

The Ministry Advantage

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Is it Time for Hymns to Die?

Last Sunday night I attended an old-fashioned Gospel sing at a church near our home.

It was out of my comfort zone because the last 25 years I've served in churches that primarily used contemporary worship music in their services. Yet, from toddler age through college I attended churches that primarily used hymns.

When the seeker movement became widespread, I and many other like-minded pastors classified traditional hymns as barriers to church growth. As a result, I seldom used them in the churches I served except for the occasional "Amazing Grace."

However, as I sat through the Gospel sing, something stirred deep within me.

Had I neglected an important part of my Christian heritage by not incorporating them in the church services? Should I reconsider them going into the future?

The Gospel sing worked like this. The song leader invited those who attended (a couple hundred) to pick a hymn from the hymn book. They then raised their hands and he'd pick someone. They'd call out the hymnal page number. We'd turn to that page. The pianist would start playing. We'd sing.

After 30 minutes of suggestions and singing, probably 20 songs, we'd take a short break from singing. The pianist then played a medley of hymns and a duet sang a couple hymns. Then we sang for another 30 minutes, prayed and dismissed for ice cream sundaes in the gym.

I thought I'd be bored and planned to surreptitiously follow NFL games on ESPN's Gametracker on my iPhone. Was I surprised.

Here are several lessons I learned that night.

1. The majority who attended were clearly older than 65, many in their 70s and 80s.

As I watched these seniors sing, their faces glowed with a deep love for Jesus. God reminded me that preferred music styles don't indicate a person's love for Him. The builder generation, which is quickly declining, has shown incredible commitment and sacrifice to the cause of Christ the last several decades. Just because they prefer a different music style than my preference doesn't mean I'm any closer to Jesus than they.

2. I was surprised at how well I recalled these songs I hadn't sung in more than 20 years.

I seldom even needed to look at the hymnal for the words. I realized how grateful I was to my parents for the rich Christian heritage they gave me. Those many years they took me to Sunday morning, Sunday night and Wednesday night services along with revivals and vacation bible schools had left an indelible imprint on my soul. Those hymns had deeply imbedded the truth of God's word into my heart that I'd never forgotten.

3. I marveled at the magnificence of how God created our brains.

Music increases our ability to recall truth because it enhances long-term memory. Even after decades of not reading the words or singing the hymns, my mind easily recalled them. This thought reminded me how important music should play in our services to imbed theology into the hearts of believers.

4. I felt sad as I watched my youngest daughter who sat next to me.

As my wife and I sang, she followed along as best as she could, yet she hardly knew a single hymn. Either my naivety or my pride (or both) had caused me to neglect this powerful medium to teach the essence of the Faith. My kids had become the losers.

5. Finally, I resolved to bring hymns back into the churches I serve.

While updating their tempo and style a bit, I want those young and old in the faith to encounter the living Christ through the power of God's word hitched to the medium of hymn music.

This article is written by Charles Stone (www.charlesstone.com), author of the new book, [People Pleasing Pastors](#). Submitted by Russ Olmon, President of Ministry Advantage, Inc. For more on this and other helpful subjects, go to www.ministryadvantage.org.

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