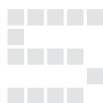




**WORSHIP LEADERS**  
**WE ARE NOT ROCK STARS**

**STEPHEN MILLER**



## WE ARE THEOLOGIANS

No matter your age, you should recall the melody to this classic children's song: A B C D E F G . . . H I J K L M N O P . . .

You're singing along, aren't you? Sing with me—Q R S . . . T U V . . .  
W X . . . Y and Z.

You remember the song, right? The catchiness of its melody was responsible for fusing into your brain some of the most foundational facts you have ever learned. And not just the facts themselves, but the memories and very experience of learning them.

I still remember learning my ABCs in preschool. I remember the brand-new, multicolored mats we sat on as the teacher introduced us to the large, plush-doll cartoon characters that were shaped as

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each letter. Each one had his own theme song that he sang on tape. As I recall, *F* was tall and lanky and sported a set of size 23 early '80s Chuck Taylors as he sang his theme song, "Feet, Happy Feet." *T* was short and stocky and his teeth spanned the breadth of his entire body as he sang his theme song, "Teeth, Tall Teeth." It stuck with me. I can still sing those songs today.

I remember going to church as a child and learning to sing "Jesus loves me, this I know" and "Jesus loves the little children of the world" and actually believing the truth as I sang it for all to hear. I learned that God had a plan to show His love to the world through me as I sang, "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine."

Those simple songs were the bedrock for my childlike faith. If no one else loved me, I knew Jesus did.

Even as a child, songs were constantly shaping my theology. They were shaping my love for Jesus, teaching me who He is and what He has done. They made me a worshiper.

As an adult, it is no different. I can look at some of the other songs I learned growing up and see how they have formed me as a Christian. I remember how some of the broken theology in them unintentionally gave me permission to become a selfish, human-centered Christian because they made Jesus look like a weak God whose universe centered around me. Sigh. Even then, poor theology had me grasping at half-truths and no truths at all. Today correct theology remains the power of the music we choose to lead or even write. As a child, those lyrics would shape the way I viewed Jesus for years to come.

Other songs I would sing boasted of the glory and holiness of God in a way that I could not ignore or deny. The truth in those songs would eventually win out and demolish all the lies I had believed about God

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before. Those songs were foundational and I still sing them to this day.

God gave us the gift of music. He created it with unique properties for our enjoyment, expression, edification, and education.

This is not to downplay the formative importance of preaching in the church, but honestly I could not tell you the take-home point of two sermons I heard growing up, no matter how clever the preacher's alliteration was. But I can still sing "Holy, Holy, Holy" word for word. I know "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" by heart. "The Solid Rock" is an ever-present companion for me in difficult times. Those songs have taught me a vocabulary to express myself when I come before God, and in that expression to learn the truth of God in a way that will stay with me for a lifetime.

We don't need to perform scientific studies to see that music and melody fuse truth into our memories and intellects in a unique way. We can all observe how melody attaches meaning, emotions, affections, and experiences to words like nothing else can. How it takes phrases and sentences to new heights and depths that they couldn't go on their own. We tend to remember the seasons of our lives by the soundtrack of that season, partly because the soundtrack actually shapes the seasons of our lives. The thoughts we dwell on, the truths we listen to—all of these shape our worldview and make us who we are.

This is true spiritually. The songs we sing teach us theology. For better or worse, as worship leaders, the songs we



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choose to sing with our churches will inevitably shape the way they view God and interact with Him. Songs that are rich with gospel truth and weighty in God-centered, Christ-honoring content will shape worshipers who understand and adore God, while deficient, flimsy, man-centered songs will produce a lack of understanding of who God actually is, which leads to deficient, flimsy, man-centered worship. If we are to worship God, we must know who He really is.

My wife is a petite, green-eyed, blonde-haired, gorgeous woman. She is kind and compassionate, loves our children, and is an incredible mother and wife. I could go on and on about all of the things that I love about her.

But what if I were to come to her and say, “I wrote this song for you to tell you how much I love you”—and then went on to sing about how much I love her brunette hair and brown eyes and how I can’t wait to marry her and have kids someday? She would be confused and would maybe wonder if I wrote the song about another woman.

Or what if that song was actually all about me? A tribute to myself, how she makes me feel, and how I must be so great that she would love me? I praise her for being smart enough to choose to spend the rest of her life with me, because I’m the center of the universe and she is lucky to have me.

I’ll tell you what she’d do. She would be offended and might make me go to counseling to get a better handle on reality. And she would be right! I would have to be a lunatic to do something like that.

We do this very thing to God when we blatantly or unintentionally disregard the prominent presence of God’s Word in the songs we sing and are flippant about the words that we sing to Him and about Him. When we ascribe to Him attributes and motives that are not true to who He is, or sing “to Him” songs that only exalt ourselves, we aren’t in touch

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with reality anymore, regardless of how good our intentions might be.

I often wonder if sometimes, when we are singing to God in corporate worship, He is listening and thinking, “Who do they think they are singing about? Because it’s certainly not Me!”

Worship leaders have the responsibility to make sure this doesn’t happen. As I said in the last chapter, we have a unique teaching role within the church. We are telling people who God is and how He has acted through the songs that we sing. That means that we have to actually know Him. We have to be students of the Scriptures and diligently pursue relationship with Him and a knowledge of Him.

We must be theologians.

A theologian is someone who makes it his life’s mission to know God’s nature, character, will, and ways with the highest level of expertise possible. A theologian is a warrior shepherd who knows God’s truth, instructs in God’s truth, and fights for God’s truth in the church. Who holds “firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (Titus 1:9).

When we are leading our people in worship through singing, we are actually putting words into their mouths to sing to God. Therefore, it is imperative that we guard with all diligence the songs that we choose for our people to sing and be careful to maintain the doctrinal integrity of the content we are teaching. It must be truth in song every time. No exceptions.

As a student of the God who has revealed Himself in the Bible, a worship leader must prayerfully examine what each song is teaching and ask the question, “Is this true according to what God has revealed about Himself in Scripture?” This doesn’t necessarily mean that it has to be word for word from the Bible, but it should conform to

what we find there. We simply can't improve on what God has to say about God. He is the ultimate authority on Himself. There are many songs out there, both old and new, that are absolute nonsense when it comes to speaking about God rightly and coherently, and we must humbly, prayerfully, and intentionally weed these out.

Additionally, we must ask, "Is this song making much of me or of God?" God is very passionate about His glory. He will not give it to another (Isaiah 48:11). Yet we are prone to mistaking sentimental or emotional experiences with the type of worship that God desires from us; namely, worship that is in spirit and truth.

The world is constantly spewing lies to us.

"You deserve it."

"You earned it."

"You have to look out for Number One."

"You have to love YOURSELF first."

"You have to do whatever makes YOU happy."

In all of these subtle ways the world tells us that it's all about us. Those lies start to creep into our personal lives and we begin to compromise the truth. We exchange the glory of the Creator for the created and eventually replace God with ourselves. And as we become the object of our own worship, these subtleties start to creep into our worship services. They creep into our songs and the way we interpret and preach Scripture. They creep in as a consumer mentality that says we must bend over backwards to please the consumer Christians who are attending.

As theologians, we must be able to lead away from the cultural norms and engage the emotions and affections of people with the truth that God alone is worthy of our worship. We must make sure that the songs we sing with our church focus on the attributes, character, and

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actions of God—His power, majesty, glory, justice, mercy, compassion, and greatness. There will never be a shortage of things to focus on here.

The best news in the world is that God wants us to know Him! He is a loving Father who wants what is best for us, and in His grace, patience, and compassion, He has chosen to reveal His will and His ways to us through His Word. If we would know God and teach His ways in our songs, we must love His Word. We must read it, study it, memorize it, meditate on it, and live it.

But this will not come with a light cursory skimming of the Scriptures whenever we feel like it. It will not come by washing over the parts of the Bible that we don't like or understand. Neither will it come by attempting to candy-coat the hard truths in order to make them more palatable, nor by twisting its words to make it mean what we want it to. We cannot neglect to read God's Word because we are too busy, don't understand it, or don't enjoy it. If we are to know God, if we are to delight in Him and lead people in that delight, we must know Scripture.

Jonathan Edwards says of God's Word, "This is the fountain from which all knowledge in Divinity must be derived. Therefore, let not this treasure lie by you neglected."<sup>1</sup>

God's Word is our treasure. It is paramount and is to take prominence in our studying. At the same time, we must not be arrogant in thinking that we have it down, or that every idea we think about God must be original. We have the benefit of living in a time where information and education is more accessible than ever.

The songs we sing with our church must focus on the attributes, character, and actions of God—His power, majesty, glory, justice, mercy, compassion, and greatness.



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At the click of a computer mouse button (or smart phone, PC tablet, or e-reader download for that matter), we can read the greatest works by theologians and historians of the last two thousand years.

Jonathan Edwards himself was a theologian who often spent fourteen hours per day studying the Scriptures. Today we can glean much from his studies, as well as from those of many other spiritual fathers who have gone before us. To say the least, the words and works of Athanasius, Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Charles Spurgeon, A. W. Tozer, and C. S. Lewis ought to occupy a large chunk of our studies of the living God, as well as reading from such contemporary Christian thinkers and theologians as John Piper, Timothy Keller, Wayne Grudem, J. I. Packer, and R. C. Sproul.

Fiction is good. Leadership books are fine. Self-help or how-to readings—sure. But learning from these spiritual giants who have gone before us should occupy the worship leader's reading more than anything but the Bible itself. We must dare to think their thoughts, test their works, and apply their writings where appropriate. We must work to let the deep truths of their labor in theology shape the way we relate to God as well as the way we relate to the church in the songs we sing and the way we sing them.

We must drench our worship in doctrine and saturate our services and songs in Scripture. In doing so, we will lay a strong theological foundation on which the Lord will build His kingdom. He will be lifted up and draw men to Himself. After all, to borrow a phrase from the song that taught you your left from your right, "that's what it's all about."

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