

# The Purpose of Music in Worship

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God has purpose and intent in including music as an element of worship. The Bible has much to say about music and its role in worship. The following list summarizes seven roles that will help us define the purpose of music in worship.

- 1) Music is a primary means of **praising God**. The majority of references to music in the Bible, including verses that teach about music, as well as Psalms and other passages that are the texts to songs, are in the context of praising God. Through music we exalt, glorify, honor, bless, and adore God. We marvel at the perfection of His character, attributes, gifts, names, and works, ascribing to Him in song all that He is! *The Psalter* itself culminates in praise:

Praise the LORD!  
Praise God in His sanctuary;  
Praise Him in His mighty firmament!  
Praise Him for His mighty acts;  
Praise Him according to His excellent greatness!  
(Psalm 150:1–2)

Music exists first and foremost to the glory and praise of God and Scripture convincingly bears this out.

- 2) Music is a primary means of **giving thanks to God**. Thanksgiving is a grateful acknowledgment or public confession of the goodness of God manifest in what He has done for His people. It is a grateful response to God for His deliverance, healing, forgiveness, salvation, and other blessings that He brings to us. Music accompanies thanksgiving in worship:

Hallelujah! I will give thanks to the LORD with all my heart  
In the company of the upright and in the convocation.  
(Psalm 111:1)

Thanksgiving is also sung in the context of evangelism:

I will give thanks to You among the peoples, O Lord;  
I will sing praises to You among the nations.  
(Psalm 57:9)

As with praise, references in Scripture to giving thanks most often occur in song.

- 3) Music serves as a means of **prayer**. Many of the songs and psalms of Scripture are addressed directly to God. David, for example, in Psalms 4 and 5 pours out his heart to God, brings petitions and asks for help and mercy. Throughout the Psalter, psalmists lament over sorrows, anguish over difficulties, confess their sinfulness, rejoice over God's kindness, celebrate His goodness, and express numerous other emotions as they pour out their hearts before Him. Music can serve as invocation, petition, supplication, intercession, repentance, lamentation, and other forms of prayer, lifting our concerns before God.
- 4) Music serves as a means to **proclaim truth**. As we sing praise, thanksgiving, and prayer we voice our words to God, but music can also bring God's Word to us. We can sing the words of Scripture, Psalms and other passages set to music. We can also teach and admonish one another in song with the truths of Scripture. Psalm 1, for example, is a didactic song that teaches us the difference between the blessed and the ungodly. Music helps us to remember and meditate on the truths of Scripture. It serves alongside preaching as a means of proclamation, edifying the church and evangelizing the lost, as it provides an emotional context in which we can interpret, understand, and express the truths of God's Word.
- 5) Music serves as a means of **exhortation**. Music lifts our words to God in prayer and brings God's Word to us in proclamation, but it can also voice our words to one another. Psalm 95, for example, is a call to worship. We exhort one another with the words:

Oh come, let us sing to the LORD!  
Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation.  
Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving;  
Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms.  
(Psalm 95:1–2)

Through music God's people speak to one another, stirring up one another to good works. Music can call us to worship, exhort us to love and serve one another, encourage us to live in obedience to God's Word, admonish us to flee from sin and pursue holiness, and enjoin us to go out and witness and share the gospel.

- 6) Music serves as a means to **confess our faith**. With music God's people can express common beliefs and doctrines as one voice. In the Old Testament Israel rehearsed their faith and history through music. Psalm 118, for example, is a public confession of the goodness and enduring mercy of God. The New Testament contains several confessional

statements such as 2 Timothy 2:11 that many scholars believe are fragments of early hymns. Music provides an effective way to unite in declaring our confessions of faith.

Perhaps the most notable example of this in church history is the “Doxology,” written by Thomas Ken in 1709, a musical affirmation of the doctrine of the Trinity:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise Him, all creatures here below;  
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

- 7) Finally, music serves as a means of **enriching worship with beauty**. According to Scripture, singing praise to God is pleasant and beautiful. Psalm 147:1 reads:

Praise the LORD!  
For it is good to sing praises to our God;  
For it is pleasant, and praise is beautiful.

It is good when we unite our voices together in singing to God. Music provides a beautiful garb in which we dress our words and actions in worship. It is a pleasant means of joining together to express our love and devotion to God in worship.

These are seven roles or functions of music that God affirms in His Word. God has commanded us to make music and included it in His design for worship. It is not the purpose of music to amuse, manipulate, or entertain us in worship. God has given us music that we might beautifully lift our praise, thanksgiving, and prayers to Him; that we might proclaim the truth of His Word, confess our faith, and exhort one another to good works as we gather in corporate worship.

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