

The Studio

EPISODE // STAGE PRESENCE IN WORSHIP

It's no secret that most people like familiarity. We don't like change. This is especially true when it comes to worship music. I mean, think about it, in church we sing heartily and confidently to the songs we know best. We play the catchiest songs on repeat in our car until we have every word memorized. The hymns that have stuck around for centuries are still, to this day, the ones that bring us to tears.

Congregations are happy with this “musical comfort zone” that we have created for ourselves over the years. This is not a bad thing, but I believe that sometimes God wants to move us past what is familiar. God is always creating in the world to give us fresh expressions of the faith. One of those fresh expressions comes through new music.

As a worship leader, you have the ability to be the vessel for new songs in worship. It can be difficult to introduce new music to a congregation without them feeling intimidated, disconnected, or inadequate. But it's something that we all have to do! Here are a few tips on ‘how to teach a new song in worship’ that will hopefully help you out.

- ✦ **Remember you are a leader, and not a performer.** Be patient with your congregation, move slowly, and do everything in love. Remember, you'll be several steps ahead of your congregation with the song they're learning. And, while you may be a professional musician, most of them aren't. Bring the people along with you. Usher them into worship; enable them to walk alongside you. Teach with humility.
- ✦ **Choose your new material wisely.** Don't pick the hip new song with the catchy drum beat that is a perfect match for your voice. Choose songs that your congregation can sing, and choose songs that will enhance your congregation's spiritual diet. Choose to teach songs they need, not the ones that you want.
- ✦ **Don't overwhelm the congregation with a flood of new materials.** Watch your congregation as you lead them, and see how quickly they pick up new songs. Chances are they will be hesitant, and you want them to learn one song well before you teach them more. I rarely teach my congregation more than eight or ten new songs in a year. Then, I repeat them. This helps them feel like they can comfortably participate in worship every week.
- ✦ **When teaching a new song, introduce it well.** Prepare a spoken introduction that answers questions like, “What do these lyrics say? What should be our response to this encounter with God? What Scripture does this come from?” Have a soloist sing through the first verse and chorus before the congregation joins, or have the worship leader sing through some lines acoustically at first. Offer the song as a time of reflection and active prayer, or during communion. The options are endless. Just make sure that you are intentional with how you teach the new material.
- ✦ **Provide cues for your congregation.** Use hand or verbal gestures for entrances and to provide emphasis so they know which part is coming up next. Also, try to keep your eyes open as much as possible when you teach a new song. The people will be watching you closely, and it is your job to actively lead them in this time. Stay alert!

Teaching a new song requires a lot of preparation, intentionality, patience, and humility. Be wise and selfless in your role as teacher, and your congregation will trust you and they will respond well.

Good luck!