

Your Ministry of Singing in the Church Choir

by

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DISCUSSION GUIDE

prepared by

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: *Your Ministry of Singing in the Church Choir* by Roger Deschner.
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Roger Deschner's little book, *Your Ministry of Singing in the Church Choir*, is full of wisdom for anyone involved in the practice and performance of music in the church – directors, organists, pianists, choir singers, praise team and band members, soloists, instrumentalists, as well as those who sing in the greatest choir of all – the congregation. Here you will find solid teaching that is scriptural, historical, theological, practical, and fit for any style of worship and music.

This volume's size makes it ideal for a short-term study for a Sunday school class, a choir retreat, weekly devotions or study at choir rehearsal, for private individual study, or for a small-group study. This discussion guide is designed to provide questions for thought, discussion, even debate. The guide exactly follows the content layout of the book. Users should feel free to change, omit, or adapt the questions and to add questions of their own.

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1. The Tradition of Singing in the Choir

1. (p. 1): The opening paragraph gives a brief description of what might have gone into early Hebrew and Christian worship music and how it may have sounded.
 - a. How does this sound compare to the sound of worship music in your congregation?
2. (p. 2): “Early church musicians were usually both instrumentalists and singers.”
 - a. Is this so in your own congregation?
 - b. How common is this in churches today?
 - c. Is some worship music usually rendered by instrumentalists? singers? instrumentalists and singers together?
 - d. What are the implications for worship and song if the church musicians are instrumentalists OR singers, and if they are BOTH?
3. (p. 2): “Music played an awesome role in the life of the [early biblical] society and in worship, as it still does in ours.”
 - a. What is the role of music in congregational worship?
 - b. What is the role of music in contemporary society?
4. (pp. 2-3): These pages describe the transformation of worship music that took place under David’s leadership. David “organized official choirs of singers and instrumentalists in the temple.”
 - a. Who were the members of these early church choirs?
 - b. What were the qualifications necessary to be chosen to lead these choirs?
5. (pp. 3-4): These pages describe the book of Psalms as “the earliest hymnbook in our tradition” and as “anthem repertoire for the choirs.”
 - a. What Psalm-based hymns are in the hymnal?
 - b. What Psalm-based choir anthems has your choir sung?
6. (p. 5): “When David organized temple music with official choirs of singers and instrumentalists, he knew the power that music played in worship.”
 - a. Does music have power in worship today?
 - b. Does music have power in your congregation’s worship?
7. (pp. 5-6): These pages describe the prophetic role music plays, and the link between the people’s worship of God and “the revelation of God’s returning word.”
 - a. How does music help the people to worship God?
 - b. How does music help the people to hear “God’s returning word”?
 - c. What is the role and responsibility of your choir in this process?
8. (pp. 6-7): These pages discuss a number of different names given to early choirs based upon the musical role they played.
 - a. How or when does your choir fulfill these roles in worship?
 - 1) *Huy-yedah*: thanksgiving choir
 - 2) *Sharim* and *mishererim*: celebration choir
 - 3) *Zammarin*: a choir accompanied by plucked string instruments

9. (pp. 8-9): Following the destruction of the temple and its choirs and the dispersion and capture of those who made music in worship, worship and music came to be organized differently in the congregation, or synagogue.
 - a. What were the roles of the *sheliach sibbur*, the *rabbi*, the *chazzan*, and the *cantor*?
 - b. What importance does the image of Jesus as *rabbi* and *chazzan* have for you today?
10. (pp. 9-10): This passage describes early Christian organization for worship and music.
 - a. Who sang in the early church choirs and why were they selected?
 - b. Today we do not ordain choir members, and we “consecrate” those who lead the choir and congregational music.
 - 1) Music directors today are usually not ordained? Why not?
 - 2) Why do we no longer ordain choir members?
11. (p. 10): Here are eight tasks or descriptions of today’s choir members. The author suggests that if these are accurate, then the church should “[give] thought to either the consecration or ordination of choir members.”
 - a. Do you agree?
 - b. Would ordaining or consecrating choir members have an effect upon you? your choir? your congregation?
12. (pp. 10-11): The author states that the church should “[train] choir members in matters important to both music and the church,” and “encourage and nurture the spiritual growth of its members.” He further states that choir members “should feel called to service” and “should seek the cultivation and training offered by the church”; and following “an agreed upon amount of study and a period of service, the church should find a way to make all choristers, directors, and instrumentalists true ministers of music.”
 - a. Do you agree?
 - b. Is this something your congregation would support?
13. (p. 11): The author suggests that the church is not ready to do that, “as essential as it seems,” but that the local church and choir “should proceed with training and spiritual nurture in the choir as if ordination were possible.”
 - a. How can you continue to learn and develop as a musician?
 - b. How can you be nurtured in your own spiritual growth?
 - c. What can your congregation do to help you with both?
14. (p. 11): The quotes from Martin Luther describe music as “a gift of God” that occupies “the highest place and the greatest honor” after theology.
 - a. Is this true?
 - b. Does your church agree?
 - c. How does it demonstrate its agreement or lack of agreement?

2. Entering the Choir: What Is Required?

Seek Ensemble With All Your Heart

1. (p. 13): Have you ever been in a church in which the choir could be spoken of as “the war department”?
2. (pp. 13-14) The author uses the image of the church as the Body of Christ as a model of what the choir should be.
 - a. Is your choir related? Does it speak, act, listen, and move together?
 - b. How is your choir “present in this world and striving to accomplish what God would have it do”?
3. (p. 14) Paragraph 3 gives specific technical musical things for choir singers to do individually and as a group, and concludes, “But you must agree to become a part of this body and to seek ensemble with every muscle of your talent and nerve of your attention.”
 - a. How do you do this?
 - b. What might the results be if you fail to do this?
 - c. What might the results be if everyone in the choir does this?

Seek the Best Performance You Can Do

4. (p. 15): The opening paragraph draws a parallel between the temple sacrifice of the best, unblemished animals or grain and the modern choir’s offering of music and work “with care, diligence, and imagination.”
 - a. Why is this necessary?
 - b. What does this requirement mean for each individual singer?
5. (p. 15): What does “best performance” mean for:
 - a. large choirs in large churches with large budgets and professional staff
 - b. small choirs in small churches
 - c. the gifted, well-trained musician
 - d. the least talented, untrained choir member
6. (pp. 15-16): The author seeks to redeem the word “performance” when associated with church choirs and music in worship.
 - a. Why have many church musicians said that our choirs, singers, and instrumentalists do not “perform”? Why is *performance* a bad word?
 - b. How does the author argue that *performance* is a good word for church musicians?

Suggestions for Seeking a Good Choir Performance

7. (pp. 16-22): The author offers sixteen specific suggestions for good choir performance (italicized in the text).
 - a. What are they? Make a list.
 - b. Which suggestions deal with music and singing technique?
 - c. Which suggestions deal with spiritual and mental preparation?
 - d. Which suggestions deal with your responsibilities to the group and the director?

8. (pp. 16-22): Compare these suggestions with Wesley's *Rules for Singing* (Appendix B, pp. 37-43; also found in the front of our hymnal).
- Are the author's suggestions of a different kind or quality than Wesley's?
 - Is there agreement between any of the author's and Wesley's suggestions?

Luther on Good Performance

9. (pp. 22-23): Luther and the Wesleys shared musical abilities as well as a love for music and an appreciation of what it brings to worship.
- How might a knowledge or appreciation of or ability in music influence pastors and others in the church who plan and lead worship?
10. (p. 23): Luther describes choral music as "an inexpressible miracle of the Lord" and says that those who do not agree are "clods and not worthy to be considered humans."
- Do you share Luther's high opinion of choral music?

Seek God's Word, Love, and Power in All You Sing

11. (pp. 23-24): The author writes, "Of all the people gathered together to worship, the worship leaders, themselves, often are not worshipping."
- Do you have trouble worshipping while you're singing in the choir?
 - What are the obstacles that keep you from worshipping?
 - If you are not worshipping, how do you understand what you are doing?
 - If you have difficulty worshipping, are there other times and places where you can enter into the experience of worship?
12. (pp. 24-25): The author suggests a number of "spiritual disciplines" to adopt in your attitude toward the choir, including praying for members, seeking unity, meditating on the words, reflecting theologically, and taking delight in rehearsals and preparation.
- How and when can you do these things?
 - What will be the result, both for the choir and for yourself, if you do them?
13. (pp. 25-26): "To measure the 'success' of our music performance by compliments received after the service is treacherous."
- How should we evaluate the success of our music performance?
 - What's "treacherous" with measuring success according to the number of compliments received?
 - How should you respond to a church member who compliments you on the Sunday choir anthem by saying, "There wasn't a dry eye in the house" or "You should have sung that one on Annual Financial Campaign Sunday"?
14. (p. 26): The author suggests that, even with all of our preparations and rehearsals, our proper attitudes, and our spiritual practices, that "it is God who makes our music have...power...prophecy...revelation," that it is God who "makes our musical offerings sacred."
- If this is true, why should we bother with the preparation, rehearsal, attitude, and spiritual practices?

3. Temptations

High Talents

1. (pp. 27-29): “High Talents” are those choir members with the best voices, the most talent, the most training and experience.
 - a. What temptations do “high talents” experience?
 - b. What temptations does the presence of “high talents” in the choir bring to the other choir members?
 - c. What would be a good, healthy attitude for “high talents”?
 - d. What would be a good, healthy attitude for the rest of us who sing in choirs with “high talents”?
2. What positive elements do “high talents” bring to the choir?

The Pits

3. (pp. 29-30): “The Pits” is a state of negativity, depression, and awareness of one’s musical inadequacy.
 - a. What qualities can tempt a choir member into “the pits”?
 - b. What takes you to the choral “pits”?
 - c. How can you help another choir member, especially a new choir member, who is in “the pits”? Or, asked another way, how can you tap into “the power of the choir to be a redemptive ensemble of faithful singers”?

Those Who Know Best

4. (pp. 30-32): This section paints a picture of the choir in which all the members are the director. “Many of us choir members are tempted, on our own, to lead the choir in one way or another, especially in difficult times.”
 - a. What are the problems that result from a choir full of leaders?
 - b. How should you go about making a suggestion to the director?
 - c. How should you NOT go about making a suggestion to the director?
5. (p. 32): “Some decide things, and some carry things out. Some direct, and some prepare themselves for performance. Some teach, and some learn.” How does this sentence relate to:
 - a. the choir members?
 - b. the director?
 - c. the accompanist?
 - d. the pastor?
 - e. the congregation?

The Exclusive Club of the True Saints

6. (pp. 32-33): Do you sometimes find yourself in the Exclusive Club of True Saints by virtue of your actions or words?
 - a. The adaptations of Luke 18:11, 12 and 1 Corinthians 13:1-8 take different approaches in providing us with help. What are these two different approaches?

7. (p. 33): The paragraph that begins “If we seek ensemble for the sake of power....” could serve as a personal attitude adjustment checklist for choir members.
 - a. How can you keep your attitude where it should be?
 - b. How can the choir as a whole do the same?

A Choir Member’s Paraphrase of Matthew 4

8. (pp. 33-34): This adaptation of the temptation of Jesus by Satan provides a number of opportunities for reflection.
 - a. In the first temptation, who or what is the tempter?
 - b. In the second temptation, who or what is the tempter?
 - c. In the third temptation, who or what is the tempter?

Appendix A: Vocal Training Provided by John Wesley (pp. 35-36)

1. “Though Wesley did not approve of the use of anthems in his societies....”
 - a. Should Wesley’s disapproval of choir anthems affect us today?
 - b. What might have been the reasons for Wesley’s disapproval?
2. How much do we share today John Wesley’s concern for the people’s musical education?
3. If the journalist quoted on p.35 visited your congregation on Sunday morning, how apt would be the description, “those lousy, stinking, canting [singing] Methodists!”
 - a. What would be your worship and singing practices that might cause you to deserve or avoid the description?

Appendix B: Wesley’s Rules for Singing (pp. 37-43)

1. How do Wesley’s Rules for Singing balance the demands of art with those of worship?
2. What are the demands of art as they are related to choir singing or playing?
3. What are the demands of worship as they are related to choir singing or playing?