

# The Need for New

*Let us sing a new song not with our lips but with our lives.*

*Saint Augustine*

In the music industry we're seeing a cultural shift toward writing original worship. More and more worship teams are traveling to Nashville to learn how to craft songs, and I spend many of my days working with them. Recently I sat down to write with some worship team members from Life.Church, Craig Groeschel's church. They told me their goal is to write 70 percent of their own worship songs within the next year. They aren't the only church moving this direction.

It seems like a new phenomenon, but in fact it is a very ancient practice. For centuries, people groups have created their own songs, their own sounds. It was only in the 1970s that Nashville and the music industry became the gatekeepers of church music. Part of that was simply because of the available methods of distribution. Music began to funnel through record labels and was distributed by them as well. With the internet, though, distribution and marketing have changed again. Now there is a marketing platform accessible to everyone. Churches are forming their own publishing companies as well as writing, recording, and releasing their own songs. These songs are landing on Christian music charts like Billboard.

More songs are available to the church now than ever before. Do we really *need* more? And why should we write original songs for our churches instead of simply singing songs that are popular in the church at large? Before we go any further, let's answer these questions. I see five significant reasons that new worship songs have been and will continue to be needed by the church.

## New Songs Bring Fresh Praise and Fresh Revelation

God loves fresh praise. Yes, we have praised Him before. But in any relationship, it takes creativity and intentionality to continue growth. How many times have you told the same person you love him or her? God will never tire of fresh praise because it means love and depth. It blesses Him every time.

The Bible contains many references to singing, and there is a clear emphasis on the *new song* and how it praises His name. Psalm 96:1–2 says, "Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day" (NIV).

I absolutely love that God tucked the command “Sing to the LORD a new song” several times into the Psalms, the oldest worship songs, because He knew we would have them for a long time. That way, if we got stuck on the old ones, we would have to be reminded to sing new ones. Even the book of Revelation mentions new songs around the throne (see 5:9; 14:3)! The new song of praise is meant to be eternal.

Sometimes the newness in our praise happens through lyric. Sometimes the newness in our praise happens through melody or sound. Sometimes it’s a different form or structure. Sometimes it’s spontaneous. But it’s always fresh.

Have you heard the song “Surrounded (Fight My Battles)”<sup>1</sup>? That song was birthed out of a live worship set. It’s totally different from most songs out there today, but it’s fresh. I love the bold newness in that song.

Just as the Lord loves fresh praise, we love fresh revelation. Have you ever sung a new song that expressed how you had been feeling for a long time and suddenly you had words to articulate your emotions? Have you ever felt like your eyes have been opened to understand a truth, which you may have already known, in a much deeper way? Have you ever seen Scripture begin to connect in new ways? Has God given you fresh insight about your purpose? That’s revelation! Revelation always fills us back up with hope and peace.

John Calvin spoke about this revelation, saying, “Till the Lord opens them, the eyes of our heart are blind. Till the Spirit has become our instructor, all that we know is folly and ignorance. Till the Spirit of God has made it known to us by a secret revelation, the knowledge of our Divine calling exceeds the capacity of our own minds.”<sup>2</sup>

When we are born again, “the Holy Spirit opens our eyes so that we can see who God is and who we are for the very first time,” and after we are saved, “He continues to work to give us insight into His revealed Word and to deepen our personal relationship with Him.”<sup>3</sup>

We all have the opportunity to receive insight like this firsthand by spending time with Jesus. He promises that when we seek Him, we will find Him (see Jer. 29:13). New songs are a way to express these new revelations from Him to us and to the church. I regularly pray that my songs will be not simply bearers of information but deliverers of revelation! There’s a big difference.

## New Songs Speak a Dialect

I grew up in Michigan, so I have a midwestern accent. My son once asked me if I was from another country, and I replied, “Pretty much.” That was even after I’d lived in Tennessee for many years. Once, while shopping in the clothing section at a Target store in Tennessee, I approached the fitting rooms to try a few things on, and an elderly woman behind the counter asked me a few questions. Her voice sounded so familiar to me, though I had never met her. I asked her where she was from. She said, “Allegan, Michigan.” My hometown. I couldn’t believe I could hear that specific accent.

While describing the day of Pentecost, the Bible says, “When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken” (Acts 2:6 NIV). That chapter goes on to record Peter’s message to the crowd and says that three thousand people came to believe that day (see v. 41). There was such an amazing harvest because they could hear what was being said in a way that spoke to them personally. Jesus has a way of doing that—of finding ways to speak to us individually. I believe He has the same desire for congregations when it comes to worship songs.

Did you know your church has its own dialect? A mother tongue. I know because I’ve written with many church leaders as they’ve come through town. As we talk and begin to get to know each other before cowriting, I can hear it in their conversation. If I ask more questions, I discover phrases the pastor says a lot. Words that are off limits. Different denominational beliefs. A powerful message from the pastor that has become part of a congregation’s vocabulary. I’m telling you, if you write in your church’s own dialect, your songs have such a personal approach to worship that lives will change because the message is more specific and sounds like home.

I’ve seen many online debates about certain worship songs. Sometimes lines are rewritten (rewriting any copywritten lyric always requires permission from the publisher). Songs can be written for any church dialect. Maybe your church needs someone to rise up and write them.

## New Worship Songs Bring Unity to the Church

A church that has the ability to write original worship songs has a unique opportunity to bring unity to the church staff. Having conversations and seeking the Lord about certain topics are great ways to grow together. Questions such as “What is the Lord speaking to you this week?” and “What Scripture are you studying right now?” may seem simple but can become amazing Holy Spirit connections for the team. It’s awesome when the pastor is willing to engage in these conversations with the worship leaders and songwriters in the church.

These conversations will bring unity not only to the staff but ultimately to the entire church. This is because the songs written will emphasize and accelerate the message the pastor is preaching. When you put a message to melody, you help everyone remember the teaching well beyond Sunday morning.

I’ve been writing a lot with the worship staff at Cross Point Church in Nashville. The pastor, Kevin Queen, has been speaking about waiting on the Lord, so we wrote a song about that. It’s breathtaking when they sing it!

I’ve also seen unity develop the opposite way. Recently Pastor Queen heard a new song we had written for the church based on a quote from one of the members who has ALS (aka Lou Gehrig’s disease). He was so inspired that he scrapped the message he was supposed to preach the next Sunday

and rewrote his whole sermon around the new song. It was one of the most powerful church services I've ever experienced.

## New Worship Songs Minister to the Congregation

Whether in times of challenge or victory, worship leaders and songwriters have an opportunity to meet the congregation right where they are.

Worship songs help us gently approach people experiencing trials and lead hearts to healing. Often we can encourage through song as we never could through the spoken word. We get to remind people going through hard things that God loves them and will never leave them no matter what.

Songs can also help us celebrate a victory like a sea-crossing moment. I love the story of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea. After they arrived on the other side, Miriam pulled out her tambourine to worship the Lord with a new song (see Ex. 15:20–21). If your church has experienced a breakthrough that only the Lord could have orchestrated, you need to celebrate! Maybe five hundred people just got baptized. Maybe there's a new building. Praise the Lord with a new song!

Sometimes God will speak the same theme to many individuals in a congregation at the same time. This happened at my church not too long ago. I wrote a song called "Back to Life." It was birthed out of my daughter walking through extreme anxiety. The bridge says this: "Resentment, depression and all anxieties, / They have no power over me. / Addictions and strongholds and every disease, / They have no power over me."<sup>4</sup> We had some reservations about those words in the writing room and how they would go over in a worship set. But the first Sunday we sang that song with our congregation, people began recording it on their phones. Several people asked me after the service where they could get the depression song. They were all dealing with it! The Lord used that song to minister to them as He ministered to my family at the same time.

God can also use songs to minister to a congregation outside the official worship time. Sometimes this looks like one song shared one friend at a time. Maybe you write a song for a friend who's grieving. Maybe you write a song for a family celebrating an adoption. These songs are a great way to bring encouragement or celebration in a more intimate way by affecting individual members of a congregation. I believe this has a bigger impact on the congregation and kingdom as a whole than we realize.

Whatever the circumstance that birthed them, songs can minister to people in all situations!

# New Worship Songs Prepare Congregations for the Future

I was recently studying about prophets in the Bible, and I was amazed to find that many of them were also songwriters. Some of the greatest prophets in the church may very well be part of our worship teams.

“Watch What He Will Do” is another song I wrote with Cross Point Church. It’s a call for revival. The bridge goes like this:

*You better get ready for a miracle  
You better get ready for the joy  
You better get ready for revival  
'Cause it's coming; it's coming<sup>5</sup>*

This is the heartbeat of where the church is feeling called to go but has not yet been. Putting this message on their lips now will prepare them for where the pastor feels they are being led: revival.

I once brought a song to my congregation called “Fighting for Us.”<sup>6</sup> One of our most precious members was battling cancer during that time. Tears streamed down her face as she worshipped the Lord with complete abandon. We didn’t know that a few months later she would be in heaven, sitting at the feet of Jesus. Since her passing, when we sing it with her family in the congregation, I realize “Fighting for Us” means something different now. Only God could have known the full purpose of why we wrote that song.

So, yes, new worship songs bring fresh praise and fresh revelation, they speak a dialect, they bring unity to the church staff and congregation, they minister to the church, and they prepare us for what’s ahead.

Do I think original worship songs are all we need? Absolutely not! In the Bible, Paul mentioned “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (Eph. 5:19 <sup>KJV</sup>). Psalms, as we know, were the old songs. It is believed that hymns may have been instructional songs. And spiritual songs ... well, those could have been spontaneous or new songs.<sup>7</sup>

Any way we honor Him with song is beautiful, but this passage reminds us we need balance. Oftentimes, when we get out of balance, it’s because we are missing the new songs. Not on my watch!