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Beyond Sunday Morning: Communal Singing and Corporate Identity

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ABSTRACT

Corporate worship singing long aided congregants in growing their communal identity and theological understanding of biblical principles. While modern singing trends help congregants grow their theological understanding, modern church singing trends suggest songs are not encouraging growth in communal identity mimicking cultural values of individualism in corporate worship song lyrics. Historically, individual first-person pronouns represented the individuals alongside the rest of the church; but with a rise in cultural individualism, first-person pronouns now represent individuals independent of one another. This individualistic focus can lead congregants to conclude they do not need the church and to remove themselves from the body of Christ or to only be involved minimally in the life and activities of the church. Since the corporate worship service is often the entry point for both non-Christians and new Christians, and song lyrics affect congregants theological and communal views, it is imperative that corporate song lyrics encourage participants beyond corporate worship services into discipling, evangelizing, and serving opportunities of the church. This dissertation employs mixed methods to bridge the gap between worship scholars encouraging communal language and church practices.

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United States (US)

Southern Baptist Convention (SBC)

Contemporary Worship Music (CWM)

Contemporary Christian Music (CCM)

Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI)

Annual Church Profile (ACP)

Sunday School (SS)

Baptism Percentage Formula (BPF)

Sunday School Percentage Formula (SSPF)

Primary Worship Attendance (PWA)

Chapter One: Introduction

"It seems that nothing defines a people like its music…People are what they sing. If we would understand a culture other than our own, we should start not by reading essays about it by so-called objective observers, but by listening to the music, feeling its rhythm, and hearing the story of its poetry."[1] If an observer were to listen to the music of the church in the United States (US) would they hear praise to God and songs for teaching and admonishing one another as Colossians 3:16 suggests? Would they hear individuals responding to God? Observers of modern US corporate worship services find in many churches: announcements to engage individuals in church activities, sermons with points of personal application, and songs which encourage individualized encounters with God. In short, corporate worship services have lost their communal focus and are often designed to meet the perceived individualistic needs of congregants by engaging the individual directly through individually-focused singing in corporate worship services.

A time of worship renewal is occurring and the gap between worship scholars and song choices may be narrowing. Popular composers like Keith and Kristyn Getty, authors like Vernon Whaley, and conference speakers like Bob Kauflin all use their platforms to encourage and challenge church leaders to reconsider their corporate worship traditions in favor of communal language and deeper theological song texts to grow congregants into stronger believers. Among the challenges churches face are intentional church leader decisions to focus congregants on their personal spiritual journey apart from the rest of their community of believers. This dissertation

[1] Daniel I. Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Ada: Baker Academic, 2014), 221.

challenges church leaders to increasing communal language usage to encourage congregants to grow beyond their individualized view of Christianity into the larger identity of the church.

Background and Context

Scholarly literature agrees that corporate worship songs affect congregant's theology and communal identity. Yet, there is little research supporting these conclusions as supplying evidence to rationalize personal observations is often difficult. This dissertation supplies research that rationalizes scholarly claims by taking data sets often considered distinct from one another and comparing them to one another. If scholarly convictions are valid, then a connection between song lyrics and discipleship data should exist. Thus, this dissertation utilizes data to measure scholarly claims that corporate worship songs affect congregant's theology and communal identity.

Theoretical Framework

The New Testament does not provide the exact liturgy, procedures, and methods for corporate worship services; yet the New Testament emphasizes the corporate body over the individual. The apostle John writes: "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:23, New American Standard Bible).[2] Similarly, Paul in a letter to the church at Colossae offers:

> Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father" (Colossians 3:15-17).

[2] Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced employ the *New American Standard Bible*.

In addition, the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9-13) uses communal language and heavenly worship in Revelation is described as multitudes "with a loud voice" speaking as one group (Rev. 7:9-12 and 19:6-9). These examples, along with others on unity (1 Cor. 1:10, Acts 4:32, Gal. 3:28, etc.), emphasize the importance of keeping a unified spirit as the body of believers. Every aspect of the church worship service, including its songs, must guide congregants toward unity with the rest of the body of Christ.

Corporate worship services are the "front door" of churches, whether through in-person or online means, thus the choices made for these services affect seasoned Christians, new converts, and unbelievers.[3] Seasoned believers are all-of-life believers engaged in a growing relationship with God throughout the entire week and singing about that individualized experience has little effect on their already mature understanding of the church and their communal identity. For them, corporate worship constitutes but one of 168 hours in a week spent with God; thus, it is easy for them to set aside their corporate worship preferences and corporately worship in a way deemed best for the entire congregation.

New converts, on the other hand, do not have a communal identity or it is in its very formative stages. As music affects congregants' theology and communal identity, singing with individualistically-focused lyrics emphasizes their individual walk with God at the expense of growing into the community of believers. Without growing into the larger community and understanding the edifying role of all congregants, new converts may conclude that Christianity is an individual walk with God that does not require other believers and falsely believe, as 1 Corinthians 12 writes: "Because I am not a hand, I am not *a part* of the body" (1 Cor. 12:12-18).

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[3] Thom S. Rainer, "The Amazing Shift of Four 'Front Doors' in Churches," Church Answers, February 14, 2022, https://churchanswers.com/blog/the-amazing-shift-of-four-front-doors-in-churches/.

All congregants are part of the body and church leaders must teach them, through every available means, the importance of growing into the community of believers.

This dissertation utilizes qualitative research methods to survey scholarly literature. It utilizes both qualitative and quantitative methods to represent church leader views on the use of communal language in corporate worship services. This dissertation also utilizes quantitative methods to statistically analyze modern singing and discipleship trends.

Problem Statement

The songs a congregation regularly sings form the theological and communal identities of its congregants. With Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) churches in decline "for the 13th consecutive year," and a similar decline with Gallup Poll respondents claiming their religious preference, it is plausible that individually-focused corporate worship services are one of the contributing factors toward this decline.[4] While individualistic language historically implied a communal church-wide focus, the individualistic culture of the US automatically suggests, as Brian Wren writes, "I, as distinct from you and everyone else."[5] Utilizing mostly individually-focused lyrics in corporate worship no longer encourages congregants to grow in their communal identity and must, therefore, be reconsidered.

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[4] "Southern Baptist Convention Continues Statistical Decline, Floyd Calls for Rethinking ACP Process," Baptist Press (n.d.), accessed August 12, 2022, https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/southern-baptist-convention-continues-statistical-decline-floyd-calls-for-rethinking-acp-process/; "Self-Described Religious Identification of Americans 2021," *Statista*, accessed January 20, 2023, https://www.statista.com/statistics/245478/self-described-religious-identification-of-americans/.

[5] Brian A. Wren. *Praying Twice: The Music and Words of Congregational Song*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 185.

According to Scott Aniol, there are three types of worship: lifestyle, private, and corporate.[6] Both lifestyle and private worship present opportunities for believers to focus on themselves and using individualistic language is appropriate for such occasions; thus, radio stations using songs with individualistic language is both expected and encouraged as these songs are used for times of private worship. However, the merging of private and corporate worship song selections is a modern problematic trend. Corporate worship songs should encourage congregants to grow in both their theological and communal identities. Thus, corporate worship songs should stand apart from popular Contemporary Worship Music (CWM), Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) played on radio stations, and other mediums used for times of private worship. One significant way corporate worship songs can stand apart is by singing less first-person singular pronouns in favor of more communal language.

An argument for including first-person singular pronouns is mimicking the language used in the book of Psalms. Throughout the book of Psalms individualistic language is employed; but, as this dissertation will show, the Psalms also include communal language. Thus, to primarily use individualistic language to mimic the Psalms ignores the communal language used within the Psalms while also ignoring Paul's encouragement to sing with all the song types available: "psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs" in both Colossians and Ephesians (Col. 3:16 and Eph. 5:19).[7]

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[6] Scott Aniol, *Worship in Song: A Biblical Approach to Music and Worship* (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 2009), 149-55.

[7] There are different interpretations of the song types listed in Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19 including the interpretation that "psalms," "hymns," and "spiritual songs" suggest exclusive psalmody. This researcher supports each as unique types of songs serving different purposes. A full discussion of the various viewpoints is beyond the scope of this dissertation, so further discussion will be delimited.

Worship scholars agree on the importance of song lyrics encouraging theological development and communal formation. Yet, song writers increasingly write songs utilizing individualistically-focused lyrics with individualized subjective encounters with God. Thus, there is a disconnect between worship academia and worship song selection. This dissertation seeks to bridge the gap between worship scholars and song selection by emphasizing the importance of using communal corporate worship lyrics to encourage congregants to increase their engagement within the body of Christ.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this dissertation is to assess modern corporate singing trends, establish church leader viewpoints on corporate worship singing language and connections to communal identity as measured through discipleship involvement, and to bridge the gap between scholarly literature and corporate worship singing practices.

Methodology

This dissertation utilizes mixed methods to present and analyze data. For the church leader interviews, this dissertation utilizes qualitative methods to summarize church leader explanations to quantitatively answered questions. Thus, mixed methods are used for church leader interviews representing the communal singing beliefs and philosophies of church leaders. For the song record analysis, this dissertation utilizes quantitative methods to objectively analyze and categorize songs then to compare these records to discipleship data. Thus, quantitative methods are used to analyze song records and discipleship data.

Research Questions

This dissertation utilizes mixed methods to answer its primary research question: What do modern corporate worship trends teach congregants about their communal identity? This dissertation's overarching framework includes what scholars, church leaders, and records say about communal identity forming through congregational songs. Based on what scholars say, what church leaders say, and what records say, this researcher will draw conclusions and recommendations for church leaders.

RQ1: What do modern corporate worship singing trends teach congregants about their communal identity? To answer this dissertation's primary research question, this researcher represents the scholarly community through the literature review section of this dissertation. In addition, each subsequent research question adds greater depth to the answer to RQ1 as additional information is presented through both qualitative and quantitative means.

RQ2: How do worship leaders and senior pastors encourage communal identity through corporate worship? Employing qualitative methods, this researcher presents what church leaders believe about corporate song lyrics and communal identity through church leader interviews. Interview questions progress through six categories: (1) general church and discipleship information, (2) corporate worship singing philosophy, (3) making communal connections in corporate worship, (4) individual versus communally-focused lyrics, (5) God-centered versus man-centered lyrics, and (6) requesting access to corporate worship services song records and final comments.

RQ3: What quantifiable results do records show about communal identity through the lyrics of corporate songs? Employing quantitative methods this researcher presents data from Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI) from 1989 to 2023, and Annual Church

Profile (ACP) data from 1988 to 2022 to mark modern trends. Regardless of what scholars and church leaders think about corporate worship songs, this final question supplies an objective analysis to analyze both song lyric trends and discipleship data. In addition, this researcher compares three-months of church leader interview song records to CCLI data of the same period for analysis and discussion.

Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study

Rationale

SBC churches are in decline and church leaders often blame outside sources. Publications like The Gospel Coalition's article "Why is the SBC Membership Declining?" point to: (1) declining trust in institutions, (2) aging congregations, and (3) younger generations walking away from the Church.[8] Yet, all these observations are external symptoms of internal issues with discipleship. If churches were discipling their congregants into deeper communal relationships, then younger believers would not be walking away from the church.

Unfortunately, while modern church trends toward entertainment may have initially been caused by society's individualistic views, the church has adopted entertainment models by focusing times of corporate worship on their perceived needs of individuals; thus, congregants become consumers instead of part of the community of believers. Ian Nell and Neil Meyer recognize this reality when they write: "Many churchgoers for their part tend to judge churches on their ability to entertain. The problem is that the analogy of church and theatre or church and entertainment dissolves, so that church *is* theatre and worship *is* entertainment. When this

[8] Ryan Burge, "Why Is the SBC Membership Declining?," *The Gospel Coalition* (blog), May 13, 2023, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/sbc-membership-declining/.

happens, members are encouraged to treat the church as consumers treat other forms of entertainment."[9] Consumer preferences matter to organizations selling goods, but when church leaders adjust their strategies to meet the perceived needs of congregants, then they equate congregants to consumers and corporate worship then focuses on meeting consumer preferences. In essence, when church leaders elevate the perceived needs of congregants above the purposes of the church they relegate themselves to mere entertainers meeting the desires of their congregants.

Regardless of whether church leaders or society initiated an entertainment model for corporate worship is not the issue, the issue is that entertainment ideals drive corporate worship displacing God as the primary focus and audience of corporate worship. This is apparent in modern singing trends that emphasize mankind over God and individuals above the community. John MacArthur addresses the displacement of God in corporate worship by retelling a newspaper article from The New York Times:

> A number of years ago I read a newspaper account of a christening party in a wealthy Boston suburb. The parents had opened their palatial home to friends and relatives, who had come to celebrate the wonderful event. As the party was moving along and the people were having a wonderful time eating and drinking and celebrating and enjoying one another, somebody said, "By the way, where is the baby?"
>
> The heart of that mother jumped, and she instantly left the room and rushed into the master bedroom, where she had left the baby asleep in the middle of the massive bed. The baby was dead, smothered by the coats of the guests.
>
> I've often thought about that in reference to how the Lord Jesus Christ is treated in His own church. WE are busy supposedly celebrating Him, while He is smothered by the coats of the guests.[10]

Modern trends have displaced God-centered songs and replaced them with man-centered singing while also emphasizing individuals above the gathered body of believers by over-utilizing

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[9] Ian A. Nell and Neil Meyer, "Invited by God Onto the Worship Stage: Developing Missional Communities through Participation in Theo-Drama" *Verbum Et Ecclesia* 34, no. 1 (2013): 1.

[10] John F. MacArthur, *The Ultimate Priority* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1995), 21.

individualistic language. If church leaders continue to choose songs that are man-centered and individually-focused, they continue to entertain the masses instead of helping them grow into the body of believers.

Relevance

The relevance of this project is the scale of the data analysis. Some scholars provide historical snapshots in their research, supplying focused data, but they do not measure trends over time. This dissertation takes their research findings to another level by increasing the magnitude of song evaluation. Daniel Thornton, for example, supplies a formula for objectively evaluating songs but only analyzes twenty-five popular songs.[11] Therefore, Thornton's conclusions are objective and beneficial but also limited to those twenty-five songs. This researcher scales Thornton's research methods to mark trends from 1989-2022 showing scholarly claims of man-centered and individualistic singing trends are rationalized by analyzing and discussing a significant sample of corporate worship songs.

Significance

Modern trends creating individual encounters with God during corporate worship services encourages congregants into private worship encounters in the presence of others. This type of worship encounter mimics private times of worship as individuals encounter God directly without consideration for others around them. Thus, corporate worship becomes irrelevant and may lead to participants not increasing their involvement with the body of believers or it may even lead to them leaving the church altogether. While individualistic language is only part of

[11] Daniel Thornton, "Exploring the Contemporary Congregational Song Genre: Texts, Practice, and Industry," (PhD thesis, Macquarie University, 2014), https://www.academia.edu/24269011/Exploring_the_Contemporary_Congregational_Song_Genre_Texts_Practice_and_Industry.

the issue, it is one factor discouraging congregants from increasing their involvement with the body of Christ beyond the corporate worship service because it elevates their individual preferences above that of the gathered community.

The literature review presents agreement among worship scholars on the importance of singing songs that employ communal language. However, this scholarly agreement does not appear to significantly impact congregational song selection. Thus, this researcher seeks to bridge the gap between worship scholars and church leader song selections to help church leaders understand the importance of growing congregants into the community of the church, through utilizing communal language, instead of merely meeting perceived individualistic preferences during corporate worship. By bridging the gap between worship scholars and church leaders this researcher hopes to start a modern trend where corporate worship song lyrics, employing communal language, stands apart from private worship practices, employing singular language, to encourage congregants deeper into the community of believers that make up the Church.

Definitions of Key Terms

Corporate Worship

Corporate worship occurs when God's people intentionally gather to worship together with other members of the body of Christ using "psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs" to sing vertically to God and horizontally to one another for discipleship (Col. 3:16) as well as through corporate prayer and confession, Scripture reading and preaching, celebrating the Lord's Supper and baptism, and other corporate acts of worship. This is often done on a weekly basis, and most often occurs on Sunday mornings in Christian worship; however, corporate worship is not limited to Sunday morning gatherings.

Discipleship

Discipleship is the process of growing into a deeper relationship with God by "faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2). In the context of corporate worship, it is meant to grow congregants in their relationship with God and knowledge of Him. Discipleship can occur through regular Bible study and interaction, historically known as Sunday School, but discipleship groups and discipleship are not synonymous with one another.

Communal Identity

Communal identity is the viewpoint that individuals belong to a community larger than themselves. For churches, communal identity is made plain through congregants engaging in the various activities of the church and through growing discipleship relationships. This occurs most often through intentional discipleship relationships which may occur within church events or outside the church.

Communally-Focused Songs

Communally-focused songs are songs that include more "we" than "me" language. Songs are considered communally-focused when there are more first-person plural, second-person, and third-person pronouns.

God-Centered Songs

God-centered songs are songs that sing more to and about God than man's response to God. Songs are considered God-centered when there are more references to God than the singer, or singers.

Individually-Focused Songs

Individually-focused songs are songs that include more "me" than "we" language. Songs are considered individually-focused when there are more first-person singular pronouns than first-person plural, second-person, and third-person pronouns. The phrase "individually-focused songs" is interchangeable with "singular-focused songs" throughout this dissertation.

Man-Centered Songs

Man-centered songs are songs that sing more about man's response to God than to and about God. Songs are considered man-centered when there are more references to the singer, or singers, than God.

Singular-Focused Songs

Singular-focused songs are songs that include more "me" than "we" language. Songs are considered singular-focused when there are more first-person singular pronouns than first-person plural, second-person, and third-person pronouns. The phrase "singular-focused songs" is interchangeable with "individually-focused songs" throughout this dissertation.

Worship

Mankind was created for worship. It is man's obedient, loving response to God's revelation of Himself made possible through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There are three types of worship: lifestyle worship, private worship, and corporate worship.[12] While singing is one act of worship, it is not the only act of worship; nor is singing considered a greater act of worship than any other.

[12] Aniol, *Worship in Song*, 149-55.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations of the Study

Assumptions

This researcher presupposes that Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19-20 emphasize two audiences for corporate worship songs. First, corporate worship songs should be "to God" (Col. 3:16). Second, corporate worship songs should "admonish one another" (Col. 3:16) and "to yourselves" (Eph. 5:19). This researcher believes these verses are clear and leave little room for intentionally designing corporate worship services to evangelistically-focus or to create individual encounters with God within corporate worship services.[13]

This researcher also presupposes communal language used in corporate worship songs encourages congregants into growing connections with other members of the body of Christ. By singing songs with more "we" then "me" language, congregants, and specifically new converts and immature Christians, are encouraged to question why congregational song lyrics are different than other Christian songs. This distinction between CWM and CCM allows church leaders to educate their congregants on the purposes of the church often agreed upon to be worship, discipleship, and evangelism. If congregants view the church through their individual understanding, they may not move beyond corporate worship services into the discipleship and evangelistic opportunities of the church.

This researcher also presupposes his limited exposure to corporate worship services intentionally focusing on the perceived needs of individuals is representative of modern church trends in the US. Individual experience is the lens through which a person perceives the world.

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[13] This presupposition is heavily influenced by this researcher's DWS Thesis: Justin Aaron McKinney, "Worship, Discipleship, and Evangelism: How the Purpose of the Church Affects Congregational Singing" (2021), *Doctoral Dissertations and Projects*, https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/3217.

Because this researcher recognizes scholarly literature addressing the same things his personal experience has witnessed, it is an educated assumption that church leaders intentionally focus on what they perceive to be the needs of their congregants. As educated and experiential as this researcher's assumption may be, it is an assumption none the less.

This researcher also presupposes first-person language encourages congregants into individualistic and man-centered expressions of worship. The church is meant to be a communal activity and the New Testament repeatedly emphasizes this communal nature (1 Cor. 1:10, Gal. 6:2, Rom. 12:5, etc.). However, not all congregants understand the corporate nature of the church, so those who only attend the corporate worship service, are likely to be heavily influenced by what songs teach them. When services are designed to meet the perceived needs of the individual, then congregants who only attend corporate worship services are unlikely to grow into the community of the church.

Like above, this researcher also presupposes that songs are formative and regular use of first-person language encourages congregants to view their worship, corporate or otherwise, as an individual, intimate conversations between them and God apart from other believers. Thus, the formative nature of congregational songs molds the beliefs of congregants. When church leaders utilize first-person person congregational song lyrics, they are teaching their congregations the importance of an individual encounter with God regardless of that church leader's personal beliefs on the communal nature of the church. If songs are formative theologically, they will also affect how congregants view the church as a place to serve their needs or as a place to serve the needs of others.

This researcher also presupposes the Psalms are more communal than credited. The people of the Old Testament were a communal people. Thus, for them to write

individualistically-focused songs seems unlikely. The assumption that all Psalms use individualistic language is refuted by the first Psalm which does not use either "we" or "me," but instead speaks horizontally about others by using the third-person pronouns "his" and "he." This example is not a closed case to rationalize this dissertation's claim; however, it does suggest claiming the Psalms are all individualistic is not an accurate representation of the book of Psalms.

This researcher also presupposes modern America is as various forms of media propaganda regularly promote America's cultural value of individualism. Thus, churches may feel cultural pressure to cater toward the perceived needs of their congregants by creating times of corporate worship designed to create an individual encounter with God. E. Byron Anderson writes on the implications and effects of *American individualism*, specifically as it applies to corporate worship practices.[14] Anderson writes: "The separation of the individual from the community in our understanding of worship is very much a 'modern' concern, not limited to North American expressions of Christianity. Nevertheless, such separation is often expressed more strongly in this context because of the powerful culture-shaping traditions of 'American individualism.'"[15] Like Anderson, this research presupposes modern *American individualism* affects modern corporate worship practices.

This researcher presupposes that *some* individualistic language within corporate worship is not only allowed but encouraged. Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19 both encourage singing with "psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs" suggesting churches use a variety of song types within corporate worship services. Thus, corporate worship should include a combination of

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[14] E. Byron Anderson, "Individualism and Community within Worship Practices," in Williams and Lamport, eds., *Theological Foundations of Worship*, 218-231.

[15] Anderson, "Individualism and Community within Worship Practices," 219.

God-centered and *man-centered* songs, as well as both *communal* and *individual*. In addition, due to the variety of activities within corporate worship, it seems appropriate for a variety of song types to fit different parts of services. For intimate times of corporate worship or times of invitation or response, it seems prudent to utilize individualistic language for individual response. This researcher is not against utilizing man-centered or individualistic language within corporate worship but is opposed to excessive use of man-centered or individualistic language.

Finally, this researcher also believes that songs utilizing mostly references to mankind are considered man-centered and songs utilizing mostly singular language are considered individualistic. Music itself has a subjective nature, and this is not to be entirely disregarded, but this researcher believes songs can be objectively analyzed to determine their overall focus.

Limitations

The greatest limitation of this dissertation is this researcher cannot prove causation between communal song lyrics and communal formation. At best, this research suggests a correlation between the two based on statistical analysis and a holistic view of all data presented. In addition, the records supplying data, CCLI and ACP, supply data dependent upon church's sending accurate records. CCLI records may also lack public domain songs as churches are not required to submit public domain songs for their reporting. While some public domain songs are included in the CCLI record, it is unlikely all public domain songs are accounted for. Thus, data may be skewed because of incomplete records.

This dissertation does not delimit its discussion to exclude any aspect of corporate worship services (the eucharist, baptism, announcements, preaching, etc.) as these aspects of corporate worship are vital to understanding church leaders' communal views. It does, however,

intentionally focus discussion on corporate worship songs as they are both theologically and communally formative more significantly than other aspects of corporate worship.

Delimitations

This researcher delimited interview candidates to worship pastors and senior pastors serving full-time Southern Baptist Convention churches in Florida using the English language on their websites. Several part-time worship leaders and non-SBC churches were willing to participate but were respectfully removed from consideration.

There are many factors that can help congregants grow in their communal identity, specifically healthy relationships with other members of a church. While this researcher appreciates and validates other aspects of corporate worship that affect congregants' theology and communal identity, this dissertation will focus its discussion on corporate worship songs and only include discussion of other factors as deemed necessary.

CCLI records are available for churches around the world; yet this researcher was granted access to the CCLI Top 100 for the US. While future research is encouraged for other countries, this dissertation narrowly focuses on the US.

Qualifications of the Researcher

This researcher served in a church orchestra through most corporate worship services throughout his high school and many of his undergraduate college years. Upon shifting roles from an instrumentalist to a worship pastor, this researcher noticed song lyric trends unusually focused on individuals (as evidenced through pronoun usage). Thus, this researcher was intrigued and began studying corporate worship song lyrics leading him to find a seeming disagreement between worship scholars who mark the formative effect of songs–scholars like Jen Wilkin who writes: "Words set to music have a profoundly formative effect. Any lyric we

hear or sing can yield us either well-formed or malformed, depending on the content of that lyric"–and modern corporate worship song trends.[16]

This researcher has chosen a project deeply personal and extremely important for church leaders as he personally witnessed modern tendencies toward individually-focused singing throughout his twelve years of full-time worship ministry, two years of interim worship ministry, four-years of employment and adjunct teaching at a Christian higher education institute, and graduate courses for a Master of Arts in Music and Worship Leadership, Doctor of Worship Studies with a concentration in Leadership, and Doctor of Philosophy in Christian Worship courses. Possibly the greatest competency this researcher holds is the determination to objectively find answers to questions relevant to the researcher and to modern and future church leadership practices.

Dissertation Summary

This dissertation utilizes mixed methods to study aspects of corporate worship to find if congregant's communal identity is being formed through corporate worship songs to help church leaders understand the importance of weekly discipling congregants, through corporate worship songs, to grow closer to the body of Christ. It addresses its research questions by establishing what scholarly literature presents through the Literature Review, comparing that to what church leaders believe as presented in the Research Findings, and presenting scholarly and church leader records for corporate worship songs and discipleship data in the Research Findings chapter. In essence, there appears to be a gap between what scholars present and church leaders practice.

[16] Jen Wilkin, "Sing to the Lord a True Song," *Christianity Today*, (November 2021): 30.

This dissertation bridges that gap by collecting and analyzing relevant data through both subjective qualitative and objective quantitative methods.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Scholarly literature supplies different views on the purpose of congregational singing and the effect it has on congregants. This literature review begins with the theological and communal identity formative nature of congregational singing presenting scholarly stances on the importance of songs being representative and formative of a congregation's beliefs. This literature review then turns toward scholarly conversations debating individualistic and communal language in corporate worship songs before closing with scholarly studies that have quantified song lyrics.

Formation Through Singing

Scholarly literature emphasizes the importance of congregational singing as it forms both the theological understanding and communal identity of congregants. The ability for songs to encourage congregants' theological and communal identity is unique to corporate song as "singing together is uniquely special."[1] While other acts of corporate worship are significant, it is a strength of congregational singing to meet both the cognition and emotions of participants in a way that makes it more formative than cognitive acts of worship can achieve on their own.

Theological Formation Through Congregational Song

This section presents segments of scholarly literature supporting congregational song as formative of a congregation's theology and closes with literature supporting both the representative and formative nature of congregational song.

[1] Jon Benjamin Gathje, "Singing the Body into Being: Congregational Song and Faith Formation," (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, 2020), 1, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Congregational Song as Formative

Carol Doran and Thomas Troeger begin their article "How to Select a Hymnal" by emphasizing the importance of choosing the right hymnal:

> Choosing a hymnal for corporate worship is *one of the most important theological decisions a church ever makes* [emphasis original]. If that seems an exaggeration, consider the facts: compare the number of people in a congregation who read theology to the number who sing hymns on Sunday. Week after week the hymns of your church are giving people the basic vocabulary of their faith. Hymns shape the landscape of the heart, planting images that bring meaning and order to people's understanding of life. Hymns keep congregations in touch with the history from which they have sprung, reinforcing their identity as Christians and directing their understanding of how they are to live in the world. Hymns do all of this with extraordinary power because they are coupled with music which opens the heart to the more profound resonances of reality, those motions of the Spirit that move through us in "sighs too deep for words" (Rom. 8:26).[2]

Doran and Troeger list several benefits of choosing the right hymnal, the greatest of which is the theologically formative nature of corporate song. Eskew and McElrath write similarly:

> The hymnal is often overlooked as a ready means of presenting and teaching Christian doctrine. More Christian's basic beliefs are formulated by singing hymns than by preaching or Bible study. Certainly one's disposition toward, or away from, right belief is subtly, but indelibly, influenced by the hymns one repeatedly sings. When talking about their faith, average churchgoers can quote more stanzas of hymns than they can verses of Scripture. This fact, far from lessening the importance of preaching and Bible teaching, is simply a testimony to the importance of the hymnal as a practical textbook in doctrine. Moreover, it focuses attention on the critical requirement that the content of the hymns taught to young and old, insofar as possible, accurately reflect theological and biblical truth.[3]

For Eskew and McElrath, it is the consistent repetition of hymns that forms the beliefs of congregants. Thus, choosing the correct hymnal is essential to forming the theology of its congregants. It is also important to note that both Doran and Troeger as well as Eskew and

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[2] Carol Doran and Thomas H. Troeger, "How to Select a Hymnal" in Robert Webber, ed., *Music and the Arts in Christian Worship*, vol. 4, *The Complete Library of Christian Worship* (Nashville, TN: Star Song Pub. Group, 1994), 332.

[3] Harry Eskew and Hugh T. McElrath, *Sing With Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Hymnology*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Church Street Press, 1995), 63-64.

McElrath emphasize the theologically formative nature of *hymns*, but it is a fair assumption they recognize the theologically formative power of any type of music regularly sung in corporate worship services. Thus, their text may easily apply to all types of congregational songs and not hymns alone.

John Bell writes extensively about the formative effects of congregational song in *The Singing Thing*. One of the things he notes is how singing moves beyond hearing and seeing into a psychologically participative activity.

> WHAT I HEAR, I FORGET,
> WHAT I SEE, I REMEMBER,
> WHAT I DO, I UNDERSTAND [emphasis original].
>
> Singing is a hearing and seeing and, above all, doing activity. It requires us to take into ourselves and circulate through our system words and music which others have written and, for a shorter or longer period, to make these our own. What the Church sings, therefore, is determinative of the faith which the singers hold.[4]

Nowhere does Bell reduce hearing the Word and discipleship as an ineffective means of communicating theological truth but clearly notes the formative nature of congregational singing as moving beyond hearing alone into a deeper cognitive acceptance of what is heard. Like Bell, Ronald Allen and Gordon Borror, in *Rediscovering the Missing Jewel*; Jen Wilkin, in "Sing to the Lord a True Song;" and Mike Harland and Stan Moser, in *Seven Words of Worship*, each emphasize the formative nature of congregational song as teaching biblical truth.[5] Similarly, Brian Wren, in *Praying Twice*, writes: "Though the words we sing are only part of the experience of singing, they deserve critical attention, because they either enlarge and develop

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[4] John L. Bell, *The Singing Thing: A Case for Congregational Song* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2000), 57.

[5] Ronald Allen and Gordon Borror, *Worship: Rediscovering the Missing Jewel*. Portland (OR: Multnomah, 1987), 163; Jen Wilkin, "Sing to the Lord a True Song," *Christianity Today*, November 2021, 30; Mike Harland and Stan Moser, *Seven Words of Worship: The Key to a Lifetime of Experiencing God* (Tennessee; B&H Publishing Group, 2008).

Christian faith, or distort and diminish it."[6] Wren's exact position is discussed below, but Wren begins his text by marking the importance of congregational song because of its formative nature.

A final consideration for this section is brought forth by Scott Aniol and his comments in *Worship in Song*. Aniol marks the importance of theological depth in songs balancing them with the ability of congregants to remember what they sing. He writes:

> Often proponents of modern worship music defend its shallowness by saying it allows believers more time to meditate on one particular truth at a time. They complain that traditional hymnody is too deep with truth to be of lasting value to believers. Commenting on Charles Wesley's "Arise, My Soul, Arise," John Frame says, "Although it is a good teaching hymn, it is not easily remembered. I have sung it a hundred times or so, and I still have to open the hymnal to get the words right."[7]

Aniol clearly marks the importance of songs being memorable and both lyrics and melody affect a song's memorability. If they are not memorable, no matter how theologically deep they are, they have limited formative power on its singers. Therefore, Aniol both emphasizes the theologically formative nature of songs, but also encourages memorability as a more effective tool for forming theology than theological depth alone.

Congregational Song as Both Representative and Formative

Some scholarly literature supports congregational song as being formative of a congregation's theological beliefs. Others, however, support congregational song as both representative and formative of a congregation's beliefs. To rationalize both, Constance Cherry marks six reasons the church sings, the fifth of which suggests a representational aspect of

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[6] Brian A. Wren. *Praying Twice: The Music and Words of Congregational Song*, 1st ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 1.

[7] Scott Aniol, *Worship in Song: A Biblical Philosophy of Music and Worship* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 2009), 187.

singing. Cherry writes: "We sing because it is a vehicle for expressing our faith."[8] At first glance, this reason suggests congregational song as representative; however, Cherry continues by writing it is "the repetition of melody and text [that] embeds the meaning of the songs within us."[9] For Cherry, corporate worship singing is both representative and formative.

According to Carl Bear, in "Performing Theology through Congregational Song Repertoire:" "Christian worship is a theological activity; it expresses and forms the faith of worshipers. Christian worship says something about who we believe God is, how God relates to us, and how God calls us to relate to the world. One aspect of worship—congregational singing—is particularly expressive and formative of worshipers' faith in God."[10] Bear begins by noting the theological nature of Christian worship as both expressing (representative) and formative, before specifically applying it to congregational singing. While the theological integrity of private worship songs is important, that is beyond the scope of this project. Similarly, in "The Importance of Hymns," Matt Boswell writes: "Singing for the Christian is formative and responsive, and therefore must be informed by Scripture. The importance of hymns is that we learn what we sing."[11]

John Witvliet takes a slightly different angle than the straight-forward assertations made by the above authors. Witvliet writes:

> Congregational singing is not merely an expression of a community's beliefs and experiences, but also a means by which that community's imagination, practices, virtues, and way of being in the world can be deepened, chastened, improved, healed, and

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[8] Constance M. Cherry, *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services* (Ada, OK: Baker Academic, 2010), 156.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Carl Bear, "Performing Theology through Congregational Song Repertoire," *The Hymn* 70, no. 1 (2019): 32.

[11] Matt Boswell, "The Importance of Hymns: 5 Reasons Why You Should Keep Using Hymns in Your Worship Services" ChurchLeaders.com. Last modified October 21, 2022.

> sanctified. Worship is not only expressive. It is also formative. This is especially so if we are willing to sing not only the songs we want to sing, but also the songs we need to sing, and if, by God's grace, we learn to want to sing the songs we need to sing. Embracing this formative vision is a fitting call to churches of every denomination, ethnic and cultural group, and liturgical identity.[12]

Like Bear and Boswell above, Witvliet emphasizes that congregational singing is both representative and formative of a congregation's beliefs. Similarly, Ronald T. Michener, in *Theological Foundations of Worship*, writes: "We may say that worship practices stem from what we think, and what we think also stems from our practices."[13] Likewise, Harry Eskew and Hugh McElrath, in *Sing with Understanding*, write: "It has been said that hymns are the poor person's poetry and ordinary person's theology. Hymns are the most popular kind of verse in living use because they express what common folk have believed through the ages and what can be affirmed today as true and reliable."[14]

Simon Chan's *Liturgical Theology* goes well beyond the debate between the representative or formative power of congregational song by directly challenging church leaders. After discussing shortcomings of the "contemporary" service, he goes on to pose the question: "The real reason we worship is that we are a people shaped by the Christian story. If this is so, can we simply entrust our worship to worship leaders who have no such understanding?"[15] He bases this accusation on churches whose singing does not communicate the central theological components of Christianity. Chan recognizes both the representative and formative power of

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[12] John D. Witvliet, "Mind the Gaps: Responding to Criticisms of a Formative Vision for Worship and Congregational Song," *The Hymn* 67, no. 4 (2016): 33.

[13] Ronald T. Michener, "Humanity and Worship," in Khalia J. Williams and Mark Lamport, eds., *Theological Foundations of Worship: Biblical, Systematic, and Practical Perspectives* (Ada, OK: Baker Academic, 2021), 72.

[14] Eskew and McElrath, *Sing With Understanding*, 63.

[15] Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshiping* Community (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006), 157.

congregational song and is therefore challenging church leaders to rethink what they emphasize through congregational song.

Summary

Within scholarly literature is an undertone assuming scholars already agree that congregational singing is representative of a congregation's beliefs. Yet, scholars also support the formative qualities of congregational song to develop the theological identities of congregants. All in all, scholarly literature supports congregational song as both representative and formative of a congregation's theological beliefs.

Communal Formation Through Congregational Singing

Music can bring people together like no other activity. Yet, churches have divided over their musical preferences and "worship wars" have been fought to rationalize one style of music over another. Daniel Block notes: "Although the songs we sing should bind us together, in our day music is destroying the church. Whereas previous generations fought and divided over doctrine, today we battle over worship style, which in most places means the music."[16] The fierceness of the battle might be because of music's deeply emotional and personal meaning to each believer.

This section begins by discussing scholarly literature against cultural individualism within corporate worship songs because corporate worship is meant to be a communal activity. Next, it turns toward the unifying potential of music discussing authors who provide biblical justification for the communal benefits of congregational singing. Finally, this section closes by

[16] Daniel I. Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Ada: Baker Academic, 2014), 221.

emphasizing how church communities are made up of individuals and thus the individual is an essential part of the whole.

Corporate Focus Against Cultural Individualism

The church stands as a community of believers gathered for the purposes giving glory to God and building one another up (Col. 3:15-17 and Eph. 5:18-20); Brett McCracken writes about personal relationships:

> We are more comfortable talking in terms of our "personal relationship" with Jesus than in "we" terms of the corporate health of our faith community. But even though we are called and respond to the gospel on an individual level, we must resist the rampant notion that church is an optional add-on to one's solitary faith journey. Too often we perpetuate an unhealthy disconnect between soteriology and ecclesiology, overlooking the fact that there is a link between being "justified with respect to God the Father upon salvation" and being "familified with respect to our brothers and sisters in Christ."[17]

McCracken's text reminds readers of the corporate nature of the body of Christ too often forgotten as culturally individualistic trends increasingly permeate the culture of the church.

Cultural individualism is prevalent in churches within the US; However, Byron Anderson notes global individualism as a modern trend.

> The separation of the individual from the community in our understanding of worship is very much a 'modern' concern, not limited to North American expressions of Christianity. Nevertheless, such separation is often expressed more strongly in this context because of the powerful culture-shaping traditions of "American individualism."[18]

David Lemley similarly recognizes the effects of cultural individualism in the church, by noting individualistically-focused services binding individuals together based on their personal

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[17] Brett McCracken, *Uncomfortable: The Awkward and Essential Challenge of Christian Community* (Crossway, 2017), 80, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[18] E. Byron Anderson, "Individualism and Community within Worship Practices," in Williams and Lamport, eds., *Theological Foundations of Worship*, 219.

preferences.[19] For Lemley, this perpetuates ideology that corporate worship is nothing more than individuals who happen to worship alongside one another in a communal setting. An ideological stance Lemley opposes throughout his text.

Cultural individualism entered the practices of the church significantly enough that scholars intentionally refute its integration into corporate worship services. The beginning of a chapter on "The Church as an Institution of Worship," as part of *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*, begins with the following statement to frame the discussion for readers: "Christian worship is not an activity of isolated individuals but a function of the corporate life of the church. The place and shape of worship in the New Testament can best be understood against the background of the life of the church as a whole. The church, which offers worship to almighty God and to his Christ, is and has always been a human organization."[20] This opening statement is unnecessary if cultural individualism had not permeated the church; yet, the culture of individualism stands as a direct afront to corporate worship as it negates the need for individuals to depend on one another by upholding them as "isolated individuals" in a corporate setting.

Another clear attack on cultural individualism entering the practices of corporate worship is presented by Steve Klingbeil in *For Whose Pleasure*. Klingbeil writes:

> *Nowhere in Scripture is there any mention that a worshiper should be gratified in worship* [emphasis original]. The worshiper is never the aim of biblical worship. The worshiper's likes, dislikes, feelings, and preferences are never factors in any worship encounter with the almighty God. It's not there. It's a little nervy of us, in fact, to think that we should humbly come into the presence of the Creator of the universe expecting to find personal pleasure. That's presumptive—maybe arrogantly so. Worship isn't about us. Worship isn't meant to please us. There is no biblical reason whatsoever that worship

[19] David Lemley, *Becoming What We Sing: Formation through Contemporary Worship Music* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans Publishing, 2021), 18.

[20] Robert Webber, ed., *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*, vol. 1, *The Biblical Foundations of Christian Worship* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 146.

> should be comfortable, non-threatening, enjoyable, impressive, entertaining, stimulating, uplifting, or anything else that we fancy. Biblical worship is often just the opposite; uncomfortable, threatening, and humbling. But if we think worship should be like that, or if we expect it, we are aiming at the wrong goal in our worship—the goal of pleasing self. This aim is manifest every time you or I talk about worship using the phrases "I like…," "I prefer…," "I wish…," "I need…," "I think…," or any other similar sentiment.[21]

While Klingbeil's approach is aggressive, his point is valid none the less. Klingbeil clearly marks how individualistic language "'I like…,' 'I prefer…,'" etc. represents an individualistic perception of corporate worship.

Another text on cultural individualism finding its way into the church is presented by Calvin Johansson in *Discipling Music Ministry*. Johansson's text can be summarized similarly to Klingbeil's above as he attacks "Phrases such as, 'I enjoyed the music,' or, 'I loved that song,' or 'the special music was thrilling'" as they mark "the fact that the way we value something is largely by how much we like it."[22] These phrases mark an introverted view of corporate worship and fail to recognize that worship should be extroverted by giving glory to God for His acts and attributes.[23]

A different viewpoint notes the emotive side of worship and recognizes the individual emotional effect worship has on its congregants. According to Nick Page:

> Emotion, by its very nature, is personal, intimate. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why so much of worship–indeed religion in general–has been turning in on itself. If what I feel is all that matters, then that will be reflected in the words that I sing and the style of my worship. The result is that we have worship songs that concentrate almost solely on us as individuals and, more specifically, on how we feel. Our worship songs are more about

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[21] Steve Klingbeil, *For Whose Pleasure: Confronting the Real Issue as We Gather to Worship* (Innovo Publishing, 2011), 20.

[22] Calvin Johansson, *Discipling Music Ministry: Twenty-First Century Directions* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992), 50.

[23] Ibid.

> creating feeling rather than helping understanding. Songs talk less and less about the attributes of God, or the work of Jesus, and more about, well, me.[24]

These authors against an individualistic-focus are not alone on their stances. Byron Anderson states, "In the United States, the relationship between the individual and communal often seems to be reserved."[25] Cherry notes "Christian worship, especially Western Christian worship, has been subject to radical individualism."[26] John Bell, Simon Chan, Marva Dawn, and Donald Hustad each attack any belief that places an individual above the community in corporate worship.[27] Scholarly literature takes a particular stance against individualism entering into corporate worship practices because it is common enough that scholars believe they should refute such practices. However, not all scholars attack cultural individualism and corporate worship practices which cater toward the preferences of congregants but instead argue for the benefits of corporate unity and biblical foundations of corporate worship.

Corporate Unity and Biblical Foundations

Scholars employ several tactics to support their views of communal identity forming through congregational song. This section shares the two most common: the communally formative nature of music unifying a body of believers and biblical reasons scholars use to support the communal nature of music in corporate worship services.

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[24] Nick Page, "From Poet to Pop Star," in *And Now Let's Move into a Time of Nonsense: Why Worship Songs are Failing the Church* (Authentic Media, 2003), ProQuest Ebook Central.

[25] Anderson, "Individualism and Community within Worship Practices," in Williams and Lamport, eds., *Theological Foundations of Worship*, 230.

[26] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 13.

[27] Bell, *The Singing Thing*, 129; Chan, *Liturgical Theology*, 157; Marva J. Dawn, *Royal Waste of Time: The Splendor of Worshipping God and Being Church for the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 68-69; Donald Hustad, *True Worship: Reclaiming the Wonder and Majesty* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2000), 154.

Corporate unity. "Music also affirms the corporate unity of the body of Christ because it is something that the entire congregation does together."[28] As simplistic as it may seem, any activity done in community is often viewed as communal, regardless of the motivations and purposes for such a coming together of people. Cherry writes:

> Any response to the Word is primarily *corporate* in nature (see chap. 1). Biblically and theologically speaking, in worship God has addressed a *community of believers*, not a group of individuals. This is a difficult perception to embrace given our individualistic culture. Those churches with strong roots in the revivalist period and/or that consider themselves to be part of the Free Church tradition have an especially challenging shift to make from the *individual* being addressed by God to the *community* being addressed by God. Too easily we forget that God speaks to the church—the covenant people who are gathered before God [emphasis original].[29]

Thus, a gathering for a professional sporting event or at a theater for entertainment is automatically viewed as a communal activity. As Cherry clearly marks, some denominations have a harder time than others getting acclimated to a communal view of corporate worship. Yet, even within each denomination are various churches which exhibit varying levels of individualistic or communal foci for corporate worship.

Wren addresses the communal nature of corporate singing throughout his text *Praying Twice*. First, he writes: "Congregational song is corporate by choice, because individual persons decide to join with others."[30] Later he writes: "Congregational song is *corporate*. Singing together brings us together, whether we are a choir, a congregation, or a group of friends and relatives around a piano. On a practical level, musical melodies and rhythms make corporate speech more attractive and decisive."[31] Even later Wren writes: "Congregational song is by

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[28] Robert E. Webber, *Worship Old & New*, Rev. ed., (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 195.

[29] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 103.

[30] Wren, *Praying Twice*, 85.

[31] Ibid., 104.

definition communal."[32] As all three quotations indicate, Wren sees corporate worship as a communal activity. He has little or no place for an individualistic-focus within corporate worship.

Witvliet quotes David Bailey noting "a lot of attention has been paid to the formative qualities of specific elements of worship, 'it is not just what we do or sing in worship that forms us, it is also *who we worship and sing with* that forms us [emphasis original].'"[33] This marks the importance of the gathered community as much as the liturgy of corporate worship services. This is written more succinctly by Jon Gathje who writes: "As Christians are gathered together to sing, to pray, and to worship, they are united by and as the body of Christ."[34] It is the gathering of believers with a common purpose that unites them.

John Bell questions two modern singing trends. First, "Because congregational song is a corporate activity, people need to feel connected, and having them all face one direction does not encourage that sense of connectedness."[35] Second, "Here's a simple, but relatively unknown, rule of thumb: if you sit more than three feet (91.44 centimeters) away from someone you'll not sing in case they hear you. If you sit closer than three feet you will sing because you hear them."[36] Bell's contribution reminds readers that is both the act of singing and how congregations sing that affects how congregants engage with one another. While congregants may sing "The Bond

[32] Wren, *Praying Twice*, 184.

[33] Witvliet, "Mind the Gaps," 37.

[34] Gathje, "Singing the Body into Being," 3.

[35] Bell, *The Singing Thing*, 126.

[36] Ibid., 22.

of Love," which employs communal language throughout, they are not truly unifying themselves if they are facing one direction and spread apart.[37]

The section above presents several ways congregational songs unite a congregation. Welton Gaddy reminds readers: "Music can unite a worshiping congregation like no other activity. A real community of worship is formed as one voice joins another in obedience to the biblical admonition to worship God with singing."[38] Corporate worship should be a unifier for churches, and one of the things that unifies churches is their commitment to one another expressed through their corporate acts of worship.

Biblical foundations of corporate singing. This section begins by marking two philosophies of congregational singing based on biblical ideas before turning to biblical applications. First, Cherry supplies six reasons for the necessity of congregational songs: (1) "We sing because the church was born in song;" (2) "We sing because there is a biblical mandate for corporate singing in worship;" (3) "We sing because it is a primary communal activity;" (4) "We sing because it is inclusive;" (5) "We sing because it is a vehicle for expressing our faith;" and (6) "We sing because it provides much inspiration for the community."[39] Of Cherry's six reasons, five have a communal purpose to them. Therefore, viewed philosophically through Cherry's lens, congregational songs should focus on building a communal identity.

Second, Ligon Duncan, in *Perspectives of Christian Worship* edited by Matthew Pinson, writes the following about corporate worship from an evangelical point of view:

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[37] Otis Skillings, "The Bond of Love," (Lillenas Music Publishing), https://songselect.ccli.com/Songs /14459/the-bond-of-love/viewlyrics.

[38] C. Welton Gaddy, *The Gift of Worship* (United States: Broadman Press, 1992), 155.

[39] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 154-56.

> For our worship to be biblical in all its aspects means, among other things, that: (1) Its content, parts, and corporateness are all positively in accord with Scripture. (2) It is simultaneously a communal response of gratitude for grace, an expression of passion for God, the fulfillment of what we were made and redeemed for, and a joyful engagement in a delightful obedience, as Scripture teaches. (3) It is a corporate, Christ-provided, Spirit-enabled encounter with the almighty, loving, and righteous Father. Thus, it always has in view the Triune God, again in accord with the Bible's teaching. (4) It aims for and is an expression of God's own glory, contemplating the consummation of the eternal covenant in the church triumphant's everlasting union and communion with God.[40]

All four of aspects of Duncan's philosophy of corporate worship have communal implications. Both Cherry and Duncan paint a clear philosophical picture of the communal nature of corporate worship.

Khalia Williams also chooses a philosophical angle of corporate singing when she writes:

> In worship, we are invited by God, through the Holy Spirit, into a fellowship in which we exist not so much as individuals but as community; a fellowship that, if only for that moment, urges us to look beyond ourselves, our struggles, our differences, and our traditions, and to connect around a shared faith through liturgical practice. It is in this practice that we become one, a united body.[41]

Like other scholars, Williams summarizes biblical teaching into a philosophy of corporate worship that emphasizes the community of believers over the individual.

There are several biblical texts supporting a communal view of corporate worship. Seven texts of which are discussed in the article "Terms Referring to the Practice of Christian Worship:"

> But New Testament worship was…a corporate experience of the gathered church celebrating its existence as a covenant people before the Lord, who had called it into being…The church is created for worship, "being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices [*pneumatikas thusias*] acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5). The church is *ekklēsia,* a people "called out" from the unfaithful and from the world, set apart for the Lord as "the saints" or "holy ones" (*hoi hagioi,* never used in the New Testament to refer to an individual Christian but applied

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[40] Ligon Duncan, "Traditional Evangelical Worship," in Matthew J. Pinson, ed., *Perspectives on Christian Worship: Five Views* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2009), 109-10.

[41] Khalia Williams, "Pneumatology and Worship," in Williams and Lamport, eds., *Theological Foundations of Worship*, 105.

> only to the church as a whole). To be a Christian is to be a part of the body of Christ (*sōma christou,* 1 Cor. 12:27; *cf.* Eph. 4:12), a favorite metaphor of the apostle Paul for the corporate gathering of the new covenant. Worship takes place in the assembling together (*episunagōgē,* Heb. 10:25) of the community of faith; describing the spontaneous worship of the Corinthian church, Paul indicates that it occurs when the people "come together" (*sunerchomai,* 1 Cor. 11:18; 14:23, 26).[42]

The literature repeatedly emphasizes the corporate nature of corporate worship. Following biblical ideals, corporate worship is meant to be a community where individuals minimize their individuality for the sake of the greater body of believers. To have an individualistic view of corporate worship is biblically a contradiction; thus, the focus of corporate worship must be on the unity of the body of believers.

The Individual as Part of the Greater Community

No community is complete without its individual parts, and corporate worship ought to move congregants beyond their individual viewpoints into the greater community. According to Mikie Roberts: "If we make the individual as the smallest building block of the collective identity, then it suggests that the action of singing in which each member of the congregation is involved, feeds into the larger framework of the overall congregational identity."[43] This collective identity in corporate worship is communal by title and its definition, but because it is made up of individual parts there is still an individual aspect to the community.

Williams' *Theological Foundations of Christian Worship* presents two different chapters discussing the individual and communal aspects of corporate worship. Ronald Michener writes: "Worship is not simply about 'me and God,' blocking those around me out of mind. Worship is

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[42] Webber, *The Biblical Foundations of Christian Worship*, 17-18.

[43] Mikie Roberts, "Hymnody and Identity: Congregational Singing as a Construct of Christian Community Identity," (PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, United Kingdom, 2014), 248, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

indeed an expression of the body, but it is more about the corporate body of Christ as embodied human beings in community than it is about individual, autonomous bodies in worship."[44] For Michener, the above section rejecting all cultural individualism misses the mark of corporate worship. While he believes corporate worship is communal, he does not completely reject some individualism.

Byron Anderson writes similarly:

> What all these writers point to is a necessary relationship between the individual and the community in any consideration of Christian worship. The more we focus on "personalizing" worship, the harder it becomes to think of worship as a gathering of God's people in a common work of praise and prayer, as a place and time in which the diverse parts of the body of Christ are reunited and nourished. But worship "is intrinsically social and collective; it gives shape to the church as a 'visible organism.' "Religious life (Christian as well as that of other religious traditions) is always concerned with the individual *and* the community, not the individual *or* the community; this "and" is, for Christians, of the essence of the church.[45]

Anderson's stance clearly indicates the "both/and" idea that corporate worship is not for the individual or the community but both. As an individual corporately worships, they have a communal impact while the community also has an impact on the individual. In Anderson's words: "Our individual identity as Christians depends on our relationship to the community of the church."[46] Elsewhere Anderson writes: "To the extent that the hymn is sung by a corporate body, it requires not only our engagement in mind and body but a bodily engagement that is simultaneously individual and communal. The strophic and rhythmic character of the hymn

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[44] Michener, "Humanity and Worship," in Williams and Lamport, eds., *Theological Foundations of Worship*, 74.

[45] Anderson, "Individualism and Community within Worship Practices," in Williams and Lamport, eds., *Theological Foundations of Worship*, 221-22.

[46] Ibid., 224.

requires that if we are to sing, we must sing and breathe together."[47] Anderson's claim is consistent across his writings and emphasizes both individual and corporate validity for congregational singing.

In addition to Williams' text, other scholars note the individual and communal benefits of singing together. Quick comments like the following permeate worship scholarly literature and while some are developed further, oftentimes their claims are presented without fuller development. Brian Wren, in *Praying Twice*, makes the statement without justification: "When we sing together, the acoustic response of the worship space should give each individual a sense of being part of the assembly, 'an assurance that one is not alone nor unduly exposed,' and that 'as small as one's contribution may seem, it is a meaningful part of the whole.'"[48] Little rationale is provided because Wren's entire book reflects on how the individual relates to the rest of the community and how the use of first-person language, in corporate worship, has affected congregants differently over the years as culture individualism has grown.

One of the reasons corporate worship perpetuates individualism is, "It is in the worship of the body that the individual most frequently experiences God."[49] For them, God is experienced individualistically, but it is the gathered body of believers that helps this occur as God meets His people in corporate worship. This does not preclude the possibility of God meeting individuals "in a one-to-one relationship, but to assume that the one-to-one is the norm or rule would seem to

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[47] E. Byron Anderson, *Worship and Christian Identity: Practicing Ourselves* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2003), 207.

[48] Wren, *Praying Twice*, 108.

[49] Arlo Duba, "The Relationship Between Worship and Evangelism" in Robert Webber, *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*, vol. 7, *The Ministries of Christian Worship* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 429.

misread Scripture."[50] Yet, church leader's attempts to create times of corporate worship "between me and God" falsely understand the one-to-one relationship Duba emphasizes.

Summary

The literature above stands against individualistic-focused times of corporate worship. Yet, it does not entirely remove the individual from corporate worship. This section began by noting scholars' rejection of cultural individualism within corporate worship service in favor of using music to unify congregants. Corporate worship music is a communal activity but one that always includes individuals. Thus, to separate individual believers and the community at large is to misunderstand biblical teaching.

Individualistic Verses Communal Language in Corporate Song

Worship scholars write much on individualistic language in corporate worship. This section begins with scholars marking an increase in individualistic corporate song lyrics, before turning to scholars noting church leaders assumption of a communal-focus while employing individualistic language, and it closes with scholarly literature supporting either individualistic or communal language in corporate worship.

An Increase in Individualistic Lyrics

Gertrud Tönsing recognizes a development of increasing individualistic lyrics when he writes: "With the devastation of the Thirty Years' War in Germany (early 17th century), hymns became focused more on the individual. Most of these hymns were intended for home use and were included in official hymnals only much later. There was more emotive content in the words

[50] Duba, "The Relationship Between Worship and Evangelism" in *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*, vol. 7, 429.

and the tune and a growing emphasis on the individual faith response."[51] This confusion between private and corporate worship continued into modern times because "The advertising industry has learned to push all the right buttons in order to generate the need to consume its products. We have adopted a similar approach in attracting congregants."[52] Monique Ingalls notes the lines between CCLI and CCM found on the radio significantly overlapped as songs increased their individualistic-focus for private and corporate songs.[53] Ingalls writes: "Increasingly, praise songs of the 1990s employed exclusively the first-person singular voice (e.g., 'I Could Sing of Your Love Forever,' 'I Want to Know You,' 'I Will Celebrate,' and 'Open the Eyes of My Heart, Lord')."[54]

Noting the historical trend and its continued use is different than marking the benefits, or consequences, of such a shift. Scholars like Simon Chan warn that "Privatized worship is a persistent problem," and Marva Dawn notes: "Focusing in worship on me and my feelings and my praising will nurture a character that is inward-turned, that thinks first of self rather than of God."[55] But the greatest challenge is the unknown. According to Wells, in *No Place for Truth*,

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[51] J. Gertrud Tönsing, Cas J. Wepener, and Cas Vos, "The 'Cognitive' and the 'Emotive' Component in Christian Songs: Tracing the Shifts in Traditional and Contemporary Songs," *Verbum Et Ecclesia* 36, no. 1 (2015): 6.

[52] J. Michael Walters, *Can't Wait for Sunday* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2006), 21.

[53] Monique Marie Ingalls, "Awesome in this Place: Sound, Space, and Identity in Contemporary North American Evangelical Worship," (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2008), 168, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

[54] Ibid., 131.

[55] Chan, *Liturgical Theology*, 140; Marva J. Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn-of-the-Century Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 109.

the self movement "Has been highly successful," concluding "Its costs are apparently not self-evident."[56]

Wren supplies a brief history of individualistic language in corporate worship. The individualistic language in "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" may not have changed, but its meaning to modern audiences takes on a deeply personal subjective experience:

> Many congregational songs use the first-person singular, but this does not necessarily prevent them from being communal. A statement of deep devotion or commitment to God may require us all to say "I" as we sing it together, because "we" is less intense and commits the individual singer less strongly. A lyric saying "I" can be a communal utterance if it focuses the singer on God and is implicitly or explicitly aware of the community in which each individual sings.
>
> The meaning of "I" in worship has changed over time. In the eighteenth century, the "I" in Isaac Watts's hymn "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" meant the model believer with whom the singers were expected to identify, thus hopefully growing in faith. "When I survey" meant "I, in common with everyone else in this congregation."
>
> Nowadays, "I" more likely means, "I, as distinct from you and everyone else." Each singer is believed to be an autonomous individual who makes "free" (though mostly market-driven) choices and has distinctive personal experiences (as when Lanny Wolfe says, "*I can feel* his [God's] mighty power") [emphasis original]. In our individualistic culture, the "I" in a good congregational song should take special pains to be devout, focusing mainly on God and minimally on itself.[57]

When scholars approach individualistic language being used in corporate worship, the first question to appear is "does it matter?" According to Wren, it does matter because the pronoun use changes the meaning of the song to its audience. When a congregation sings the closing verse of "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross:"

> Were the whole realm of nature mine
> That were a present (an offering) far too small

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[56] David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Chicago: Eerdmans, 1994), ProQuest Ebook Central.

[57] Wren, *Praying Twice*, 185.

> Love so amazing so divine
> Demands my soul my life my all[58]

Congregants do not have the illusion that "the whole realm of nature" belongs to themselves and only themselves. They clearly understand that the whole realm is for all believers. It is a communal affair that affects the entire congregation, church globally, and believers across all time. Yet, for a modern singer to sing this verse implies they will receive some type of personalized gift if only they stay devoted. Anderson, addresses the same topic, but focuses on corporate prayer instead of singing:

> Does it matter if, as an invitation to prayer, the worship leader begins by saying, "Let us pray," or by saying, "Pray with me"? In the greater scheme of things, perhaps not, but how we invite people to pray in community provides one indicator of the way we think about the relationship between the individual and the community in corporate worship. Both statements assume that there is a community being invited to pray. Whether that community is two or three gathered in the Lord's name or two or three thousand, we are not praying alone. "Let us pray" indicates a priority on the community, the "us" gathered in prayer and praying together. "Pray with me" suggests that the prayer is less our shared prayer and more our joining the prayer of a worship leader, the "me" who invites our participation. Because "Let us pray" is more common in worship traditions shaped and governed by authorized forms and traditions, "Pray with me" more common in free-church/evangelical worship traditions, these two invitations also represent a perceived tension between the emphases given to ritual and spontaneity of expression that are characteristic of the two traditions. These two invitations point to different understandings of the relationship between the church and the individual believer, between corporate worship and personal piety, and between our shared and individual stories as Christian people.[59]

Wren and Anderson supply the importance of communal language and why it matters. It may only be a slight difference in language but when songs consistently employ communal language, because of the formative power of songs, congregants start to view themselves as part of the

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[58] Isaac Waats, Lowell Mason, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," Public Domain, https://songselect.ccli.com/Songs/27893/when-i-survey-the-wondrous-cross-hamburg/viewlyrics.

[59] Anderson, "Individualism and Community within Worship Practices," in Williams and Lamport, eds., *Theological Foundations of Worship*, 218.

community instead of an individual who weekly visits the community. This pronoun distinction, though based on a few words being different, can have a significant impact on congregants.

This section re-emphasizes the several century trend and increasing use of individualistic language, also supplying Wren's explanation of why this could be a problem, along with Chan and Dawn's noting the inward turn of such language. But Wells warns readers that the effect of individualistic language is simply unknown. Scholars note the continued increase in individualistic language and are encouraging their readers to move toward employing communal language instead. Dawn warns her readers: "It is urgent that the Church recognize how easily we assume the self-centered mind-set of the culture that surrounds us and work more deliberately to reject it."[60]

Assumed Communal

Scholarly literature has a section of literature which does not emphasize the importance of communal singing but instead simply assumes it. Allen Cabaniss writes:

> One of the most important things to note about Christian worship is that it is communal. No matter how few the number of worshippers, we pray in community. Our prayers are in the plural. We say, "Our" Father, give "us" this day "our" daily bread, forgive "us our" sins, lead "us" not into temptation, deliver "us" from the evil one (Matt. 6:9-13). We are one with all God's people throughout the world.[61]

Unfortunately, Cabaniss does not rationalize his claim, but simply assumes the communal nature of Christian worship. While his statement is indeed true, and the Lord's Prayer does employ communal language, his assuming the communal nature of corporate worship ignores cultural individualism creeping into the church. It is like assuming a movie theater full of people will grow their communal identity. While a certain amount of communal identity exists in the fact

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[60] Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down*, 109-10.

[61] Allen Cabaniss, *Patterns in Early Christian Worship* (Mercer University Press, 1989), 62.

that they all chose to see the movie, to assume the individuals grow into the larger community is an invalid assumption. It is likely some of the moviegoers will share a love for the actors and actresses, while others may enjoy the action, drama, or romance that movie provides, while others may simply have shown up for a myriad of other reasons. Similarly, church leaders should not assume congregants are growing in their communal identity simply because they showed up for a corporate worship service. This author commends Cabaniss for the above quote, but desires a bit more discussion to rationalize his claim more fully.

Randall Bradley marks implied communal worship in *From Memory to Imagination*:

> Sometimes communal worship is mistaken for individual worship that happens to take place in the company of others. Communal worship implies that there is mutual exchange, mutual dependence, and a synergy that results in "the sum being greater than its parts." While texts that utilize personal pronouns exclusively are sometimes responsible for individualistic worship, movements, gestures, and facial expressions that indicate private moments can also exclude. By contrast, gestures and movements that reach out to others and invite their participation in a process involving group dynamics can encourage community.[62]

The challenge with Bradley's position is it assumes communal worship will take place despite singing individualistic language. While he compensates for individualistic singing with "gestures and movements," they are not as impactful as the formative nature of song lyrics affecting both intellect and emotions.

This section is brief because most scholars support the importance of moving conversations beyond assuming community when a group gathers for corporate worship. Still, Cabaniss and Bradley represent scholars who falsely assume corporate worship is communal,

[62] C. Randall Bradley, *From Memory to Imagination: Reforming the Church's Music* (Eerdmans, 2012), 170.

despite individualistic language's prominent usage as individual language can be used "to testify to an experience of God that is universal in nature among believers."[63]

Individual Versus Communal Lyrics

This section highlights the four main literature divisions between utilizing individual or communal lyrics for corporate worship songs. The first division represents scholars against individualism because it creates times of corporate worship catering toward the musically gifted. To them, corporate worship is the congregation's opportunity to join the individuals leading worship. A second division moves beyond individual and communal language toward songs being God-centered or man-centered. Individualistic language is frowned upon, but not because it is man-centered and not because it utilizes first-person pronouns. A third group believes corporate worship should be distinct from private and lifestyle worship. For them, communal language best represents the communal nature of corporate worship. Fourth, some scholars support using both individualistic and communal language to pastor their people beyond corporate worship into individual expressions of worship throughout the week.

Gifted Individuals

John Bell's *The Singing Thing* emphasizes an increase in the performance mentality of the commercial music scene like the Middle Ages where "Worship was no longer the action of the congregation; it was now the work of a privileged few."[64] Yet, modern trends are repeating this historical development as commercial music trends toward being more for gifted individuals. Therefore, any churches actively singing as a community "is doing something profoundly

[63] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 163.

[64] Webber, *Worship Old and New*, 199.

counter-cultural" as culture emphasizes individual singers.[65] Bell continues his text by clearly marking his stance on the importance of congregations actively engaged in congregational singing when he writes:

> The congregation is confronted with a row of microphones behind which stand a row of instrumentalists and singers, one of whom may greet the assembly with the words, "We're now going to move into a time of worship. We're going to sing three songs about the love of Jesus and we hope you'll all join in."
>
> If the people don't join in, it will not be because they can't sing or feel shy. It may be because the physical line-up of musicians reminds them of a concert where they listen rather than of a community where they join in. Or it may be because they haven't been taught the songs; or because the songs are from the performance rather than the participative category, and the musicians have not recognized that there is a difference….
>
> We are creatures of our culture. We cannot undo that, nor can we fail to be influenced by trends in music as in literature. But the Church's musical mandate cannot be dictated by gifted artists or 'Christian' publishers with their eye on the profit margin. The voice of the performers will always be heard, and devotional CDs can always be purchased. But they are no substitute for the voice of the people actively praising their Maker.[66]

Bell warns his audience to avoid performance oriented times of worship in favor of the congregation actively participating in corporate worship.

John Bell is discussed above in isolation, but his point is emphasized by many other worship scholars. Simon Chan notes worship performance is "all too often in the 'contemporary' service, modeled on the entertainment world."[67] Paul Bassett, in *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*, writes: "Direct congregational participation is reduced to the singing of choruses and snippets of hymns and gospel songs surrounded by elements of performance and entertainment in which members of the congregation are mere spectators."[68] A central part of

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[65] Bell, *The Singing Thing*, 118.

[66] Bell, *The Singing Thing*, 119-20.

[67] Chan, *Liturgical Theology*, 157.

[68] Paul Bassett, "Church of the Nazarene," in Robert Webber, *The Renewal of Sunday Worship*, 1st ed., vol. 3, *The Complete Library of Christian Worship* (Nashville, TN: Star Song Pub. Group, 1993), 38.

Moody's innovations to revivalist techniques was to begin with an hour of singing and entertainment.[69] A significant obstacle to congregants engaging in corporate worship exists when congregational music is designed for the gifted few who have greater musical abilities than others.

God-Centered or Man-Centered

A portion of worship scholars moves past individualistic pronouns to ascertain whether songs are more about celebrating God or if they are more about man's response to God. Bradley, in *From Memory to Imagination*, makes his case for songs focusing firstly on God:

> Worship is first and foremost about God, so the music that we sing and the ways in which we worship should point us to God. Worship and music should encourage us to focus on God, not just each other or our own emotional gratification. In many of our gatherings, it is all too easy to think that worship is primarily about those gathered rather than about the One in whose name we are called.[70]

Bradley does not disregard the possibility of man's response through song, but he does refute the claim that worship is primarily for man's response. Block writes similarly in *For the Glory of God*: "The goal of congregational worship and of all ministry is the glory of God, and that God the Father and God the Son are most glorified when we sing of them and not of ourselves. This reminds us that our songs must be about God's love for us, not about our love for him."[71] Unlike Bradley, Block leaves little room for man's response to God and supports songs about God above others.

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[69] Elmer L. Towns and Vernon M. Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages: How the Great Awakenings Shape Evangelical Worship* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2012), 188.

[70] Bradley, *From Memory to Imagination*, 102.

[71] Block, *For the Glory of God*, 237-38.

Zac Hicks recognizes a larger picture than merely focusing on God or man's response to God. He writes:

> I used to phrase this question, "Is it God-centered?" largely because of the observation that so many current worship songs were "me-centered." Unfortunately, this emphasis has yielded a knee-jerk reaction against any and all songs that utilize first person pronouns. The Psalms, yet again, are instructive here. They are filled with personal, individual references from the "me" perspective. Perhaps the difference, then, is the aim. One always gets the sense in reading the "me" Psalms that they are aimed Godward even when they are deeply personal.[72]

Hicks notes that motivation is an important aspect of whether songs are appropriate for corporate worship. In some cases, individualistic lyrics are viewed through a communal lens and while singing first-person pronouns congregants apply those lyrics to the entire body of believers. Similarly, while songs may be filled with man's response to God, it may be accomplished through the lens of thanking God for those actions that He initiated.

Corporate Worship as Holy

One of the significant innovations of the Revival Era is the merging of evangelistic tactics into corporate worship services. Charles Finney believed that every part of corporate worship is for the sole purpose of evangelism.[73] Thus, Finney reversed historical trends of corporate worship being for and to God and gave it a man-based purpose as well. With such a significant innovation, it is no wonder distinct types of worship also began to change. Where Aniol marks three distinct types of worship—lifestyle, private, and congregational—modern corporate worship trends make it difficult to find the separation between each as worship songs are used across all three types of worship. Aniol also writes: "Both the content and the response

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[72] Zac M. Hicks, *The Worship Pastor: A Call to Ministry for Worship Leaders and Teams* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 74.

[73] Towns and Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages*, 169.

toward God will be slightly different" implying a clear distinction between all three types of worship.[74] To avoid any confusion, Aniol later writes:

> Because the purpose of congregational worship is that believers join together as the body of Christ to express a unified response to God, music that is individualistic or personal does not have a place in congregational worship. That kind of music may be appropriate for one's individual enjoyment or worship, but not for the congregation as a whole. Certain songs may express experiences or promises that are not applicable to every believer. Music used in congregational worship, however, should be limited to songs that express substantive truth that applies to all Christians.[75]

Aniol does not reject individualistic and personal singing, he simply rejects individualistic singing as part of corporate worship. For Aniol, corporate worship should be distinct from lifestyle and private worship and this should be evidenced in the language used for singing in the distinct types of worship.

As discussed above, Bell marks congregations inviting their people to sing hymns as "doing something profoundly counter-cultural."[76] But they are not only going against secular culture, which has a clear emphasis on the individual, they are also going against church cultures which often also emphasizes the individual above the community. Dawn furthers Bell's argument by marking the church "being *in* but not *of* [the world], the Church worship must be *upside-down* (at least in the world's eyes)–turning the culture's perspective on its head…teaching an opposite set of values…[and] enabling believers to make authentic differences in the world [emphasis original].[77] Dawn suggests one of the reasons the world may view the church as like themselves is the church's worship practices are not distinctly different.

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[74] Aniol, *Worship in Song*, 155.

[75] Ibid., 204.

[76] Bell, *The Singing Thing*, 118.

[77] Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down*, 17.

While Aniol, Bell, and Dawn are not alone in their convictions that corporate worship should be distinctly different than both other types of worship and the surrounding culture, they represent the importance of Paul's encouragement to the Corinthian church not "be[ing] conformed to this world, but be[ing] transformed" (Rom. 12:2). Corporate worship is distinctly different than lifestyle and private worship and should therefore be conducted distinctly different.

Both "We" and "Me"

Within the debate between "we" and "me" are scholars who answer both are valid. Their stance can often be summed up with Ian Hussey's words:

> The problem of individualism in contemporary Western churches has been well noted. Congregational song is meant to be corporate. Singing together, brings people together. As they sing together they agree not to be soloists or competitors but to compromise with each other and joining voices as if joining hands. Singing together means listening to each other, keeping the same tempo and thus loving each other in the act of singing. Congregational singing makes the theological statement "we are the body of Christ."[78]

For Hussey it is the act of singing together that unites the congregation without regard for singular or communal language. He goes on to write: "The prevalence of 1st person pronouns in contemporary songs should not be used to criticize them as 'individualistic.' It is a more complex matter than this."[79]

Because both ends of the spectrum can both be correct, authors like Mark Keown write: "The frequent criticism of the excessive use of the personal pronoun 'I' over against 'we' in contemporary worship is not really the issue. The problem lies more with the nature of the use of 'I' and especially with the psychological and intensely emotive language with which the

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[78] Ian Hussey, "The Songs We Sing: A Textual Analysis of Popular Congregational Songs of the 20th and 21st Century," *Ecclesial Practices* 6, no. 2 (2019): 229.

[79] Ibid., 230.

pronouns are associated."[80] There is a deep psychological issue that individualistic language can cause. By employing only individualistic language, church leaders are teaching that congregants are on their journey alone. Unfortunately, this can lead congregants to conclude they do not need the rest of the body of believers.

Jack Hayford, in *Mastering Ministry*, suggests a balance between "we" and "me" by establishing "the supremacy of God as the object of *our* worship [emphasis original]."[81] Beginning with communal language establishes the importance of their communal identity and celebrating God directly in corporate worship. He then turns the lyrics toward a more personal expression employing first-person pronouns "drawing people to focus on their particular and individual relationship with God."[82] For Hayford, both communal and individualistic expressions are appropriate for corporate worship because, like Hicks, church leaders should think pastorally by encouraging congregants into private worship experiences throughout the rest of the week.[83]

Summary

Scholars agree employing dominantly first-person language encourages the idea that congregants individually worship alongside one another in corporate worship, but they disagree on viable solutions. Some scholars encourage some inclusion of first-person lyrics while others encourage only communal lyrics. Thus, the body of scholarly literature does not address the appropriate amount of individualistic language in corporate worship, but merely marks too much

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[80] Mark Keown, "How Much Should We Sing?" *Stimulus: The New Zealand Journal of Christian Thought & Practice*19, no. 3 (September 2012): 6.

[81] Jack W. Hayford and John Kilinger, *Mastering Ministry: Mastering Worship* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 31.

[82] Hayford and Kilinger, *Mastering Ministry*, 31.

[83] Hicks, *The Worship Pastor*, 57.

as undesirable and suggests trends of increasing individualistic language and man-centered singing in corporate worship.

Individualistic Worship Lyric Studies

Scholarly worship literature claims an increase in individualistic language in corporate worship song lyrics, leading to several studies to rationalize such a claim. Oftentimes scholars write that first-person singular language is not enough to mark a song as incompatible with corporate worship claiming: "A lyric saying 'I' can be a communal utterance if it focuses the singer on God and is implicitly or explicitly aware of the community in which each individual sings."[84] Thus, evaluating songs based solely on singular or communal language is insufficient without also considering whether a song is God-centered. This section first supplies studies evaluating corporate worship songs use of singular or communal language before presenting studies discussing whether songs are God-centered.

"We" Versus "Me" Studies

Scholarly literature has long recognized trends emphasizing an increase in individualistically-focused corporate worship songs with a simultaneous decrease in communal language. Several scholars study this trend further to substantiate their claims. This section introduces significant studies quantifying song lyrics to objectively validate claims of increasing first-person pronoun usage among corporate worship music.

Hannah Byrd's "The Impact of Lyric Choices on Spiritual Edification" quantifies results of 18–23-year-old evangelical believers who took part in her survey.[85] Her thesis focuses on the

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[84] Wren, *Praying Twice*, 185.

[85] Hannah Jane Byrd, "The Impact of Lyric Choices on Spiritual Edification," (DWS thesis, Liberty University, 2019), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

individual spiritual edification of its participants through distinct types of song lyrics. Byrd employed three different approaches writing new songs to fit each approach: emotional lyrics, theological lyrics, and integrated lyrics. She defines emotional lyrics as "limited to a personal point of view, intimate or romantic language in nature, and descriptors of feelings;" theological lyrics as "demonstrating a corporate point of view, descriptions of the Trinity, and allusions to scripture and the Gospel" and integrated lyrics as employing both emotional and theological lyrics.[86] Byrd's study is not limited to the effects of individual and communal lyrics, but it "yielded significant differences in spiritual transcendence according to worship lyrics, specifically finding a significant difference between emotionally driven and integrated driven lyric approaches;" rationalizing further study of the effects corporate worship lyrics have on congregants.[87]

Nelson Cowan analyzed the song lyrics of "Hillsong Worship and Hillsong United albums between 2007 and 2015" in an article entitled "Heaven and Earth Collide: Hillsong Music's Evolving Theological Emphases" published by *Pneuma*, a Journal for Pentecostal Studies.[88] Pulling the lyrics from CCLI's database, Cowan analyzed the songs for first-person and plural perspective of the worshipper finding 71% of the songs employing a first-person singular perspective and 52% of the songs employing a first-person plural perspective (accounting for 19% overlap of songs employing both first-person singular and plural perspectives).[89] Cowan found minimal variation over the eight-year period though he notes a

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[86] Byrd, "The Impact of Lyric Choices on Spiritual Edification," 53.

[87] Byrd, "The Impact of Lyric Choices on Spiritual Edification," 67.

[88] Nelson Cowan, "Heaven and Earth Collide: Hillsong Music's Evolving Theological Emphases," *Pneuma,* 39 (2017): 81.

[89] Ibid., 90.

minor reduction in first-person plural perspective after the "I Heart Revolution" ended in 2009.[90] Cowan's study shows first-person singular and plural language is quantifiable. His study also shows that first-person singular and plural language is an important form of song lyric analysis.

Robert Woods, Brian Walrath, and Diane Badzinski present a unique viewpoint in a chapter entitled "We Have Come into His House: Kerygma, Koinonia, Leitourgia—CWM That Models the Purpose of the Church."[91] Analyzing songs through the lens of *Kerygma* (God's attributes and works), *Koinonia* (corporate language "we," "us," "our," etc.), and *Leitourgia* (individualistic language responding directly to God), the authors categorized the top 77 praise and worship songs reported by CCLI between 1989 and 2005 putting each song through a rigorous process with several layers of validation.[92] Woods, Walrath, and Badzinski classified 39% of the songs as *Kerygmia*, 14% as *Koinonia*, and 47% as *Leitourgia*.[93] Their chapter did not specifically analyze the use of individualistic and corporate language within the top songs; however, *Koinonia* songs employ corporate language while *Leitourgia* songs utilize individualistic language. Also, they mark an increase of songs classified as *Leitourgia* with a similar decrease of songs marked *Kerygma* in the same period. Therefore, Woods, Walrath, and Badzinski's chapter rationalizes further research into lyric trends by noting an increase of individualistic language with only a small percentage of songs employing communal song lyrics.

While only briefly discussed and minimally developed, Daniel Thornton's "Exploring the Contemporary Congregational Song Genre" analyzed twenty-five contemporary congregational

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[90] Ibid.

[91] Robert Woods, Brian Walrath, and Diane Badzinski, "We Have Come into His House: Kerygma, Koinonia, Leitourgia—CWM That Models the Purpose of the Church" in *The Message in the Music: Studying Contemporary Praise and Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), ProQuest eBook Central.

[92] Woods, Walrath, and Badzinski, "We Have Come into His House."

[93] Ibid.

songs (see Appendix A).[94] Within his analysis Thornton found sixteen of the songs (64%) written with first-person, singular pronouns (I, me, my).[95] He compares this to Mark Evans' 2002 analysis (see Appendix B) which found 71% of songs utilizing individualistic language to suggest a possible decrease in individualistic language among contemporary Christian music.[96] However, Evans' "survey of song-types in Australian congregational song covered a selection of albums between 1992–1999."[97] Because both Evans and Thornton's studies were based on sample portions of contemporary Christian music, it is difficult to fully accept Thornton's conclusions. Even so, both studies supply enough evidence to warrant further research on congregational singing trends.

Hussey's "The Songs We Sing: A Textual Analysis of Popular Congregational Songs of the 20th and 21st Century" supplies various analysis of song lyrics. Hussey compared hymns, a list compiled by Robert T. Coote (see Appendix C) of the most frequent songs found in hymnals since the late 1800s, and contemporary songs, determined by the "27 most popular songs on the CCLI database on 9 November 2018."[98] Hussey's analysis found 3.2250% of the total hymn lyrics and 5.5132% of the total contemporary song lyrics were first-person singular pronouns.[99] He also found 3.0911% of the total hymn lyrics and 1.8377% of the total contemporary song

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[94] Daniel Thornton, "Exploring the Contemporary Congregational Song Genre: Texts, Practice, and Industry," (PhD thesis, Macquarie University, 2014), 167, https://www.academia.edu/24269011/Exploring_the_Contemporary_Congregational_Song_Genre_Texts_Practice_and_Industry.

[95] Ibid., 190.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Mark Evans, *Open Up the Doors: Music in the Modern Church* (London: Equinox, 2006), 193.

[98] Hussey, "The Songs We Sing," 222-23.

[99] Ibid., 226.

lyrics were first-person plural pronouns.[100] Hussey's data shows a clear shift from the communal language found in hymns toward the individualistic pronouns found in contemporary songs. While Hussey's methods represent the entire song population, it does not measure individual songs apart from the whole. Thus, Hussey can only mark the pronoun shift from hymns to contemporary but does not elaborate further on trends within the hymns or contemporary music.

To substantiate scholarly literature's claims of substantial individualistic-focused worship song lyrics, Christine Longhurst did her own analysis publishing her results in the *Direction* Journal. Longhurst's study supplied "surprising" results as they "certainly didn't seem to support the 'all about me' reputation contemporary worship songs typically carry."[101] Longhurst legalistically analyzed the 509 songs in the Mennonite *Songs of Fellowship 5*, published in 2011, finding 34% individualistic (I, me, my), 44% corporate (we, us, our), 19% a combination (I plus we), and 3% having no voice.[102] Interested by the results, Longhurst continued her analysis and analyzed two additional Mennonite hymnals, *Worship Together* and *Hymnal: A Worship Book*, supplying similar results.

Scholars perform different lyric studies to rationalize scholarly literature's growing claims that modern songs employ more individualistic than communal language. This section represents significant studies performed to rationalize such a conclusion. While most of the studies' results rationalized the scholarly claims with data suggesting a decrease in communal language usage, Longhurst's study uniquely found the opposite to be true.

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[100] Ibid.

[101] Christine Longhurst, "The Words We Sing: An Exploration of Textual Content in Contemporary Worship Music," *Direction,* vol. 44, 2 (2015): 162.

[102] Ibid., 161.

God-Focused Versus Man-Focused Studies

It is entirely possible to have a song that is communally-focused yet entirely based on man's response to God. While man's response to God is an integral part of corporate worship, it should not be ignored. However, if corporate worship is to include edification of the entire body of believers, then songs should encourage congregants to grow in their knowledge and understanding of God more than simply responding to God by itself. This section presents several studies quantifying corporate worship songs as being God-focused or man-focused.

Lester Ruth, in a chapter entitled "How Great Is Our God: The Trinity in Contemporary Christian Worship Music," supplies an analysis of Trinitarian song lyrics within "the top 77 songs that constitute the heart of CWM between 1989 and 2005."[103] Ruth does not provide "absolute statements" but to him "it seems that the basis for choosing CWM for worship services is not tied to explicit Trinitarian content within the songs."[104] Ruth's study marks the lack of Trinitarian language of songs as song lyrics shift toward more direct lines of communication between man and Jesus.

Evans' study of popular Australian congregational songs, focuses his study on "immanence or transcendence; that is, is the repertoire focused more on our intimate relationship with God or his transcendent holiness?"[105] Evans determines whether songs are about a relationship with God or about God's attributes and characteristics. He does not degrade songwriters for writing about man's "personal" and "experiential" relationship with God, but he

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[103] Lester Ruth, "How Great Is Our God: The Trinity in Contemporary Christian Worship Music," in Robert Woods and Brian Walrath, *The Message in the Music: Studying Contemporary Praise and Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), ProQuest eBook Central.

[104] Ruth, "How Great Is Our God."

[105] Evans, *Open Up the Doors*, 115.

does note: “Over half the songs analysed were primarily concerned with the relationship between the participant and the Godhead. Of these, over 70 percent were written from an individualistic point of view, and over 60 percent addressed the Godhead in the more informal second person address.”[106] Thus, Evans’ study shows songs as highly individualistic, but also as extremely relatable. While this trend of describing God as a relatable God may be favored by some church leaders, Evans also warns it is a dangerous trend: “For when the songs of the Church cease to sing about God they will become mere social and personal commentary. Clearly this is not the case at this point in history, and what is important in corporate worship programmes is a balance between praise of God and personal response to that praise.”[107] Evans does not quantify his study’s limited body of songs, but he does rationalize his concern that congregational songs are increasingly focusing on man, and man’s response to God, than on God Himself.

Thornton recognizes the trend of individualistic language decreases within CCM. However, like others before him, he also notes that first-person language is not enough to categorize song lyrics. In addition to the pronoun use, Thornton encourages readers to also consider the number of personal references referring to man compared to the number of references to God. To quantify these results, Thornton creates a simple formula dividing the number of personal references by the number of God references. If the result is greater than “1,” then songs are “More Individually-focused” and songs with a result less than “1,” are “More God-focused.”[108]

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[106] Ibid., 137.

[107] Evans, *Open Up the Doors*, 164-65.

[108] Thornton, “Exploring the Contemporary Congregational Song,” 191.

$$\frac{\text{Number of personal references}}{\text{Number of God references}} > 1 \ = \text{More Individually} - \text{Focused}$$

$$\frac{\text{Number of personal references}}{\text{Number of God references}} < 1 \ = \text{More God} - \text{Focused}$$

Figure 1. Thornton's formula for individually or God-focused song lyrics.

While Thornton's analysis is brief, and only analyzes a sample group of songs, his formula is essential to this dissertation's quantification of song lyrics as being God-focused or man-focused.

In addition to Longhurst's individualistic-focused worship song lyrics analysis supplied above, she also addresses the criticism that corporate worship song lyrics more often focus on the worshiper rather than God.[109] Longhurst employs her "best judgement" to determine if *Songs of Fellowship 5* songs focus primarily on God (43.2%), the individual (29.7%), the corporate body (20.6%), the individual and God (3.3%) or the corporate body and God (3.1%).[110] Similar to her individualistic versus corporate analysis, Longhurst was surprised to find "that almost half focused primarily on God, and nearly one-quarter had a primary or partial focus on the Christian community."[111]

If Longhurst's analysis is placed through Thornton's system, it yields different results. While Longhurst marks nearly half the songs analyzed as focusing primarily on God, Thornton would note the individual (29.7%) and the corporate body (20.6%) should be combined (50.3%). Thus, Thornton would conclude there are more songs focused on man (50.3%) which is greater than Longhurst's finding 43.2% of the songs in her study that focused primarily on God.

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[109] Longhurst, "The Words We Sing," 167.

[110] Longhurst, "The Words We Sing," 167-68.

[111] Ibid., 168.

Longhurst does not present false data, she simply quantifies a focus on the individual uniquely different from a focus on the corporate body while Thornton combines them.

The scholarly research on God-focused or man-focused songs suggests an unhealthy balance of man's response to God over His attributes and characteristics. While each researcher approaches the conversation from diverse angles, they all came to the same conclusion that there are more songs focused on man's response than on God Himself (except for Longhurst who separates a focus on the individual from the corporate body)). Still, each of the above studies are based on samples of all corporate worship songs and thus might supply skewed data; yet their consistent findings suggest the need for further research.

Summary

Scholarly literature recognizes the formative and representative nature of songs on the theology of its congregants. To determine one over the other is the same as the chicken or the egg paradox, yet recognizing the theologically formative and representative nature of corporate worship songs makes it essential to choose songs fitting to each unique congregation. Scholars also reject individualistically-focused times of corporate worship, without entirely removing some individualistic-focus from corporate worship by recognizing every community is comprised of individuals.

The literature rejects the dominant use of first-person language while disagreeing about precisely where and how to draw the line. Still, the literature clearly suggests the gathered body should sing more "we" than "me" corporate worship song lyrics without completely dismissing song lyrics that help congregants continue to engage in private worship throughout the week.

Few lyric studies quantify the number of individualistic lyrics used in corporate worship. Of those few studies, they focus on a sample size to draw conclusions with some scholars

focusing on a particular group of songs (Cowan with Hillsong's songs between 2007 and 2015) and others studying a limited selection from CCLI (Thornton with 25 popular CCM songs). The studies also measured the frequency of individualistic and communal language, but they move beyond pronoun usage to see if songs were more about God or man's response to God. No study measures changes across time, nor does any study the CCLI Top 100 songs. Thus, this dissertation seeks to build on their research.

Bradley warns his readers about the dangers of corporate worship services focusing narrowly on individuals:

> When music becomes overly individualistic, it loses its communal appeal, and its ability to be hospitable is compromised. While private worship is possible and sometimes important, we were created to worship in community, and music is a crucial component of corporate worship. When we privatize our worship music — either through exclusionary texts or actions — we shut others out and forfeit the ability of music to encourage mutual exchange and edification.[112]

With much disagreement about how to cope with increasing individualism in corporate worship, worship scholars agree increasing first-person language is a sign that cultural individualism is permeating the corporate worship practices of the church. Individualistic expressions ostracize churches from their communities by not standing apart from culture while also failing to disciple congregants into engaging more with the body of Christ.

[112] Bradley, *From Memory to Imagination*, 170.

Chapter Three: Methods

This chapter supplies the methods used to collect data; it is divided into two sections with data analyzed independently before being combined in chapter four to present findings. The first section addresses this dissertation's second research question utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methods and procedures for interviewing church leaders to establish their beliefs on the impact of corporate song lyrics on communal identity. Since the scholarly literature views the individuality of songs and God-centeredness of songs as interdependent, research questions address both categories as well as collecting other relevant data. The second section addresses this dissertation's third research question utilizing quantitative methods and procedures to identify modern corporate worship singing trends.

Church Leader Interview Methodology

To represent the communal singing beliefs and philosophies of church leaders, this researcher interviewed church leaders serving in both worship pastor and senior pastor roles in their churches. Interviews moved through a series of questions to provide quantifiable answers to various questions while also allowing participants to justify their responses with additional explanation. This section introduces the qualifications of participants, methods for choosing participants, procedure for interviews, overall structure of interview questions, and methods of analysis.

Participants

Participants are church leaders serving full-time in Southern Baptist churches across Florida. A *senior pastor* is defined as the administrative and spiritual leader of a church acting as "overseer" according to 1 Timothy 3:1-7. A *worship pastor* is defined as a worship leader

spending more than half their professional time on corporate worship related activities. While they may be considered an overseer of their church, this dissertation does not limit worship pastors to those serving in an overseer role. These senior pastor and worship pastor participants are reflective of church leaders making decisions about corporate worship practices; thus, their inclusion serves as a sample of the greater Southern Baptist Convention church leader population.

Church Leader Sample Set

Florida does not perfectly represent every cultural and political ideal of the entire US, yet it represents significant diversity within its borders. While there are many valid methods of dividing Florida, the Florida Baptist Convention divides Florida into six distinct geographical regions (serving as the six regions used in this dissertation): *West*, *North*, *East*, *Central*, *Southwest*, and *Southeast*.[1] Each of these regions represent different cultural contexts. Florida's cultural distinctiveness is also politically diverse. According to The Washington Post: "There is one constant in Florida politics: Its elections will be close."[2] The article continues by discussing the six different political regions of Florida and marking their distinctiveness. Though not a perfect sample of the entire US population, the cultural and political diversity of Florida helps it stand as a sample set of the US.

The cultural and political diversity of Florida helps it stand as a sample set of the entire US; however, this dissertation also delimited interview candidates to senior and worship pastors serving in Southern Baptist Churches. According to Pew Research Center "Southern Baptists

[1] "Florida Map - Florida Baptist Convention," Florida Baptist Convention, 2018, https://flbaptist.org/florida-map/.

[2] "The Six Political States of Florida," Washington Post, accessed June 22, 2023, https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/politics/florida-political-geography/.

make up about a fifth of all U.S. evangelical Protestants (21%)" and represents approximately 5.3% of all US adults.[3] Thus, this dissertation's delimiting to Florida makes it representative of the US while delimiting it further to Southern Baptists makes it less representative of the entire population in the US. A limit of this dissertation is that the church leader sample does not perfectly represent all US church leaders. Even so, as the country's largest protestant denomination and Florida's cultural diversity, this dissertation's delimitations represent many church leaders across the US.

Procedure

Utilizing the "Find a Church" page on the Florida Baptist Convention website, FLBaptist.org, a web search of Southern Baptist churches in Florida occurred to form a database of potential churches.[4] Search results included churches that either listed a website or a contact email address for a total of 1,175 potential churches. For church websites, a search of the website occurred adding email addresses for a general contact or the senior and/or worship pastor, these results were added to an Excel spreadsheet organizing all potential interview candidates.

The FLBaptist.org church search had its limitations. First, search results were limited to twenty-five results per search, so large cities yielded incomplete results while smaller cities included excessive results which necessitated procedural adjustment. Therefore, for large cities with twenty-five results for that city, zip codes were used to provide additional results (with duplicate results removed from the Excel spreadsheet). The large cities requiring a zip code search were Jacksonville, Lakeland, Miami, Ocala, Orlando, Pensacola, and Tampa.

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[3] Fahmy, Dalia, "7 Facts about Southern Baptists," Pew Research Center, last modified June 7, 2019, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/06/07/7-facts-about-southern-baptists/.

[4] "Find." *Florida Baptist Convention | FBC*. Florida Baptist Convention, October 18, 2015. Last modified October 18, 2015. Accessed July 6, 2023. https://flbaptist.org/find/.

A second limitation existed when website links were followed for various church websites. Some of the church websites did not connect to valid links. To verify it was simply a user error, this researcher verified the "www" was included in the address, as well as the suffix's inclusion (".com," ".org," etc.). There also did not appear to be any specific typing error (i.e., "www.restoringtampa.org" was the website listed for House of Restoration in Christ church which yielded an invalid web address). In addition, some websites linked correctly, but there was no email address listed on the website either for a general church contact, senior, or worship pastor. Thus, both conditions removed potential churches from consideration.

A third limitation was found with churches whose websites did not utilize the English language. This researcher is thankful for the cultural diversity of Florida; however, due to analysis methods utilizing the English language, churches speaking other languages were delimited from this study.

Upon IRB approval (see Appendix D), prospective candidates were contacted through email (see Appendix E) and given the opportunity to participate in this dissertation project. Participants needed only to respond to the email to receive an additional email inviting candidates to schedule an interview. At the same time as the scheduling email, respondents were also supplied with a consent form (see Appendix F) providing additional information about the research project.

After participants agreed to participate and an interview time was established, approximately three days prior to the interview participants were emailed a reduced list of questions (see Appendix G). These questions were designed to encourage forethought on a line of questioning not always considered by church leaders but did not contain every church

interview question. Using a Google One Premium Plan for its flexibility and ability to record video calls, participants were sent invitations to a Google Meet video meeting.

Interview Design

Interviews began with verification the technology was functioning correctly, and an introductory statement was provided by the host thanking participants and reminding them the interview was being recorded for later transcription and analysis. Participants were then asked general questions about their church and themselves.[5] With the preliminary questions completed, the interview questions turned toward their corporate worship philosophy. The opening question, "What is your philosophy for corporate worship?," is intentionally broad to allow participants freedom to share with little direction from the questions/host. It also serves as an answer with little question-based bias though the preparatory questions may have influenced candidates toward communal answers unintentionally. This question follows by asking participants to list three words to describe their corporate worship philosophy to provide a clearer, and more quantifiable, answer to the opening question.

After completing the corporate worship philosophy questions, interview questions turn toward "communal connections in corporate worship" to gauge the intentionality of church leaders encouraging congregants to grow in their communal identity beyond corporate worship services. Questions then turn toward song lyrics being either individually or communally-focused, followed by questions about God-centered or man-centered song lyrics. Both sections of questions allow participants to describe how they do or do not address these distinct types of song lyrics.

[5] Appendix H supplies a complete interview script.

Interviews ended by requesting permission to access corporate worship singing records for further analysis and giving respondents an opportunity to add additional comments they deem relevant to this dissertation and with pre-determined closing comments thanking them for their participation before the meeting ended.

Analysis Methods

Shortly after the completion of each meeting, the transcription and recording were downloaded and stored in a Dropbox folder dedicated to this dissertation with an additional level of password security placed on the folder. This researcher then submitted recordings to Cockatoo and allowed its artificial intelligence to convert videos to transcripts.[6] When supplied by respondents, song records were also analyzed according to the methods described below in the Church Song Records section.

The first group of interview questions asks for general information including the respondent's name, title, and main responsibilities. For question 1, the name was kept confidential for accuracy and distinction among interviews; though as noted earlier, true names were replaced by pseudonyms with general distinctions for each church. To determine pseudonyms: First, churches were named in the order they responded, and a regional identifier was assigned. Next, a distinction between senior and worship pastors was assigned (i.e., "Third Central Worship" was the pseudonym for the third church in the central region's worship pastor to respond). For question 2, the answers to the "title" question were categorized and quantified according to results. For question 3, asking about the respondent's main responsibilities, respondent answers were categorized and quantified and question 3a verified the respondent

[6] Cockatoo.com, "Cockatoo - Convert Audio and Video to Text with AI," Accessed September 22, 2023, https://www.cockatoo.com.

served the role of worship pastor by being active in worship ministry for at least half their professional time.

The second group of interview questions asks general questions about the church. For question 4 (continuing numbering from the beginning section as was done throughout the interview questions list), respondents were asked the name of their church, the city and state of the church, and if they were affiliated with the SBC. If respondents replied *no* to being affiliated with the SBC or their responsibilities did not line up with those of a senior or worship pastor, they were thanked for their time and the interview was appropriately ended.[7] Questions 5 (average corporate worship attendance), 6 ("Is Sunday School [SS] your primary discipleship opportunity"), and 7 ("What is the average SS, or other primary discipleship opportunity, attendance this past year?") supplies information to evaluate discipleship data against the ACP discipleship analysis following the procedures in the next section. By dividing the average attendance by the average SS (or other primary discipleship opportunity), this researcher created an estimated discipleship attendance percentage provided in figure 2:

$$\frac{\text{SS}}{\text{Total Membership}} = \text{Discipleship \%}$$

Figure 2. Estimated discipleship percentage formula.

This information is biased as church leaders may skew data in their favor. However, it serves as a comparison to ACP data to validate data.

The next group of interview questions focused on "Corporate Worship Philosophy." Question 8 allows respondents the opportunity to openly describe their philosophy of corporate

[7] This never occurred within a meeting; however, it did occur in preparation of an interview and this researcher, along with the respondent, found it best to not continue into the interview stage.

worship singing with responses categorized and quantified. The follow up to question 8 asks respondents to "List three words to describe your corporate worship singing philosophy" supplying answers that were categorized and quantified. Question 9 asks "Is your philosophy of corporate worship singing different than your philosophy for private worship singing?" This supplies a quantifiable answer to measure if church leaders view a difference between private and corporate worship. In addition, respondents were asked to explain their response and answers were categorized and discussed accordingly. Question 10 similarly allows respondents a quantifiable answer to "the difference(s) between private and corporate worship" and the opportunity to explain their answers which was then categorized and discussed. This group of interview questions closes with two very direct questions to evaluate church leader views on the theological formation of participants (see question 11) and the communal identity formative nature of corporate worship songs (see question 12). Both questions begin with a quantifiable answer with opportunity for additional explanation that was categorized and discussed.

To further address the final question of the previous section and to directly address this dissertation's research questions, the next group of interview questions on "Communal Connections in Corporate Worship" directly engage how church leaders encourage communal growth. The first question (see question 13), asks the quantifiable question: "Do you think corporate worship songs encourage congregants to engage more in the discipleship aspects of your church?" Respondents were then encouraged to supply additional explanation that was categorized and discussed. This question is like the previous one (see question 12), but specifically addresses church leader views on the singing part of corporate worship and thus remains distinctly different. The following two questions allowed church leaders to share how

their church (see question 14) and they (see question 15) encourage congregants to grow in their communal identity.

The next section, “Individual Versus Communally-Focused Lyrics,” supplies four questions with quantifiable answers and opportunity for explanation that was later categorized and discussed. Similarly, the following section, “God-Centered Versus Man-Centered Lyric,” also supplied four questions with similar data analysis methods. However, question 22 (unlike questions 20, 21, and 23) allowed three different answers (“God-Centered,” “Man-Centered,” and “Balanced”) and both question 21 and 22 did not ask for additional explanation. The last section of “Closing Questions” asks for access to song records for analysis (see question 24) and a final opportunity for respondents to supply unscripted answers.

This section has overviewed the data analysis methods for the interview questions results. These methods can be summed up as general interview questions, quantifiable interview questions and opportunities for explanation which was later categorized and discussed. The phrase “categorized and discussed” means this researcher reviewed each explanation and attempted to categorize it according to modern worship practices. This allowed respondents the opportunity for general discussion to rationalize their responses and supply deeper meaning to their quantified answers.

Song and Attendance Methodology

To represent modern trends, this researcher followed the below procedures for data collection and analysis. Methods were designed to mark modern trends of corporate worship singing represented by Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI) data comparing those results to both the Psalms and attendance records supplied by Annual Church Profile (ACP) data. This section describes how data was collected, procedures for song and Psalm analysis,

description of the comparative analysis between different data sets, as well as the procedure for collecting and analyzing church song records.

Data Collection

Data collection for current CCLI trends is publicly available on SongSelect.com without login credentials. CCLI also shows the top 100 songs based on different regions of the world (US, United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada). This allows researchers to evaluate differences between various world regions; however, it is beyond the purpose of this dissertation to accomplish such research. While the current top 100 United States Songs is readily available, a historical look at this list is not available and the self-collection of such data is impossible as SongSelect has only recently begun publishing this data. As a result, this researcher contacted CCLI support, who redirected the contact to their Intellectual Property Team who responded with permission to use their Excel spreadsheet file attached to their email response (CCLI Top 100 Songs in the United States between 1989 and June of 2022). The Intellectual Property Team of CCLI granted this researcher, along with his advisor, the opportunity to determine how best to give credit to CCLI for the data.[8] CCLI's intellectual team placed a stipulation that the data may only be used for academic research and not for personal monetary gain; thus, CCLI records will be destroyed after completion, and acceptance, of this dissertation. The CCLI data ended with June of 2022; thus, when the December 2022 and June 2023 Top 100 Songs in the United States were released, this researcher added the data for a complete set of records between 1989 and June of 2023. Data was also collected from the ACP. However, since this data is publicly available, this researcher did not require special permission to gain access.

[8] Appendix I supplies the email from CCLI's Intellectual Property Team.

Procedure of Song Analysis

Upon collection of CCLI data, this researcher reduced the full list of Top 100 Songs in the US from 1989 through 2023 to remove duplicates, lyrics were copied into a Microsoft Word document, color coding was applied to emphasize relevant words, a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet was created, and this researcher systematically counted words relevant to this project. This section provides specific details relevant to this data collection procedure.

CCLI Song Reduction and Lyrics Copied

To begin, it was prudent to reduce the list of 6,800 entries into a more manageable list. By selecting the entire data set and utilizing the "Remove Duplicates" tool in Microsoft Excel, the list of entries was reduced to 546 unique entries based on their CCLI "SongID."[9] This became the list of songs relevant to this project and discussed as the *CCLI Body of Songs*. While the CCLI data ranks songs, specific top 100 ranking was deemed irrelevant to this project and songs reaching number one hold the same influence on the data as songs reaching 100; therefore, the only ranking relevant to this project was its inclusion in the top 100 Songs in the US between 1989 and 2023. With a CCLI Body of Songs collected, this researcher then utilized the SongSelect database to copy Titles, Lyrics, and CCLI data to a Microsoft Word document.

Advanced Find & Replace

With the database reduced and compiled into a Word document, this researcher completed an *Advanced Find & Replace* to color code and emphasize relevant words to this project. The following color coding was implemented: First, all first-person singular pronouns (*I*,

[9] For example, in June of 2019, CCLI Song Number 5196131 "Great is Thy Faithfulness" was included. However, a SongSelect search for "5196131" did not yield any results due to an unknown data error. Other songs share the title "Great is Thy Faithfulness," but according to SongSelect records, 5196131 was the song included in the CCLI Top 100. Therefore, this song along with five others, were removed from analysis.

me, *my*, and *mine*) and all third-person singular pronouns (*he*, *his*, *him*, *you*, and *your*) were found and replaced with the same word colored red with a single underline.[10] Second, all first-person plural pronouns (*we*, *us*, and *our*) and third-person plural pronouns (*them* and *they*) were found and replaced with the same word colored green with a double underline.

Third, names of God beginning with a capital letter (*Father*, *God*, *Jesus*, *Lord*, *Spirit*, *Christ*, *Lamb*, *Savior*, *I Am*, *Master*, *King*, *Holy One*, and *Other*) were found and replaced with the same word colored blue with a dotted underline.[11] Fourth, indirect references to God beginning with a capital letter (*Him*, *He*, *His*, *Thee*, *Thou*, *Thine*, *Thy*, *You*, and *Your*) were found and replaced with the same word colored purple with a squiggle underline.

Fifth, words that fit into more than one category were scrutinized to categorize them correctly. Words like *You* that could be a man-centered reference to the singer's fellow man, or it could be God-centered focusing the singer on God. In addition, God references were not always capitalized, especially with indirect references like *he* and required additional scrutiny. Even *You* at the beginning of a line could refer to man or God. Therefore, every purple word was especially scrutinized to categorize the word correctly. As a sixth and final measure, each song was reviewed to verify no relevant words were unintentionally ignored. *Other* words like *Saviour* appeared during this last step and were thus included in the names of God section of the Excel spreadsheet. Figure 2 shows a visual representation of how songs looked once the *Advance Find & Replace* steps were implemented.

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[10] The purpose of this color-coding system was not to classify different words for final categorical results. Procedures indicate first-person singular pronouns are singular and third-person singular pronouns are communal; however, they were both colored green because they were singular and not plural and not for their classifications.

[11] The "Other" category included names of God utilizing different spellings of names (i.e., "Saviour"), phrase names of God (i.e., "Light of the World," "Prince of Peace," etc.), and additional infrequently used names of God (i.e., "Almighty," "Maker," etc.). "Other" words were not searched but a final review of each song included these words in results.

Living Hope

Verse 1

How great the chasm that lay between us
How high the mountain I could not climb
In desperation I turned to heaven
And spoke Your name into the night
Then through the darkness Your loving-kindness
Tore through the shadows of my soul
The work is finished the end is written
Jesus Christ my living hope

Figure 3. Visual representation of "Living Hope" for analysis.[12]

CCLI Word Spreadsheet

As referenced above, a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet was created to collect information for each song. The data collected included the Song Title, the CCLI Number (also called "SongID"), a unique Song Number to calculate the total amount of songs analyzed, and the total words for each song. To calculate the total words: all lyrics were highlighted, then any references to "Verse," "Chorus," etc. were subtracted from the total lyrics.[13] All general data included thus far were under column titles with white text and a black background to mark the content area as distinct from others. Columns to the right of this general data were also color coordinated to coincide with the above *Advanced Find and Replace* color-coding with nine columns colored red for singular words, five columns colored green for plural words, thirteen columns colored light

[12] Brian Johnson, Phil Wickham, *Living Hope* (Phil Wickham Music; Simply Global Songs; Sing My Songs; Bethel Music Publishing), 2017, https://songselect.ccli.com/songs/7106807/living-hope.

[13] For example, "I Speak Jesus" totaled 137 words. However, the words "Verse 1," "Verse 2, "Chorus," "Verse 3," "Verse 4" were included in the initial search. Therefore, the "Total Words" for "I Speak Jesus" was the excel formula "=137-9" for a total of 128 lyrics.

blue for names of God (including an additional column to list *Other* names used), and nine columns colored darker blue for indirect references to God.

CCLI Data Collection

With the aid of the color coordinated lyrics listed above in the Advanced Find & Replace section, and the already created Excel document, this researcher systematically chose a song, input the song general data, and counted words following the columns provided by the Excel document. The Excel document includes additional columns, not relevant until below; one such column important to note was a column totaling man-centered and God-centered words. When the total difference of man-centered and God-centered words was two or less, this researcher recounted words for that song as an additional protective measure to protect the integrity of the data. Of the 149 songs with two or less difference between God-centered and man-centered lyrics, a recount of words did not change the result categorically from "Man-centered," "God-centered," or "Neutral;" though it did, on a few occasions, change the degree of which the song was categorized (i.e. if a song was less than 1.00 then it was deemed "God-centered." Finding an additional name or reference to God did not change the song categorically but could have changed it [hypothetically] from .86 to .91). As a result, this additional protective step increased the integrity of the data.

Data Analysis

While some authors have performed song studies to support their claims, none found by this researcher completed a large-scale study seeking to encompass over 30-years of CCLI Top 100 Song lists. Following the previous procedures of counting lyrics, this section describes the procedures used to convert that data to quantifiable data. This section describes the data analysis methods for the CCLI song analysis, the Psalm analysis, the ACP analysis across the 30-year

period from 1989-2023, and methods for analyzing church song records supplied by church leaders.

CCLI Song Analysis

As noted above, scholarly literature encourages readers to consider both the singer (either as an individual or as a community), as well as the audience of the song (whether it is God-centered or man-centered). This section provides quantification methods for both the Thornton and McKinney analysis procedures discussed within this Methodology chapter.

Thornton's formula. The literature review revealed a formula, (see figure 1), for classifying songs as either God-centered or man-centered. This formula, presented by Thornton in "Exploring the Contemporary Congregational Song Genre," measures the "Point of View" as either "More God-Focused" (*God-centered* in this dissertation) or "More Individually-Focused" (*man-centered* in this dissertation).[14] His formula was modified to allow for song neutrality. For this dissertation the following procedures were used to classify songs as God-centered, man-centered, or neutral.

Following the counting procedures listed above, each song was quantified by adding all man-centered words (including first-person singular, third-person singular, first-person singular, and third-person singular) and dividing that by all references to God (both by naming God directly and by referring to Him indirectly). Thus, this dissertation's classification of God-centeredness is a simple formula, provided below in figure 4, based on counting lyrics and quantifying them into a ratio.

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[14] Daniel Thornton, "Exploring the Contemporary Congregational Song Genre: Texts, Practice, and Industry," (PhD thesis, Macquarie University, 2014), 191, https://www.academia.edu/24269011/Exploring_the_Contemporary_Congregational_Song_Genre_Texts_Practice_and_Industry.

$$\frac{\text{Number of personal references}}{\text{Number of God references}} > 1 \ = \text{Man} - \text{Centered}$$

$$\frac{\text{Number of personal references}}{\text{Number of God references}} = 1 \ = \text{Neutral}$$

$$\frac{\text{Number of personal references}}{\text{Number of God references}} < 1 \ = \text{God} - \text{Centered}$$

Figure 4. Adjusted Thornton formula for God-centeredness.

As an example, following these procedures for "How Great Thou Art" (CCLI SongID 14181) finds eighteen first-person singular pronouns (*I*, *me*, and *my*) with zero third-person singular, first-person plural, and third-person plural pronouns. It also finds nine names of God (*God*, *Lord*, *Christ*, and *Savior*) with twelve indirect God references (*Him*, *He*, *His*, *Thee*, *Thou*, and *Thy*). Thus, the Thornton formula classifies "How Great Thou Art" as .86 God-centered following the below equation in figure 5:

$$\frac{\text{Number of personal references}}{\text{Number of God references}} = \frac{18}{9+12} = \frac{18}{21} = .86$$

Figure 5. "How Great Thou Art" Thornton formula quantified.

Thornton's formula is helpful because it both classifies a song and measures it by providing a ratio. As seen above, "How Great Thou Art" is God-centered at .86. This means there are both God-centered and man-centered lyrics but there are more God-centered than man-centered. But some songs do not have any man-centered lyrics at all (i.e., "Majesty") and are thus considered 0.00 God-centered making a case that it is more God-centered than a song like "How Great Thou Art." The merit of one of these songs over another is well beyond this current discussion; however, the ratio allowed deeper statistical analysis than categorical analysis alone.

A new formula: the McKinney formula. The literature suggests the importance of the God-centeredness of a song but also whether that song is singularly-focused or communally-focused. Unfortunately, Thornton's formula cannot quantify songs that include either no singular or communal references and errors regularly appeared for songs with no singular or no communal references when quantified following Thornton's formula.[15] Thus, Thornton's formula required modification to both classify and measure the individuality of a song. For the sake of clarity, this dissertation identifies this revised formula as the "McKinney" formula throughout this dissertation. For this dissertation, the following procedures were used to classify songs as singular, communal, neutral, or none.

Following the counting procedures listed above, each song was quantified adding all individual words (first-person singular) and dividing that by the total words of the song. The quotient was then subtracted from the total communal words (third-person singular, first-person plural, and third-person plural) divided by the total words of the song. Before the formula applied: first, songs with no communal or singular words were classified as none; then, the formula below in figure 6 classifies the singularity of each song.

[15] Fortunately, this was not an issue when determining the amount of God-centeredness as no song included zero names of God or indirect references to Him.

$$\left(\frac{\text{Singular}}{\text{Total}}\right) - \left(\frac{\text{Communal}}{\text{Total}}\right) < 0 = \text{Communal}$$

$$\left(\frac{\text{Singular}}{\text{Total}}\right) - \left(\frac{\text{Communal}}{\text{Total}}\right) = 0 = \text{Neutral}$$

$$\left(\frac{\text{Singular}}{\text{Total}}\right) - \left(\frac{\text{Communal}}{\text{Total}}\right) > 0 = \text{Singular}$$

Figure 6. McKinney formula for singularity.

As an example, following these procedures for "How Great Thou Art" (CCLI SongID 14181) finds eighteen first-person singular pronouns (*I*, *me*, and *my*) with zero third-person singular, first-person plural, and third-person plural pronouns. "How Great Thou Art" has a total of 172 words. Thus, the McKinney formula classifies "How Great Thou Art" as .10 singular following the below equation in figure 7:

$$\left(\frac{\text{Singular}}{\text{Total}}\right) - \left(\frac{\text{Communal}}{\text{Total}}\right) = \left(\frac{18}{172}\right) - \left(\frac{0}{172}\right) = .10 - 0 = \ .10$$

Figure 7. "How Great Thou Art" McKinney formula quantified.

McKinney's formula, like Thornton's, is helpful because it both classifies a song and provides a continuous interval variable. As seen above, "How Great Thou Art" is singular at .10. Because of McKinney's formula, this dissertation can classify and measure differences among songs based on interval variables.

Secondary analysis. As suggested by the scholarly literature, combining the classifications for Thornton and McKinney formulas allows an additional level of analysis that combines both the categories of God-centered or man-centered as well as communal or singular for each song. Ignoring songs that are neutral creates a four-point sequential scale: 1) God and communal, 2) God and singular, 3) Man and communal, and 4) Man and singular. Scholars clearly lean toward

God-centered songs above man-centered and communal songs above singular; thus, this scale represents biases toward one or another. There is an argument for combining the middle two categories into a distinct group; however, this researcher chooses songs that are "God and singular" over songs that are "Man and communal" and thus left the distinctiveness.

Biblical foundations of corporate singing. There are two distinct formulas this dissertation uses to objectively measure results: (1) the Thornton formula labeling songs as God-centered or man-centered, and (2) the McKinney formula labeling songs as singular or communal. In addition, there are three types of analysis for songs: (1) a statistical analysis supplying a ratio variable for the Thornton formula and interval variable for the McKinney formula, (2) a categorical analysis labeling songs for the Thornton formula as *God-centered*, *man-centered*, or *neutral* and for the McKinney formula as *None*, *Communal*, *Neutral*, or *Singular*, and (3) a secondary analysis combining the Thornton and McKinney categorical labels into *God and communal*, *God and singular*, *man and communal*, and *man and singular*.

Psalm Analysis

One argument for individually-focused songs is the singing of the Psalms. Hicks, in *The Worship Pastor*, supports this view writing:

> I used to phrase this question, "Is it God-centered?" largely because of the observation that so many current worship songs were "me-centered." Unfortunately, this emphasis has yielded a knee-jerk reaction against any and all songs that utilize first person pronouns. The Psalms, yet again, are instructive here. They are filled with personal, individual references from the "me" perspective. Perhaps the difference, then, is the aim. One always gets the sense in reading the "me" Psalms that they are aimed Godward even when they are deeply personal.[16]

[16] Zac M. Hicks, *The Worship Pastor: A Call to Ministry for Worship Leaders and Teams* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 74.

To justify this stance–represented here by Hicks, as well as Keown, Page, and others who support individualistic singing because of the Psalms–this researcher statistically analyzed the Psalms following the same ratio criteria as the top CCLI songs.[17]

One additional point of analysis is whether the author of the psalm uses individual or communal language. For instance, for David to use individualistic language seems appropriate when writing a psalm for private worship. However, when writing songs for corporate worship one expects language to be more communal. Similarly, readers expect a group of psalmists, like the Korahites, to use communal language as they sang as a group. Thus, additional analysis supplied insights on using the Psalms as a validation for using first-person language. Utilizing "Psalms Explorer," as part of Logos 10, and marking each Psalm by its first listed author (i.e., Psalm 124 is first attributed to Anonymous [LXX] then to David and was thus analyzed as "Anonymous [LXX]") allows the McKinney analysis of each psalm to be attributed to either an individual or group of writers.[18]

The final analysis method combines the Thornton and McKinney results for the Psalms and compare those to the CCLI body of songs. Combining the Thornton and McKinney analysis and ignoring results that were either *None* or *Neutral*, creates four sequential categories. The first category, *God and Communal*, utilizes the most favorable result from both the Thornton and McKinney formulas. The second category, *God and Singular*, utilizes the favorable results from the Thornton formula and the less favorable results from the McKinney formula. The third category, *Man and Communal*, utilizes the less favorable results from the Thornton formula and

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[17] Hicks, *The Worship Pastor*, 6; Nick Page, *And Now Let's Move into a Time of Nonsense: Why Worship Songs are Failing the Church* (Authentic Media, 2003), ProQuest Ebook Central.

[18] David Witthoff, Kristopher A. Lyle, and Matt Nerdahl, *Psalms Form and Structure*, edited by Eli Evans (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife), 2014.

the favorable results from the McKinney formula. The second category is preferred over the third category because keeping songs God-centered is more important than speaking as a community. The fourth category, *Man and Singular*, utilizes the least favorable combination of results from the Thornton and McKinney formulas.

ACP Discipleship Analysis

Thanks to the public availability of ACP data, it is possible to analyze attendance trends over the same period as the CCLI analysis. However, attendance alone is not an indicator of how many are being discipled within the church. Thus, two indicators paint a better picture of how well churches disciple over the same period: 1) total percentage of baptisms and 2) total percentage of people involved in Sunday School (SS). To determine the first, total percentage of baptisms, the total number of ACP reported baptisms was divided by the total ACP membership and displayed as a percentage as illustrated in figure 8.

$$\frac{\text{Baptisms}}{\text{Total Membership}} = \text{Baptism \%}$$

Figure 8. Baptism Percentage Formula (BPF).

Similarly, to determine the total percentage of people involved in SS, the total number of ACP reported SS attendance was divided by the total ACP membership and displayed as a percentage as illustrated in figure 9.

$$\frac{\text{SS}}{\text{Total Membership}} = \text{SS \%}$$

Figure 9. SS Percentage Formula (SSPF).

Unfortunately, the data for SS is inconsistent after 2010 (from 2011 to 2014, the ACP did not report SS attendance). When SS data collection continued in 2015, the measurement changed

from “Sunday School Enrollment” to “Sunday School/Bible Study/Small Group Average Attendance.” Thus, two distinct analyses were completed: from 1989-2010 and 2015-2022. In addition, in 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2020 ACP reports missing SS data and a clear decrease in raw data was noticeable (in 2010 7.6 million in SS was reduced to 3.6 million in SS when data resumed in 2015). However, it is possible that the Baptism Percentage Formula (BPF) and the Sunday School Percentage Formula (SSPF) accurately reflects modern trends and was compared to approximated interview results (even though a bias in interview results is likely).

ACP data also began reporting Primary Worship Attendance (PWA) in 2005. Thus, an additional calculation was made following the below procedures.

$$\frac{\text{Baptism}}{\text{PWA}} = \text{Baptism PWA \%}$$

Figure 10. Baptism PWA percentage formula.

$$\frac{\text{SS}}{\text{PWA}} = \text{SS PWA \%}$$

Figure 11. SS PWA percentage formula.

Correlating baptism and discipleship percentages against the Thornton or McKinney CCLI analysis does not prove causation between the two. However, if church attendance, and discipleship numbers, change similarly to singing trends then there is a potential correlation between the two and further research will be encouraged.

30-Year Trends

Other scholarly song lyric studies focused their analysis providing a glimpse of the data, but no study has enveloped the Top 100 Songs from 1989–2023 to mark modern trends and supply statistical analysis for corporate song lyrics. Using the procedures listed above, this

researcher analyzed the CCLI data over time to mark modern singing trends. Song classifications were converted to percentages to allow for variations in the data when forming tables (i.e., 1989 only included 97 songs while 1990 through 2022 often contained 200 songs [100 songs reported in June and 100 songs reported in December]). In addition, Thornton's formula was applied to data from 1989 to 2023 marking God-centered, man-centered, and neutral song trends over a 30-year period. The McKinney formula was also applied to data presented from 1989 to 2023 marking none, singular, neutral, and communal song trends over a 30-year period.

A secondary analysis combining Thornton and McKinney's results was applied, and data presented in chart form from 1989 to 2023 marking God and communal, God and singular, Man and communal, and Man and singular trends over a 30-year period. In addition, Thornton's CCLI results were compared to the Psalm results, McKinney's CCLI results were independently compared to the Psalm results, and the combination of Thornton's and McKinney's results were compared to the Psalms based on the four-point scale discussed above.

To deepen results in search of statistical significance, this researcher used comparative and correlative statistical analysis using STATA BE Version 17 and IBM's SPSS Version 29.[19] The STATA and SPSS analysis compared Thornton and McKinney data sets using a correlation matrix, independently analyzed Thornton and McKinney data sets over the 30-year period visualized through scatterplots, and independently analyzed Thornton and McKinney data sets to the Psalms. Additional STATA and SPSS analysis compared Thornton and McKinney trends against ACP data.

[19] STATA BE Version 17.0 (StataCorp LLC, College Station, TX); IBM SPSS Statistics for Mac Version 29.0 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY: IBM Corp).

Church Song Records

Song records from April to June of 2023 were supplied by churches interviewed. When CCLI SongID's were provided, songs were analyzed according to the above methodology. However, when songs provided did not include a CCLI SongID, they were individually analyzed before results were compared to church leader interview results.

Limitations

This data analysis is not without its limits. One limit noted earlier in this dissertation, is that not all songs are reported to CCLI (especially songs that are public domain). The lack of such songs skew data toward songs written more recently. However, the exclusion of such public domain songs is likely consistent from 1989 through 2023 and thus this limitation is anticipated to minimally affect the data. Another limitation was churches who do not list their websites on the Florida Baptist Convention's "Find a Church" page, and churches who do not provide a contact email address, were not included in this dissertation's search. Thus, a segment of churches (likely smaller churches who do not have a church website) were not included in this study. Another limitation is the possibility of skewed data in ACP SS percentages, particularly after 2010 when data collection was more erratic. This data was compared to interview results to see if recent low percentages reported in the ACP coincide with church leader discipleship percentages in an effort to confirm the ACP data.

Summary

This section supplied a variety of methodology to create a wholistic picture of modern trends in corporate song lyrics and how that may affect discipleship percentages in churches. The data analysis is designed to address church leader views of modern corporate worship singing trends through senior pastor and worship pastor interviews and to supply quantifiable statistical

analysis to data sets of modern CCLI song trends, Psalm analysis, and ACP discipleship analysis across 30-years of data. This data also supplies a limited statistical analysis between song lyric and discipleship trends. This methodology is designed to create wholistic and quantifiable data results to support or refute this dissertation's hypotheses and to supply opportunities for future analysis.

Chapter Four: Research Findings

This chapter presents five sections of research findings relevant to this dissertation. First, this chapter presents and discusses findings for church leader interviews and church song record data analysis. Presentation of data begins with quantitatively presenting responses, then qualitatively summarizing church leader explanations to questions adding depth to responses, then closes with quantitatively analyzing church song records. Second, this chapter presents statistical, categorical, and secondary analysis for the body of songs listed in the CCLI Top 100 songs from 1989 to 2023 in the US. Third, this chapter establishes modern trends by analyzing data from 1989 to 2023 for Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI) and Annual Church Profile (ACP) data sets. Fourth, it compares church leader interview results to current CCLI and ACP data to validate church leader interviews. Fifth and final, this chapter summarizes the findings.

Church Leader Interviews

Following the interview procedures listed above in the Methods chapter, this researcher compiled a list of 1,175 potential Florida churches for interviews. Of the 1,175 potential churches, 617 were excluded because they (1) did not have valid email addresses, (2) the provided website link did not lead to a valid website, (3) were not an SBC church, (4) did not have a full-time worship or senior pastor, or (5) had a website in a language other than English. The remaining 558 churches were systematically emailed and given the opportunity to participate. Of the 558 churches, 10 churches declined to participate through an email response, seven expressed interview interest but never completed an interview, and 511 churches never responded to the interview request email. As a result, of 1,175 potential churches in Florida, 30

respondents (2.5%) met the interview criteria and completed the corporate worship singing interview performed by this researcher.[1]

Church Leader Interview Results

This section supplies quantifiable interview answers and a summary of respondent explanations most relevant to this dissertation. While interviews followed the *Interview Script* (see Appendix H), not all responses will be thoroughly discussed below. This section will follow the order of the interview by presenting general questions, corporate worship philosophy, communal connections in corporate worship, individual versus communally-focused lyrics, God-centered versus man-centered lyrics, closing with analysis of corporate worship song records supplied by interview respondents, before summarizing results.

General questions

Of the 30 interview respondents, 18 are *worship pastors* and 12 are *senior pastors*.[2] Five churches were from the *West* region, four from the *North*, nine from the *East*, seven from *Central*, four from the *Southwest*, and one from the *Southeast* of Florida.[3] Based on the original 1,175 potentials found in the FLBaptist.org search the ideal region distribution of 30 interviews should be: three from the *West*, five from the *North*, seven from the *East*, nine from *Central*,

[1] 2.5% is considered low and leaves a considerable margin of error. Interview responses may be biased by education level, interest in the interview material, or a variety of additional factors. Therefore, this researcher recommends further studies to rationalize this researcher's findings.

[2] This researcher will categorically identify respondents as *worship pastors* and *senior pastors* even though their precise titles varied from person to person.

[3] Matthew J. Pinson, ed., *Perspectives on Christian Worship: Five Views* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2009). While church leaders represented various regions of the state, this researcher perceived (though did not directly ask) that church leaders implemented traditional, blended, and contemporary worship styles as discussed within *Perspectives on Christian Worship: 5 Views*. Thus, results may not represent churches utilizing *Liturgical* and *Emerging Worship* worship styles.

three from the *Southwest*, and three from the *Southeast*. Comparatively, this dissertation's interview distribution includes: two more from the *West*, one less than ideal from the *North*, two more from the *East*, two less than ideal from the *Central*, one more from the *Southwest*, and two less than ideal from the *Southeast* region as presented in table 1.

Table 1. Interview region distribution

FL Region	Ideal Number of Interviews	Actual Number of Interviews	Variance
West	3	5	2
North	5	4	-1
East	7	9	2
Central	9	7	-2
Southwest	3	4	1
Southeast	3	1	-2

Along with the respondent's regional distribution, the respondents also showed diversity in their average corporate worship attendance, average discipleship attendance, and percentage of congregants attending weekly discipleship events.[4] The respondents estimated average worship attendance is lowest at 45 and highest at 1,400 with a mean of 347.9, median of 242.5, and a mode of 250. Figure 12 shows the estimated average worship attendance in boxplot form.

[4] Many respondents had various names for their weekly discipleship activity–including Bible Fellowship Groups, home groups, family groups, etc.–this section generalizes all names for weekly discipleship groups under the term "discipleship."

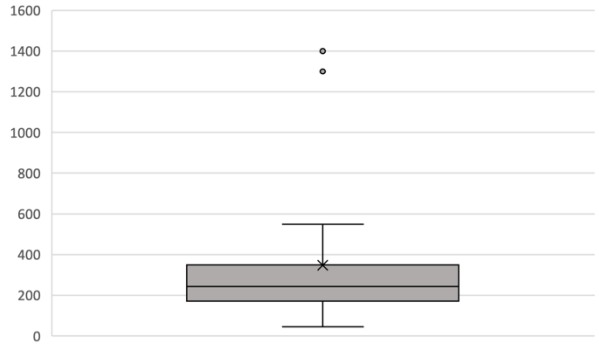

Figure 12: Estimated average worship attendance of interviewed churches.

Respondents estimated discipleship attendance is lowest at 36 and highest at 950 with a mean of 194.8, median of 137.5, and a mode of 100. Figure 13 shows the estimated average discipleship attendance in boxplot form.

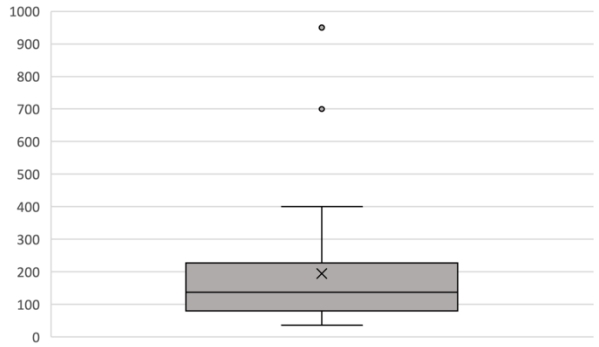

Figure 13: Estimated discipleship attendance of interviewed churches.

Calculated based on the above data, the average discipleship percentage is lowest at 27.0%, highest at 86.7% with a mean of 61.3%, median of 67.3%, and a mode of 80.0%. Figure 14 shows the estimated average SS attendance in boxplot form.

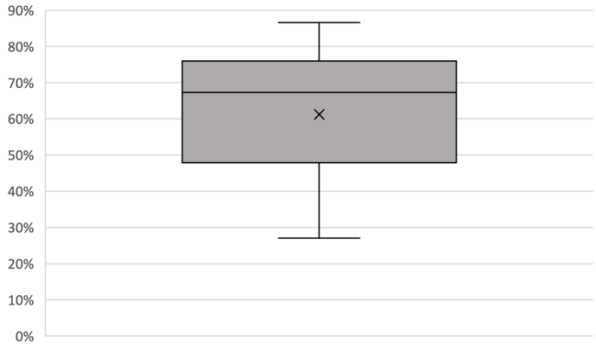

Figure 14: Estimated SS percentage of interviewed churches.

The distribution of data for estimated average attendance, estimated average SS, and SS percentage shows the diversity of size and discipleship involvement as shown in table 2.

Table 2. Interview general role and attendance results

Respondent Pseudonym	Role	Average Attendance	Average SS	SS %
First West Worship	Worship	375	300	80.0%
First East Senior	Senior	250	170	68.0%
First Central Senior	Senior	1300	700	53.8%
Second Central Worship	Worship	350	200	57.1%
Third Central Worship	Worship	325	88	27.1%
Second East Worship	Worship	185	140	75.7%
Second West Senior	Senior	235	185	78.7%
First North Worship	Worship	175	115	65.7%
Second North Worship	Worship	145	100	69.0%
Third East Worship	Worship	1400	950	67.9%
Fourth Central Senior	Senior	300	100	33.3%
Fifth Central Worship	Worship	85	70	82.4%
Third West Senior	Senior	160	124	77.5%
Third North Worship	Worship	195	150	76.9%
Fourth West Senior	Senior	85	60	70.6%
First Southeast Senior	Senior	180	75	41.7%
Sixth Central Worship	Worship	217	80	36.9%
Fourth North Worship	Worship	300	260	86.7%
First Southwest Senior	Senior	550	220	40.0%
Second Southwest Senior	Senior	1300	400	30.8%
Fifth West Worship	Worship	350	250	71.4%
Third Southwest Senior	Senior	75	50	66.7%
Fourth East Senior	Senior	550	275	50.0%
Fifth East Worship	Worship	270	135	50.0%
Sixth East Worship	Worship	180	125	69.4%
Seventh East Worship	Worship	310	192	61.9%
Fourth Southwest Worship	Worship	95	65	68.4%
Seventh Central Senior	Senior	45	36	80.0%
Sixth West Worship	Worship	250	150	60.0%
Eighth East Senior	Worship	200	80	40.0%

Table 2 also shows that three churches have an estimated average attendance of 1,300, 1,400, and 1,300 with SS percentages of 53.8%, 67.9%, and 30.8% (respectively) suggesting worship attendance and average discipleship attendance are not correlated. To rationalize this

observation, a Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between estimated average worship attendance and estimated average discipleship attendance. A moderate negative correlation was found (r (28) = -.312, p =.093), indicating an insignificant linear relationship between the two variables.[5] Larger numbers of average worship attendance do not equate to higher percentages of discipleship attendance among churches interviewed.

Corporate worship philosophy

After respondents supplied background information about themselves and their churches, they were asked: "What is your philosophy for corporate worship singing?" Several respondents rightly noted the broadness of the question before supplying their answers. The purpose of such a broad question was to allow respondents the opportunity to respond with little bias and guidance from this researcher, though some bias existed based on respondents receiving some of the interview questions in advance (see Appendix G). For this reason, responses were broad but still fell into three broad categories: biblically-based, corporate, and other.

Biblically-based responses. Respondents marked the importance of corporate worship singing being biblically-based. Third Southwest Senior marked this saying corporate worship singing should be *doctrinally sound*; while Fifth Central Worship, as part of his eight-point philosophy, marked both *Sola Scriptura* and *biblically-formed* as the first two aspects of his corporate worship singing philosophy.[6] Others spoke more generally, like Seventh East Worship, who said

[5] -.310 falls within the moderate correlation range. However, since the moderate range is from .3 to .7, a result of -.310 is barely considered moderate.

[6] Third West Senior, video interview by author, Google Meet, August 21, 2023; Fifth Central Worship, video interview by author, Google Meet, August 18, 2023; This dissertation will use masculine identifiers for all church interview respondents because all respondents were men.

corporate worship singing is "a biblical mandate for believers to gather and sing."[7] Another consistent answer was that corporate worship singing should be theologically rich and informed by the Bible itself.

A second division of biblically-based responses focused on corporate worship singing about and to God. Second Southwest Senior said: "I want the songs to be God-centered, not man-centered," while others, like Third Central Worship, said choosing music that "glorifies God" is important.[8] Others, like Fourth West Senior, said the purpose of corporate singing is "obviously to glorify God…we sing for an audience of one."[9] Each respondent supplied unique justification for their responses, but a consistent theme in corporate worship singing philosophies was the importance of it being God-centered in both content and directed toward God.

A third division of biblically-based responses was Christocentric. Sixth Central Worship said corporate worship singing should be "ultimately focused on the ministry of Christ."[10] In addition to Fifth Central Worship's responses above, the third of eight aspects of his corporate worship philosophy was that it was "gospel wrought."[11] In addition, similar phrases like "honors Christ" (as spoken by First Southeast Senior) were also prevalent in respondents' answers.[12]

Biblically-based answers were so common that twenty-one respondents (70%) included it as a major part of their response. Even respondents who focused on other topics often included

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[7] Seventh East Worship, video interview by author, Google Meet, September 13, 2023.

[8] Second Southwest Senior, video interview by author, Google Meet, August 30, 2023; Third Central Worship, video interview by author, Google Meet, August 4, 2023.

[9] Fourth West Senior, video interview by author, Google Meet, August 25, 2023.

[10] Sixth Central Worship, video interview by author, Google Meet, August 18, 2023.

[11] Fifth Central Worship, August 18, 2023.

[12] First Southeast Senior, video interview by author, Google Meet, August 25, 2023.

theological, the importance of the Bible, God-centered, or gospel-centered aspects in their responses. Thus, respondents clearly emphasized the importance of corporate worship singing being biblically-based in both their major themes and throughout their responses.

Corporate. Respondents also emphasized the corporate nature of corporate worship singing. For some respondents, *corporate* was an obvious answer, but one they wanted to articulate nonetheless. First West Worship immediately responded to the question by saying: "First one is the fact that it is congregational…I fully intend for all God's people there to be singing. It's non-negotiable in scripture, and that's my main focus for corporate worship singing is that it's congregational."[13] Third East Worship also emphasized the importance of the congregation being actively involved in corporate worship singing saying:

> Certainly, you know, other than the preaching of the word, I think the singing of the people of God in our corporate worship experiences is the next highest value that we have. And because it's the work of the people, right? It's what they're doing and participating, responding and all of those things. And so, I believe in a big corporate worship, congregational singing culture.[14]

Third East Worship's "congregational singing culture" was reflected by other respondents who similarly emphasized active engagement by the congregation in services. For them, corporate worship singing should "be facilitated in such a way that people are engaged as participants and not spectators."[15] Thus, according to First Central Senior, corporate worship singing "needs to be in a way that [the congregation] understand[s]."[16]

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[13] First West Worship, video interview by author, Google Meet, July 20, 2023.

[14] Third East Worship, video interview by author, Google Meet, August 11, 2023.

[15] Third North Worship, video interview by author, Google Meet, August 25, 2023.

[16] First Central Senior, video interview by author, Google Meet, July 31, 2023.

Thirteen respondents (43.3%) specifically marked the corporate nature of their corporate worship singing philosophy as a significant component of their response. For them, it was not enough to assume corporate worship singing is a corporate activity, they instead took part (or all) of their answer in describing the importance of corporate worship singing being both active and engaging for the congregation to participate.

Other responses. In addition to corporate worship singing philosophies being *biblically-based* and *corporate*, respondents also supplied a variety of other ideas. For Fifth West Worship, his entire corporate worship singing philosophy could be reduced to "balance."[17] For him, songs should be directed to God, but some should also be directed horizontally; balance between "peppy praise music" and "lament and crying out to the Lord" was important, as well as some music that is "theologically rich" alongside other "simple" songs.[18] Similarly, Sixth Central Worship suggested balance marking the importance of mimicking the many themes presented in the book of Psalms.[19]

A second common response was that worship should be evident throughout the week, as respondents sought to encourage all-of-life worshipers. Both Second East Worship and Second Central Worship emphasized the importance of worship occurring throughout the week, which does not differentiate between private and corporate worship, though it marks a biblical understanding of worship.[20] Other themes significant to respondent answers included *excellence*

[17] Fifth West Worship, video interview by author, Google Meet, August 30, 2023.

[18] Fifth West Worship, August 30, 2023.

[19] Sixth Central Worship, August 18, 2023.

[20] Second East Worship, video interview by author, Google Meet, August 8, 2023; Second Central Worship, video interview by author, Google Meet, August 4, 2023.

(Second North Worship), *witnesses* to the lost and for edification (First North Worship), and bringing congregants to an *awareness of God* (Fourth Southwest Worship).[21]

Philosophy statement in three words. In addition to the unscripted answers discussed above, respondents provided "three words to describe [their] corporate worship singing philosophy." Of the eighty-eight responses, thirty-nine were categorically *biblically-based* (44.3%), thirty-four were categorically *corporate* (38.6%), and fifteen were categorically *other* (17.0%). As this question was not supplied in advance, it took respondents a moment to determine their list. Interestingly, three respondents (10%) used words currently being used in their church vision statements, and three respondents (10%) supplied entirely biblically-based answers; but significantly, twenty respondents (66.7%) included both categorically *biblically-based* and *corporate* responses to their list of words to describe their corporate worship singing philosophy.

Although respondents were given full freedom in their responses, their answers heavily emphasized corporate worship singing being *biblically-based* that is *theologically rich*, *God-centered*, and *gospel-centered*. Respondents also emphasized the corporate nature of corporate worship as well as a variety of *other* answers. Asking for reduced answers to their corporate worship singing philosophies presented mostly *biblically-based* and *corporate* responses.

The difference between private and corporate worship. Following corporate worshiping singing philosophies, respondents answered two questions determining if they viewed private and corporate worship as two synonymous or uniquely different activities. When asked, "Is your philosophy for corporate worship singing different than your philosophy for private worship

[21] Second North Worship, video interview by author, Google Meet, August 14, 2023; First North Worship, video interview by author, Google Meet, August 11, 2023; Fourth Southwest Worship, video interview by author, Google Meet, September 15, 2023.

singing?" twenty respondents said *yes* (66.7%), eight said *no* (26.7%), and two said *both* (6.7%). For those who responded *yes*, their explanations were most often based on the difference between worshipers being alone and with others. They noted that with others involved in corporate worship, participants should be mindful of the collective body of believers over the individual's needs. In private worship, no such consideration is required, so worshipers customize their approaches based on their personal preferences.

Of the eight responses that said there was no difference between private and corporate worship, five of them noted the same principles guiding their earlier corporate worship singing philosophy answers by applying them to both corporate and private singing. The two *no* respondents emphasized the communal difference between private and worship singing in their explanation, yet their answer remained as *no* difference between the two. The final *no* respondent marked his self-perceived "horrible" voice keeps him from singing in corporate worship, which suggests his *no* should be *yes* as he perceived a willingness to sing in one setting but not the other.[22] Thus, three explanations of the *no* responses suggest their answers presumably should have been *yes*.[23]

Looking at the data by church leader role: sixteen of all worship pastors responded *yes* (88.9%), with one responding *no* (5.6%), and one responding *both* (5.6%); while at the same time only four senior pastors responded *yes* (33.3%), with seven responding *no* (58.3%), and one responding *both* (8.3%).[24] These responses show a clear difference between worship and senior

[22] First Southwest Senior, video interview by author, Google Meet, August 25, 2023.

[23] While respondent explanations sometimes suggested an answer different than their *yes* or *no* answers, this researcher did not change respondent answers. For the above example, all three respondent answers are presented as *no* even though their explanations suggested otherwise.

[24] Percentages based on total responses by respondent church role.

pastors as 53.3% of all *yes* responses came from worship pastors while only 13.3% came from senior pastors.

Formational aspects of corporate worship songs. The Literature Review of this dissertation devoted a section of material on the formative nature of corporate worship singing to theology and the communal identity of congregants. As a result, respondents were asked direct questions on both these topics to determine the church leader beliefs on the formative nature of corporate worship songs. When asked, "Do corporate worship songs form the theology of congregants?" twenty-four respondents answered *yes* (80.0%), five responded *no* (16.7%), and one responded *both* (3.3%). Of the five *no* answers, three of them, and also the respondent who supplied the *both* answer, were willing to say corporate worship singing "assists" in forming the theology of congregants, but it does not solely form the theology of congregants. The remaining two *no* respondents suggest corporate worship singing was "representational" of congregant theology and not "formational." Table 3 shows the *no* and *both* responses and a summation of their explanations.

Table 3. *No* and *Both* responses to songs forming theology.

Pseudonym	**Response**	**Explanation**
Third Central Worship	No	Representational
Fourth Central Senior	No	Assists
Third West Senior	No	Assists
First Southwest Senior	Both	Assists
Second Southwest Senior	No	Representational
Third Southwest Senior	No	Assists

Analyzing these responses through the role of the church leader shows 94.4% of worship pastors responded *yes,* while only 58.3% of senior pastors responded the same. Had the question

been reworded to say *assist* instead of *form*, some of these senior pastors may have changed their answers as illustrated in Fourth Central Senior's explanation:

> The reason I don't [think it] form[s] it is because if you get your theology from your singing, you're in bad shape. I think they [the songs] either enforce it or dilute it. But to be theologically correct, it has to come from Scripture. So, if the songs, as a secondary, if songs were from the Bible, then yes, they would form your theology.[25]

Regardless of the ambiguously worded question, respondents still strongly supported corporate worship songs as formational while others supported corporate worship songs as assisting in the formation of congregant theology.

When asked "Do corporate worship songs form the communal identity of congregants?" twenty-three respondents answered *yes* (76.7%), five responded *no* (16.7%), and two responded *maybe* (6.7%). Like the above question, all seven *no* and *maybe* respondents responded *no* based on corporate worship songs not being the only factor contributing toward communal identity. Therefore, according to church leaders, corporate worship singing at least assists in forming both congregant theology and their communal identity.

Summary. According to church leader interviews, corporate worship philosophies are guided by three categories. First, corporate worship songs should be biblically-based, including theologically rich lyrics informed by the Bible, contain God-centered lyrics, and be Christocentric. Second, corporate worship songs should be corporate by encouraging congregants to actively participate and place the needs of the body of believers above the individual. Third, corporate worship songs should be balanced, encourage all-of-life worship, excellence, witness to the lost, for edification of believers, and bring congregants to an awareness of God. Interviews also support a clear distinction between private and corporate

[25] Fourth Central Senior, video interview by author, Google Meet, August 18, 2023.

worship practices as well as corporate worship songs assisting in the formation of both the theology and communal identity of congregants.

Communal connections in corporate worship

When asked, "Do you think corporate worship songs encourage congregants to engage more in the discipleship aspects of your church?" nineteen respondents answered *yes* (63.3%), nine responded *no* (30.0%), and two did not respond (6.7%). Within the nine *no* responses, four discussed how the songs neither had a positive nor a negative impact; still, their answer remained *no* and have been presented accordingly. Two of the remaining *no* responses depended on their personal experience by saying: "It hasn't been my experience" and "I don't see that happening as much."[26] Sixth East Worship, a *no* respondent, redirected his response by noting the importance of discipleship pointing toward worship.[27] The two remaining *no* responses rejected corporate worship music leading toward discipleship.

The question "Do you think corporate worship songs encourage congregants to engage more in the discipleship aspects of your church?" was intentionally designed to work alongside the previous question, "Do corporate worship songs form the communal identity of congregants?" The wholistic idea of the two questions is simple: If corporate worship songs form the communal identity of congregants, then corporate worship songs encourage congregants to engage more in the discipleship aspects of the church. The response to one question should be synonymous with the second. Yet, of the thirty interviews, only twenty-two respondents held the

[26] Second Southwest Senior, August 30, 2023; Eighth East Senior, video interview by author, Google Meet, September 14, 2023.

[27] Sixth East Worship, video interview by author, Google Meet, September 13, 2023.

same answer for both questions (seventeen *yes* to *yes*, four *no* to *no*, and one *maybe* to *no* response).

The change in response suggests church leaders view communal identity as independent from discipleship opportunities. This claim is supported most clearly by Third Southwest Senior's explanation which was provided without having communal identity defined by this researcher. Third, Southwest Senior responded *yes* to communal identity as "certain people are attracted to certain styles of music," while he also responded *no* to encouraging more discipleship engagement because relationships encourage discipleship involvement more than music does.[28] Thus, Third Southwest Senior views music as bringing people together for corporate worship but people encouraging congregants to move from corporate worship to discipleship opportunities of the church. Other respondents whose answers changed did so for a variety of different explanations. The common thread in their explanations is that corporate worship singing's role in forming communal identity is independent of its role in encouraging congregants to engage more in discipleship opportunities.

The two remaining "Communal Connections in Corporate Worship" questions did not yield significant data relevant to this project, so discussion of respondent explanations is limited to the following as it is relevant to one of this dissertation's research questions: Church leaders utilize a variety of corporate worship opportunities to encourage congregants to engage more in discipleship activities of the church through sermons, song preparations, announcements, and others. While music plays a role in congregants engaging in discipleship activities of the church, it is but one of many techniques church leaders utilize. In addition to various aspects of corporate worship, only eight church leaders interviewed (26.7%) responded they "encourage congregants

[28] Third Southwest Senior, video interview by author, Google Meet, August 25, 2023.

into the discipleship aspects of your church" as part of their platform leadership, with the remaining twenty-two church leaders (73.3%) involved in one-on-one conversations or both one-one-conversations and as part of their platform leadership. Thus, most church leader responses support the importance of corporate worship songs encouraging congregants to engage more in discipleship.

Individual versus communally-focused lyrics

Moving beyond corporate worship singing philosophies and communal connections in corporate worship service, this researcher transitioned the interviews with the following spoken transition:

> These next questions deal with something that occurs in scholarly literature. Some scholars suggest an increasing number of corporate worship songs emphasizing the individual within corporate worship services by utilizing individualistic language. The idea here is that there is more "me" lyrics than "we" lyrics while scholars suggest there should be more "we" than "me." With this in mind, I have a few questions for you.

The following questions were intentionally designed to determine the church leader's validation of scholarly literature's claim, to address sub-points within the scholarly literature, and to establish how many church leaders intentionally choose songs based on communal language.

When asked, "Do you agree that modern trends are individualistic?" twenty-four respondents answered *yes* (80.0%), zero responded *no* (0.0%), three responded *both* (10.0%), and three did not respond (10.0%). Of the three respondents who answered *no*, all of them marked an abundance of songs utilizing individualistic language but also noted recently written songs utilizing communal language. Thus, they could not fully agree with the question because they recognized a recent increase in songs utilizing communal language. Of the three respondents who did not respond to the question, Fourth Central Senior agreed the radio is *definitely*

individualistic, but "The church services I've been involved in, not necessarily."[29] He continued by noting he did not have enough data to provide a response. A similar explanation was provided by the other two respondents who did not answer the question.

Interestingly, all three respondents who did not answer were senior pastors. In addition, seventeen of the eighteen worship pastors interviewed responded *yes* (94.4%) while of the senior pastors: seven responded *yes* (58.3%), two responded *both* (16.7%), and three did not respond (25.0%). Worship pastors strongly marked modern times as individualistic, while senior pastors were less inclined to reach the same conclusion. In defense of senior pastors, they are not always enveloped with the details of corporate worship services as their responsibilities are often to provide overall leadership to the services. Thus, senior pastors having a lower response rate is expected.

The question itself, "Do you agree that modern trends are individualistic?" could have yielded different answers had it not been prepared with the above transition. However, evident in *yes* responses is that respondents answered as it related to CCM and CWM for both private and corporate worship. Their answers often mentioned *The American Dream*, as well as cultural shifts between generations becoming more singular-focused. Respondents also marked increasing *me-centered* songs as song writers write songs based on their view of what God has done for them, limited theological depth, and personal experience. The explanations for this question show a clear frustration that "rampant individualism is in the church," evidenced significantly within the songs of corporate worship.[30] While the question itself is deficient as it is

[29] Fourth Central Senior, August 18, 2023.

[30] Fifth Central Worship, August 18, 2023.

too broad; fortunately, the overarching theme of the interview seemingly compensated for its broadness.

This dissertation presupposes that some singular-focused language within corporate worship is acceptable as personal response is an essential aspect of corporate worship. When asked, "Should corporate worship song lyrics focus on an individual's Christian walk?" thirteen responded *yes* (43.3%), two responded *no* (6.7%), fourteen responded *both* (46.7%), and one did not respond (3.3%). Explanations for the *yes* responses consistently emphasized some parts of the service focusing on individuals if those songs pointed them toward God and His attributes. Similarly, the *both* responses emphasized the validity of parts of corporate worship services encouraging congregants toward individual response to God. Basically, church leaders allow for some aspects of corporate worship, including corporate worship song lyrics, focusing on an individual's walk as long as it remains God-centered and relevant to the entire congregation.

As described in the Methods section above, some scholars argue for singular-focused songs rationalized by the language employed in the book of Psalms. For this reason, church leaders were asked: "Some church leaders and scholars suggest individually-focused lyrics mimic the Psalms. Do you believe the Psalms have an individualistic focus?" Of the responses, five respondents answered *yes* (16.7%), two responded *no* (6.7%), and twenty-three responded *both* (76.7%).[31] Of the *no* respondents, one noted the book of Psalms is about Jesus and mankind includes themselves too much, and the other noted "the superscription often points to 'the choirmaster' which implies a communal aspect to the Psalms."[32] Of the *yes* responses, First East

[31] Respondents were often encouraged to respond "yes" or "no," so it is interesting that many respondents desired another option by responding "both." However, some of the "yes" or "no" responses may have chosen "both" had they known it was a valid option.

[32] Third Southwest Senior, August 25, 2023; Sixth Central Worship, August 18, 2023.

Senior answered, “Yes, but they were private worship experiences made public,” marking a communal component to the Psalms, while others noted a mix between singular-focused and communally-focused songs evident in the Psalms.[33] Thus, church leaders agree the book of Psalms have some singular-focus to them, but the psalms are mostly balanced between singular-focused and communally-focused psalms.

When asked, “Do you intentionally choose songs because they use individualistic or communal language?” fifteen respondents answered *yes* (50.0%), fourteen responded *no* (46.7%), and one did not respond (3.3%). Church leader explanations revealed four categorical answers to this question: First, some church leaders intentionally choose songs because they utilize communal language. Second, communal language is but one of many criteria for song selection. Third, some church leaders emphasized the importance of God-centered singing over the use of singular or communal language. Fourth, respondents who did not provide an explanation beyond their answer to the question.

The individual versus communal language interview questions reveal the following insights. First, church leaders mark modern trends as individualistic. Second, church leaders allow for some aspects of corporate worship songs focusing on an individual’s walk with God with the caveat that songs remain God-centered and relevant to the entire congregation. Third, church leaders disagree that the book of Psalms justifies dominantly singular-focused singing; instead, they emphasize the book of Psalms as being balanced between singularly-focused and communally-focused. Fourth and final, church leaders supplied mixed results on whether they intentionally choose songs because they use either singular or communal language.

[33] First East Senior, video interview by author, Google Meet, July 22, 2023.

God-centered versus man-centered lyrics

Like the previous section of questions, the God-centered versus man-centered question section began with a transitional statement:

> Something else the scholarly literature revealed is that song lyrics emphasizing "me" or "we," isn't the main issue. The main issue is whether or not songs are God-Centered or Man-Centered. These scholars argue that singing to and about God is more important than singing about man's response to God. With that in mind, I have a few questions for you.

The following questions were intentionally designed to determine the church leader's validation of scholarly literature's claim and to establish how many church leaders intentionally choose songs based on whether songs are God-centered.

When asked "Do you agree with scholars who say the focus of the song (being God-Centered or Man-Centered) is more important than using individualistic or communal language?" twenty-six respondents answered *yes* (86.7%), one responded *no* (3.3%), one responded *both* (3.3%), and two did not respond (6.7%). The *no* response, supplied by First Central Senior, explained: "I think the biggest danger would be a danger of moving into legalism of telling people that their worship…they're giving from their heart is not appropriate, it's not good enough. They're worshipping from Samaria, not in Jerusalem like they ought."[34] The *both* respondent emphasized parts of corporate worship where God-centered singing is appropriate and other times where man-centered singing is appropriate. Of the respondents who did not answer, one did not rationalize his lack of answer and the other, Fourth East Senior, does not think God-centered singing is either more or less important than man-centered singing.

When asked "Thinking about your own church leadership, do you intentionally choose songs because they are God-Centered or Man-Centered?" twenty-six answered *yes* (86.7%), two

[34] First Central Senior, July 31, 2023.

answered *no* (6.7%), and two did not respond (6.7%). The two *no* respondents and the two respondents who did not answer did not explain their answers further. Comparing these results to the previous two questions supports the position that church leaders both agree with scholars that songs being God-centered is more important than songs utilizing communal language, and they more intentionally choose songs based on them being God-centered than those who choose songs because they utilize communal language.

Summary

Church leader interview corporate worship singing philosophies revealed an emphasis on songs being biblically-based and God-centered. Church leaders also (1) strongly supported corporate worship songs as aiding both the theology and communal identity of congregants, (2) strongly agreed with scholars on modern trends being individualistic, (3) agree corporate worship song lyrics focusing on individual's Christian walk, with the caveat that songs remain God-centered and relevant to the entire congregation, (4) strongly disagree with scholarly claims that the book of Psalms is dominantly individually-focused, (5) hold mixed results on intentionally choosing songs based on individual or communal language, (6) strongly agree with scholarly claims on songs being God-centered as more important than individualistic or communal language, and (7) strongly agree that they choose songs because they are God-centered. In summary, church leaders agree with the formative nature of corporate worship songs, modern trends of individualism, and the importance of corporate worship songs being God-centered.

Church Song Record Lyric Analysis

Nineteen of the thirty church leaders interviewed (63.3%) submitted their song records from April to June of 2024 for additional analysis. This section analyzes those church song

records to find the central tendencies and categorical analysis of corporate worship song lyrics based on both the Thornton and McKinney formulas. This section intentionally represents the church leader song records wholistically before presenting variations between the different churches represented.

Church song records body of songs

Church song records body of songs statistical analysis. Following the figure 4 formula for statistically representing songs as *God-centered* or *man-centered*, using Excel this researcher calculated a ratio variable for the church song records following the procedures discussed in the Methods chapter. Using SPSS to measure central tendency of the ratio variables for the body of songs found in the church song records shows the mean for the Thornton analysis to be 1.0821 with a standard deviation of 1.4195. The median is .8300 with an interquartile range from .40 to 1.25 with a full range from 0.00 to 21.00 as shown in the figure 15 boxplot.

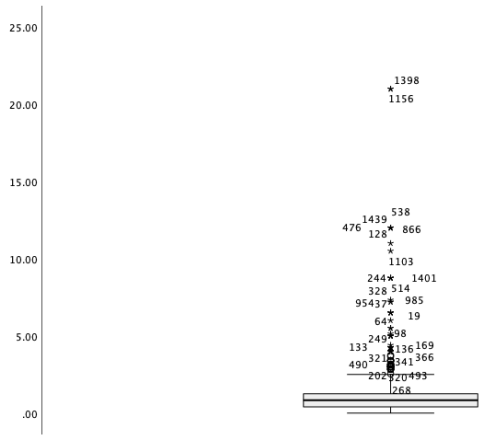

Figure 15. SPSS boxplot of Thornton formula for church song records.

Since the ratio variables less than one are *God-centered*, variables equal to one are *neutral*, and variables greater than one are *man-centered*; this central tendency, represented in figure 15,

shows most of the Thornton results falling near the man-centered mean (1.0821) and God-centered median (.8300) with a series of man-centered outliers reaching as far as 21.00.

A histogram of the Thornton formula shows a normal curve distribution of the data. A true normal curve is impossible because there are no indicators below 0.00, as 0.00 is entirely God-centered and therefore negative values are impossible. As a result, there are clear spikes in the ~0.00 to ~2.00 range. Even so, the normal distribution represents the mean and median showing values near the neutral 1.00 value with the distribution falling toward the man-centered side as shown in figure 16.

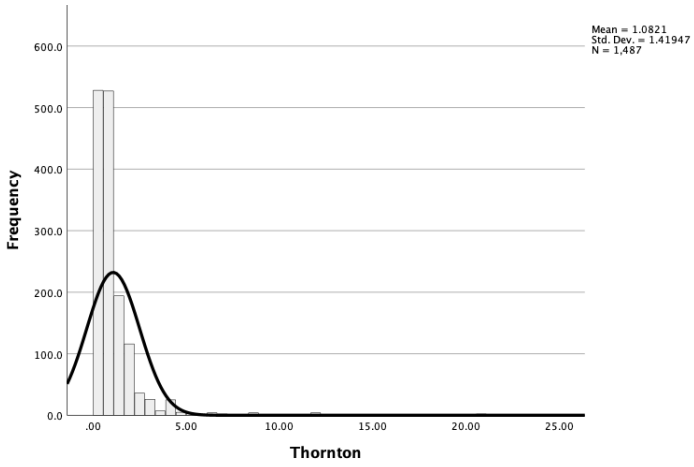

Figure 16. SPSS histogram of Thornton values for church song records.

Following the figure 6 formula for statistically representing songs as *communal* or *singular*, this researcher calculated an interval variable for the church song records following the procedures discussed in the Methods chapter. Negative interval variables are *communal*, variables equal to zero are *neutral*, and positive variables are *singular*. The church song records body of songs central tendency shows the mean for the McKinney analysis to be .0370 with a standard deviation of .0828. The median is .0400 with an interquartile range of -.03 to .10 with a full range from -.20 to .28 as shown in figure 17.

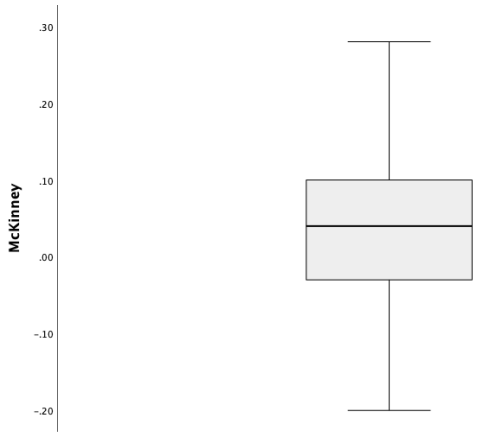

Figure 17. SPSS boxplot of McKinney formula for church song records.

Figure 17 shows most of the McKinney songs falling near the singular-focused mean (.0370) and median (.0828) with no clear outliers.

A histogram of the McKinney formula shows a normal curve distribution against the data. The normal distribution represents the mean and median showing values near the neutral 0.00 value though the distribution falls on the individualistic side (values above 0 are singular). Unlike the Thornton histogram of ratio variable shown above in figure 16, the McKinney histogram represents interval variables and are thus better distributed than Thornton values in a normal curve distribution as shown in figure 18.

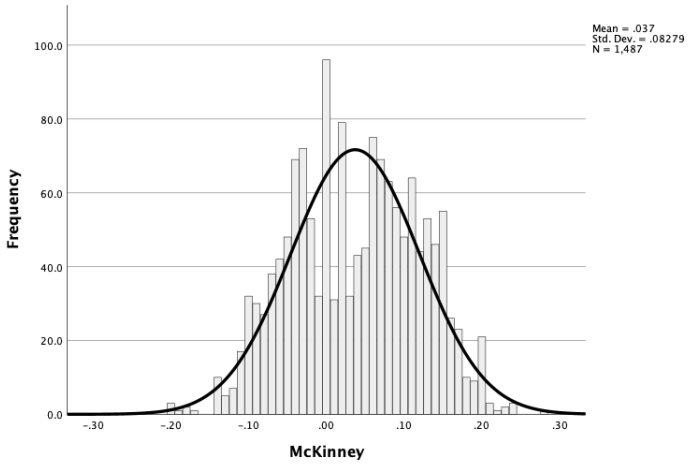

Figure 18. SPSS histogram of McKinney values for church song records.

Descriptive statistics for the central tendency of the Thornton formula show corporate song records to be near the neutral mark, with outliers skewing the data toward man-centered values. However, because the data is a ratio variable it is difficult to visualize a normal curve distribution of data. Descriptive statistics for central tendency of the McKinney formula show corporate song records fall on the singular-focused side, as visible in the central tendency, box plot, and histogram.

Church song records body of songs categorical analysis. Following the figure 4 formula for classifying songs as *God-centered*, *neutral*, or *man-centered*, this researcher classified each song for the body of songs found within the church song records following the procedures discussed in the Methods chapter.[35] The Thornton categorical analysis shows of the 643 corporate song record songs: 369 are categorically *God* (57.4%), 37 are *Neutral* (5.8%), and 237 are *Man* (36.9%) as visualized in figure 19.

[35] According to figure 4, songs with ratio variables calculated as less than one are *God-centered*, variables equal to one are *neutral*, and variables greater than one are *man-centered*.

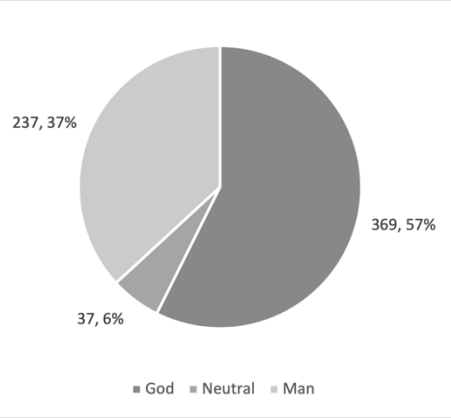

Figure 19. Pie chart of Thornton distribution of corporate song records.

Following the figure 6 formula for singularity classifying songs as *none*, *communal*, *neutral*, or *singular*, this researcher classified each song for the body of songs found within the church song records following the procedures discussed in the Methods chapter.[36] The McKinney categorical analysis shows of the 643 corporate song record songs: 15 are categorically *None* (2.3%), 236 are *Communal* (36.7%), 5 are *Neutral* (0.8%), and 387 are *Singular* (60.2%) as visualized in figure 20.

[36] According to figure 4, songs with ratio variables calculated as less than one are *God-centered*, variables equal to one are *neutral*, and variables greater than one are *man-centered*.

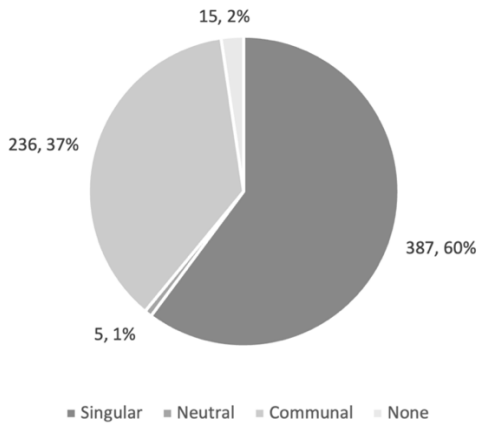

Figure 20. Pie chart of McKinney distribution of corporate song records.

The categorical analysis of the body of corporate song records shows them mostly God-centered and singular-focused.

Church song records body of songs secondary analysis. Following the secondary analysis methods, the Thornton and McKinney results combined into four categories: *God and Communal*, *God and Singular*, *Man and Communal*, and *Man and Singular*. For the corporate song records, 186 are *God and Communal* (32%), 165 are *God and Singular* (28%), 42 are *Man and Communal* (7%), and 193 are *Man and Singular* (33%), as shown in table 4.

Table 4. Secondary analysis of the corporate song records

	God and Communal	**God and Singular**	**Man and Communal**	**Man and Singular**
Total Results	186	165	42	193
% of Results	32%	28%	7%	33%

An additional 57 songs did not fit any of the four categories.

This view of the data shows the two edge categories (*God and Communal* and *Man and Singular*) to hold similar values (roughly one-third) for the church song records. Categorizing

songs in this way shows nearly two-thirds of the results fall entirely to one side or another while the remaining one-third is a combination of categorical analyses.

Church song records

Churches supplied corporate song records through a variety of means and some churches hold more than one type of service. To compensate for these data variations, the song records were analyzed through median Thornton and McKinney values and by combining all data for a church to find the percentage of songs relevant to each criterion. Song repetition had a direct effect on results. For example, First West Worship supplied seventy-seven songs for services from April to June 2023. During the thirteen services, the "Doxology" was sung at the end of every service.[37] The "Doxology" has zero references to the singer making it entirely God-centered (Thornton formula value of 0.00). Thornton's categorical percentages for First West Worship show 79.2% of songs are God-centered, 3.9% are neutral, and 16.9% are man-centered, including thirteen accounts of the Doxology. However, if the "Doxology" is only counted a single time, then Thornton formula values for First West Worship become 75.4% of songs as God-centered, 4.6% as neutral, and 20.0% as man-centered. As a result, repetition of songs affects the data. This researcher's aim is to represent church records accurately; therefore, song repetition remains part of the data. Of the nineteen churches who supplied their corporate worship song records, only one, Seventh East Worship, did not supply songs for each week and is therefore delimited from this section when discussing results from the Thornton and McKinney formulas.[38]

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[37] Louis Bourgeois and Thomas Ken, "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow (Old 100th)," songselect.ccli.com, Public Domain (CCLI Song Number 56204).

[38] While Seventh East Worship's lack of repetition affects data in this section, previous sections account for

Church song records statistical analysis. A correlation matrix was conducted for the thirty churches to find any correlations between estimated average worship attendance, estimated average discipleship attendance, estimated discipleship percentage, and church song records for Thornton median value and McKinney median value for each church as illustrated in figure 21.

		Estimated Average Worship Attendance	Estimated Average Discipleship Attendance	Estimated Discipleship Percentage	Thornton	McKinney
Estimated Average Worship Attendance	Pearson Correlation	1	.915**	-.312	.220	.142
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	.093	.380	.574
	N	30	30	30	18	18
Estimated Average Discipleship Attendance	Pearson Correlation	.915**	1	-.009	.131	.170
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		.961	.606	.499
	N	30	30	30	18	18
Estimated Discipleship Percentage	Pearson Correlation	-.312	-.009	1	-.308	-.083
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.093	.961		.213	.742
	N	30	30	30	18	18
Thornton	Pearson Correlation	.220	.131	-.308	1	.625**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.380	.606	.213		.006
	N	18	18	18	18	18
McKinney	Pearson Correlation	.142	.170	-.083	.625**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.574	.499	.742	.006	
	N	18	18	18	18	18

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Figure 21. SPSS correlation results of church song records.

According to this correlation analysis, only two correlations of significance exist. First, a Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between estimated average worship attendance and estimated average discipleship attendance. A strong positive correlation was found (r (28) = .915, p <.001), indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. Churches with higher numbers of estimated average worship attendance tend to also have higher numbers of estimated average discipleship attendance. At the same time, a Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between estimated average worship attendance and estimated discipleship percentage. A moderate negative correlation that was not

significant was found (r (28) = -.312, p =.093).[39] Churches with larger numbers of estimated average worship attendance do not equate to higher average discipleship attendance. These two correlations considered together suggest larger churches in regular worship attendance are likely to also have more people in regular discipleship but are not more likely to have a higher percentage of worship attenders actively involved in discipleship than smaller churches.

A second correlation exists between Thornton's median values and McKinney's median values. A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between Thornton and McKinney values among church song record participants. A moderate positive correlation was found (r (16) = .625, p =.006), indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. Songs that are man-centered also tend to be singular-focused.

Church song records categorical analysis. Using Excel to measure the central tendency of the church song records, categorical analysis shows the mean for the God-centered songs to be 60.2% with a median of 59.4%. The interquartile range for God-centered is from 56.4% to 64.5%, with a full range from 44.9% to 79.2%. The mean for man-centered songs is 33.8%, with a median of 34.7%. The interquartile range is from 28.8% to 38.7%, with a full range from 16.9% to 53.1%. Church song records show more songs that are categorically God-centered than man-centered songs. Boxplots for God-centered and man-centered church song records are visualized in figure 22.

[39] The difference in this data set and that presented above in table 2 (and discussed immediately following) is that this data set only includes those churches who provided their corporate worship song records. While the exact calculations differ, both data sets draw the same conclusion of a moderate negative correlation that was insignificant.

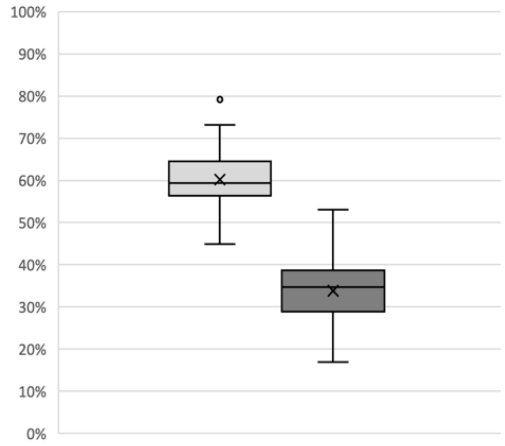

Figure 22. Excel boxplot of God-centered and man-centered results for church song records.

Using Excel to measure the central tendency of the church song records, categorical analysis shows the mean for communal songs to be 33.0% with a median of 33.9%. The interquartile range for communal songs is from 25.2% to 41.2%, with a full range from 16.3% to 41.2%. The mean for singular songs is 63.2%, with a median of 65.1%. The interquartile range is from 52.9% to 72.8%, with a full range from 45.0% to 83.7%. Church song records show more songs that are categorically singular than communal songs. Boxplots for communal and singular church song records are visualized in figure 23.

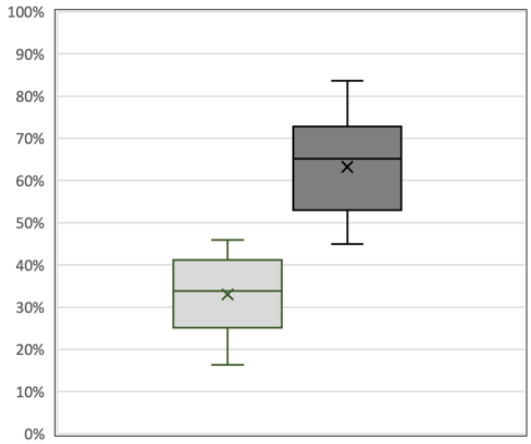

Figure 23. Excel boxplot of communal and singular results for church song records.

Regardless of what church leaders think about corporate worship songs, categorical analysis shows church leaders choosing God-centered over man-centered songs and singular over communal songs for corporate worship.

Summary of Church Interviews

Church leaders generally agree with the formative nature of corporate worship songs, the need for songs to be corporate, and the importance of corporate worship songs being God-centered. They strongly agree that "corporate worship songs form the communal identity of congregants," yet they chose fewer songs utilizing communal language than songs with singular language. Comparing interview results to church song records suggests church leaders believe communal lyrics to be important but not important enough to choose songs based on this criterion. At the same time, comparing interview results to church song records suggests that church leaders believe corporate song lyrics should be God-centered, a claim justified by their corporate song records.

Song Record Analysis

This section presents the CCLI body of songs listed as part of the CCLI Top 100 songs from 1989 to 2023, providing statistical and categorical analysis before comparing the 150 Psalms to the CCLI body of songs. It will discuss statistical, categorical, and secondary analysis results before comparing individual and groups of Psalm authors to the use of singular or communal language. This section discusses each data set wholistically without regard to trends over time.

CCLI Body of Songs Analysis

This section analyzes the collection of CCLI Top 100 Songs, from 1989 to June 2023, to find the CCLI central tendencies and categorical analysis based on both the Thornton and McKinney formulas. This section intentionally represents the CCLI body of songs holistically without regard to song repetition and popularity over time.

CCLI body of songs statistical analysis

Using SPSS to measure central tendency of the CCLI body of songs shows the mean for the Thornton analysis to be 1.0338 with a standard deviation of 1.5229. The median is .7500 with an interquartile range from .3450 to 1.1725 with a full range from 0.00 to 21.00 as shown in figure 24.

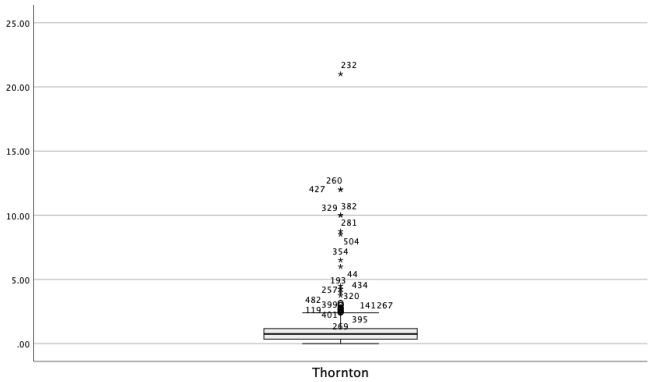

Figure 24. SPSS boxplot of Thornton formula for CCLI body of songs.

This central tendency shows most of the Thornton results falling near the man-centered mean (1.0338) and God-centered median (.7500), with a series of man-centered outliers reaching as far as 21.00.

A histogram of the Thornton formula shows a normal curve distribution of the data. A true normal curve is impossible because there are no indicators below 0.00, as 0.00 is entirely God-centered, and therefore, negative values are impossible. As a result, there is a clear spike in the ~0.00 to ~1.00 range. Even so, the normal distribution represents the mean and median showing values near the neutral 1.00 value with the distribution falling toward the man-centered side as shown in figure 25.

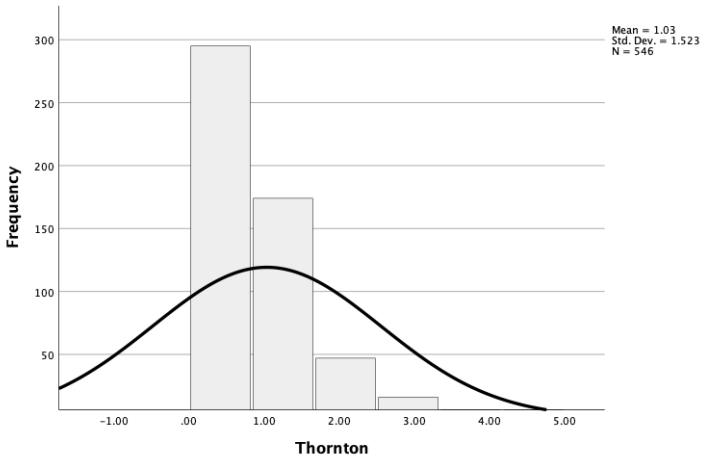

Figure 25. SPSS histogram of Thornton values for CCLI body of songs.

The CCLI body of songs' central tendency shows the mean for the McKinney analysis to be .0420 with a standard deviation of .0894. The median is .0400 with an interquartile range of -.0300 to .1100 and a full range from -.20 to .25 as shown in figure 26.

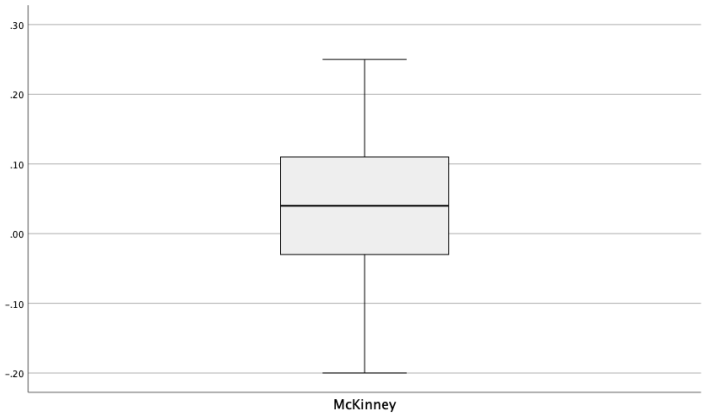

Figure 26. SPSS boxplot of McKinney formula for CCLI body of songs.

Figure 26 shows most of the McKinney songs fall near the singular-focused mean (.0420) and median (.0894) with no clear outliers.

A histogram of the McKinney formula shows a normal curve distribution against the data. The normal distribution represents the mean and median showing values near the neutral 0.00 value though the distribution falls on the individualistic side (values above 0 are singular).

Unlike the Thornton histogram of ratio variables shown above in figure 25, the McKinney histogram represents interval variables and is thus better distributed as a normal curve distribution, as shown in figure 27.

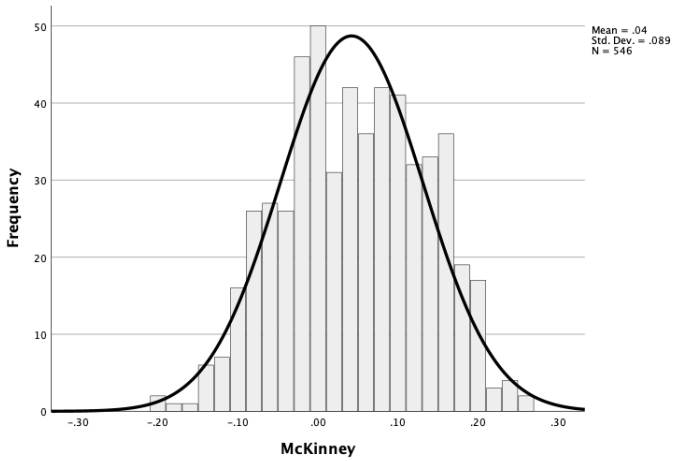

Figure 27. SPSS histogram of McKinney values for CCLI body of songs.

Descriptive statistics for central tendency of the Thornton formula suggest the CCLI body of songs to be near the neutral mark, with outliers skewing the data toward man-centered values. However, because the data is a ratio variable, it is difficult to visualize a normal curve distribution of the data. Descriptive statistics for the central tendency of the McKinney formula suggests the CCLI body of songs fall on the singular-focused side as visible in the central tendency, box plot, and histogram.

CCLI body of songs categorical analysis

The Thornton categorical analysis shows of the 546 CCLI songs that, 339 are categorically *God* (62.1%), 33 are *Neutral* (6.0%), and 174 are *Man* (31.9%) as visualized in figure 28.

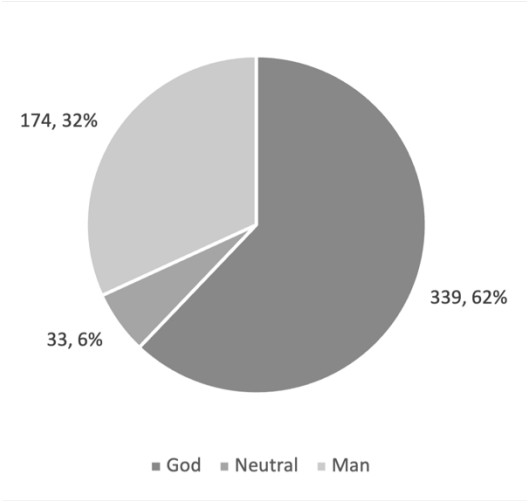

Figure 28. Pie chart of Thornton distribution of CCLI body of songs.

The McKinney categorical analysis shows of the 546 CCLI songs: 32 are categorically *None* (5.9%), 166 are *Communal* (30.4%), 8 are *Neutral* (1.5%), and 340 are *Singular* (62.3%) as visualized in figure 29.

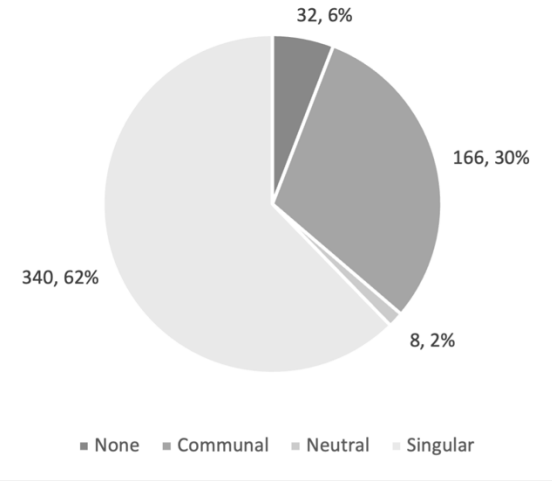

Figure 29. Pie chart of McKinney distribution of CCLI body of songs.

The categorical analysis of the body of CCLI Top 100 Songs, from 1989 to June of 2023, shows them mostly God-centered and singular-focused.

Summary

The CCLI categorical analysis of Thornton's formula marking most CCLI songs as God-centered stands in contrast to the statistical analysis marking the CCLI body of songs as man-centered. The boxplot of the Thornton results, shown above in figure 24, shows the skewed nature of the Thornton analysis and thus accounts for these conflicting results. Therefore the statistical analysis should be considered alongside the categorical analysis. This researcher concludes the CCLI body of songs is categorically God-centered, but the significant ratio of man-centered lyrics skewed the statistical analysis toward man-centered. Thus, man-centered outliers are biased enough toward man's viewpoint that statistical analysis compensates for the outliers and marks the entire body of songs as man-centered. For the McKinney analysis, the CCLI categorical analysis of McKinney values supports the statistical analysis marking the CCLI body of songs as both statistically and categorically singular.

Psalms and CCLI Body of Songs Analysis

As discussed above, Zac Hicks argues the importance of utilizing first-person language based on the use of first-person language throughout the Psalms.[40] Similarly, Nick Page writes on the prominent use of *I* and *me* in CWM writing: "Obviously this is not wrong in itself; the same mode of expression can be found in many Psalms."[41] Mark Keown also uses the Psalms' individualistic response to reflect "a deeper feel than the shallow theology and emotion of many contemporary songs."[42] Keown takes things further by presenting a study of the 1984 NIV

[40] Hicks, *The Worship Pastor*, 74.

[41] Page, *Into a Time of Nonsense*, "From Poet to Pop Star."

[42] Mark Keown, "How Much Should We Sing?" *Stimulus: The New Zealand Journal of Christian Thought & Practice*19, no. 3 (September 2012): 6.

translation that utilized *we* 83 times with *I* being used 798 times concluding "that worship in the Old Testament, while corporate, is centered on the individual and his or her response to God."[43] Unfortunately, likely due to the brevity of his article, Keown did not provide further rationalization for his claim thus its full implications are unknown. This section does not address the entire Old Testament as Keown did but will statistically and categorically analyze the body of Psalms compared to the body of CCLI songs. It then supplies a secondary analysis of the Psalms and CCLI body of songs before presenting the authorship and singular or communal nature of each Psalm.

Psalms and CCLI statistical analysis

A two-sample t-test comparing the average Thornton variable between the Psalms (N=150, mean=1.3860, SD=1.3689) and the CCLI body of songs (N=546, mean=10.8919, SD=8.0772) shows a statistically significant difference between the groups ($t = -14.3501$, $p < 0.0001$). The CCLI body of songs is more man-centered than the Psalms as illustrated below in figure 30 where "Group 0" is the book of Psalms, and "Group 1" is the CCLI body of songs.

[43] Keown, "How Much Should We Sing?," 6.

```
. ttest thornton, by(ccli)

Two-sample t test with equal variances

   Group |     Obs        Mean    Std. err.   Std. dev.   [95% conf. interval]
---------+--------------------------------------------------------------------
       0 |     150       1.386     .111768    1.368873    1.165145    1.606855
       1 |     546    10.89194    .3456732    8.077222    10.21293    11.57096
---------+--------------------------------------------------------------------
Combined |     696    8.843247    .3099452    8.176915    8.234706    9.451788
---------+--------------------------------------------------------------------
    diff |           -9.505941    .6624325               -10.80655   -8.205329
------------------------------------------------------------------------------
    diff = mean(0) - mean(1)                                      t = -14.3501
H0: diff = 0                     Degrees of freedom =       694

    Ha: diff < 0                 Ha: diff != 0                 Ha: diff > 0
 Pr(T < t) = 0.0000         Pr(|T| > |t|) = 0.0000          Pr(T > t) = 1.0000
```

Figure 30: Stata Two-Sample t Test comparing the Psalms and CCLI body of songs based on the Thornton variable.

In addition, data analysis also shows both the Psalms and the CCLI body of songs fall categorically man-centered based on their mean. Therefore, claiming man-centered singing is representative of the book of Psalms is justified as both the mean for the CCLI body of songs and the Psalms are man-centered. However, according to this analysis, the amount of man-centered singing in the CCLI body of songs (10.892) far exceeds the amount of man-centered singing of the Psalms (1.386). As a result, claiming modern man-centered singing trends mimic the Psalms is not supported by this statistical analysis because the amount of man-centered language is significantly higher in the CCLI body of songs than the Psalms.

A two sample t-test to determine a difference in the mean McKinney value was conducted on the Psalms (N=150, mean=-.0041, SD=0.0731) and the CCLI body of songs (N=546, mean=3.0403, SD=4.6553) to determine if there was a difference in mean McKinney value shows a statistically significant difference between the groups ($t = -8.0048$, $p < 0.0001$). The CCLI body of songs is more singular than the Psalms as illustrated below in figure 31 where "Group 0" is the book of Psalms, and "Group 1" is the CCLI body of songs.

```
. ttest mckinney, by(ccli)

Two-sample t test with equal variances

   Group |     Obs        Mean    Std. err.   Std. dev.   [95% conf. interval]
---------+--------------------------------------------------------------------
       0 |     150   -.0040667    .0059702    .0731193   -.0158638    .0077305
       1 |     546    3.040293    .1992282    4.655295    2.648944    3.431642
---------+--------------------------------------------------------------------
Combined |     696    2.384181    .1633203    4.308685    2.063521    2.704841
---------+--------------------------------------------------------------------
    diff |            -3.04436    .3803146               -3.791065   -2.297655
------------------------------------------------------------------------------
    diff = mean(0) - mean(1)                                      t =  -8.0048
H0: diff = 0                     Degrees of freedom =       694

    Ha: diff < 0                 Ha: diff != 0                 Ha: diff > 0
 Pr(T < t) = 0.0000         Pr(|T| > |t|) = 0.0000          Pr(T > t) = 1.0000
```

Figure 31: Stata Two-Sample t Test comparing the Psalms and CCLI body of songs based on the McKinney variable.

In addition, statistical analysis shows the Psalms fall categorically as communal (-.0040667) while the CCLI body of songs fall categorically as singular (3.040293) based on their means. Therefore, to claim the CCLI body of songs reflects the individualistic singing of the book of Psalms is not supported by this statistical analysis as there is more singular language utilized within the CCLI body of songs than in the Psalms. While the Psalms employ some singular language, the CCLI body of songs has a disproportionate amount of singular language.

This statistical analysis does not support the Psalms as justification for the man-centered trends present in modern congregational singing as the CCLI body of songs were statistically more man-centered than the Psalms. However, this data does support some man-centered congregational singing based on the Psalms, it simply does not support it to the use prevalent in the CCLI body of songs. The data also does not justify excessive use of singular-focused language. To the contrary, the Psalms are more communal than they are singular, so to use the Psalms as rationale for employing singular-focused language misses a wholistic understanding of the book of Psalms.

This analysis may shock readers who believe the Psalms are individualistic. Yet, a fresh look at the data may help readers understand what factors affected the data. Based on the McKinney analysis, table 5 shows the total percentages of pronouns representing the singer or singers:

Table 5. Total count of pronoun type divided by total word count

	1st Person Singular	**2nd & 3rd Person Singular**	**1st Person Plural**	**3rd Person Plural**	**Total Communal**
Psalms	5.22%	1.64%	0.78%	1.75%	4.17%
CCLI	6.77%	0.43%	2.18%	2.18%	4.79%
% Difference	29.69%	-73.78%	179.49%	24.57%	14.87%

From 5.22% of total Psalms lyrics to 7% of total CCLI lyrics, an increase of 29.69% is demonstrated, marking an increase in first-person singular pronouns. At the same time, there is a drop (-73.78%) in second and third-person singular language and a leap (179.49%) in first-person plural pronouns. In addition, there is an increase in third-person plural pronouns by 24.57%. This data shows communal singing about one another in the Psalms utilizing words like *he*, *his*, *him*, *you*, and *your* is replaced with singing with one another in the CCLI body of songs utilizing words like *we*, *us*, and *our*, suggesting the CCLI songs use more inclusive language than the Psalms. However, even with differences in both categories, there was less of an increase in total communal words: 4.17% for the Psalms and 4.79% for CCLI, for an overall increase of 14.87%. For the McKinney analysis, it is the increase in first-person singular pronouns that explains the increase in results from the Psalms to the CCLI body of songs.

Psalms and CCLI categorical analysis

The Thornton categorical analysis shows of the 150 Psalms: 68 are *God* (45.3%), 5 are *Neutral* (3.3%), and 77 are *Man* (51.3%). Of the 546 CCLI songs, 339 are categorically *God* (62.1%), 33 are *Neutral* (6.0%), and 174 are *Man* (31.9%), as represented in table 6.

Table 6. Categorical distribution of Thornton results

Category	**Psalms %**	**CCLI %**
God	45.3%	62.1%
Neutral	3.3%	6.0%
Man	51.3%	31.9%

Categorically, the CCLI body of songs shows more God-centered songs with fewer man-centered songs than the Psalms which stands in stark contrast to the man-centered statistical mean of 1.0338 found above based on ratio of lyrics.

The McKinney categorical analysis shows of the 150 Psalms, 3 are *None* (2.0%), 81 are *Communal* (54.0%), 3 are *Neutral* (2.0%), and 63 are *Singular* (42.0%). Of the 546 CCLI songs, 32 are categorically *None* (5.9%), 166 are *Communal* (30.4%), 8 are *Neutral* (1.5%), and 340 are *Singular* (62.3%), as represented in table 7.

Table 7. Categorical distribution of McKinney results

Category	**Psalms %**	**CCLI %**
None	2.0%	5.9%
Communal	54.0%	30.4%
Neutral	2.0%	1.5%
Singular	42.0%	62.3%

Categorically, the CCLI body of songs shows more singular songs with fewer communal songs, which is consistent with the above statistical mean of 0.420 based on the ratio of lyrics.

Psalms and CCLI secondary analysis

Following the secondary analysis methods described in the Methods chapter, the Thornton and McKinney results combined into four categories: *God and Communal*, *God and Singular*, *Man and Communal*, and *Man and Singular*. For the Psalms, 46 are *God and Communal* (33.1%), 16 are *God and Singular* (11.5%), 30 are *Man and Communal* (21.6%), and 47 are *Man and Singular* (33.8%), as shown in table 8.

Table 8. Secondary analysis of the Psalms

	God and Communal	**God and Singular**	**Man and Communal**	**Man and Singular**
Total Results	46	16	30	47
% of Results	33.1%	11.5%	21.6%	33.8%

In addition, 11 songs did not fit any of the four categories. For the CCLI body of songs, 132 are *God and Communal* (27.9%), 171 are *God and Singular* (36.2%), 23 are *Man and Communal* (4.9%), and 147 are *Man and Singular* (31.1%), as shown in table 9.

Table 9. Secondary analysis of the CCLI body of songs

	God and Communal	**God and Singular**	**Man and Communal**	**Man and Singular**
Total Results	132	171	23	147
% of Results	27.9%	36.2%	4.9%	31.1%

In addition, 73 of the CCLI body of songs did not fit any of the four categories.

This view of the data shows the two edge categories (*God and Communal* and *Man and Singular*) holding similar values (roughly one-third) between the Psalms and the CCLI body of songs; however, the inner two categories (*God and Singular* and *Man and Communal*) differ significantly, as shown below in figure 32.

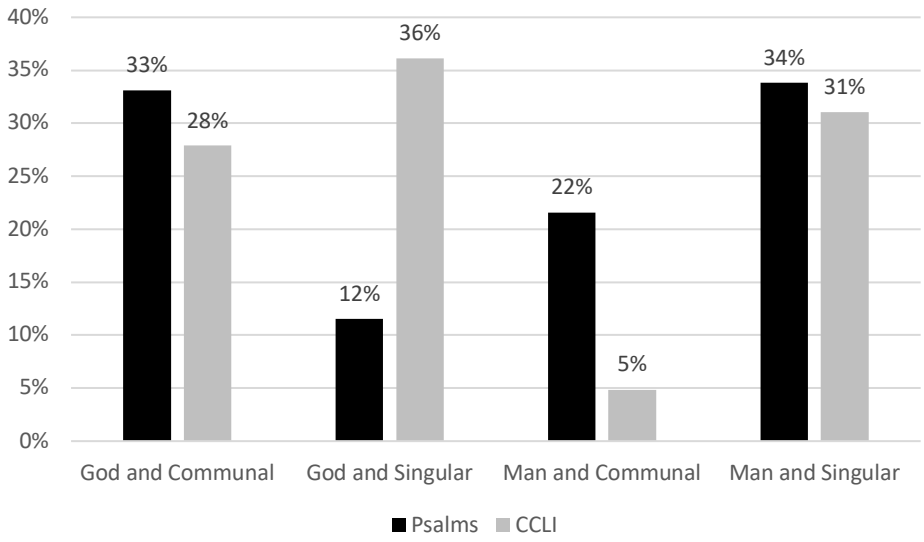

Figure 32. Secondary analysis between the Psalms and CCLI.

Categorizing songs this way shows nearly two-thirds of results fall entirely to one side or another, while the remaining third is approached from opposing viewpoints.

Psalms individual authorship compared to a group of authors

Utilizing *Psalms Form and Structure* as part of Logos 10, this researcher marked the authors of all 150 Psalms.[44] Of the 150 Psalms, 73 are attributed to David, 45 to Anonymous, 12 to Asaph, 11 to the Korahites, 3 to Anonymous (LXX), 3 to Haggai (LXX), 1 to Ethan the Ezrahite, 1 to Heman the Ezrahite, and 1 to Moses. These authors reveal three different segments of Psalms authorship: (1) individual Psalmists, (2) groups of Psalmists, and (3) anonymous Psalmists. According to the McKinney analysis, of the 91 Psalms attributed to an individual, 1 is *None*, 37 are *Communal*, 2 are *Neutral*, and 51 are *Singular*. Of the 11 Psalms attributed to a group, 0 are *None*, 7 are *Communal*, 1 is *Neutral*, and 3 are *Singular*. Of the 48 Psalms attributed to Anonymous, 2 are *None*, 37 are *Communal*, 0 are *Neutral*, and 9 are *Singular*.

[44] Witthoff and Nerdahl, *Psalms Form and Structure*.

Table 10. Categorical distribution of McKinney results based on authorship

Category	**None**	**Communal**	**Neutral**	**Singular**
Individual Psalmist	1	37	2	51
Group of Psalmists	0	7	1	3
Anonymous Psalmist(s)	2	37	0	9

Table 10 shows 51 (56%) of the Psalms attributed to an individual utilized singular language with 37 (41%) employing communal language. For Psalms attributed to a group of Psalmists, 3 (27%) utilized singular language with 7 (64%) utilizing communal language. For Psalms attributed to anonymous (whether an individual or a group is unknown), 9 (19%) utilized singular language with 37 (77%) utilizing communal language. These divisions show clear tendencies toward communal singing even among individual psalmists who utilized communal language 41% of the time.

This analysis suggests the audience is more important than the singer, and even though David was the author of nearly half the Psalms, he utilized communal language for one out of every three of his songs. When analyzing the singular or communal McKinney categorization alongside the authorship, most groups of Psalmists and anonymous Psalmists employ communal language, while individual Psalmists lean toward individualistic language without completely disregarding the use of communal language.

Summary

The Thornton analysis yields different results between the statistical and categorical analyses of the Psalms and CCLI body of songs, likely due to the range of results. The Thornton analysis for both the Psalms and CCLI body of songs shows the minimal value at 0.00 (entirely God-centered with no man-centered words), but the maximum value is 11.0 for the Psalms and 21.0 for the CCLI body of songs. These values suggest the statistical analysis better compensates

for Psalms and songs that have substantial amounts of man-centered lyrics, while the categorical analysis scrutinizes results less so, and outliers affect results minimally. The McKinney analysis yields the same results between the statistical and categorical analyses of the Psalms. Analyzing the authorship compared to the categorization of songs also shows Psalm author tendencies toward communal singing.

This section shows a statistically significant difference between Psalms and the CCLI body of songs showing the CCLI body of songs is more man-centered than the Psalms. At the same time, the categorical analysis shows the CCLI body of songs is more God-centered than the Psalms. Thus, the Thornton results both statistically support and categorically refute claims that the Psalms are man-centered as rationale for increasing man-centered corporate worship songs.

This section also shows statistically significant and categorical data that the CCLI body of songs is more singular than the Psalms. Thus, the McKinney analysis refutes claims that the Psalms rationalize increased individualistic singing in corporate worship songs. While the Psalms do rationalize some individualistic singing, the amount of individualistic singing in the CCLI body of songs is well over the Psalms analysis. In addition, Psalms written by a group of Psalmists, as well as anonymously, have clear tendencies toward utilizing communal language (79% of the Psalms attributed to a group or anonymous) while individual Psalmists, especially David, only utilized individualistic language 56% of the time. Thus, claims of individualistic singing based on individual Psalmists are not refuted, though it is not as substantial as some scholars have claimed while disregarding the amount of Psalms utilizing communal language.

Secondary Analysis shows comparable results for both edge categories (*God and Communal* and *Man and Singular*), with clear differences in the inner categories (*God and Singular* and *Man and Communal*). This secondary analysis affirms the categorical analysis

without affirming the statistical analysis, finding the CCLI body of songs more man-centered than the Psalms as 36% of the CCLI secondary analysis are categorized as either *Man and Communal* or *Man and Singular,* with 56% of the Psalms fitting these two categories. The secondary analysis also affirms both the categorical and statistical analyses finding the CCLI body of songs more singular than the Psalms categorizing 67% of songs as *God and Singular* or *Man and Singular* with only 46% of the Psalms fitting these two categories.

In summary, this data analysis is inconclusive as it both statistically supports and categorically refutes claims that modern corporate worship singing is more man-centered than the Psalms. Therefore, both sides of the argument may hold credibility depending on how the data is compiled and the lens through which it is viewed. While the data is statistically significant showing the CCLI body of songs is more man-centered than the Psalms, categorically the CCLI body of songs is more God-centered than the Psalms. However, the McKinney analysis both statistically and categorically supports the CCLI body of songs as more singular-focused than the Psalms. Therefore, claiming Psalm singing as rationale for individualistic congregational singing is not supported by this dissertation's data.

Summary of Song Record Analysis

The CCLI body of songs is statistically mostly man-centered while the categorical analysis is mostly God-centered with significant outliers affecting the statistical calculations without affecting the categorical calculations. The CCLI body of songs is both statistically and categorically more singular-focused. In addition, comparing the Psalms to the CCLI body of songs both statistically supports and categorically refutes claims that modern corporate worship songs are more man-centered than the Psalms while also statistically and categorically supporting the CCLI body of songs being more singular-focused than the Psalms. Therefore,

modern trends of singular-focused corporate worship singing based on the Psalms is not justifiable as the Psalms are statistically and categorically more communal.

30-Year Trend Analysis

This section presents and discusses statistical, categorical, and secondary analysis for CCLI and ACP data from 1989 to 2023. It first presents ACP discipleship trends. Then, it compares CCLI to ACP data for data correlations. Next, it presents categorical trends for both Thornton and McKinney CCLI data. Finally, it combines Thornton and McKinney categorical results to mark corporate worship singing trends from 1989 to 2023.

ACP Discipleship

Authors note the statistical decline of membership among SBC churches, after a peak in the early 2000s. However, statistical decline does not equate to Southern Baptists being ineffective in their discipleship methods (because total membership can diminish with baptism and/or SS attendance staying consistent or increasing and thus increasing discipleship). This section analyzes baptism and SS data against overall membership trends in recent years. This researcher recognizes that baptism and SS records do not represent all discipleship opportunities for churches and the challenging task of collecting such data. Since this more specific discipleship data is publicly unavailable, this section compares and marks trends based on the ACP data for baptisms and SS.

ACP baptism data analysis

Utilizing the Baptism Percentage Formula (BPF) found in figure 8, and applying it over time shows an overall decreasing trend as displayed in figure 33.

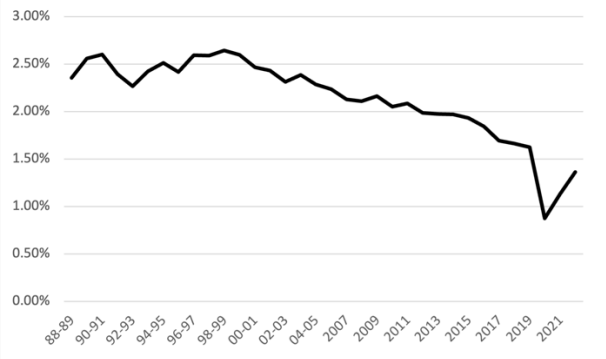

Figure 33. ACP BPF results.

There are years of statistical increase, but overall patterns show a decrease from 2.35% (in 1988–1989) to 1.36% (in 2022) with a minimum baptism percentage of 0.87% and a maximum of 2.65%. The effects of Covid are also apparent as attendance dropped significantly in 2020.

ACP Sunday School data analysis

Utilizing the Sunday School Percentage Formula (SSPF) and measuring it over time shows an overall decreasing trend, as displayed in figure 34.

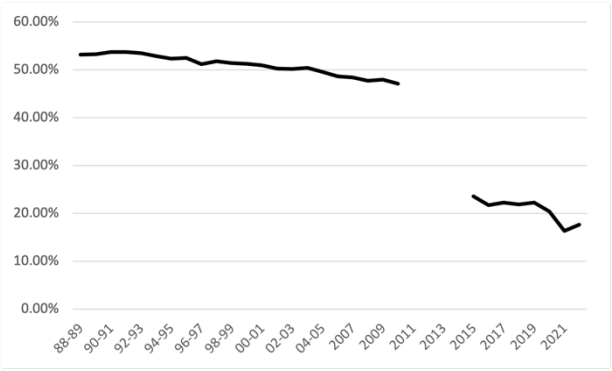

Figure 34. ACP SS percentage formula results.

Like the baptism results above there are years of statistical increase, but overall patterns decrease from 53.22% (in 1988-1989) to 17.66% (in 2022). However, there are two challenges with this data. First, data is missing from 2011 to 2014; and second, data after the break shows a significant decrease when compared to that before the break (from 47.15% before to 23.57%

after). In addition, beginning in the 2014 ACP, results include notes indicating missing data. Even with these challenges, two conclusions can be drawn: first, a declining trend in the SS ACP data exists. Data analysis before the break (see figure 35) and after the break (see figure 36) shows a decline in both time periods:

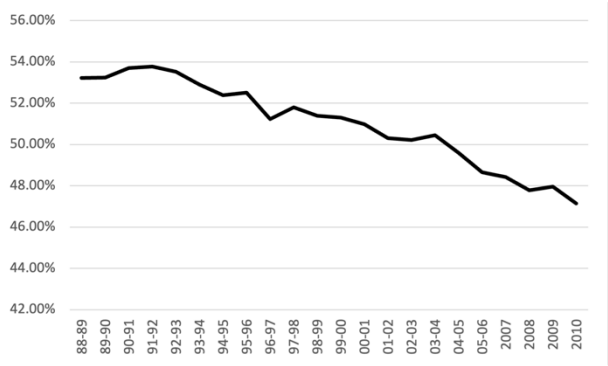

Figure 35. ACP SS percentage formula results before the break.

Trends before the break show a decrease from 53.22% (in 1988-1989) to 47.15% (in 2010) with a minimum SS percentage of 47.157% and a maximum of 53.77 %.

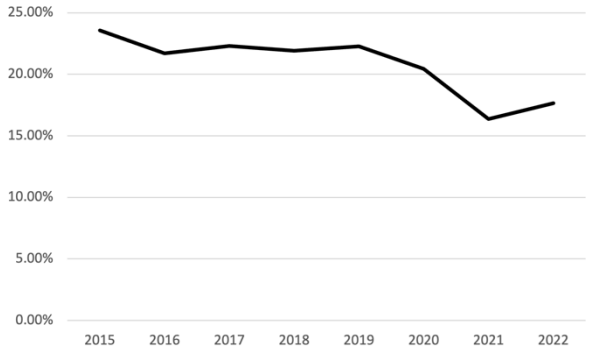

Figure 36. ACP SS percentage formula results after the break.

Trends after the break also show a decrease from 23.57% (in 2015) to 17.66% (in 2022), with a minimum SS percentage of 16.38% and a maximum of 23.57%.

A second conclusion drawn from the data suggests the measurement for ACP SS attendance changed between 2010 and 2015. The 2010 ACP shows “Sunday School Enrollment”

while the 2015 shows "Sunday School/Bible Study/Small Group Avg. Attendance."[45] This suggests the 2015 and following data to be more accurate in actual attendance as the 2015 *average attendance* is more accurate than 2010 and earlier measurements based on overall *enrollment*. The change in data measurement is better in 2015 because a person who visits four churches in 2010 would have been marked on four different church reports (assuming they were added to SS enrollment at all four churches). With the change of measurement in 2015, this same person visiting four different churches would have been averaged into each church's calculations and thus should only be included for a maximum of once for the overall calculation. Even with the changes in measurement, both sets of data show a decline over time.

Primary worship attendance, baptism, and Sunday School data analysis

Beginning in 2004, the ACP reports data for the Primary Worship Attendance (PWA). This section compares PWA data to baptism and SS data. Utilizing the data in figure 10, Baptism PWA Percentage Formula, and applying it over time shows a decreasing trend as displayed in figure 37.

[45] "Annual of the 2010 Southern Baptist Convention: One Hundred Fifth-third Session, One Hundred Sixty-fifth Year" prepared by the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention (Orlando, FL: Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, 2010), 124-25; "Annual of the 2015 Southern Baptist Convention: One Hundred Fifty-Eight Session, One Hundred Seventieth Year" prepared by the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention (Columbus, OH: Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, 2015), 122-23;

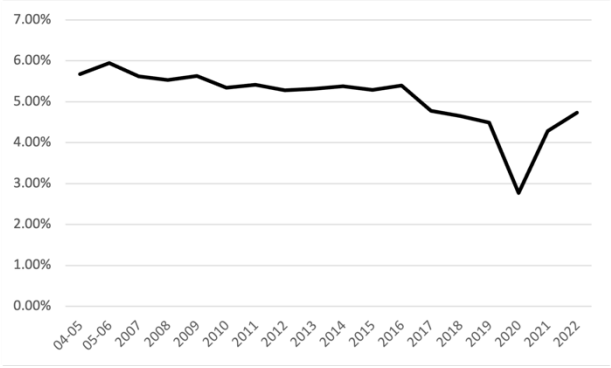

Figure 37. ACP PWA baptism percentage results.

Beginning in 2015 at 5.68% and decreasing to 4.74% in 2022, with a minimum of 2.77% and a maximum of 5.94%, the PWA shows a decrease over time. Similarly, figure 38 shows the PWA SS Percent Results.

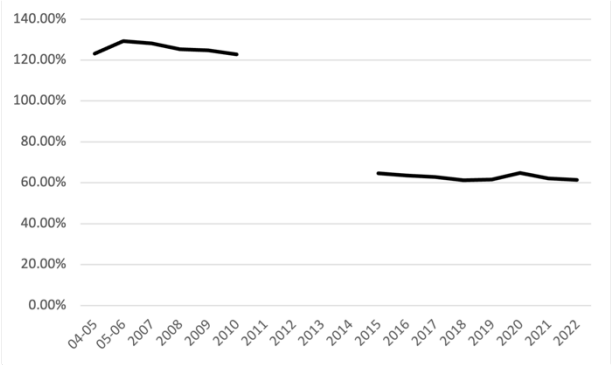

Figure 38. ACP PWA SS percentage results.

Results begin in 2015 at 123.14% and decrease to 122.79% in 2010, with a minimum of 122.79% and a maximum of 129.21%. The second SS measurement, 64.64% in 2016, after the data measurements for SS enrollment to average attendance changed, and decreasing to 61.37% in 2022, with a minimum of 61.30% and a maximum of 64.85% showing a decrease in SS attendance.

Summary

The ACP and PWA data both show long-term decreases in discipleship data. While the data did mark years of increase, these years of increase never led to a sustained growing trend as numbers declined within a few years. The SS data is incomplete, with some data points missing and data collection procedures altered during the analyzed period. Even with these limitations, all data shows trends of, (1) fewer baptisms per members, (2) fewer SS attendees per members, (3) fewer baptisms per PWA, and (4) fewer SS attendees per PWA.

CCLI Over the Years Statistical Analysis

To find correlations in the data, SPSS was used to statistically compare modern corporate worship singing trends to ACP discipleship data. This section presents CCLI and ACP trends from 1989–2022 based on statistical correlations, then marks correlations between Thornton measurements and discipleship data, before discussing McKinney correlations to discipleship data. This section presents correlation statistical analysis, illustrated in figure 39, before discussing results by year, the Thornton formula, and the McKinney formula.

		Year	Thornton	McKinney	Baptism	Sunday School	Baptism (PWA)	Sunday School (PWA)
Year	Pearson Correlation	1	.957**	.615**	-.862**	-.900**	-.768**	-.942**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	34	34	34	34	30	18	14
Thornton	Pearson Correlation	.957**	1	.761**	-.778**	-.779**	-.701**	-.736**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		<.001	<.001	<.001	.001	.003
	N	34	34	34	34	30	18	14
McKinney	Pearson Correlation	.615**	.761**	1	-.292	-.222	.684**	.912**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001		.094	.238	.002	<.001
	N	34	34	34	34	30	18	14
Baptism	Pearson Correlation	-.862**	-.778**	-.292	1	.902**	.940**	.772**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	.094		<.001	<.001	.001
	N	34	34	34	34	30	18	14
Sunday School	Pearson Correlation	-.900**	-.779**	-.222	.902**	1	.699**	.991**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	.238	<.001		.005	<.001
	N	30	30	30	30	30	14	14
Baptism (PWA)	Pearson Correlation	-.768**	-.701**	.684**	.940**	.699**	1	.671**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.001	.002	<.001	.005		.009
	N	18	18	18	18	14	18	14
Sunday School (PWA)	Pearson Correlation	-.942**	-.736**	.912**	.772**	.991**	.671**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.003	<.001	.001	<.001	.009	
	N	14	14	14	14	14	14	14

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Figure 39. SPSS correlation results from 1989-2022.

CCLI and ACP trends over the years

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between passing years and Thornton results. A strong positive correlation was found (r (32) = .957, p <.001), indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. As time progressed, songs became increasingly man-centered. A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between passing years and McKinney results. A moderate positive correlation was found (r (32) = .615, p <.001), indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. As time progressed, songs became increasingly singular, though only by a moderate amount.

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between passing years and ACP baptisms compared to total membership. A strong negative correlation was found (r (32) = -.862, p <.001), indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. As time progressed, smaller percentages of total members were baptized. Similarly, A Pearson

correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between passing years and ACP baptisms compared to PWA. A strong negative correlation was found (r (16) = -.768, p <.001), indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. As time progressed, smaller percentages of people attending corporate worship services were baptized.

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between passing years and ACP SS attendance compared to total membership. A strong negative correlation was found (r (28) = -.900, p <.001), indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. As time progressed, smaller percentages of people attending corporate worship services also attended SS. Similarly, A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between passing years and ACP SS compared to PWA. A strong negative correlation was found (r (12) = -.942, p <.001), indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. As time progressed, smaller percentages of people attending corporate worship services also attended SS.

Over the years, statistically strong and statistically significant correlations exist. First, as years progress songs became more man-centered and singular-focused, though the amount of singular-focus is not as strong as the increased in man-centered songs.[46] Second, as years progress fewer people were baptized based on both total membership and on PWA calculations. Third, as years progress fewer people were attending SS both based on total membership and on PWA calculations. This shows not only that less people attending churches over time, but percentages of those baptized and those attending SS also decreased.

[46] This data supports the church song records correlation above which found a moderate positive correlation suggesting as songs become more man-centered they also tend to be more singular-focused.

Thornton correlations

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between Thornton and McKinney results. A strong positive correlation was found (r (32) = .761, p <.001), indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. As songs become increasingly man-centered, so too do they become increasingly singular.

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between Thornton and ACP baptisms compared to total membership. A strong negative correlation was found (r (32) = -.778, p <.001), indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. As songs become increasingly man-centered smaller percentages of total membership are baptized. Similarly, A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between Thornton and ACP baptisms compared to PWA. A strong negative correlation was found (r (16) = -.701, p =.001), indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. As songs become increasingly man-centered smaller percentages of people attending corporate worship services are baptized.

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between Thornton and ACP SS attendance compared to total membership. A strong negative correlation was found (r (28) = -.779, p <.001), indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. As songs become increasingly man-centered smaller percentages of people attending corporate worship services also attend SS. Similarly, A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between Thornton and ACP SS compared to PWA. A strong negative correlation was found (r (12) = -.736, p =.003), indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. As songs become increasingly man-centered smaller percentages of people attending corporate worship services also attend SS.

Comparing the Thornton results to discipleship data shows statistically strong and statistically significant correlations. First, as songs become more man-centered, they also become more singular-focused. Second, as songs become more man-centered, fewer people are baptized. Third, as songs become more man-centered, fewer people are attending SS. In summation: decreases in discipleship involvement were correlated with increases in man-centered corporate worship singing.[47]

McKinney correlations

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between McKinney and ACP baptism attendance compared to PWA. A moderate positive correlation was found (r (16) = .684, p<.002), indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. As songs become increasingly singular-focused moderately, greater percentages of people attending corporate worship services are also baptized. Similarly, a Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between McKinney and ACP SS compared to PWA. A strong positive correlation was found (r (12) = .912, p <.001), indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. As songs become increasingly singular-focused greater percentages of people attending corporate worship services also attend SS. These McKinney results, for PWA baptism and SS attendance showing an increase in PWA data, seems to contradict the correlation between an increase in man-centered songs and singular-focused songs: therefore, additional analysis and discussion is required.

Figures 40 and 41 show McKinney to baptism and SS correlation data for 1989-2010 (the first SS measurement) and 2015-2022 (the second SS measurement), respectively.

[47] Correlation does not prove causation. While this data shows statistically strong and statistically significant correlations, this researcher recognizes any number of factors could cause such a correlation.

1989–2010 (Sunday School First Measurement) McKinney and ACP Correlations

		McKinney	Baptism	Sunday School	Baptism (PWA)	Sunday School (PWA)
McKinney	Pearson Correlation	1	-.563**	-.918**	.637	.981**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.006	<.001	.124	<.001
	N	22	22	22	7	7
Baptism	Pearson Correlation	-.563**	1	.689**	.104	-.642
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006		<.001	.824	.120
	N	22	22	22	7	7
Sunday School	Pearson Correlation	-.918**	.689**	1	-.327	-.914**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001		.475	.004
	N	22	22	22	7	7
Baptism (PWA)	Pearson Correlation	.637	.104	-.327	1	.634
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.124	.824	.475		.126
	N	7	7	7	7	7
Sunday School (PWA)	Pearson Correlation	.981**	-.642	-.914**	.634	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.120	.004	.126	
	N	7	7	7	7	7

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Figure 40. SPSS McKinney correlation results from 1989-2010.

2015–2022 (Sunday School Second Measurement) McKinney and ACP Correlations

		McKinney	Baptism	Sunday School	Baptism (PWA)	Sunday School (PWA)
McKinney	Pearson Correlation	1	-.043	-.302	.175	.322
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.920	.467	.678	.436
	N	8	8	8	8	8
Baptism	Pearson Correlation	-.043	1	.698	.895**	-.046
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.920		.054	.003	.914
	N	8	8	8	8	8
Sunday School	Pearson Correlation	-.302	.698	1	.310	.368
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.467	.054		.455	.370
	N	8	8	8	8	8
Baptism (PWA)	Pearson Correlation	.175	.895**	.310	1	-.228
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.678	.003	.455		.587
	N	8	8	8	8	8
Sunday School (PWA)	Pearson Correlation	.322	-.046	.368	-.228	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.436	.914	.370	.587	
	N	8	8	8	8	8

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Figure 41. SPSS McKinney correlation results from 2015-2022.

Data for 2015–2022, displayed in figure 41, yielded weak correlations and insignificant results and is thus unnecessary for this conversation other than to document its irrelevant data. The data for figure 40, however, shows opposite direction movement for both baptism versus baptism (PWA) and SS versus SS (PWA) results from 1989-2010. Visualized a different way, figure 42 shows the years of the first SS measurement with the years of PWA data marked in grey.

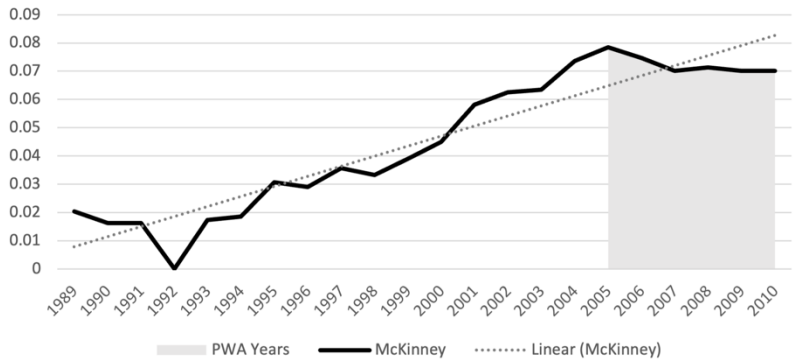

Figure 42. Excel McKinney correlation results from 2015-2022.

Within the years of PWA data (2005 to 2010), the McKinney median results moved similarly to the downward SS PWA trends despite an overall increasing trend from 1989 to 2010 as illustrated in scatterplots shown in figure 43, and thus created a positive correlation during that limited period of data. Since the PWA data is but part of the overall data set, it is therefore not the best measurement of correlation and created a misleading correlation between McKinney and baptism (PWA) as well as McKinney and SS (PWA) results.

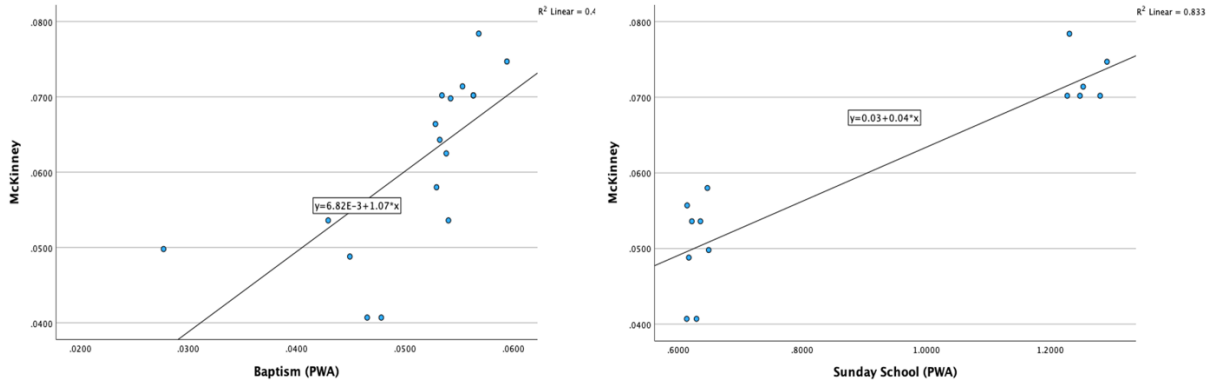

Figure 43. Scatterplots of McKinney to baptism (PWA) and SS (PWA).

In actuality, figure 40 shows the relationship between McKinney and baptism data from 1989 to 2010. A moderately strong negative correlation (r (20) = -.563, p<.006) between 1989 and 2010, indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. As songs became increasingly become singular-focused, smaller percentages of people attending corporate

worship services are baptized. Similarly, figure 40 shows the relationship between McKinney and SS data from 1989 to 2010. A strong negative correlation (r (20) = -.918, p <.001) between 1989 and 2010, indicating a significant linear relationship between the two variables. As songs became increasingly singular-focused, smaller percentages of people attending corporate worship services also attend SS. Figure 44 shows the scatterplots of baptism and SS data from 1989–2022 marking the linear negative correlations of the data.

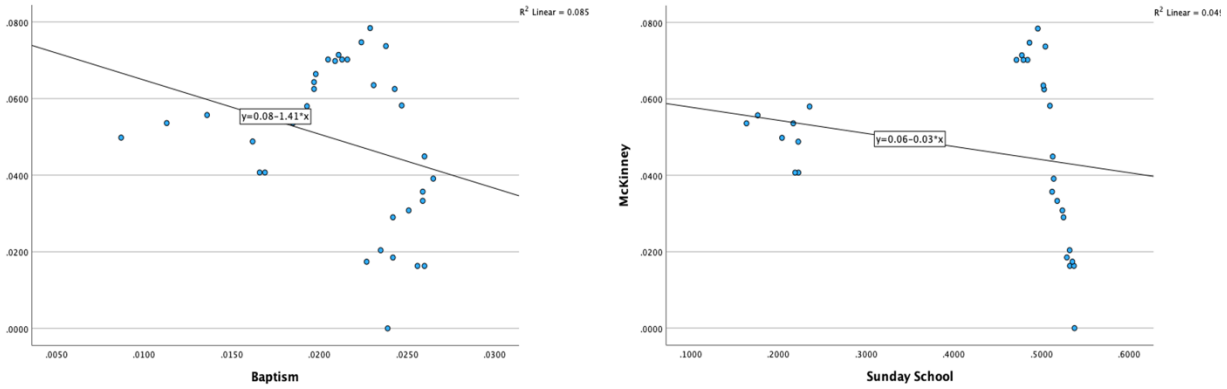

Figure 44. Scatterplots of McKinney to baptism and SS.

To summarize, initial correlation data analysis illustrated in figure 39 shows an increase in singular-focused songs from 1989 to 2022 while also showing a decrease in baptism and SS data. At the same time, it also shows a moderately strong positive significant correlation between McKinney and baptism (PWA) data, as well as a strong positive significant correlation between McKinney and SS (PWA) data; thus, falsely suggesting as singular-focused songs increase so too does baptism and SS data. Upon further scrutiny, the data shows a moderately strong negative significant correlation between McKinney and baptism data from 1989 to 2010, as well as a weak insignificant correlation from 2015–2022. In addition, the data shows a strong negative significant correlation between McKinney and SS data from 1989–2020, as well as a moderate and insignificant correlation from 2015–2022. Therefore, as songs become increasingly singular-focused, baptism and SS attendance percentages go down.

Summary

The above statistical analysis marks an increase in man-centered and singular-focused songs from 1989–2022. It also marks a decrease in baptisms and SS attendance over the same period. In addition, Thornton's CCLI data marks a correlation between an increase in man-centered songs and an increase in singular-focused songs, as well as a correlation between an increase in man-centered songs and a decrease in both baptisms and SS attendance. Finally, the data at quick glance suggests an increase in singular-focused songs leads to an increase in baptisms and SS attendance; however, upon further scrutiny, the data more accurately shows a decrease in baptism and SS attendance as more songs are singular-focused.

CCLI Over the Years Categorical Analysis

The Thornton categorical analysis shows the percentage of songs that are God-centered, man-centered, and neutral by year. Figure 45 marks God-centered and man-centered CCLI trends from 1989 to 2023.

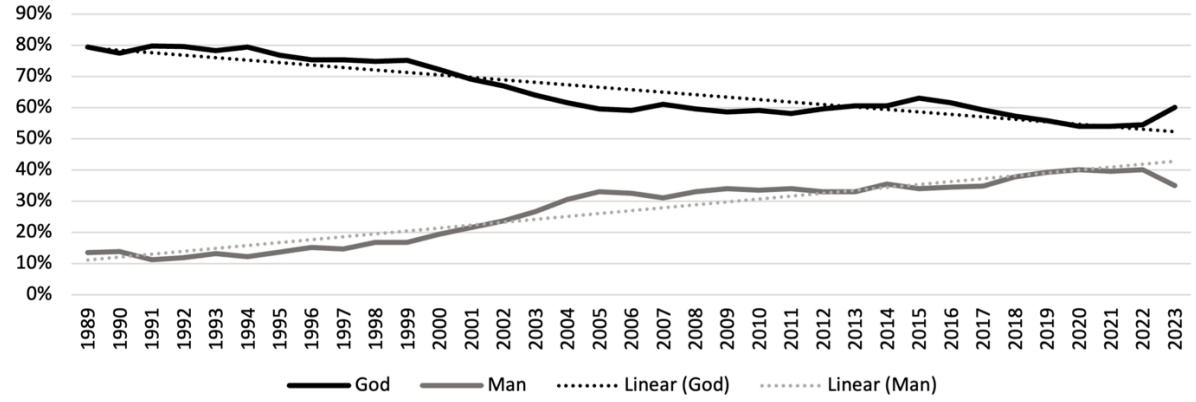

Figure 45. Excel Thornton God-centered and man-centered categorical percentages by year with trendlines.

While the God-centered and man-centered trends are obvious in figure 45, the trendlines show a clear decrease in God-centered songs and an increase in man-centered songs according to the

Thornton values. This data supports the statistical analysis, which finds an increase in man-centered songs over time. One interesting thing figure 45 shows is a change of direction for both variables in 2023. It is too early to tell if this will be a short-term change or if it will last the long haul. However, this type of short-term change has occurred several times in the data and has yet to create a long-term trend.

The McKinney categorical analysis follows the percentage of songs that are singular, man-centered, neutral, and none. Figure 46 marks communal and singular CCLI trends from 1989 to 2023.

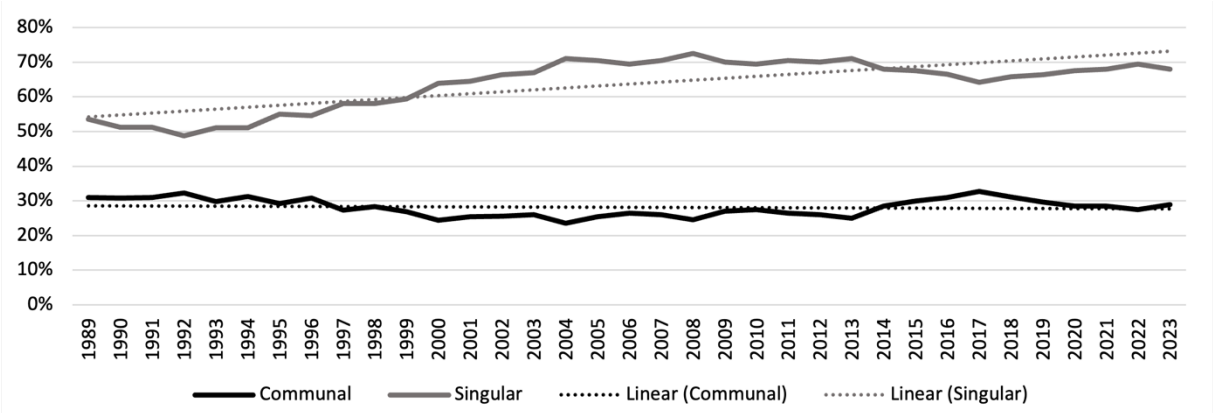

Figure 46. Excel McKinney communal and singular categorical percentages by year with trendlines.

Figure 46 shows a clear upward trend of man-centered songs, with a slight downward trend to communal song percentages (beginning at 31% and decreasing to 29%). This data supports the statistical analysis, which found an increase in singular-focused songs over time.

CCLI Over the Years Secondary Analysis

Secondary analysis combines Thornton and McKinney data to mark trends. Figure 47 shows the secondary analysis results.

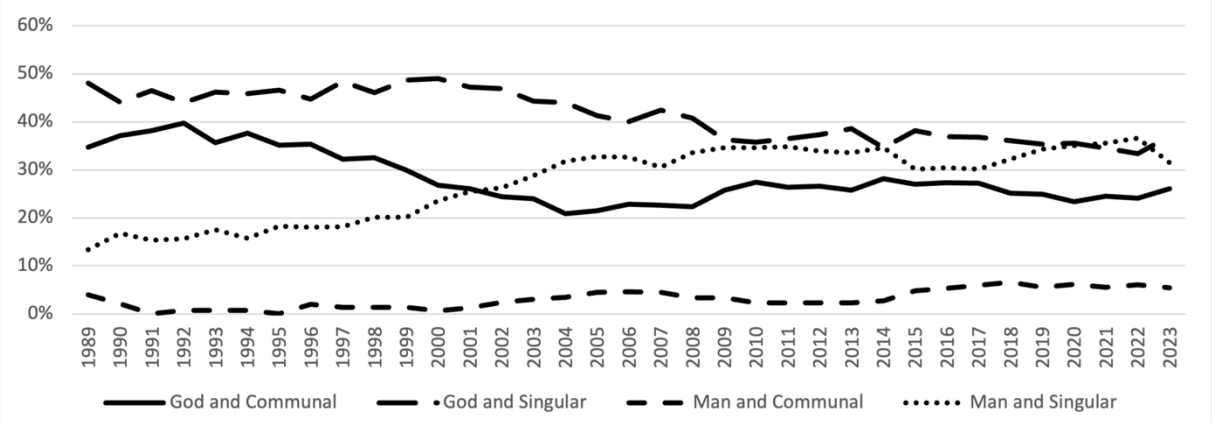

Figure 47. Excel CCLI secondary categorical analysis by year.

Figure 47 is helpful to see the overall data, but it is difficult to determine trends based on figure 47 alone. For instance, for several years the value for "God and Communal" increases beginning in 2004; that increase encompasses several years illustrating a temporary change, but is it enough to stop the overall trend? The answer is more apparent in figure 48, showing ongoing data trends.

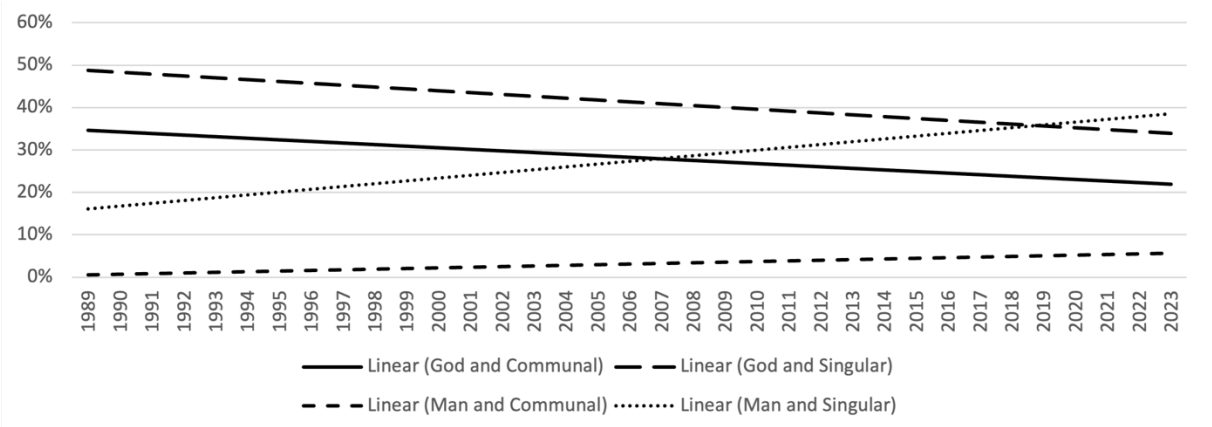

Figure 48. Excel CCLI secondary categorical analysis by year.

Figure 48 shows the answer to the above question to be *no*; despite the several-year increases for *God and Communal* from 1989 to 2023, there still exists an overall decrease in songs that are both *God and Communal*.

The categorical analysis shows a decrease for *God and Communal* songs, a decrease for *God and Singular* songs, an increase for *Man and Communal* songs, and an increase for *Man and*

Singular songs. Table 11 shows the minimum, maximum, and percentage of change values for all four categories.

Table 11. Secondary analysis percentage of change

	Minimum	**Maximum**	**% of Change**
God and Communal	20.8%	33.3%	60.1%
God and Singular	33.3%	49.0%	47.1%
Man and Communal	0.0%	6.6%	Incalculable
Man and Singular	13.3%	36.6%	175.2%

It is clear change occurred in all four categories, even though *Man and Communal* is incalculable there is an obvious difference between 0.00% and 6.6%; still, the amount of increase evident in the *Man and Singular* category is significantly larger than the others.

Summary of 30-Year Trend Analysis

The statistical, categorical, and secondary analyses all suggest the same conclusions. First, from 1989 to 2023, songs increasingly became man-centered. Second, from 1989 to 2023, songs increasingly became singular-focused. Third, there is a strong and significant correlation between an increase in man-centered and singular-focused songs, there is a strong and significant correlation between man-centered songs and fewer baptisms and SS attendance, and there is a moderate and significant correlation between singular-focused songs and fewer baptisms with a strong and significant correlation between singular-focused songs and smaller SS attendance. In summary, the data marks trends of corporate worship songs becoming increasingly man-centered and singular-focused, which correlates with a simultaneous trend of fewer baptisms and lower SS attendance.

Church Interview Compared to CCLI and ACP Data

This section compares church song and discipleship records to validate them as representative of modern trends. The church song records statistically showed a median value for the Thornton formula value of 0.8308 and the McKinney formula value of 0.0389. During the same period, CCLI data statistically showed a median value for the Thornton formula value of 0.8604 and the McKinney formula value of 0.0532. A comparison of statistical values is illustrated in table 12.

Table 12. Church song records statistically compared to CCLI data

	Thornton	**McKinney**
Church Song Records	0.8308	0.0389
CCLI (June 2023)	0.8604	0.0532

The church song records categorically averaged (mean) 60.2% of songs as God-centered, 33.8% as man-centered, 33.0% as communal, and 63.2% as singular. During the same period, CCLI data for June 2023 records shows 60.0% of songs as God-centered, 35.0% as man-centered, 29.0% as communal, and 68.0% as singular. A comparison of these results is in table 13.

Table 13. Church song records categorically compared to CCLI data

	God-Centered	**Man-Centered**	**Communal**	**Singular**
Church Song Records	60.2%	33.8%	33.0%	63.2%
CCLI (June 2023)	60.0%	35.0%	29.0%	68.0%

Using Excel to measure the central tendency of the church interviews, the estimated discipleship percentage shows the mean is 63.3% with a median of 68.5%. The interquartile range for estimated discipleship percentage is from 52.9% to 76.1% with a full range from 27.1% to 86.7%. A boxplot for estimated discipleship percentage is visualized in figure 48.

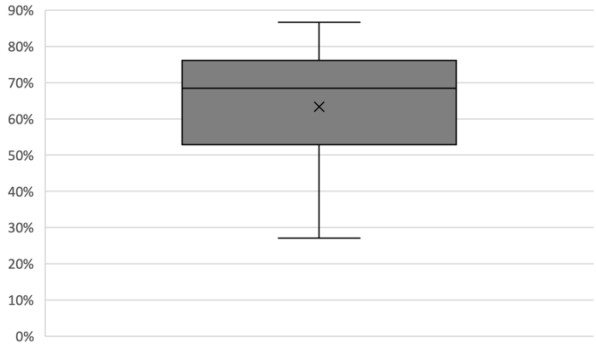

Figure 49. Excel boxplot of estimated discipleship percentages for church interviews.

ACP data shows a 61.4% SS percentage, based on PWA, and therefore is like the estimated discipleship percentage of 63.3% shown above.

Clearly, church song records reflect CCLI Thornton's categorical values as both percentages are nearly identical. At the same time, church song records reflect CCLI McKinney categorical values with similar percentages, though this evidence shows church song records utilizing more communal songs than CCLI records show. In addition, church leader discipleship data reflects ACP data. As a result, this dissertation claims the churches interviewed are representative of modern song trends, as represented by CCLI within this dissertation, as well as modern discipleship percentages, as represented by ACP data.

Summary of Church Leader Interviews and Song Record Analysis

The results of the church leader interviews suggest church leaders agree with scholars while simultaneously following CCLI and ACP trends. They strongly agreed that "corporate worship songs form the communal identity of congregants," yet more of their corporate worship songs categorically and statistically utilized singular language. Thirty years of data analysis suggest songs are becoming increasingly man-centered and singular-focused with statistical correlations between man-centered and singular-focused songs correlating with decreased discipleship percentages. This section closed by comparing the results of church leader data and

current CCLI and ACP data, finding the date from the church leaders interviewed to emulate modern trends.

These research findings suggest church leaders represent modern trends and are likely to continue doing so in the future. Church leaders are not immune to modern trends becoming increasingly man-centered, singular-focused, with fewer people actively involved in discipleship. In summation, church leaders believe in the formative nature of corporate worship songs but must change their practices if they desire corporate worship songs to encourage growing communal identity and create times of corporate worship that include song lyrics that are more God-centered and communal.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

This dissertation presented different data sets evaluating corporate song lyrics and discipleship data over time comparing those results to both scholarly literature and church leader interviews. Research findings support increasing man-centered and singular singing despite scholarly encouragement for more God-centered and communal corporate worship songs. If corporate worship song lyric trends continue, there will be more man-centered than God-centered songs like there are currently more singular than communal songs. This section closes this dissertation addressing the data and supplying suggestions.

Research Question Answers

RQ1: What do modern corporate worship trends teach congregants about their communal identity? Modern trends encourage congregants to view the church through their individualistic perspective through increasing number of songs utilizing singular language emphasizing the singer's personal relationship with God. At the same time, song trends increasingly emphasize man over God. Thus, not only are songs emphasizing an individual relationship with God, but the songs also increasingly emphasize individuals above God by using more man-centered than God-centered language. As a result, corporate worship songs do not encourage congregants to grow in their communal identity. To the contrary, the increasing corporate worship song emphasis on the individual places individuals above the rest of the gathered body of believers. While some corporate worship songs utilizing *individualistic* language is appropriate within corporate worship services, it is the excessive use of individualistic language that discourages congregants from growing their communal identity with the body of believers because they may erroneously conclude worship is solely between them and God.

The Literature Review marked the theologically formative and representational nature of congregational singing. Scholars also mostly stand against individualistically-focused times of corporate worship. At the same time, they do not entirely remove the individual from consideration in corporate worship, they simply agree that too much cultural individualism in corporate worship is undesirable. For them, corporate worship music is a communal activity that includes individuals; thus, to separate individual believers and the community of believers is to misunderstand biblical teaching. It is in recognizing the community is composed of individuals that scholars struggle to make application. Some scholars encourage only communal lyrics, which deemphasizes individuals in corporate worship, while others allow for some inclusion of first-person lyrics. Church leader interview responses also struggled with this question. When answering the question "Should corporate worship song lyrics focus on an individual's Christian walk?" they supported both *yes* and *both*. Therefore, church leaders struggle with the precise amount of individualistic language in corporate worship. Still, agreement exists among church leaders and scholars that modern trends are individualistic and too much individualistic language is undesirable among corporate worship songs.

This researcher suggests more God-centered than man-centered and more communal than singular corporate worship song lyrics. Like other scholars, this researcher is unwilling to establish an exact amount as some individualistically-focused singing is appropriate within corporate worship songs (i.e. a time of *Invitation* is specifically designed for individual response). However, to grow the communal identity of congregants through corporate worship songs this researcher concludes more communal than singular language should be utilized.

RQ2: How do worship leaders and senior pastors encourage communal identity through corporate worship? Most church leaders agree (63%) that "corporate worship songs encourage

congregants to engage more in the discipleship aspects of [their] church." In addition to song lyrics, they also encourage congregants to grow in their communal identity by presenting opportunities for discipleship, discipleship classes (Sunday School for some of the church leaders), and modeling being an active member of the church for their congregants. Church leaders also intentionally invite congregants to discipleship opportunities while on the platform and through one-on-one conversations.

While church leaders recognize that corporate song lyrics affect communal identity, and actively try to get people to engage more in the life of the church, their song records reflect the CCLI song records almost perfectly when comparing the church leader's songs from April to June of 2023 to the CCLI songs for January to June of 2023. This suggests church leaders intellectually agree with scholars; yet, that understanding does not affect their song selection. Unfortunately, this means church leaders are thinking one thing but practicing another. While they encourage congregants to engage more in discipleship, at the same time most songs elevate the individual above the community of believers through utilizing individualistic language. The deficiency in communal language may be compensated by the God-centered nature of their corporate worship songs as church leaders chose more God-centered songs than man-centered ones.

In summation: church leaders use a variety of means to encourage communal identity. Most of them believe corporate worship songs at least aid in forming communal identity, while also utilizing more individualistic than communal language in their corporate worship song selections.

This researcher suggests continuing to use announcements, song transitions, sermons, and other aspects of corporate worship services to encourage congregants to grow in their communal

identity. However, these verbal encouragements pale in comparison to corporate worship songs which meet both the cognitive and emotions of congregants. Therefore, this researcher suggests a *both/and* approach to both increasing communal language in corporate worship songs and encouraging congregants to grow in their communal identity through other aspects of corporate worship.

RQ3: What quantifiable results do records show about communal identity through the lyrics of corporate songs? The statistical, categorical, and secondary analyses all suggest the same conclusions. First, from 1989 to 2023 songs increasingly become man-centered. Second, from 1989 to 2023 songs increasingly become singular-focused. Third, there is a statistically strong and significant correlation between an increase in man-centered and singular-focused songs, there is a statistically strong and significant correlation between man-centered songs and fewer baptisms and SS attendance, and there is a statistically moderate and significant correlation between singular-focused songs and fewer baptisms with a statistically strong and significant correlation between singular-focused songs and fewer SS attendance. In summary, quantifiable data marks trends of corporate worship songs becoming increasingly man-centered and singular-focused which correlates to decreases in discipleship data.[1]

This researcher suggests church leaders take seriously the decreasing discipleship data trend and use every means available to disciple their congregations. This dissertation's data suggests recent church trends are failing and increasing God-centered times of corporate worship utilizing communal language may help increase discipleship. It is time church leaders stop

[1] This researcher reminds readers that correlation does not prove causation. Additional factors, beyond the scope of this dissertation, may have caused this correlation.

meeting the perceived needs of congregants and encourage congregants to grow in their communal identity.

Summary and Reflection of Research Process

This research has been an incredible opportunity for this researcher to evaluate claims he has not been able to justify. In addition, this research process has allowed him to conclude the gap is not between worship scholars and application (measured through CCLI records), but a gap between church leaders' thinking and practice. Thus, the research becomes extremely personal for him, as a church leader, in utilizing communal language to help congregants grow in their communal identity.

The educational experience of this dissertation has allowed this researcher to grow in quantitative research methods most significantly evidenced by his greater understanding of statistical analysis. Prior to this dissertation, this researcher had little experience with statistical analysis, though the capacity for growth in the area was already existent. Above all, this researcher is thankful to complete a dissertation that fills a gap in scholarly literature, aiding church leaders in recognizing the importance of utilizing communal language, and encouraging scholarly conversations on communal versus singular language to a new level.

Suggested Applications of this Research

The content of this dissertation affects all believers, but most heavily affects songwriters and song publishers as well as church leaders. This section directly addresses these audiences.

To Songwriters and Song Publishers

This dissertation's research suggests corporate worship song lyrics should be God-centered as scholars, church leaders, and CCLI data all support this conclusion.[2] Yet, the number of God-centered songs, as analyzed and presented within this dissertation, decreases from 1989-2023. This researcher does not believe songwriters intentionally decrease God-centered lyrics, but they are increasing the number of songs utilizing individualistic language. Thus, while some consider God-centered versus man-centered songs to be a different conversation than singular versus communal language, the statistical correlation between increases in singular language and man-centered songs connects the two (as illustrated in figure 39). Therefore, this researcher encourages songwriters and song publishers to reconsider increasing the use of individualistic language for corporate worship songs.

To accomplish more communal and less singular language in corporate worship songs songwriters and song publishers may be able to release different versions of songs. Songs written for CCM are for private worship, and nothing within this dissertation measures or refutes the validity of individualistic language in private worship. However, a challenge exists when churches begin using songs written for CCM as part of corporate worship. Therefore, this researcher encourages songwriters and song publishers to release versions of popular CCM songs utilizing communal language for use in corporate worship services. Doing so will allow churches to use popular CCM songs while also using scholars preferred communal language. First West Worship said: "They're [songwriters] writing from a songwriter's perspective. That's why a lot of times the music and melody is just awesome…They're still thinking of it [sic] on a personal level, so let's all sing it together on a personal level. And when that saturates too much, we get

[2] This researcher also believes songwriters and music publishers support this conclusion as well.

away from the we/us mentality."[3] First West Worship was thankful for the unique perspectives of songwriters while also marking the incompatibility of individualistic language with the *we/us* of corporate worship.

In summary to songwriters and song publishers: church leaders love your songs, that is why they use them even though they utilize more individualistic language than they prefer, is it possible to release versions of your songs for corporate worship that utilize communal language?

To Church Leaders

This researcher was disappointed to find the gap was not between scholars and corporate song records, but within church leaders themselves.[4] Every week worship pastors balance a variety of factors from musical taste to demands for time considerations to congregational engagement; so, to add another item for consideration seems daunting. There are many resources that supply suggestions for planning corporate worship (i.e., Frank Page and Lavon Gray's *Hungry for Worship* and Martin Thielen's *Getting Ready for Sunday* both supply practical guides for planning worship, while Bob Kauflin's *Worship Matters* supplies a list of "healthy tensions" for corporate worship).[5] Even with all the resources available few, if any, account for excessive individualistic language. This dissertation shows the statistically significant correlation between corporate song language and discipleship data (between both Thornton and McKinney data); but it also shows the gap between church leader thinking and song records.

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[3] First West Worship, video interview by author, Google Meet, July 20, 2023.

[4] This claim is deeply personal to this researcher as a long-time worship pastor himself.

[5] Frank S. Page and L. Lavon Gray, *Hungry for Worship: Challenges and Solutions for Today's Church* (Birmingham, AL: New Hope, 2014), 168-69; Martin Thielen, *Getting Ready for Sunday: A Practical Guide for Worship Planning* (Broadman Press, 1989); Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 153-210.

Church leaders should not assume thinking about corporate worship songs equates to choosing particular types of songs for corporate worship. Church leaders should devise a method of measurement and accountability for song selection; a long-term strategy for analyzing song records to see if they are truly helping their congregants to grow in their communal identity or focusing on individuals. Without a clear method of measurement and accountability, church leaders are likely to follow CCLI trends and utilize an excessive number of songs with individualistic language. Unfortunately, there is not a magic button that will make it happen, nor is there an external force that will require it of them. If church leaders are going to change the corporate song records for their church, they are going to have to measure, analyze, and evaluate songs and this will only happen when they intentionally decide to make it happen. Fortunately, this dissertation supplies a procedure and methodology for objectively analyzing corporate worship songs.

Recommendations for Future Research

As with all scholarly literature, this dissertation branched out by adding a unique contribution to scholarly literature. By delimiting research and hyper-focusing research, opportunities for future research exist. This section highlights five key recommendations for future research.

Chapter Three notes this dissertation utilized a sample population to represent all church leaders delimiting church interviews to worship pastors and senior pastors (along with other similar titles) of SBC Churches in Florida who are full-time employees. As with any sample population, the researcher hopes the sample size represents the greater population but cannot confirm this research is representative until someone does additional research. This researcher encourages scholars to compare this dissertation's interview results to additional data sets. This

researcher also encourages a nationwide, or a worldwide, study to most accurately represent church leader views.

A second recommendation for additional research is based on the *SS PWA Percentage Formula* found in chapter three. The PWA data measurement was first reported in the 2004-2005 ACP Report. As a result, there are currently only eighteen years of data for PWA, four of which do not have simultaneous data for SS attendance. Thus, analysis during the period may have yielded incomplete results (although as discussed above, the results were found consistent when considered alongside similar data during the same period). This incomplete data suggests future research to validate claims made within this dissertation based on the current data. This researcher also suggests additional data sets to see if similar statistical correlations exist beyond the ACP data. The Barna Group, Lifeway Research, Pew Research, or US Census Data may supply additional data to either affirm or refute ACP and CCLI data findings.

A third opportunity for research is found in CCLI records. Currently CCLI supplies the Top 100 Songs for the US, United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada. Following this dissertation's research methodology, this researcher encourages future scholars to compare song lyrics around the world. But CCLI also supplies data by decade, seasonal songs, and even languages other than English. Utilizing CCLI as a resource with this dissertation's objective measurements encourages a plethora of potential research for future scholars.

This researcher limited data analysis to objective and quantifiable methods. However, music is highly subjective, and songs may have a subjectively God-centered focus while utilizing man-centered language. This idea also came up in the Literature Review where songs were suggested communal because they took place among a group of people, despite utilizing individualistic language. Therefore, this researcher recognizes there is also a subjective

conversation that should also be considered. This researcher recommends song analysis of a group of songs both objectively following objective and quantifiable methods, like in this dissertation, alongside subjective analysis of those same songs. While this dissertation represented trends based on objective data analysis, subjective analysis will yield additional data to increase understanding of modern song trends.

A final suggested research opportunity identifies the limited collection of corporate song records of church leader corporate song lyric records analyzed within this dissertation. While eighteen churches are enough to draw conclusions, the depth of those conclusions may be limited by the particular church song records. Expanding the amount of church song records will allow greater depth and insight into the data and better compare it to modern trends. For this reason, this researcher encourages future scholars to expand this dissertation's findings by performing additional song analyses.

There are, of course, additional opportunities for research based on this dissertation's methods and analysis. This section merely serves as an introduction to inspire future scholars to continue growing worship scholarly literature through thoughtful and sound research practices.

Scholarly Contributions

This section marks four scholarly contributions this dissertation makes. The first, and most obvious, is the *McKinney* formula for objectively quantifying singular and communal word usage in corporate worship songs. This contribution would not have been possible without Daniel Thornton's formula presented in "Exploring the Contemporary Congregational Genre."[6]

[6] Daniel Thornton, "Exploring the Contemporary Congregational Song Genre: Texts, Practice, and Industry," (PhD thesis, Macquarie University, 2014), https://www.academia.edu/24269011/Exploring_the_Contemporary_Congregational_Song_Genre_Texts_Practice_and_Industry.

While Thornton's formula was instrumental in objectively quantifying God-centered versus man-centered songs, it was inadequate in dealing with songs that included no individual or communal language; thus, a new formula was necessary. The ability to objectively quantify song lyrics for singular or communal lyrics is a research method this researcher was unable to locate in scholarly literature. Therefore, the new McKinney formula for objective and quantifiable measuring of corporate worship song lyrics is a contribution to scholarly literature.

A second contribution this dissertation makes is based on the scale of the CCLI analysis. The Literature Review shows few authors performing CCLI song records analyses and the ones who did accomplishing their study on a small scale. This dissertation contributes quantifiable data for analysis of the CCLI Top 100 songs from 1989 to 2023 in the US. To date, this researcher has not found a study of song lyrics on such a scale as is presented in this dissertation.

A third contribution is a unique method of comparing CCLI and ACP records. This method supplies statistical correlations between data sets that may be considered disconnected by others. Yet, by comparing Thornton and McKinney results to discipleship data, this dissertation found statistical correlations that are both statistically strong and significant. While this dissertation cannot claim song lyrics are the only factor correlating the data, this dissertation does suggest a correlation that is uniquely found.

Every dissertation supplying interview data, supplies a unique contribution to scholarly literature that is difficult for others to replicate. While church leader views may or may not represent all church leaders, they constitute a unique group of church leaders, asked a unique set of questions, and responded with unique answers. Thus, one of the contributions of this dissertation is the unique group of church leaders interviewed for this dissertation. In addition,

their church song records represent eighteen unique churches over a specific span of time, and therefore also contribute a unique data set for analysis.

Closing Summary

Scholars long encouraged church leaders to make corporate worship songs God-centered and communally-focused by utilizing God-centered and communal language in their corporate worship songs. Yet, from 1989-2023 corporate worship songs have become more man-centered and more individualistically-focused. While scholars and church leaders tend to separate a song being God-centered from it utilizing individualistic language, this dissertation shows a statistically strong correlation between the two. Therefore, songs employing individualistic language is connected to how God-centered they are. In addition, this dissertation marks trends of corporate worship songs becoming increasingly man-centered and singular-focused, which correlates with a simultaneous trend of decreasing discipleship data. As church leaders increasingly utilize man-centered singular language, churches are also seeing fewer people baptized and involved in discipleship activities of the church. Therefore, this dissertation encourages church leaders to increase corporate worship songs utilizing communal language in addition to current strategies for encouraging congregants to grow their communal identity.

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Appendix A: Daniel Thornton's Twenty-Five "Representative CCS [Contemporary Christian Songs]"

#	Song Title	CCLI #	Year
1	10,000 Reasons	6016351	2011
2	Cornerstone	6158927	2011
3	Our God	5677416	2010
4	How Great Is Our God	4348399	2004
5	Oceans (Where Feet May Fall)	6428767	2012
6	Blessed Be Your Name	3798438	2002
7	Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)	4768151	2006
8	Mighty to Save	4591782	2006
9	Here I Am to Worship	4591782	2000
10	God is Able	5894275	2010
11	Beneath the Waters (I Will Rise)	6179573	2011
12	One Thing Remains (Your Love Never Fails)	5508444	2010
13	In Christ Alone	4450395	2001
14	Hosanna	4785835	2006
15	I Surrender	6177317	2011
16	Jesus at the Center	6115180	2011
17	The Heart of Worship	2296522	1997
18	How Deep the Father's Love	1558110	1995
19	Happy Day	4847027	2006
20	Indescribable	4847027	2006
21	The Stand	4705248	2005
22	For All You've Done	4705248	2005
23	Open the Eyes of My Heart	2298355	1997
24	Desert Song	5060793	2008
25	Revelation Song	4447960	2004

Appendix B: Mark Evans' Song classification and analysis

Song Title	Songwriter	God Address	POV
Above All	Leblanc	2nd	Individual
All For Love	Fieldes	2nd	Individual
All I Do	'Galanti, Bedingfield'	2nd	Individual
All of My Days	Stevens	2nd	Both
All the Heavens	Morgan	2nd	Plural
All Things Are Possible	Zschech	2nd	Individual
And That My Soul Knows Very Well	Frager/Zschech	2nd	Individual
Angels	Sampson	3rd	None
Awesome in This Place	Davies	3rd	Plural (Ind)
Beautiful One	Hughes	2nd	Individual
Beautiful Saviour	Bullock	3rd	Individual
Because of Your Love	Fragar	2nd	Individual
Before the Throne	Fragar		
Believe	Lasit	2nd	Both
Better than Life	Sampson	2nd	Individual
Blessed	Zschech, Morgan	2nd	Plural
Blessed Be	Bullock	3rd	Individual
Blessed Be Your Name	Redman/Redman	2nd	Individual
Breathe	Barnett	2nd	Individual
By Your Side	Sampson	2nd/3rd	Both
Can't Stop Praising	Faletolu, Sampson	2nd	Individual
Can't Stop Talking	Fragar	3rd	Individual
Carry Me	Sampson	2nd	Individual
Church on Fire	Fragar	3rd	Plural
Come Now is the Time to Worship	Doerksen	God/Man	None
Consuming Fire	Hughes	2nd	Plural
Creation Stands in Awe	Bullock	2nd	Plural
Deeper and Deeper	Bullock	2nd	Individual
Dwell in Your House	Ewing	2nd	Individual
Dwelling Places	Webster	2nd	Individual
Eagles Wings	Morgan	2nd	Individual
Emmanuel	Badham	2nd	Plural
Emmanuel	Morgan	2nd	Individual
Ever Living God	Badham	2nd	Plural
Evermore	Houston	2nd	Individual
Everyday	Houston	2nd	Individual
Every that Has Breath	Morgan	2nd	Individual
Exceeding Joy	Webster	3rd	Individual
Faith	Bullock	None	Individual
Faith	Morgan	Both	Individual
Father of Lights	Fragar	3rd	Individual
For All You've Done	Morgan	2nd	Individual
For This Cause	Houston	2nd	Individual
Forever	Sampson	2nd	Individual
Forever and a Day	Badham	2nd	Individual
Forever and Always	Bullock	2nd	Individual
Free	Sampson	God/Man	Individual
Free to Dance	Zschech	2nd	Individual
Friends in High Places	Fragar	3rd	Individual
Glorified	McPherson	2nd	Both

Glorify Your Name	Holmes/Zschech	2nd	Individual
Glory	Bullock	2nd	Plural
Glory	Morgan	3rd	Plural
Glory to the King	Zschech	2nd	Individual
God He Reigns/All I Need is You	Sampson	Both	Individual
God is Great	Sampson	2nd	Plural
God is in the House	Fragar/Zschech	3rd	Individual
God So Loved	Morgan	3rd	None
Grace Abounds to All	Bullock	Both	Plural
Grace and Mercy for All	Bullock	3rd	Plural
Great in Power	Fragar	3rd	None
Hallelujah	Myrin/Sampson	2nd	Individual
Have Faith in God	Bullock	2nd/3rd	Individual
He Shall Be Called	Fragar	3rd	Note
Hear Me Calling	Bullock	2nd	Individual
Heart of Love	Bullock	3rd	(Individual)
Here I Am to Worship	Hughes	2nd	Individual
Here to Eternity	Zschech, Moyse	2nd	Both
Hiding Place	Crabtree/Smith	2nd	Individual
Highest	Morgan	2nd	Plural
His Love	Badham	2nd	Both
Holding On	Bullock	2nd	Individual
Holy Holy	Fellingham	3rd	None
Holy One of God	Bullock	3rd	None
Holy Spirit Come	Bullock	2nd	Plural
Holy Spirit Rain Down	Fragar	2nd	Plural
Holy Spirit Rise	Bullock	2nd	Individual
Home	Sampson	2nd	Individual
I Adore	Morgan	Both	Both
I Am Carried	Bullock	2nd	Individual
I Am Overwhelmed	Bullock	2nd	Individual
I Believe	Bullock	2nd	Individual
I Believer the Promise	Fragar	3rd	Both
I Can't Wait	Fragar	2nd	Individual
I Could Sing of Your Love	Smith, M.	2nd	Individual
I Feel Like I'm Falling	Badham	2nd	Individual
I Give You My Heart	Morgan	2nd	Individual
I Just Want to Praise the Lord	Bullock	2nd/3rd	Individual
I Know It	Zschech	3rd	Individual
I Live to Know You	Zschech	2nd	Individual
I Simply Live for You	Fragar	2nd	Both
I Surrender	Bullock	2nd	Individual
I Will Bless You Lord	Zschech	2nd	Individual
I Will Love	Webster	2nd	Individual
I Will Rest in Christ	Bullock	3rd	Individual
I Will Run to You	Zschech	2nd	Individual
I Will Worship	Bullock	Both	Individual
I Will Worship You	Bullock	2nd	Individual
I'll Love You More	Eastwood	2nd	Individual
I'll Worship You	Bullock	2nd	Individual
In Freedom	Puddle	3rd	None
In Jesus' Crown	Bullock	3rd	Plural
In the Name of the Lord	Bullock	3rd	Plural

In the Silence	Iannuzzelli	2nd	Individual
In Your Hands	Morgan	2nd	Individual
Irresistible	Zschech	2nd	Individual
It is You	Zschech	2nd	Individual
Jesus Lover of My Soul	Grul/Ezzy/McPherson	2nd	Individual
Jesus the Same	Badham	3rd	Plural
Jesus You Gave it All	Gower	2nd	Individual
Jesus You're All I Need	Zschech	2nd	Individual
Jesus, What a Beautiful Name	Riches	3rd	Individual
Joy in the Holy Ghost	Fragar	3rd	Both
Just Let Me Say	Bullock	2nd	Individual
King of Kings	Bullock	3rd	None
King of Love	Riches	2nd	None
King of Majesty	Sampson	2nd	Individual
Know You More	Zschech	2nd	Individual
Latter Rain	Bullock	3rd	Plural
Let Creation Sing	Morgan	2nd	Plural (Ind.)
Let the Peace of God Reign	Zschech	2nd	Individual
Let Us Adore	Morgan	2nd	Plural
Let Us Rise to Worship	Bullock	2nd (3rd)	Plural (Ind.)
Let Your Presence Fall	Willesdorf	2nd	Plural
Lift Our Praise	Kay	Both	Plural
Light to the Blinded Eyes	Bullock	2nd	Individual
Longin' for Your Touch	Iannuzzelli/Uluirewas	2nd	Individual
Lord I Give Myself	Zschech	2nd	Individual
Lord of All	McPherson	2nd	Individual
Lord of All Mercy	Bullock	2nd	Individual
Lord of the Heavens	Fisher	3rd	Individual
Lord We Come	Bullock	2nd	Plural
Lord Your Goodness	Morgan	2nd	Individual
Lost Without Your Love	Bullock	2nd	Individual
Love Divine	Bullock	3rd	Individual
Love You So Much	Fragar	2nd	Individual
Made Me Glad	Webster	2nd	Individual
Magnificent	Badham	2nd	Plural
Make Me Your Servant	Fragar	2nd	Individual
Mercy	Bullock	2nd	(Individual)
More Than Life	Morgan	2nd	Individual
Most High	Morgan	Both	Individual
My Best Friend	Houston, Sampson	God/Man	Individual
My Greatest Love is You	Fragar	2nd	Individual
My Heart Sings Praises	Fragar	2nd	Individual
My Hope	Zschech	2nd	Individual
My Redeemer Lives	Morgan	2nd/3rd	Individual
Need You Here	Morgan	2nd	Individual
No Higher Place	Bullock	2nd	Individual
No Long I	Bullock	3rd	Individual
Now is the Time	Bullock	3rd/2nd	Individual
Now that You're Near	Sampson	2nd	Individual
Oh God of All Comfort	Bullock	3rd	Individual
Oh Holy Spirit	Bullock	2nd	Individual
Oh the Mercy of God	Bullock	Both	Plural
One Day	Morgan	2nd	Individual

One Desire	Houston	2nd	Individual
One Way	Douglass/Houston	2nd	Individual
Open the Eyes of My Heart	Baloche	Both	Individual
People Get Free	Fragar	3rd	Individual
People Just Like Us	Fragar	2nd	Plural
Praise His Holy Name	Zschech	3rd/2nd	Both
Pressing On	Bullock	Both	Individual
Reaching for You	Badham	2nd	Individual
Refresh My Heart Lord	Bullock	2nd	Individual
Rock of the Ages	Bullock/Zschech	3rd	Individual
Salvation	Bullock	2nd	Individual
Salvation is Here	Houston	3rd	Individual
Saviour	Zschech	2nd	Both
Shelter House	McPherson	2nd/3rd	Individual
Shout to the King	Davies	Both	Both
Shout to the Lord	Zschech	2nd/3rd	Both
Shout to the North	Smith, M.	God/Man	(Plural)
Shout Your Frame	Myrin, Bedingfield, Galanti, Nevison	2nd	Individual
Sing (Your Love)	Morgan	2nd	Individual
Sing of Your Great Love	Zschech	2nd	Individual
So You Would Come	Fragar	Not God	None
Song of Freedom	Sampson	2nd	Individual
Song of God	Sampson	Both	Individual
Stay	Munns	2nd	Individual
Steppin' Out	McPherson	3rd	Plural
Still	Morgan	2nd	Individual
Surrender	Bullock	2nd	Individual
Take All of Me	Sampson	2nd	Individual
Tell the World	Douglas/Houston/Sampson	Both	Individual
Thank You	Pringle	2nd	Individual
Thank You, Lord	Jernigan	2nd	Individual
That's What We Came Here For	Fragar/Zschech	2nd	Plural
The Great Southland	Bullock	3rd	Plural
The Love of God Can Do	Fragar (C&R)	3rd	None
The Potter's Hand	Zschech	2nd	Individual
The Power and the Glory	Bullock	2nd	Individual
The Power of Your Love	Bullock	2nd	Individual
The Stone's Been Rolled Away	Bullock	3rd	Individual
The Time Has Come	Bullock	3rd	Plural
There is Nothing Like	Myrin/Sampson	2nd	Individual
This is How We Overcome	Morgan	2nd	Both
This Kingdom	Bullock	3rd	Plural
This Kingdom of Love	Bullock	Both	Both
This Love in Me	Bullock	2nd	Individual
Through it All	Morgan	2nd	Individual
To the Ends of the Earth	Houston, Sampson	2nd	Individual
To You	Zschech	2nd	Individual
To You Alone	Morgan	2nd	None
Touching Heaven, Changing Earth	Morgan	2nd	Plural
Trading My Sorrows	Evans	3rd	Individual
Unfailing Love	Bullock	3rd	Individual
Walking in the Light	Zschech	2nd/3rd	Individual
We Proclaim Your Kingdom	Bullock	2nd	Plural

We Will Rise	Bullock	3rd	Plural
Welcome in This Place	Webster	2nd	Individual
What the Lord Has Done in Me	Morgan	3rd	Individual
What the World Will Never Take	Crocker/Ligertwood/Sampson	2nd	Individual
Whenever I See	Bullock	2nd	Individual
With All I Am	Morgan	2nd	Individual
With You	Morgan	2nd	Individual
Within Your Love	Bullock	2nd	Individual
Wonderful God	Davies	2nd	Plural
Worthy is the Lamb	Zschech	2nd	Individual
Yes and Amen	Fragar	3rd	Individual
You are Holy	Morgan	2nd	Individual
You are My God	Bullock/Dunshea	2nd	Individual
You are My Rock	Bullock	2nd	Individual
You are My Song	Bullock	2nd	Individual
You are My World	Sampson	2nd	Individual
You are Near	Morgan	2nd	Plural
You are the One	Bullock	2nd	Individual
You are Worthy	Zschech	2nd	Individual
You Are/You Are Lord	Va'a, Zschech	2nd	Individual
You Call Us Near	Bullock	Both	Plural
You Gave Me Love	Morgan	2nd	Individual
You Give Me Shelter	Bullock	2nd	Individual
You Placed Your Love	Bullock	2nd	Individual
You Rescued Me	Bullock	2nd	Individual
You Said	Morgan	2nd	Individual
You Stand Alone	Stevens, McPherson	2nd	Individual
Your Grace & Your Mercy	Bullock	2nd	Individual
Your Love	Bullock	2nd	Plural
Your Love	Morgan	2nd	Individual
Your Love is Beautiful	Morgan, Badham, McPherson, Hednroff	2nd	Individual
Your Love Keeps Following Me	Fragar	2nd	Individual
Your Name	Zschech	2nd	Individual
Your People Sing Praises	Fragar	2nd/3rd	Plural
Your Unfailing Love	Morgan	2nd	Individual
You're All I Need	Bullock	2nd	Individual
Your is the Kingdom	Houston	2nd	None

Appendix C: Robert Coote's Twenty-Seven "Hymns That Last"

#	Song Title	Composer	Year	Number of Hymnal Appearances
1	Abide with Me	H. Lyte	1847	28
2	All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name	E. Perronet	1779	28
3	Come, Ye Thankful People, Come	H. Alford	1844	28
4	Crown Him with Many Crowns	M. Bridges; alt. G. Thring, 1874	1851	28
5	Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken	J. Newton	1779	28
6	Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah	Wm. Williams	1745	28
7	Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty	R. Heber	1826	28
8	How Firm a Foundation	R. Keene	1787	28
9	In the Cross of Christ I Glory	J. Bowring	1825	28
10	Jesus Shall Reign Where'er the Sun	I. Watts	1719	28
11	Love Divine, All Loves Excelling	C. Wesley	1747	28
12	O Sacred Head, Now Wounded	Bernard of Clairvaux; tr Gerhardt 1656; tr J.W. Alexander 1860	12th C	28
13	When I Survey the Wondrous Cross	I. Watts	1707	28
14	A Mighty Fortress Is Our God	M. Luther; tr F.H. Hedge, 1952	1529	27
15	All Glory, Laud, and Honor	Theodulph; tr J.M. Neale, 1854	Ca. 820	27
16	Come, Thou Almighty King	Anon and C. Wesley	1757	27
17	Just As I Am, Without One Plea	Charlotte Elliott	1836	27
18	Now Thank We All Our God	M. Rinkart; tr Catherine Winkworth, 1858	1626	27
19	O, For a Thousand Tongues to Sing	C. Wesley	1738	27
20	O God, Our Help in Ages Past	I. Watts	1719	27
21	O, Worship the King All Glorious Above	R. Grant	1833	27
22	The Church's One Foundation is Jesus Christ Her Lord	S.J. Stone	1866	27
23	Christ the Lord is Risen Today!	C. Wesley	1739	26
24	Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee	Bernard of Clairvaux; tr E. Caswall, 1849	12th C	26
25	Saviour, Like a Shepherd Lead Us	Attr Dorothy Thrupp in *Thrupps Hymns*	1836	26
26	The Day of Resurrection	John of Damascus; tr J.M. Neale, 1853	Ca. 750	26
27	There's a Wideness in God's Mercy	F.W. Faber	1854	26

Appendix D: IRB Approval

From: do-not-reply@cayuse.com
Subject: [External] IRB-FY22-23-1768 - Initial: Initial - Exempt
Date: June 23, 2023 at 7:41 AM
To: jamckinney1@liberty.edu, ldanielson3@liberty.edu

[EXTERNAL EMAIL: Do not click any links or open attachments unless you know the sender and trust the content.]

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

June 23, 2023

Justin McKinney
Lori Danielson

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-1768 Church Leader Views on Corporate Worship Singing

Dear Justin McKinney, Lori Danielson,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix E: Prospective Interview Candidate Email

Church Leader Views on Corporate Worship Singing: Recruitment Email

Dear [Name of Potential Participant],

As a doctoral candidate in the School of Music at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of my PhD Dissertation. The purpose of my research is to establish church leader views on using songs with communal language during corporate worship service songs ("we" instead of "me"), as well as establish church leader views on the importance of God-centered corporate worship singing, and I am writing to invite you to join my study.

Participants must be an active full-time senior pastor or worship pastor (other titles will be accepted who perform the function implied by these titles) serving in a Southern Baptist Church in Florida. Participants will be asked to take part in a video-recorded interview. It should take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete the interview questions. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but participant identities will not be disclosed.

To participate, please email me your confirmation [redacted] and I will contact you to schedule your interview. A consent document will be emailed to you if you meet the study criteria as part of the scheduling email. The consent document contains additional information about my research.

If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me before the interview.

Sincerely,

Justin McKinney
Liberty University PhD Candidate
[redacted]

Appendix F: Interview Consent Form

Church Leader Views on Corporate Worship Singing: Consent Form

Consent

Title of the Project: Church Leader Views on Corporate Worship Singing
Principal Investigator: Justin McKinney, Liberty University PhD Candidate, School of Music.

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a full-time senior pastor or worship pastor (other titles will be accepted who perform the function implied by these titles) serving in a Southern Baptist Church in Florida. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of my research is to establish church leader views on using songs with communal language during corporate worship service songs ("we" instead of "me"), as well as establish church leader views on the importance of God-centered corporate worship singing.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Prepare for the interview by reviewing the reduced list of interview questions emailed to you at least three days before the interview and prepare answers when appropriate.
2. Participate in an interview, completed and recorded through Google Meet, expected to last 20-30 minutes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study include a new way of philosophically approaching corporate worship singing. Benefits to worship literature include a study specifically focused on the corporate worship singing and its communal effects.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data collected from you may be used in future research studies and shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.
- Data will be stored on the cloud-based Dropbox utilizing double-authentication security. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted and all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored on the cloud-based Dropbox for three years. The researcher will solely have access to these recordings.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Justin McKinney. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [redacted]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Lori Danielson, at [redacted].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

Appendix G: Reduced Interview Questions

Church Leader Views on Corporate Worship Singing: Interview Prep Questions

1. What is the name of your church?
    a. What city/state is that located?
    b. Are you affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention?
2. What is the average attendance for weekend corporate worship service(s) this past year?
3. Is Sunday School your primary discipleship opportunity?
4. What is the average Sunday School or other Primary Discipleship Opportunity attendance this past year?
5. What is your name?
6. What is your title?
7. What are your main responsibilities at the church?
8. What is your philosophy for corporate worship singing?
9. Do corporate worship songs form the theology and/or communal identity of congregants?
10. Do you think corporate worship songs encourage congregants to engage more in the discipleship aspects of your church?
11. Should corporate worship song lyrics focus on an individual's Christian walk?
12. Do you agree with scholars who say the focus of the song (being God-Centered or Man-Centered) is more important than using individualistic or communal language?
13. May I have access to your corporate worship song records for recent months (April - June) for further analysis?
14. Is there anything else you'd like to add that you feel is relevant to my dissertation and this discussion?

Appendix H: Interview Script

Church Leader Views on Corporate Worship Singing: Interview Script

Script Guide:

Words in purple are transitional parts of the script.
Words bolded in green are merely a guide between the different parts of the interview.
Words in blude are only spoken if clarification is required.
Words in red are customized appropriately.

Good morning/afternoon. Can you hear me?
[wait for their response]

Can you see me?
[wait for their response]

Welcome and thank you for your willingness to participate in my research as part of my PhD Dissertation. I'm Justin McKinney and I've long had a burden for congregational singing and feel that we should be intentional with how we choose songs for corporate worship. Thus, my dissertation focuses in on this conversation. Have you had the opportunity to review the Preparatory Questions I emailed you a few days ago?
[wait for their response]

As a reminder, this interview will be video-recorded for later transcription and analysis and your information will be stored securely. If at any time you no longer wish to participate, simply let me know and I'll remove you from my research. If there's a question you choose not to answer, simply let me know and we'll continue past it.

We'll begin this interview by gathering information on your church and your role there.

[Interviewee Questions]

1. What is your name?
2. What is your title?
3. What are your main responsibilities at the church?
    a. Do you spend half or more of your time on worship related responsibilities?

[Church Questions]

4. What is the name of your church?
    a. What city/state is that located?
    b. Are you affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention?
5. What is the average attendance for weekend corporate worship service(s) this past year?
6. Is Sunday School your primary discipleship opportunity?

   a. Definition, if necessary: "Discipleship" is the process of growing into a deeper relationship with God by “faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2, NASB). In the context of corporate worship, it is meant to grow congregants in their relationship with God and knowledge of Him.
   b. Yes/No
   c. If necessary, please explain.
7. What is the average Sunday School, or other primary discipleship opportunity, attendance this past year?

Thank you for that information. We'll now turn toward questions which deal with your corporate worship singing philosophy.

[Corporate Worship Philosophy]

8. What is your philosophy for corporate worship singing?
   a. If you had to list three words to describe your corporate worship singing philosophy, what three words would you choose?
9. Is your philosophy for corporate worship singing different than your philosophy for private worship singing?
   a. Yes/No
      i. Please explain…
10. What, if anything, is the difference(s) between private and corporate worship?
   a. Same/Different
      i. If they're the same: What acts of worship are included in corporate worship?
      ii. If they're different: What acts of worship separates private and corporate worship
      iii. If necessary, what "things" are different between the two?

The next two questions are very fine distinctions. So please listen to each question carefully.

11. Do corporate worship songs form the theology of congregants?
   a. Yes/No
      i. Definition, if necessary: "Theology" is defined as the biblical understanding of the nature of God.
   b. Please explain…
12. Do corporate worship songs form the communal identity of congregants?
   a. Yes/No
      i. Definition, if necessary: "Communal identity" is the viewpoint that individuals belong to a community larger than themselves. For churches, communal identity is made plain through congregants engaging in the various activities of the church and through growing discipleship relationships. This occurs most often through intentional discipleship relationships which may occur within church events or outside the church.

b. Please explain…

Now, we'll turn toward a different line of questions designed to gauge your views on creating corporate connections during corporate worship.

[Communal Connections in Corporate Worship]

13. Do you think corporate worship songs encourage congregants to engage more in the discipleship aspects of your church?
    a. Yes/No
        i. Please explain…
14. How does your church, during corporate worship services, encourage congregants into the discipleship aspects of your church?
15. How do you, yourself, encourage congregants into the discipleship aspects of your church?
    a. If necessary: This question refers to specific things you do regularly from the platform during weekend corporate worship services.
    b. Are those through one-on-one conversations OR are they part of the church services themselves?

Thank you for these answers. These next questions deal with something that occurs in scholarly literature. Some scholars suggest an increasing number of corporate worship songs emphasizing the individual within corporate worship services by utilizing individualistic language. The idea here is that there is more "me" lyrics than "we" lyrics while scholar suggest there should be more "we" than "me." With this in mind, I have a few questions for you:

[Individual vs. Communally-Focused Lyrics]

16. Do you agree that modern trends are individualistic?
    a. Yes/No
        i. Why or why not?
17. Should corporate worship song lyrics focus on an individual's Christian walk?
    a. Yes/No
        i. Why or why not?
18. Some church leaders and scholars suggest individually-focused lyrics mimic the Psalms. Do you believe the psalms have an individualistic focus?
    a. Yes/No
        i. Please explain…
19. Do you intentionally choose songs because they use individualistic or communal language?
    a. Yes/No
        i. Which one do you prefer (individualistic or communal)?

Something else the scholarly literature revealed is that song lyrics emphasizing "me" or "we," isn't the main issue. The main issue is whether or not songs are God-Centered or Man-Centered. These scholars argue that singing to and about God is more important

than singing about man's response to God. With that in mind, I have a few questions for you:

[God-Centered vs. Man-Centered Lyrics]

20. Do you agree with scholars who say the focus of the song (being God-Centered or Man-Centered) is more important than using individualistic or communal language?
    a. Yes/No
        i. An example, if necessary: Chorus of "House of the Lord." It's a chorus about man's response to God. It's assumed that God brings the joy celebrated in this chorus, but the words mostly focus on how man should respond to God for the joy He gives.

        Chorus
        There's joy in the house of the Lord
        There's joy in the house of the Lord today
        And we won't be quiet
        We shout out Your praise
        There's joy in the house of the Lord
        Our God is surely in this place
        And we won't be quiet
        We shout out Your praise
    b. Please explain…
21. Thinking about your own church leadership, do you intentionally choose songs because they are God-Centered or Man-Centered?
    a. Yes/No
22. Do you intentionally songs that are God-Centered, Man-Centered, or a balance between the two?
    a. God-Centered/Man-Centered/Balanced
        i. If God-Centered: Should you include more Man-Centered songs?
        ii. If Man-Centered: Should you include more God-Centered songs?
        iii. If Balanced: Should you remain balanced or lean toward one or the other?
23. Based on this line of questioning: Are you likely to reconsider your approach to the amount of God-Centered or Man-Centered song choices you choose?
    a. Yes/No
        i. Why or why not?

[Closing Questions]

24. May I have access to your corporate worship song records for recent months (April - June) for further analysis?
25. Is there anything else you'd like to add that you feel is relevant to my dissertation and this discussion?

Thank you so much for your willingness to participate in my research. If you have any follow-up questions, don't hesitate to contact me!

Closing comments

Appendix I: CCLI Data and Approval Email

Hi Justin,

Thank you for your patience with the delayed response to your request.

We may be able to help. CCLI can provide certain info as a courtesy for students working on their dissertations, thesis papers, etc.. However, if this info is for other purposes such as a magazine article or anything besides your dissertation, we would not want to provide this info.

Can you confirm how you'll use this info?

Blessings!

Marc Straup
Intellectual Property Manager
Christian Copyright Licensing International

Hi Justin,

Thank you for confirming your intentions. I've attached the information you requested.

Have a great week!

Marc Straup
Intellectual Property Manager
Christian Copyright Licensing International