstand two hours of "stress". You see, your vocal cords are muscles and need to be conditioned and prepared like any other set of muscles that you would use. If you were going to run an hour long marathon, you would need to consistently run for an hour to condition your muscles to be in the right shape for your marathon. Well, the same is true of singing. Your vocal cords CAN withstand two hours of singing, but if you want them to give you a great performance you need to prepare them to be able to do so.

How can I possibly sing for two (or more) hours a day?

Here is the trick—look for things that you do in your life that you can add singing to. There are lots of times during the day that you could actually be singing and do what you are doing! But let me back up for a minute. *You need to start every single day of your life by warming up your vocal cords*. Period. Add this to something you already do; the shower is the perfect way to start your day with a warm-up but there are other ways too. Find something that you do every morning that you could add singing to.

Warming up doesn't require the same type of focused energy and concentration that "working out" the vocal cords would. When you warm up, you need to gently and systematically stretch your cords - that is pretty much it. It's not very complicated. Ah, but you say, I don't have to sing every day so why should I warm up? *Any day that you use your voice is a day that you could benefit from a warm-up,* even if you only use your voice to speak. Starting out your day thinking about caring for your voice will help you to think more like a "singer" throughout the day and that might encourage you to practice better vocal health overall. Besides, if you do a 15-20min warm-up every day, you will be that much closer to conditioning your cords for your weekend work-out! Next, throughout the day look for opportunities to sing and use them. Try to sing as often as possible in the same way that you will sing when you are on a platform or stage. Get into the mindset of "giving it your all" as often as you can. We all sing a bit differently when we sing in front of others, so try to mimic that when you sing throughout the week. Let your mantra be "sing, sing, sing!" Making singing a habit will be good for you in countless ways. Singing itself is good for you! But the continual practice will help to condition your vocal cords for your "warrior weekend" and you will find your voice stronger, more agile and better equipped to handle the hours of singing.