Open With The Same Song – Every Week

Why repetition can be a gift to a worship leader and a congregation

By Dan Wilt

Every week, every worship leader has the hard task of choosing one song that will open the set and provide a spiritual and musical on-ramp to the rest of the worship experience. What if you tried something unexpected – like repeating the same opening song each week for a season?

You're planning your next set asking the same kinds of hard questions you always do, in a similar order. One in particular leads the way…

- *Which song should I use to open the set, and how will that open us to worship?*

Answering this question often tips the dominoes of our other planning questions, and gets us moving in planning an effective, thematically strong set.

Give Yourself A Break – Repeat Your Opening Song

Repeating the same opening song for a *season* – i.e. *in every worship set for a limited time* – can bring relief to your worship planning and be a refreshing wind to the worship life of your congregation.

It can also be a useful experiment for seeing how your congregation actually responds to repetition. Let's talk about that for a moment.

a) Repetition As Bad Guy

Repetition in contemporary worship leadership can be seen as the bad guy in our quest to use all the great new songs that are being sung around the Church (or, quite honestly, on the radio or most popular YouTube channel).

Sure, worship leaders "repeat" new songs for a bit, then integrate them into our flow, but if we do one song too often – we'll hear about it (it should be written in a worship leader's job description, "Must please everyone, every week, and the worship experience must be a home run – without fail, always with fresh songs leading the way).

b) Repetition As Good Guy

Repetition in nature, in architecture, daily and weekly routines, and sacramental actions – can be *beautiful*.
In liturgical worlds, repeating songs like the *Doxology*, the *Gloria Patri*, and the *Sanctus* is a normal practice. Everyone knows it can bring a sense of solidarity, community, joy, healthy predictability, and *power* when a song reappears week after week.
But for contemporary worship leaders, it feels like the sky will fall if we repeat a song too much. The truth is, I wasn't sure how it would go if I repeated an opening song for a season. So, I ran an experiment.

Opening Song Case Study: *The Doxology*

For 6 weeks in one of my worship leading environments, I made the worship set a test lab. True to my liturgical roots, I decided to open *every single set*, for a 6 week season, with the *Doxology*.
However, I designed a *special Doxology* for that repetitive opening moment. I rewrote the *Doxology* of Thomas Ken into the *Doxology Anthem (Lord We Praise You)* as an intentional opening song (invocation/gathering song) to start each set, as per my criteria below.

What I Needed In An Opening Song:

- A medium-tempo song I could use as an on-ramp into the set
- A theologically-rich (Trinitarian and praise-centered) and devotionally-engaging song
- A simple, short song they could memorize (almost a prelude rather than a big song)
- A song that connected with the old and the young with equal strength
- A song that set an anticipatory musical and spiritual stage for entering into the next songs

What My Community Needed In An Opening Song:

- A song they knew by heart, and was short
- A song that didn't scare them awake at 10 am on a Sunday
- A song that felt like they *should* sing it regularly
- A song that they could harmonize with and practice weekly (in the same key)
- A song that leveraged our sense of joy in coming together

What The Congregation Did:

- The congregation began to gain confidence singing the song
- Harmonies became stronger and more beautiful
- They appreciated the repetition (I was told by many), knowing other songs followed
- They enjoyed bringing new people to a rich sonic and devotional experience
- They all sang louder each week – from the kids to the silver-haired saints

Initially my worship team mocked the idea (lovingly), and my pastor questioned me (but with enthusiasm for the concept). But after we did it for 6 weeks? Our community *loved it* (especially after the first 3 weeks when they realized I wasn't going to stop and they kicked into "harmonize" mode).

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You don't have to use the *Doxology* or *Doxology Anthem* like I did (and do). But whatever you do, find a song like it that is strong, repeatable, short, and somewhat familiar (even historic?) that works for your community and fits a theme.

1. **Pick a season**, like Advent and Christmas, to try it
2. **Talk to your pastor** about the experiment, and make sure it's welcome and good timing
3. **Set the arrangement**, keep it short, and do it the same way (in the same key) each time
4. **Tell the congregation** that's what you're doing, so they're not confused
5. **Give it at least 3-4 weeks** before judging if it works

(Personally, if I had my druthers, I could probably even begin every set, every week, for a year, with the same song! But a shorter 3-6 week season is a better start.)

With the song in your congregation's soul, you can then use the song in Communion, in weddings, in funerals, and in various other settings, with a strong, predictable response.

But even if you just repeat an opening song for a season like Advent, you'll have a taste of the saints singing, in one accord, with a song through which they can experience God's heart, express their hearts, hone their musical participation, and offer their devotion.

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Question: Have you ever tried this with a song? How did it go? What could we learn from your experience?

Resource

If you want to experiment with the *Doxology Anthem* as your opener for Advent or another season, I created a full, free resource download. It includes the song in an accessible key, chart, text files, litany, responsive reading, videos, and more.

Bio: Dan Wilt, M.Min. is an author, communicator, and innovative voice in the fields of Worship and the Arts. He is the creator of the Essentials In Worship Video Training Course for worship leaders and teams, and is the Founder of the 35K member WorshipTraining.com. Dan serves as the Director of Communications & Resources for Vineyard USA, and his ancient-future worship leadership blog offers weekly tools and team encouragements at DanWilt.com.

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