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“One Thing That Matters”:

An Exploration of Commercial Music Techniques for the Benefit of the Local Church

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## Abstract

In this study, I explored the potential benefits of applying commercial music techniques to writing, arranging, and recording church music by interacting with literature as well as performing a full creative project in writing, arranging, and recording a new worship song. Research was focused in two areas: the nature and importance of Scriptural worship music, and commercial music techniques in songwriting, arranging, and recording. The project was written in collaboration with a fellow songwriting student, and then arranged for two church contexts, and recorded at a professional recording studio in Lynchburg, Virginia. By interacting with the research, the process of writing, arranging, and recording a new song provided insight into how commercial practices in excellence and engagement can be used for the benefit of local church ministry.

One Thing That Matters: An Exploration of Commercial Music Techniques for the  
Benefit of the Local Church

The process of writing songs has been a practice of humanity ever since the time of creation, and with our modern technology we have the ability to prepare them for a multitude of audiences and record them to share around the world for various purposes. In the modern evangelical church, there is a strong emphasis on music being used as an expression of worship and adoration for God. While this usage of music is outlined in Scripture, there are various ways different churches handle it. During the time of the Protestant Reformation, many competing views about how the gift (or “dark side”) of music should be handled in the Christian church arose (Morris, 2010). Today, the prevalent belief is that music is a gift from God and meant to be used for His worship and the edification of the body of believers (Imbler, 2005). With that comes a Scriptural responsibility to steward this gift, as with all other gifts from God, with care, excellence, and holiness. Thus, some introspection and study is welcome in determining the best ways to carry out a church worship ministry.

This creative study seeks to answer the question, “How can commercial music techniques in songwriting, arranging, and recording be used to benefit the local church ministry?” The question arose from the studies of the writer, a commercial music student at a large evangelical Christian university. This study will follow the creative process of making and distributing a song in order to explore potential benefits. The goal is to identify ways in which to merge the craft of music from a commercial standpoint with the wonderful gift of music-making in the church.

**Description of the Creative Project: “One Thing That Matters”**

This study is a creative study incorporating artifacts from a full musical production of a song, called “One Thing That Matters,” which was written for this study by the author Garrett Thomas alongside fellow Liberty University songwriting student, Jennifer Smith. In order to explore and demonstrate the findings of this research topic, there will be an analysis of the songwriting process for the song, as well as the arranging process for church contexts, and will culminate with the audio production and recording of the song. Included with this study will be the finished charts for the written song and a link to the song recorded in a modern worship style at Hambone Professional Recording Studio in Lynchburg, Virginia. Examining these processes and evaluating the final products will provide insight into the research explored in this study, and will provide interaction with real life material for thought.

**Chapter 2 – Review of Literature****Introduction**

The goal of this chapter is to explore literature regarding songwriting and commercial music through the lens of the church. Exploring these topics briefly provides a basis for understanding the goal of the creative project “One Thing That Matters” by informing the methodology of the project and even explaining the necessity. First, I review Scripture in regards to the necessity of music and songwriting in the church. Second, I review literature relating to songwriting—primarily the commercial practice of songwriting and applicable techniques and practices. Third, I define *musical arrangement* and *orchestration/instrumentation* in order to demonstrate its benefit in all forms of

music in the church, and especially the writing and producing process. Finally, I review literature regarding the music production and audio engineering process.

### **Scriptural Basis for Music and Songwriting**

Scriptural references to music, praise, worship, and songwriting vary from narrative anecdotes to poetic expression to commandments. Chiciudean (2016) writes,

“The sacred music from the time of the patriarchs can be called a constant of the spiritual life, a part of each religion’s culture be it large or small, which kept evolving in time, from the psalms, towards small byzantine musical notation and incantations, to the great sacred masterpieces.” (p. 25)

As early as Genesis 4:20, we find the first reference to humanity as innate musicians with Jubal of the line of Cain. Upon escaping Pharaoh at the parting of the Red Sea, the Hebrews’ first response was to worship God through song (Ex. 15:1-18, HCSB). Near the time of his death, Moses was instructed by the Lord to write a song for the people of Israel in the wake of receiving the Mosaic Covenant (Deut. 31:19, 22, 30).

In Psalm 40:3, it is written, “He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord.” Thus, the Psalmist draws a connection from the praise of God—through song—to spiritual vitality and even outreach. The Psalms, often themselves sung as songs, make numerous references not only to music and praise but also to *writing* music and praise. In the aforementioned passage, the Psalmist writes, “He put a *new* song in my mouth” (Ps. 40:3, *emphasis added*), indicating God as being part of the creation of new music. This is of particular interest to this study: there is a vested Scriptural interest in writing new music. In Psalm 33:14, it is written:

“Rejoice in the Lord, you righteous ones; praise from the upright is beautiful.

Praise the Lord with the lyre; make music to Him with a ten-stringed harp. *Sing a new song to Him*; play skillfully on the strings, with a joyful shout.” (*emphasis added*)

This continues the theme that there is a standing command in Scripture to continue the writing of new music.

As for the New Testament and the new covenant, there is record of Jesus Christ himself singing with His disciples in the Gospels (Matt. 26:30, Mark 14:16). Moreover, there are apostolic writings that address music in the church. The apostle Paul writes in Ephesians,

“Don’t get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless actions, but be filled by the Spirit: speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music from your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Eph. 5:18-20)

Paul writes similarly in Colossians 3:16, “Let the message about the Messiah dwell richly among you, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, and singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, with gratitude in your hearts to God.”

Analyzing this passage, Imbler (2005) quotes Campbell:

‘Psalms are historic compositions, or poetic narratives. Hymns are odes of praise directly addressing the object of worship and declaring his excellencies and glorious works. Spiritual songs are such compositions as declare sentiments derived from the revelations of God, and as such as adapted to communicate to others the feelings which God’s revelations suggest.’ I hesitate to carry these

distinctions too far, for songs can easily transcend a single category. ... He further comments, 'But sometimes we sing for the sole purpose of praising God; on other occasions, for the information or edification of men.' Here again, the mood reinforces the essence of Colossians by asserting the twofold purpose of religious music, praise and edification" (p. 130-132).

Through interaction with these portions of Scripture and commentary, one can draw some basic conclusions about church music and songwriting from a Scriptural basis. Firstly, music is ordained by God for the purposes of praising Him and for edifying the Body of believers. There is also an argument that can be made elsewhere as to how creativity in general is a gift from the Lord and can be expressed in all aspects of life for the glory of God, but that is not the scope of this study.

### **Extra-Biblical Church Theories of Worship Music**

"It is a fact of culture," writes Dr. Swee Hong Lim (2014) of the University of Toronto, "where music addresses itself to the listener and therefore elicits subjective participation. It is an integral part of life, and Reymond succinctly noted, 'it expresses our sentiments and at the same time engenders them' (Lim, 306). Lim goes on to detail Bernard Reymond's theories on music as a form of theological expression:

"Reymond advocates for music to be a form of theological expression because of its ability to synthesize. It would enable theological reflection to get away from argumentative construct generated by "doctrines, principles, argumentative constructions which could be dealt with by discursive controversy according to the usual categories of thought." In ending the essay, he calls for theologians to take up the challenge of offering theology through music particularly "in the form



of musical composition or interpretation the parts of his thinking or research which cannot be expressed appropriately in the form of words.” By this Raymond sees music as rhetoric and a viable language that can embody theology” (p. 3).

Moreover, Lim continues to address how this ties to the aestheticism of music in the church, as “work[ing] with both music and theology tool kits to explicate music phenomena situated within the reality of Christian worship... It seeks to investigate and understanding musicking in the social-cultural reality of Christian spirituality in expression” (p. 4). Pepler (1958) writes,

“It has been said more than once that ‘Music hath charms’. But it can hardly be said that this charm is encountered often as it ought to be at Mass or Benediction in our parish churches up and down the country. ... At the same time, although a flat note may not cause much discomfiture to God, it must be remembered that He has made all things harmoniously, everything in the vast depths of the universe in tune with everything else. Not only are all things in harmony with God as proceeding from his infinite wisdom, but as a consequence all the infinite variety of things throughout time and space are in harmony with one another, so that the movements of the eternal spheres with the hymn proper to themselves influence the character and the movement of the men who walk this planet—at least according to the teaching of Saint Thomas.” (p. 2)

To Pepler, worship is tied inevitably with art (p. 4) because of how God has ordered everything with harmony and beauty. This is part of his argument for better and better and more beautiful music in the church as a whole. Morris (2010) writes:

“Myth or truth, the story clearly illustrates a long-lived suspicion on the part of the Church towards music. Augustine, for example, was moved by hymns, but suspicious that music might lead him into idolatry. During the Reformation Zwingli banned church music on the grounds that it was a "human" not a divine gift, and Calvin restricted church music to the singing of psalms. Only Luther was truly positive about music. Even Charles Wesley was concerned that people should not enjoy singing hymns simply because they had good tunes, but should concentrate on the words.” (Morris, p. 204)

Thus, one sees a tension in how music in the church ought to be handled. By its nature, music has a pull on the heart more powerful than most forces in the existence of humanity. This is a gift from God, who ordered the universe such, but this also begs caution. The goal of humanity is not to be carried away by emotion alone. Music has a *purpose* in the church, and so these considerations must be made in any discussion of how to create songs for use in the church. There is an extra layer of requirements for congregational music than for music for everyday enjoyment.

### **Commercial Music and Songwriting**

Lovetri (2003) writes, “Contemporary Commercial Music is the new term for what we used to call non-classical music. This is a generic term created to cover everything including music theater, pop, rock, gospel, R & B, soul, hip hop, rap, country, folk, experimental music, and all other styles that are not considered classical” (p. 1). Moreover, commercial music in regards to this study can refer to the music industry and its practices as a whole. At Liberty University, the term *commercial music* is used to refer to the study of music in terms of industry, including songwriting, film scoring, jazz

studies, producing, and artist development. This is the framework through which *commercial music* is referred to in this study.

Songwriting begins with the definition of a song. Joe Bennett (2012) writes, “Defining the term appears simple enough: Chambers defines ‘song’ as a ‘set of words, short poem, etc., to be sung, usually with accompanying music’ (p. 140). As one of the most common forms of creative expression, songwriting may take many forms in the end in terms of genre, form, style, content, and more, but it comes down to writing something to be sung. This study draws from commercial music techniques for the purpose that the music industry is at its core intending to put out material that will continue to attract and keep the interest of the most possible listeners. Bennett writes,

“Selecting songs intended for commercial consumption increases the likelihood that the composer/s will be trying actively to engage the listener, so creative decisions will share this common incentive. ... I contend that the popular song is defined—artistically and musically—by the market forces that perpetuate its survival.” (pp. 140-141)

Worship music has the added component that songs are meant to engage a congregation to actively *participate* rather than simply *listen*, and so this intent in writing can prove beneficial to a church music writer.

Whereas the purposes of worship music (praise of God, and edification of believers, as explored earlier) are not in alignment with the modern music industry, there are benefits to studying the models and practices of the industries for the purpose of applying them to church music. As read earlier in Psalm 33:3, the Psalmist’s aim is to “play skillfully.” One can apply industry techniques to our worship writing in order to

engage the Body of believers and to provide new avenues of presenting excellent and skillful worship to God. Some of these techniques for songwriting are collaboration, hook-writing, and creative constraints.

### **Collaboration**

Bennett (2012) writes,

“The process of creating popular song differs significantly from that for the majority of instrumental art music in two important aspects: firstly, it is a partly literary act, songs having lyrics; secondly, it is extremely common for the composition to be co-written. Historically, around half of US and UK ‘hits’ are written by collaborative teams, most commonly comprising of two individuals” (p. 142).

Bennett examines the number of high-ranking songs on popular charts and supports his claim that songs that are written by teams match or exceed the success of solo writers (Bennett, p. 142).

Nashville songwriter Michael Farren (personal communication, November 13, 2017), in a guest lecture at Liberty University in fall 2017, draws a connection between songwriting success with collaboration: “How do you combat insecurity in songwriting? By co-writing.” Farren points out how when writing alone, there is an extra level of mental discipline required. In a group or a duo, bad ideas are tossed out sooner in favor of making the final product stronger.

“It’s far more difficult to ‘get married to an idea,’” as Farren puts it. “Tell someone immediately and lovingly their song is bad, and help them. It takes time to develop a thicker skin to be able to move on quickly to new songs after bad

ones, but that's the difference between good and bad songwriters or producers.

Pick the good songs, and be okay with putting down the not-good ones.” (Farren, personal communication, November 13, 2017)

This process works quicker in a collaborative team, and grows songwriters far faster than working alone.

In terms of the church, this concept of collaboration can find roots in Scripture.

As previously written, Ephesians 5:19 indicates that the songs are for/to “one another.” In the Body of Christ, the church, there is an immense focus on unity in the midst of gathered individuals (Romans 12, 14, 1 Corinthians 4-6, 12). Thus, there is scriptural precedent for the success of collaborative effort in writing songs *for* such a body.

Worship music has a very specific purpose in praise for God and edification of the Body, and a very specific audience. As the local church is a living gathering, the songs they sing ought to be made *for* them by those who know them best: their shepherds. There is clearly benefit to singing songs written for other churches or written for the global church as a whole. It seems there is an extra level of engagement and meaning attached to songs written for a specific purpose and a specific people.

### **Hook-Writing**

Hook-writing contains many elements. Taken from a fishing metaphor, a *hook* in a song is often the title, but it is primarily the aspect of a song meant to stick with listeners after the song has finished, whether lyrical or musical.

Davis (1985) writes,

“Songs can put us in touch with our feelings. Have you ever found a particular song unaccountably spinning around in your brain? Psychologist Theodor Reik in

*Haunting Melody* advanced the theory that when a tune comes into our minds for no apparent reason, it is because the words to that musical phrase express what we are thinking or feeling at that moment. ... That unconscious thought connected itself to a familiar melody—one whose lyric expressed [sic] emotion.” (p. 3)

The concept of a hook is beneficial in church music in that music by its nature is memorable. Often, the songs sung in a church service are more easily remembered than the particulars of the pastor’s sermon. Bennett (2012) points out that hooks generally come from the title in popular music:

“Writing from the title outwards is a common technique for addressing the creative challenge of framing the main lyric theme. ... Co-writing sessions, notably in Nashville, may begin with each collaborator bringing a small number of titles to use as stimulus material. The title can suggest a core meaning and may also enable discussion about rhymes, placement of ‘hooks,’ lyric scansion or even melodic shape.” (Bennett, p. 154)

If hooks are the most catchy and memorable part of a song, then writing hooks in church music can be used to call attention to doctrine or other matters the church leadership deem important for the service. This extends to song-selection for church worship in general, and is a common practice for worship leaders—now it can be extended to songwriting.

When it comes to finding content to write about, whether in a church setting or a commercial setting, Farren (personal communication) says, “The best songwriters are the best listeners. Song lyrics and titles are walking around you at all times. You want to know the best way to know what songs to write? Listen to the prayers of your people

when you're at church. Those prayers are the songs you need to put on the lips of your people" (Farren, personal communication, November 13, 2017).

### **Creative Constraints**

The process of placing or working within constraints appears to go against the romanticized notions of amateur songwriting, but Bennett (2012) writes it is an important part of commercial songwriting. He writes on how the common form of most pop songs in term of duration, theme, melodic contour, rhyme, instrumentation, and song form are constraints in that deviation from these standards can lead to less engagement with listeners. Creatives enjoy pushing the bounds of these constraints and can find inspiration from them, but at the same time the constraints are what makes it work best for the market.

"It appears, then, that only a small number of song innovations are strong enough to enter, and fewer still to dominate, the domain. Thus, market forces in the form of massed listener preferences of 'generations' of purchasing/chart/airplay cycles will 'naturally select' the characteristics that are most likely to ensure survival."  
(Bennett, 2012, p. 144)

As previously stated, the goal of applying commercial techniques to church music is to engage listener/participant attention. Thus, working within certain constraints similar to industry standards can benefit the church. Common constraints will be revisited in the next chapter during the discussion of methodology for the project.

### **Musical Arrangement as Part of Production**

Musical "arranging" is the process of re-writing or adapting music for different purposes or instrumentation than it was originally intended (Britannica, 2017, p. 1).

Moreover, arranging requires an intimate knowledge with varying musical genres, instrumentation, techniques, and more.

Arranging in the church has a variety of applications across varying types of music and differing stages of production. Marsh (2012) writes,

“A Christian and church music career and ministry will lead you into most every genre of music and allow you great opportunities to be exposed to all areas of its writing and production. In my career in the church and freelance Christian recording and publishing I have had the chance to write music in classical style, big band, traditional church styles, Southern Gospel, Black Gospel, Celtic and Country music, to name a few. This is because the message of the gospel can be applied to and used by any style of music.” (p. 2)

Marsh (2012) contends that arrangement is not a strictly trained art, that the ability largely comes from critical listening and application. He writes,

“We arrangers just have to learn to speak their language and get them to be our partners in the process of creating great music for God. The great thing is that in this area of music is that you get to do it all. You get to conceive an arrangement, rehearse it, conduct it, tweak it, produce it, and sometimes even record it with really good or even professional musicians!” (p. 2)

Marsh goes on to list some distinguishing factors of various genres and the chords they use. One of these will become important for this study’s creative project, which includes a full arrangement for a Gospel church choir and orchestra. Marsh writes,

“In jazz and R&B (rhythm & blues) and Black Gospel (as opposed to Southern Gospel), you will find some more complicated chords like #9ths, sus 9ths, 11ths,



and 13ths. ... The musical culture of the black church (and to much extent the Pentecostal church) has implemented much of the jazz and R&B idioms, which shows up in the music and arrangements of their worship.” (p. 19-20)

Michael Farren (personal communication) answers a question about the level of musical complexity required or encouraged for church music:

“For corporate worship, it can be tracked by killer musicians, but it needs to be playable at the church level. Especially with worship music, it has a bad rap for ‘simplicity’ but there is no higher calling than hearing the church singing what you just wrote. They need to be able to replicate it at any skill level or church size. Put just enough seasoning that they can’t play it the first time, but they should get it within fifteen minutes of rehearsal.”

### **Music Production and Audio Engineering**

A significant portion of this study involves pursuing the process of writing and producing a song to demonstrate commercial writing and producing techniques for church music, a discussion of basic production techniques is called for.

The case used to be that to obtain a solid recording of a song, large studios paid for by record labels and run by veteran technicians were required. That reality has changed steadily over recent years (Huber, 2014). Huber (2014) writes,

“With the advent of affordable digital audio and analog recording systems, it’s a foregone conclusion that the best majority of music and audio recording/production systems are being built and designed for personal use. The rise of the ‘project studio’ has brought monumental changes in the business of

music and professional audio, in a way that has affected and altered almost every facet of the audio production community.” (p. 11)

Technology has made accessible what used to be unachievable, and most music is recorded in smaller project studios run by producers and engineers themselves rather than in large label-run spaces. This makes recording far more accessible. Huber continues:

“Truly, the modern-day project and portable studio systems offer such a degree of cost-effective power and audio fidelity that they can often match the production quality of a professional recording facility ... all you need to supply is knowledge, care, dedication, and patience.” (p. 12)

Today, there are numerous outlets both digital and traditional to learn basic audio engineering and production skills. Online resources such as YouTube, the Recording Revolution, Pensado’s Place, and more offer selections of advice and techniques in learning how to record music well. Producer Grahame Cochrane of the Recording Revolution (2017) writes on his blog,

“I have a weird way of looking at home recording and mixing. I live to break through the hype and marketing that tells people they need to spend more money if they want better results. Why? I want to eliminate any and all excuses prohibiting great talent from making great recordings. And so often, gear is just another excuse. ... You already have everything you need to get killer sounding tracks. You just need a new way of thinking.”

In the methodology, many of the processes, techniques, and strategies are employed as a recording, engineering, and producing student. Whereas the recording project for this study will be carried out in a professional studio, the strategies and

techniques easily translate to different environments. The point is that anyone can replicate these results with what resources they have available to them. A church with the desire to pursue this avenue of ministry that has access to a professional studio ought to use it. A church with less of a budget or a lack of local resources can look to do it themselves. Either way, the benefits of recording are the same: recording leads to distribution, and distribution leads to connection and engagement.

Huber (2014) writes on the job of a producer, whose role I am taking on for the recording of this project:

“Beyond the scheduling and budgetary aspects of coordinating a recording project, it is the job of a producer to help the artist and record company create the best possible recorded performance and final product that reflects the artist’s vision. A producer can be hired for a project to fulfill a number of specific duties or might be given full creative reign to help with any and all parts of the creative and business side of the process to get the project out to the buying public.” (p. 21)

The music producer thus encompasses far more roles than the public often understands or acknowledges. It is the job of the music producer to see a creative project through from start to finish.

Huber (2012) identifies seven stages to a recording production, or the recording process (p. 29) in general:

1. Preparation
2. Recording
3. Overdubbing

4. Mixdown
5. Mastering and song sequence editing
6. Product manufacturing
7. Marketing and sales

The sixth and seventh steps of Huber's recording process will not be handled in this study, as they are beyond the scope of this study. The first five, however, are critical components to the recording of the creative project. These processes will be explored more in depth in the methodology chapter of this study.

### **Chapter 3 – Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to identify potential benefits of applying commercial music techniques to church worship ministry. In order to explore these potential benefits, this study incorporates a full recording production from start to finish to provide documentation on the process and use the findings as material. The result of this production was a song titled "One Thing That Matters."

The methods are outlined in each step of the songwriting, arranging, and recording processes. In this chapter, first the songwriting process for "One Thing That Matters" is described to identify commercial music techniques used in its writing such as collaboration, creative constraints, and artistry. Second, the process of arranging the song for different instruments as part of the normal process of writing and producing is described. Last, the recording process from pre-production and planning, to tracking in the studio, to mixing, and to the beginnings of the distribution and publishing processes is described.

The study will be analyzed based on the quality and impact of the creative artifact, the song “One Thing That Matters.” Factored into the analysis will be impressions from those involved.

### **Songwriting Process**

The songwriting process for “One Thing That Matters” occurred within the space of two weeks. Some would consider this lightning speed, although commercial songwriters can sometimes have an even faster deadline to turn a song in. The song was written through a collaboration between myself and a songwriting major student, Jennifer “Jena” Smith.

The purpose in writing was discussed—to create a congregational worship song. This defined some constraints and thematic material from the start. The fact that the song was meant for congregational use demands a simple, clear, theologically- and scripturally-based lyric over a simple, singable melody. While these are by no means hard and fast *requirements*, they are good practice developed through congregational contextualization.

The discussion of possible thematic material surrounded our experience in our own churches, from the perspective of a shepherd or minister. The question was asked, “What does our church need to hear for their edification, and how can we praise God through it?” This is in keeping with the Scriptural practices of worship music in the church (Imbler, 2005, p. 130-132), and incorporates the principles of church music content from Michael Farren. What we came to decide in our initial session was that the song would revolve around the following idea: Often, church is a place where we simply go through the motions when we are not placing proper importance on the Spirit’s role in

our lives. In our initial session, we were only able to begin writing a verse and a small portion of a chorus idea along those lines.

After reconvening the next day, we found far more success in completing the first draft of the song. Our writing process began to take off when we brought a new idea to the table: a chorus hook to build the entirety of the song around. The idea was this: “Jesus, be the one thing that matters.” With this title in mind, we were following commercial practice of writing from a title (Collins, 2012). Within an hour, we had fleshed out a rough draft of the complete song using simple worship song form: Intro, Verse, Pre-Chorus, Chorus, Verse, Pre-Chorus, Chorus, Bridge, Chorus. Using this form allowed for us to more easily and more quickly write with a purpose thematically. Appendix A features the original lyric sheet of the first draft, which would go on to experience significant revisions.

Upon finishing the first draft of the song, we took it separately to our songwriting professors and received separate feedback. There were a number of critiques that, although reviewed separately, aligned with one another. We treated these particular data as especially clear and began revising the song with these in mind. One part of the feedback was that there was too much space between lyrics in each of the verses, which may cause the audience to wander rather than remain engaged and focused. Although it was artistic and was not “incorrect,” the team revised the harmonic rhythm and the melody in order to keep the song moving forward to retain attention and engagement. This also involved significant reharmonization, moving from a tonic-based harmony to a harmony based on plagal cadences and 4-1-6m-5 chord progressions. This strengthened the musicality of the song, and suited the message well enough for us to continue.

In the end, the largest revisions took place in the verses. We spent time editing and revising the lyrics in order to most clearly tell the message. We developed the song intending to encompass this idea: a petitionary song inviting the Spirit to build affection in our hearts for Jesus Christ, the “one thing that matters.” Appendix B contains the lyric sheet of the final iteration of the song.

### **Arranging Process**

Upon finishing the demo of the song, there was a brief period for arranging and programming. First was the arrangement for the recording, modeled off of modern worship movements such as Elevation Worship, Vertical Church Band, Bethel Music, and more. An arrangement of this style requires study of the particulars of this genre: modern worship music. This movement is rock music based on Christian Contemporary Music that arose at the turn of the millennium. That means that an arrangement in this style will feature drums, electric guitars, keyboards in multiple forms, and likely some synth production (whether live or programmed in a computer). We did the first layer of synth programming (that which was tempo-specific, like an arpeggiated baseline and drum-machine percussion fills) in Logic Pro X and mixed these down for the Pro Tools session we would be recording with.

### **Pre-Production**

Pre-Production for this song encompassed many different aspects of music business and producing in general. The primary phases of a recording production as outlined in Huber were each addressed in turn.

Before the recording session was scheduled, student musicians known for their musicianship and experience in recording environments were contacted to assess their

availability. The players were chosen for their ability within the genre we had chosen for the arrangement. Involved in the first session were the following musicians: Andrew Wert on drums, Isaac Wilson on bass guitar, Matthew Baker and Justin Bilderback on electric guitars, Brandon Witters on electronic keyboards, and Caroline Freeman on piano. The vocalists slated for the first portion of the song were Harmony Tetmeyer as the lead vocalist, and Garrett Thomas as a background vocalist for a second/duet harmony part. Once players were chosen, we booked studio time at Robbie Hiner's Hambone Professional Recording Studio in Lynchburg, Virginia, for a two-day session on February 7-8.

In the weeks leading up to the session, there were three primary goals for production: to write charts for the musicians, to record a demo for the musicians to hear before the session, and to finish any electronic elements *before* the recording session. Two forms of charts were provided for the musicians (Appendix A): a "Nashville Numbers" chart, and a lead sheet. The Nashville Numbers chart is a chart with numbers corresponding to chords in a diatonic key, which is easily transposable and an easy chart to read in a recording environment. The rhythm chart featured more information, including the vocal line and any rhythms necessary for the piece. At seven pages, however, this chart is not favored for in-studio reference other than by the producer. This would benefit the musicians if they prepared before the session, to get an idea for the road map of the song as well as the dynamic ebbs and flows.

The demo was recorded in the Liberty University Mathena Songwriting Labs, featuring a piano part recorded into Pro Tools via MIDI and software instrument sounds, and a vocal by co-writer Jena Smith. This form of stripped-down and easy-to-record



demo was emailed to the musicians along with their charts so that they could listen and practice at the proper tempo along with a vocalist. This is likely to increase their knowledge of the song and provide them opportunity to practice creative ideas *before* arriving in the studio.

Lastly, we finished the electronic “track” elements of the song early so that the musicians could rehearse to the proper “click track” they would be recording to on the day of. While a click track is not necessary for most recording sessions, sometimes it is a great help as many musicians are used to playing live shows to a click and guide. It can provide a sense of security, especially for young musicians, no matter how talented. It would also provide them an even better sense of the song, alongside the stripped down piano/vocal demo.

### **Tracking Sessions at Hambone Studio**

In preparation for the first tracking session on February 7, we prepared an input list to send to the studio ahead of time. This chart featured a detailed list of all instruments to be recorded, with every microphone, preamp, outboard gear, instrument, player, and even input number prepared ahead of time. The primary engineer at Hambone, Jacob Clayton, received the list in advance of the session and prepared the studio so we would be ready to start recording once musicians arrived. I arrived early with my assistant engineer, Rebekah Winans.

Once our musicians arrived and were settled into the tracking room, we tested each instrument to get appropriate gain levels into our recorder. When the engineer informed me we were ready to begin, I held a brief meeting in the tracking room to discuss the tune and any particulars. This was required because the instrumentalists had

not ever played the song together, but would be sight-reading the charts provided for the first time. This method of recording is very common in recording hubs like Nashville, Tennessee. It maximizes the abilities of the session players and ensures a fast turnaround for the music. These players were very familiar with worship music, and so would be able to quickly and excellently record in the genre. This is the benefit of the Nashville-style recording, and was a benefit to us that night.

There were only a few specifics to go over in advance of the recording, so we settled into our places and had the musicians play the song from start to finish two times so they would get a feel for it. After the third time, the song was tight enough for us to focus on individual parts that needed cleaning up. The drummer, guitarists, and pianist were good to leave after that third take, whereas we wanted the bassist to clean up a few of his parts.

As the session players filtered out, we set up for our lead vocalist by setting up three different microphones together. We had her sing through each one to what was already recorded so we could pick the best microphone for her voice. Once that decision was made, we set up that one microphone in the tracking room and had the vocalist sing the song two or three times like we had done with the rhythm section. After the third take, we had her sing each section of the song individually to ensure we got the best “composited” performance possible.

After the lead vocal was recorded, we went ahead and recorded a few takes of background vocals, but we would return the next day to spend more time on these. We had three vocalists isolated in different rooms from one another to sing three-part

harmonies on top of the lead vocalist. Once this was done, we finished with an organ recording pass to fill out a few places in the arrangement.

Upon leaving Hambone Studio, we knew we would want to overdub a few guitar parts in the coming weeks, but otherwise we were very assured we had what we needed for a great recording. The process took only a few hours the first day, and two hours the second.

### **Editing the Song for Night of Worship**

After the tracking sessions, I was asked to send a “rough mix” of the tune to the director of operations at Red Tie Music/Liberty Music Group, Lorie Marsh. She had contacted us before we went to the studio, having heard of the song while we were editing the lyrics with our respective songwriting professors, and asked to be updated on the process. Upon hearing the piano-vocal demo, before tracking, she made the decision to pitch the song to the School of Music for its annual Night of Worship at Thomas Road Baptist Church. We partnered with Mrs. Marsh to finish the song, and signed a publishing contract for the song in mid-February, the week after the recording.

For the song to be published under Red Tie/LMG, however, some lyrical revisions were deemed necessary by the Night of Worship organizers and deans of the School of Music. The revisions were centered around a theological clarification over the omnipresence of God and whether or not humans can “invite” the Holy Spirit into a place or not. The difference of opinion over the lyrics in the chorus and bridge were not necessarily deeply theological, but a matter of perspective. Jena and I sat down to discuss the changes several times, and decided to continue editing the song lyrically not just to

“sell out” to get the song published, but to contextualize the song for the church it would be used for and also to create an even better song than before.

Whereas this process was not expected for this song when we began, it is a very common idea and one central to writing songs for the church. Commercial songwriting does not have a need to edit lyrics based on theological and ideological consistency with an institution. In the church, this is vital.

In the end, the song was cut from the program material for Night of Worship. This was due to runtime constraints, and led to the song being chosen for two public concerts at Liberty University at a future date after the closing of this study.

### **Overdub Recordings**

For the next month, there were a series of overdub recordings to either replace, supplement, or support the primary recording. This consisted of auxiliary guitar, synth, and vocal tracks. Some were recorded at Hambone Studio as well, and some in the Mathena Songwriting Labs at Liberty University. The most heavily involved overdub session was a re-tracking of the lead and background vocals in late March to prepare the song for release after the edits to the lyrics were made.

### **Mixing and Mastering at Hambone Studio**

The final stage of creating the artifact for this study was mixing and mastering the song at Hambone Studio. This involved a very basic process of balancing each individual track into a whole, cohesive, and tasteful sonic reproduction of the song. Processing used in this stage include level matching, panning, equalization, compression, gating, vocal tuning, saturation, some chorus and delay effects, and reverb. We did not mix the song to

sound like a live recording, but did use reverb to emulate a space for a studio recording, as is common practice.

## **Chapter 4 – Findings and Conclusion**

### **Analysis of the Creative Artifacts**

After analyzing the final products of the creative project, I compiled a list of notes on the process as a whole and how it may answer the research question posed at the beginning of this study. The focus of this study was to uncover what benefits in applying commercial techniques there may be for church worship. The following are my initial findings in analyzing the content of this study:

1. “One Thing That Matters” features a strong hook and a focused central theme because we utilized good hook-writing technique and wrote with the title in mind. Moreover, utilizing collaboration in the songwriting process created a strong song in a very short period of time—far less time than attempting write alone. Initial interaction with listeners has demonstrated the catchiness/memorability of the song, which has heightened engagement.
2. The song attracted the attention of a professional publishing company with minimal marketing due to the strength of its artistry and strength of message—which demonstrates a combination of strong musicality from commercial songwriting but also proper application of theological material and worship-minded lyricism.
3. Recording the song has made it possible to bring it to a far wider audience than without.

**Techniques Analyzed**

Utilization of strong commercial songwriting techniques benefitted the song in several ways. First, Jena and I sat down for a meeting to talk about ideas we had. We both came in knowing what we were writing for and in what style, and we came in with ideas. This intentional stage of designing set us up for immediate success in the process. We wrote the song with the title in mind once we had arrived at the hook: “You’re the one thing that matters.” This brought a high level of cohesiveness to the song but also directed our focus in *what* was being written. Having a strong hook to write around made for a unified message. Moreover, in observing the interactions of others with this song, the song has displayed an eminent catchiness and a high level of engagement.

Second, the utilization of collaboration made for an immensely fast turnaround time for the song. We began writing with absolutely zero time spent beforehand preparing, and yet the song was in its first “finished” form within a week. That only encompassed two to three brief—less than one hour—sessions of writing to make a cohesive, tasteful worship song and record a basic piano-vocal demo. I compare this to my solo pursuits, which on the whole have often taken far more time. There are times where I have been able to ride a wave of inspiration much farther than normal, as it were, and finished a song in a matter of days or weeks. This song, however, came together in a completed form far faster than if I had attempted to write it alone.

In editing the song for congregational concerns, there was a communication barrier that extended the writing process far after we had recorded. This is rarely the norm and was exacerbated by the circumstances for which we were editing the song. Once the song was in its finished form, there had still only been two months of time that

had passed from the original concept session and the finished form. Without those contextual edits, the song would have been finished in under two weeks.

The musicality and relevance of the song was proven when through no effort of my own, the song attracted the attention of a professional music publishing company. My interactions with Red Tie Music were very favorable, and the song was consistently praised for its unified message and applicableness for congregational worship. The song was published officially in early March, and will go into the market as early as April 2018.

As for recording the song, time will tell the scope of its reach. Already, the song has been played for a multitude of interested parties, from churches across the nation to local worship teams and bands. After this process, I am able to present a professional recording to the market. It would be an interesting study to estimate how many listeners may be reached after a year of airplay on digital platforms such as iTunes and Spotify.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

For further study, the following topics can be explored with further research:

1. How do we develop a songwriting community in the local church?
2. How is the local church actively pursuing creating new songs?
3. What is the process of editing a song for congregational worship as opposed for artistic use?
4. What kind of churches—specifically what congregation size, worship methodology, and missional purpose—would benefit from this study and how can they too best apply these techniques to benefit their worship ministry and

those around them? What songwriters would benefit from this study to benefit their songwriting, producing, and marketing?

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the study was highly enlightening into the ability of a small team to create, record, and market a worship song for use in a church worship setting. The intentional application of commercial songwriting techniques seems to have benefited the process through increasing its efficiency as well as increasing the quality of the final project. Given the call of church songwriting is a call of excellence and generational relevancy, these techniques clearly communicate an advantage in writing for the church. There is a vital necessity, no matter the quality of the song as a song, to incorporate Scriptural literacy and a high emphasis on correct theology in order to create the best possible song to put on the lips of a congregation. This study proved largely beneficial in highlighting these benefits and pitfalls of incorporating commercial techniques to the writing and recording of church music.



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## Appendix A

## Charts from Songwriting and Recording Sessions

76 BPM,  $\frac{4}{4}$   
KEY: F

ONE THING THAT MATTERS

GARRETT THOMAS  
&  
JENNIFER SMITH

INTRO  $|1-\overset{2}{1}| \bullet 4 \overset{1}{\underset{7}{1}} 6- \diamond 5$

VERSE  $\{1: \overset{1}{\underset{5}{4}} \overset{1}{\underset{5}{6}}- | 5 \ 5 \bullet \overset{1}{\underset{5}{4}} \overset{1}{\underset{5}{6}}- | 5 \ 5$

PRE  $\overset{1}{\underset{3}{2}}- \overset{1}{\underset{3}{4}} \overset{1}{\underset{5}{5}} 6- 5$

CHORUS  $4 \overset{1}{\underset{7}{1}} 6- \overset{1}{\underset{5}{5}} \overset{1}{\underset{5}{5}} \overset{1}{\underset{3}{3}}- \bullet 4 \overset{1}{\underset{5}{1}} 5 \ 4 \overset{1}{\underset{5}{1}} 5$

TURN  $\overset{10}{1} \overset{10}{1} : \} \overset{10}{6}- \overset{10}{5} \overset{1}{\underset{3}{1}} 4 \ 4$

BRIDGE  $\{1: \overset{1}{\underset{5}{6}}- \overset{1}{\underset{5}{5}} \overset{1}{\underset{3}{1}} \overset{1}{\underset{3}{4}} 4 \ 4 : \} 2x$

$\overset{1}{\underset{5}{6}}- \overset{1}{\underset{5}{5}} \overset{1}{\underset{3}{1}} \overset{1}{\underset{3}{4}} \overset{1}{\underset{5}{4}} \overset{1}{\underset{5}{5}} \bullet \overset{1}{\underset{5}{6}}- \overset{1}{\underset{5}{5}} \overset{1}{\underset{3}{1}} \overset{1}{\underset{3}{4}} 5$

CHORUS  $\diamond 4 \overset{1}{\underset{7}{1}} 6- \overset{1}{\underset{5}{5}} \overset{1}{\underset{5}{5}} \overset{1}{\underset{3}{3}}- \bullet 4 \overset{1}{\underset{5}{1}} 5 \ 4 \overset{1}{\underset{5}{5}} 6- 5$   
 $\overset{1}{\underset{3}{2}}- \overset{1}{\underset{3}{4}} \overset{1}{\underset{5}{5}} \ 1 \ 1$

Rhythm Plus

## One Thing That Matters

Words and Music by  
Garrett Jonathan Thomas and Jennifer Smith

$\text{♩} = 76$  **Intro**

Track/Pad fade in.  
F

*mf* We've

1 2 *mp* 3 4 5 6

**Verse 1**

gath - ered in this place. Here we bow our heads to wor - ship You. We're

B♭2 C Dm7 F C C sus C

7 8 9 10

lay - ing down our hearts. Here we give it all to on - ly You. So we

B♭2 C Dm7 F C C sus C

11 12 13 14

**Pre-Chorus**

wor - ship You, hon - or You. We're wait - ing here for more of You. Je - sus,

Gm7 F A B♭2 C Dm7 C

*p cresc.* 16 17 18

2  
Chorus

One Thing That Matters

come. Bring your ho - ly fire. Oh, come, be our

Bb2 F2 C E Dm7

*subito p* 19 20 21

hearts' de - sire. So come, be the one thing that mat - ters. Be the

C Csus Am7 Bb2 F C Bb2

22 *cresc.* 23 24 25

Turnaround Verse 2

one thing that mat - ters. We're yearn - ing for Your pres - ence,

F C Fill F Guitars - muted 8ths rhythm Fill Bb2 C

26 *f* 27 28 *mf* 29

ask - ing for be - lief: to know You. We've tast - ed of Your glo - ry and we'll

Dm7 F C *cresc.* Bb2 C

30 31 32 33

## One Thing That Matters

3

## Pre-Chorus

nev-er be the same. God, we love You. So we wor-ship You, hon-or You. We're

Dm7 F C Gm7  $\frac{F}{A}$  Bb2 C

34 35 36 Driving feel 37 38

## Chorus

wait-ing here for more of You. Je-sus, come. Bring your ho-ly fire. Oh,

Dm7 C Bb2 F2  $\frac{C}{E}$

39 40 *f* 41 42

— come, be our hearts' de-sire. So come, be the one thing that mat-ters.

Dm7 C Csus Am7 Bb2 F C

43 44 45 46

## Turnaround

— Be the one thing that mat-ters.

Bb2 F C Keys/Track only Dm C F  $\frac{F}{A}$  Bb2 Bb2

47 48 *p* 49 50 51 52

4 One Thing That Matters

**Bridge**

53 54 55 56

57 58 59 60

61 62 63 64

65 66 67 68

*mp*

*mf*

*f*

Drums in light

Band in - Building

Fill

Fill

Fill

## One Thing That Matters

5

## Chorus 3

Bring your ho - ly fire. Oh, come, be our hearts' de - sire. So

Bb2 Fill F 2 C E Dm7 C C sus Am7

69 70 71 72

*f*

come, be the one thing that mat - ters. Be the one thing that mat - ters. So,

Bb2 F C Bb2 F C

73 74 75 76

## Chorus 4

come. Bring your ho - ly fire. Oh, come, be our

Bb2 F 2 C E Dm7

77 78 79

hearts' de - sire. So come, be the one thing that mat - ters. Be the

C C sus Am7 Bb2 F C Bb2 C

80 81 82 83

*ff*



# ONE THING THAT MATTERS

41

6

## One Thing That Matters

one thing that mat - ters. Be the one thing that mat - ters.

Dm7 C Gm7  $\begin{smallmatrix} F \\ A \end{smallmatrix}$  B $\flat$  C Fill

84 85 86

Detailed description: This block contains the musical notation for measures 84, 85, and 86. The melody is in the treble clef, and the bass line is in the bass clef. The key signature has one flat (Bb). The lyrics are 'one thing that mat - ters. Be the one thing that mat - ters.' The chords are Dm7, C, Gm7, F/A, Bb, and C. The measure numbers 84, 85, and 86 are written below the staff.

F Fill

*mf* 87 88 89

Detailed description: This block contains the musical notation for measures 87, 88, and 89. The melody is in the treble clef, and the bass line is in the bass clef. The key signature has one flat (Bb). The chords are F and Fill. The measure numbers 87, 88, and 89 are written below the staff. The dynamic marking *mf* is written below the staff in measure 87.

## Appendix B

## Final Lead Sheet

Lead Sheet

## One Thing That Matters

## Choral Arrangement

Words and Music by  
Garrett Thomas and Jennifer Smith  
Arranged by Garrett Thomas

$\text{♩} = 81$   
B♭2 F2 C E Dm7 C B♭2 C

*mp* We've gath - ered in this place.

6 Dm7 F C C<sub>sus</sub> C B♭2 C

Here we bow our heads to wor - ship You. \_\_\_\_\_ We're lay - ing down our hearts.

10 Dm7 F C C<sub>sus</sub> C Gm7  $\frac{E}{A}$  B♭(add2) C

Here we give it all to on - ly \_\_\_\_ You. *mf* So we wor - ship You, hon - or You. We're

15 Dm7 C B♭2 F2  $\frac{C}{E}$

long - ing, Lord, for more of \_\_\_\_ You. We \_\_\_\_ come. Set our hearts on \_\_\_\_ fire. \_\_\_\_ We

19 Dm7 C C<sub>sus</sub> Am7 B♭2 F C

\_\_\_\_ come, You're our sole de - sire. \_\_\_\_ We \_\_\_\_ come, You're the one thing that mat - ters. \_\_\_\_

23 B♭2 F C F F<sub>sus</sub> F Fmaj7 F B♭2 C

\_\_\_\_ You're the one thing that mat - ters. \_\_\_\_ We're yearn - ing for Your pres - ence,

2

## One Thing That Matters

28 Dm7 F2 C Bb2 C

ask - ing for be - lief: to know You. *f* We've tast - ed of Your glo - ry and we'll

32 Dm7 F Csus C BbAm7 Gm  $\frac{F}{A}$  Bb2 C

nev - er be the same. God, we love — You! So we wor - ship You, hon - or You. We're

37 Dm7 C Bb2 F2  $\frac{C}{E}$

long - ing, Lord, for more of — You. We — come. Set our hearts on — fire. — We

41 Dm7 C Csus Am7 Bb2 F C

— come, You're our sole de - sire. — We — come, You're the one thing that mat - ters. —

45 Bb2 F C Bbmaj7 C F2  $\frac{C}{E}$  Dm7 C Dm C

— You're the one thing that mat - ters. —

52 F  $\frac{F}{A}$  Bbmaj9 Bbmaj9 Dm7 C F2  $\frac{F}{A}$  Bbmaj9

*mp* Bow - ing at your feet, We give You eve - ry — thing. We want noth - ing

58 Bbmaj9 Dm C F2  $\frac{F}{A}$  Bbmaj9 Bbmaj9

more than You. Bow - ing at your feet, We give You eve - ry — thing. We want noth - ing more than You. *mf*

## One Thing That Matters

3

63 Dm7 C F  $\frac{F}{A}$   $\frac{C}{B\flat}$  B $\flat$  Am7  $\frac{C}{B\flat}$  B $\flat$  maj7 C6

Bow-ing at your feet, We give You eve-ry\_\_\_ thing. We want noth-ing more than You. *f*

67 Dm9 C F2 Am7  $\frac{C}{B\flat}$  B $\flat$  maj7 C

Bow-ing at your feet, We give You eve-ry\_\_\_ thing. We want noth-ing more than You. Lord, we

71 B $\flat$ 2 F maj7  $\frac{C}{E}$  Dm7 C C sus Am7

\_\_\_ come! Set our hearts on\_\_\_ fire. \_\_\_ We \_\_\_ come, \_\_\_ You're our sole de - sire. \_\_\_ We

75 B $\flat$ 2 F C B $\flat$ 2 F C

\_\_\_ come, You're the one thing that mat - ters. \_\_\_ You're the one thing that mat - ters. We

79 B $\flat$ 2 F2  $\frac{C}{E}$  Dm7 C C sus Am7

\_\_\_ come. \_\_\_ Set our hearts on\_\_\_ fire. \_\_\_ We \_\_\_ come, \_\_\_ You're our sole de - sire. \_\_\_ We

83 B $\flat$ 2 F C B $\flat$ 2 C Dm7 C

\_\_\_ come, \_\_\_ You're the one thing that mat - ters. \_\_\_ You're the one thing that mat - ters.

87 Gm7  $\frac{F}{A}$  B $\flat$  C B $\flat$  maj9 C F  $\frac{C}{E}$  Dm7 Worship leader ad libs C F

\_\_\_ You're the one thing that mat - ters. \_\_\_

## **Appendix C**

### **Link to Final Recording**

The following link is to a private posting of the most current mix of the song “One Thing That Matters” on SoundCloud:

<https://www.soundcloud.com/rhettjthomas/one-thing-that-matters-final-mix/s-8Am4T>