

Liberty University

**Authenticity and Worship Technology:
An Evaluation of the Use of Prerecorded Vocal and Instrumental Tracks in
Worship in Augusta, Georgia**

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of the School of Music
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Ph.D. in Christian Worship

by

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July 2024

Disclaimer Page

I declare that no portion of the work referred to in this dissertation has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university. I remain solely responsible for the content of this thesis.

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Dedication

Loving Dedicated to T, T., and T.

Acknowledgments

I have been surrounded by family, friends, and colleagues that God strategically placed in my path for my Ph.D. journey. First and foremost, I am eternally grateful to a heavenly Father who provided redemption through His love and mercy. I echo the hymn writer William Cowper:

“E’er since by faith I saw the stream, Thy flowing wounds supply,

Redeeming love has been my theme and shall be till I die.”

I thank the participants who contributed to this research. Your involvement and cooperation were crucial to the success of this study. Thank you for providing the important view from your pew. Your heart for worship was evident in every word you spoke, and your desire to worship encouraged my heart.

I am profoundly thankful for my parents, Bill & Fannie Reese, who instilled in me a love for God’s Word, the local church, and congregational worship.

To my husband, Tony, you have been a rock and constant support throughout this journey. Thank you for standing with me through the hard work of this life.

To my children, you are a blessing. I am proud of you, grateful for your support, and thankful for your encouragement.

To my grandchildren, this is a reminder that you can achieve what God calls you to do. Stay encouraged.

I am deeply grateful to my advisor, Dr. Connell. Thank you for your continuous encouragement and constructive critiques. Your guidance and understanding of biblical worship have been invaluable, and you have impacted our family in ways you cannot know about this side of eternity.

I am incredibly grateful to Dr. Widger, my reader, and Becca Stegall, my editor. Your assistance and expertise significantly contributed to the completion of this work.

I want to thank Liberty University, especially, for providing the faculty and resources to conduct my research and education with eternity in mind.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge the support of Kevin Danko. Thank you for overseeing my research and providing excellent input, and Susan for being my friend. I thank God for you both.

Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty:

for all that is in heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom,

O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all.

I Chronicles 29:11

Abstract

Every week, congregations in Augusta, Georgia, gather for corporate worship. A common practice among these congregations is incorporating pre-recorded music technology in their services. Technological advancements have significantly transformed the worship landscape. In this performance-oriented culture, the focus at times shifts from congregationally focused praise to a worship stage production, overshadowing the importance of biblical and authentic worship. This phenomenological case study investigates the lived experiences of worshipers in Augusta, Georgia, focusing on the perceptions of authenticity of worship when pre-recorded music is used. The study involved 15 participants from the Central Savannah River Area, examining their perspectives on authentic worship and the use of pre-recorded music. Through in-depth semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, the research reveals how pre-recorded music impacts the dynamics of worship, particularly in creating or mitigating a performance-driven atmosphere and emphasizing the profound importance of a heart dedicated to worship. Utilizing Nathan Myrick's Celebrity Model as a supplementary framework, the findings offer valuable insights into the complex relationship between technology, the biblical call to worship, and the cultural inclination towards performance. The study provides a nuanced understanding of how technology can enhance and challenge the perceived authenticity of the worship experience based on participants' perspectives on authentic worship, and the critical role worship leaders play in these decisions.

Keywords: Pre-recorded music, stems, multitracks, performance-driven worship, Celebrity Model, authentic worship, contemporary worship, worship leader, congregation, corporate worship, participation.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Every week, congregations in Augusta, Georgia, gather for corporate worship. A prevalent practice among these congregations is the incorporation of pre-recorded music technology in worship settings. While this technology is thought to enhance the musical experience and ensure a high-quality, seamless worship service, the actual impact upon worshippers remains to be determined. As this technology becomes more widely embraced and resources become increasingly affordable and accessible, it is essential to investigate how this practice influences the worship experience.

Background

The biblical mandate to worship is a recurring theme throughout Scripture, firmly rooted in the truth and the redemptive work of Christ. As an act made possible through Christ's redemptive work, worship transcends mere style preferences, liturgy, or instrumentation. In the book of Exodus, God's deliverance of His people from captivity is documented, granting them the freedom to "serve God upon this mountain" (Exod. 3:12, King James Version), foreshadowing the work of Christ. Isaiah echoes this divine purpose, declaring, "This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise" (Isa. 43:21).

The New Testament guides believers to "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom," achieved through "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col. 3:16). Regardless of contemporary trends, style preferences, or cultural shifts, the priority of worship remains unwavering. This research builds upon the foundational premise that God commands and ordains

worship, emphasizing congregational worship as the “conversation between God and His people.”¹ Corporate worship stands as a vital component of the church’s mission.

Study Context

Over the past two decades, technological advancements have significantly influenced the worship landscape. Modern software, electronic equipment, and digital methods are commonplace in worship presentations. Concurrently, the rise of performance-driven reality shows such as *American Idol* and *The Voice*, along with digital platforms generating content for diverse audiences, has contributed to a cultural shift in performance expectations. The recently identified “celebrity model” of worship approach introduces a new dynamic into local church ministries, emphasizing excellence not only in musical performance but also in production value, as defined by Nathan Myrick.²

The availability of prerecorded tracks can be traced back to the era of cassette tapes. The ability to mass duplicate original soundtracks expanded opportunities for artists, and the cassette tape served as a catalyst for subsequent developments in digital technology. From professional reel-to-reel machines to cassette tapes and compact discs (CDs), soundtracks and accompaniment tracks have become integral to worship and church productions.

Two noteworthy observations arise from these technological advances, revealing vulnerabilities in current soundtrack worship practices. Firstly, in the early stages of this technology, when a vocalist sang alongside a reproduction, it was often derided as “canned

¹ R. Scott Connell, *Baptists and Worship: Sitting Beneath the Gospel's Joyful Sound* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2020), 1.

² Nathan Myrick, “The Celebrity Model of Music Ministry: Characteristics and Considerations,” *The Hymn* 69, no 3 (2018): 25.

music” due to its prerecorded nature. Secondly, musical presentations began to resemble professional performances, incorporating background tracking.³ This allowed ministry volunteers to present songs with the same polished instrumentation as recording artists, reducing reliance on local church talent and enabling a more professional presentation for performers and audiences.

Multi-Site and the Digital Campus

Worship in the local church has historically occurred in a single designated worship space and time—usually on Sunday mornings. However, in some churches, the single worship time has evolved into multiple services, and desires for church growth have led to incorporating multiple campuses. In addition, in March 2020, the mandatory shutdown of corporate gatherings due to the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the church’s advance into the digital revolution, adding another option for members seeking to “attend” worship: the digital (i.e., online) campus. This online campus created multi-site campuses and increased the potential reach of the ministry. With the incorporation of technology and digital platforms, churches now face new challenges for worship gatherings. The digital campus has expanded church shopping consumerism by making viewers and subscribers a ministry goal. The quality and performance of a worship presentation provide a competitive edge as ministries seek to grow an audience through digital platforms. In a 2020 Barna study, *The State of the Church*, researchers found that 50 percent of Christians who utilize faith-based resources “at least occasionally rely on Christian resources

³ Susan R. Burgess, “Research Proposal Authenticity and Worship Technology: An Evaluation of the Use of Prerecorded Vocal and Instrumental Tracks in Worship in Augusta, GA” (class paper submitted in WRSP 917 at Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, Summer 2022).

instead of attending a church.”⁴ The attention given to how ministries use digital worship will become increasingly crucial as congregants become younger and more tech-savvy.

A phenomenon has occurred as the availability and use of technology in worship has increased, affecting amplification, microphones, recording, digital formats, new software, and additional ministry facets. From the music industry to social media platforms, the focus at times shifts from congregationally focused praise to a worship stage production, which may overshadow the importance of genuine and authentic worship from the pew. Unfortunately, in a post-Christian culture, the apparent emphasis is often on the product rather than the message. This phenomenon is not exclusive to live streaming and online presentations; it also impacts in-person worship experiences. The presentation of worship is vital as Scripture reminds the believer, “Whatever ye do, do it heartily as to the Lord, and not unto men” (Col. 3:23). The presentation of worship should not supersede the message of the Gospel.

According to a recent study, 85 percent of Protestant churches live-stream their services, with 76 percent of those same congregations providing social media content on their platforms.⁵ The new online mission field allows the performance-oriented culture to utilize available technology and infiltrate contemporary worship while potentially advancing a Celebrity Model.⁶ This contributes to the practice of production and performance as a potential criterion for modern

⁴ Barna Group, “Do Americans Replace Traditional Church with Digital Faith Expressions?” *State of the Church 2020*, March 12, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/worship-shifting/>.

⁵ Aaron Earls, “Online Services Expanded Reach of Churches During Pandemic,” Lifeway Research, October 14, 2021, <https://research.lifeway.com/2021/10/14/online-services-expanded-reach-of-churches-during-pandemic/>.

⁶ Nathan Myrick, “The Celebrity Model of Music Ministry: Characteristics and Considerations,” *The Hymn* 69, no. 3 (2018): 25–28.

worship where prerecorded music is used. However, more research is needed to understand the impact of emerging technologies and performance-driven worship on congregants.

Cultural Setting

Augusta is the second-largest city in Georgia, boasting a population of 199,894 residents.⁷ It rests on the banks of the Savannah River to the west of South Carolina. The Savannah River flows through Georgia and South Carolina, encompassing Columbia, Aiken, and Edgefield counties. This composite area is often called the Greater Augusta Area or the Central Savannah River Area (CSRA). This study encompasses churches from both sides of the river, recognizing the interconnectedness of communities. Many individuals live, work, shop, and attend churches that span state lines. As such, the culture and community are deeply entwined, leading to the reference of Augusta, Georgia, as the CSRA.

Church Selection

Eight churches are included in this study. Four of these churches identify as Southern Baptist and are affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention. The remaining congregations are Independent Baptist, Presbyterian Reformed Worship, Christian & Missionary Alliance, and United Methodist. All eight churches employ various levels of technology in their worship services, offering both in-person and digital worship options. Additionally, three churches record their own vocal stems to complement live voices during worship and record projects featuring their individual worship ministries. These congregations actively market themselves as multiethnic and multigenerational, providing a diverse demographic for this study.

⁷ World Population Review, "Augusta Georgia Population," accessed August 18, 2023. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/augusta-ga-population>.

Statement of the Problem

Qualitative phenomenological research is driven by exploring lived experiences rather than identifying a specific problem. Instead, the research investigates the participants' lived experiences to better understand a particular phenomenon. The focus of this qualitative phenomenological case study is to examine the lived experience of worshipers when stems and multitracks are used in worship. Data collected examines the impact of prerecorded music on worship experiences and the perceived authenticity of instrumentation played by individuals not physically present in the room.

While numerous studies explore worship practices in the New Testament church, there is a notable absence of research on the use of stems and multitracks in worship.⁸ By delving into the lived experiences of the worshipers, this research aims to shed light on two critical aspects of the current worship culture. Firstly, it explores participants' perspectives on authentic worship as defined by Scripture. Secondly, the data assesses how prerecorded music influences performance-driven worship, recognizing that phenomenological research often involves exploring perceptions. This information is acknowledged and analyzed. The ultimate goal is to provide insights into the impact of performance-driven worship when employing polished, prerecorded, and professionally produced tracks.

Corporate worship is inherently participatory and requires active engagement, as reflected in the scriptural exhortation, "as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" (Eph. 5:19a). The results are not clear when those outside of the gathered saints are the ones "singing

⁸ Available studies: see Monique M. Ingalls, *Singing the Congregation: How Contemporary Worship Music Forms Evangelical Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Paul Baker, *Contemporary Christian Music: Where It Came from, What It Is, and Where It's Going* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1985); David A. Miller, *Contemporary Worship in the Reformed Tradition: Practical Approaches for Congregations* (Pittsburg, PA: Vital Faith Resources, 2001); Andrew Mall, Monique Ingalls, and Jeffers Engelhardt, *Studying Congregational Music: Key Issues, Methods, and Theoretical Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2021).

and making melody in your hearts” (Eph. 5:19b). Scripture underscores that corporate worship serves as an offering of praise, whether through psalms, hymns, Scripture reading, or expressions like doxologies or benedictions.⁹ The privilege of corporate worship is bestowed upon those worshipers who gather together.

This scholarly research approach involves conducting individual interviews with worshipers in the most prominent evangelical churches situated within the CSRA. This phenomenological case study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of stems and multitracks on congregational worship through the lived experiences of worshipers. Ultimately, this study furnishes valuable insights for worship leaders, pastors, musicians, and the church music industry, aiding in creating, developing, and utilizing prerecorded music as an integral part of worship.

Statement of the Purpose

This qualitative phenomenological case study seeks to delve into the variations in worship experiences among congregants in the context of worship when prerecorded vocal and instrumental tracks are incorporated. The primary aim of this research is to evaluate the distinctive worship encounters that emerge within this environment, as perceived through the lived experiences of those actively participating in worship. The use of pre-recorded stems in worship raises the question, “Do stems or tracks authentically represent a particular worship ministry’s expression?” This research adopts a qualitative phenomenological approach and provides further insights into the effects of stems and multitracks in congregational worship.

⁹ James F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993), 36–37.

Research Framework and Methodology

Phenomenological research explores the experiences of individuals who have encountered a specific phenomenon and how they derive meaning from those experiences.¹⁰ This research constitutes a phenomenological study guided by Martin Heidegger’s philosophy of interpretive phenomenology, augmented by a biblical worldview. This biblical perspective serves as the hermeneutical lens through which worshipers’ experiences are evaluated when prerecorded music is used.

Interpretive phenomenology offers a framework for examining and interpreting the intricate and multifaceted aspects of an individual’s lived experiences. Heidegger’s phenomenology is rooted in hermeneutics.¹¹ Heidegger’s hermeneutics pertains to the process of understanding and interpretation, primarily in the context of texts and language.¹² In this context, the focus shifts from mere perceptions or perspectives to the very nature of being, existence, and reality. Heidegger characterizes this as “circumspection” rather than mere perception.¹³

The hermeneutical lens, often referred to as *fore-sight*, represents “preconceived knowledge” pertaining to the phenomenon under investigation. Combining “being there” with the *fore-sight*—preconceived knowledge—creates the hermeneutic circle, a tool employed to uncover and comprehend the phenomenon.¹⁴ Heidegger significantly impacted phenomenology

¹⁰ Katarzyna Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation: A Step-by-Step Guide* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc., 2021), 4.

¹¹ Henrik Gert Larsen and Philip Adu, *The Theoretical Framework in Phenomenological Research* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 49–51.

¹² Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation*, 33–34.

¹³ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans., John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1962), loc 152–67, 604–06, Kindle.

¹⁴ Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation*, 34.

through his unique philosophical framework utilizing the concepts of being and the human experience.

This research embarks upon a foundation of biblical presuppositions grounded in the authority of Scripture and premised on the foundational truth that the Bible represents God's inherent, infallible, and inspired Word. The study places Scripture at the forefront when examining the philosophical dimensions of authentic worship. Key verses serve as guiding principles in this exploration, including (1) "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him" (Col. 3:16–17); (2) "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:18–19); (3) "And the king said unto Araunah, Nay; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price; neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doeth cost me nothing" (2 Sam. 24:24); and (4) "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Phil. 4:8).

Phenomenological research serves as the foundation for exploring the experiences of individuals encountering a specific phenomenon and how they derive meaning from these experiences. Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology incorporates theoretical concepts that find application in this research, including the ideas of *Dasein*, *ready-to-hand*, and *present-at-hand*.

Dasein signifies the concept of “being there” or a person’s existence.¹⁵ This researcher employs Heidegger’s interpretive phenomenology, enriched by a biblical worldview as the hermeneutical lens to investigate the worshiper’s experience when prerecorded music is used.

In Heidegger’s philosophy, *Dasein* pertains to the individual’s state of “being in the world,” encompassing their existence in daily life and experiences.¹⁶ Heidegger’s “being in the world” signifies that everything within the phenomenological study is grounded in one’s lived experiences, involving what one perceives, tastes, touches, hears, and feels.¹⁷ It is important to note that in a phenomenological hermeneutical study, the focus is on the experience but may also encompass the feelings of the participant. This researcher rigorously maintains a clear distinction in the research, recognizing that individuals cannot disentangle their understanding of the world from their place in it.¹⁸

Ready-to-hand represents the human experience with objects that serve as tools to achieve a specific task, focusing primarily on the task itself rather than the object. In the context of this research, ready-to-hand pertains to the use of stems and multitracks to enhance instrumentation and enrich the worship experience. The central question is whether worshipers perceive stems and multitracks as practical and meaningful (ready-to-hand) resources or view them as tools (present-at-hand).¹⁹

¹⁵ Heidegger, *Being There*. This entire work illuminates Heidegger’s theory of *Dasein*, ready-to-hand and present-to-hand. The following pages are focal points of explanation for these terms: 91, 112–22, 141–50.

¹⁶ Michael Wheeler, s.v. “Martin Heidegger,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Fall 2020 ed., <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/heidegger>.

¹⁷ Heidegger, *Being There*, 110–14.

¹⁸ Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation*, 4.

¹⁹ Emma Williams, “In Excess of Epistemology: Seigel, Taylor, Heidegger and the Conditions of Thought,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 49, no. 1 (2015): 142–60.

Consider a pianist playing the piano—does the listener isolate the piano keys as mere objects, or do they immerse themselves in the music being produced? To answer “yes” to the first option would align with Heidegger’s concept of present-at-hand, where the emphasis is on the tool itself rather than its use in the intended activity. Understanding these two concepts is pivotal in grasping the experiences described by worshipers.

In conjunction with Heidegger’s philosophy, the work of Francis A. Schaeffer contributes an additional biblical worldview dimension to this research. Schaeffer’s writing is deeply rooted in a steadfast commitment to the authority and inerrancy of the bible. He perceives the Word of God not solely as a source of spiritual guidance but as a comprehensive worldview that answers all philosophical inquiries. Schaeffer’s approach to epistemology—the theory and understanding of knowledge—lays the foundation that God created everything (man and nature) and that “there is a correlation between the known and the knower, subject and the object.”²⁰

This study employs a multi-faceted approach to data collection. First, Scripture research is undertaken to explore the biblical mandate for worshipers to offer praise through their gifts and talents in worship. Second, an extensive literature review examines existing literature and research on genuine and authentic worship philosophies using prerecorded music. Third, individual semi-structured interviews are conducted with worshipers in the CSRA to gain deeper insights into their perceptions of prerecorded music. The overarching goal of this research is to examine individual experiences without imposing preconceived theories or frameworks. In individual interviews, worshipers are provided the opportunity to freely share their thoughts, feelings, and interpretations.

²⁰ Francis A. Schaeffer, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1972), loc 1271, Kindle.

The research concludes with a comprehensive review of the gathered data, utilizing the hermeneutic circle. Journaling plays a pivotal role in data analysis, as terms, phrases, and personal experiences potentially lead to researcher bias. As part of this journaling process, detailed notes are taken during individual interviews and throughout the data analysis stage. Qualitative research relies on data to interpret research findings. Heidegger's phenomenology philosophy closely aligns with the interpretation aspect of hermeneutics, creating the hermeneutic circle.²¹ The overall intent of this research is to unveil the experience of the participants.

It is crucial to recognize that in phenomenological studies, this research does not hinge solely on perceptions or perspectives; instead, it is rooted in the participants' worship experience. The perception becomes reality. Consequently, the objective truth of God's Word must guide any understanding and assessment of authentic worship. The philosophical approach called the *Coherence Theory of Truth* determines truth by a set of beliefs or propositions.²² This theory allows researchers to discover and establish truth when it aligns with a particular set of beliefs. For Christian researchers, the Word of God serves as the standard of consistency and the set of beliefs that inform the evaluation of connections and relationships between authentic worship and the Word of God.

²¹ Cheryl Tatano Beck, *Philosophy of Phenomenology: Focus on Methodology* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2021), 12–14. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071909669>.

²² Ralph C. S. Walker, "The Coherence Theory of Truth" in *The Oxford Handbook of Truth*, ed. Michael Glaznberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 219–22.

Significance of the Study

This phenomenological study delves into the lived experiences of volunteer worship musicians and congregants who engage in worship using stems and multitracks. The data collected through in-depth individual interviews unveils worshipers' perceptions and experiences, shedding light on the impact of prerecorded music in worship. The significance of this study extends to worship and theological studies, worship leaders, musicians, congregants, and those in the church music industry.

The transformation of church music ministries, heavily influenced by pop culture, commenced with the explosion of the Jesus Movement and the birth of Contemporary Worship Music (CWM) in the late 1960s and early 1970s.²³ By the 1990s, worship ministries began to adopt many of the same resources employed by Christian artists who embraced personality-driven and celebrity-style worship. Beyond the overarching theme of Worship Wars, this uncharted area necessitates exploring the profound impact of these changes on worshipers.

First, using stems and multitracks in worship settings represents a burgeoning trend. This practice has become integral to many worship ministries striving to leverage advanced technological resources to remain culturally relevant to their congregations and communities while delivering an exceptional worship experience. How this practice has transformed worship for those in the pews is still being determined. This study explores the lived experiences of individuals engaged in worship through these technologies. The findings may contribute to a deeper understanding of the benefits, challenges, and impacts of technological integration within local church worship.

²³ Pete Ward, *Selling Worship* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster Press, 2005), 165–68.

Secondly, by examining the lived experiences of worship musicians and congregations, this study seeks to elevate the quality and meaningfulness of worship encounters.

Phenomenological research provides the opportunity for an exhaustive exploration of the worship experience, emotional responses, and spiritual engagement facilitated by stems and multitracks. This research offers invaluable insights to those tasked with leading and planning worship, fostering a deeper connection with congregations.

Lastly, as a phenomenological study, this research makes an academic contribution to the field of worship studies by investigating the lived experiences of individuals in worship settings in which stems and multitracks are employed. This inquiry broadens our comprehension of the technological influences on corporate worship and worship practices. The essence of corporate worship revolves around the worship gathered and their offerings rather than a sole focus on elevating the production value of a service. This study endeavors to provide research that enables leaders to achieve both goals: to provide insight into involving members of the local congregation and delivering a quality program.

This qualitative research engages in an in-depth exploration of real-life worship experiences as a study. The interview data provides a rich and comprehensive understanding of the worship encounter in contexts in which prerecorded music is integrated. This study aims to identify prevailing themes or distinctive characteristics associated with the use of stems and multitracks in worship.

Research Question and Sub-Questions

The central research question this researcher seeks to answer is, “What is the effect on the participant’s perception of authenticity and experience when the worship service uses

prerecorded tracks?” The sub-questions that lead to answering this research question are as follows:

1. What does Scripture say about genuine and authentic worship that may be related to the use of prerecorded music in worship services?
2. What are the worshiper’s perceptions and feelings about the use of prerecorded music in worship services?
3. How does the worshiper describe his or her worship experiences when facilitated by the use of prerecorded music during worship services when compared with his or her recollection of those experiences that are not?
4. How does the worshiper explain why a worship leader uses prerecorded music in the worship service?
5. How does prerecorded music influence the worshiper’s sense of authenticity when compared to worship led by live volunteers from within the congregation?

Definition of Terms

Backtracking, or *backtracks*, refers to pre-recorded audio tracks, stems, or performance tracks used in music technology. These tracks provide additional instrumentation, potential harmonies, and challenging or impossible elements to perform live. They enable live musicians to utilize accompaniment tracks, offering a fuller sound without the need for extra performers. This approach can also reduce costs, eliminating the need for additional musicians.

Multitracks consist of individual channels, tracks, and items found in stems. These files may include as many tracks as are recorded or created in the studio, granting complete access to every device or effect. This level of access allows those mixing or mastering to control every audio detail.

Performance-driven worship focuses on the quality of the performance over the scriptural state of the heart and the spiritual attitude of worship. In this context, the musician's skill is prioritized over their dedication to conveying the message of Scripture. As a result, this type of service tends to resemble a concert more than a worship service.²⁴

Stems are edited, mixed, mastered, and nearly final stereo audio files separated by texture or sound but collectively sound like a complete audio project when played together. While they may not include every channel or track, they are grouped to facilitate collaboration among musicians and production teams.²⁵

Assumptions of the Study

This phenomenological case study assumes that worship ministry leaders accept and encourage using prerecorded technologies, including multitracks, stems, and prerecorded vocal and instrumental tracks, in worship services. It is widely believed that these technologies enhance worship by producing a polished final product that benefits church worship ministry teams in pursuing a high-quality worship program.

This assumption suggests that integrating such technology can improve the overall dynamics of worship. It aims to minimize distractions and heighten focus on the worship experience. With professional Christian music widely available across various platforms, congregations are regularly exposed to high-quality productions. Therefore, it is advocated that

²⁴ Karl Vaters, "6 Important Differences Between Performance Music and Worship Music," Pivot, April 2, 2019, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/karl-vaters/2019/april/performancemusic-worship-music.html>.

²⁵ The definitions for *stems*, *backtracking*, and *multitracks* are supplemented with information from Gregory Janicki, Adjunct Professor at Liberty University.

local churches utilize all available resources to create engaging worship experiences that mirror the quality heard outside of corporate worship settings.

Another underlying assumption is that most congregational worshipers are unfamiliar with the specifics of stems and multitracks and their extensive use. While using soundtracks has been a long-standing practice in many local churches, incorporating individual instruments, click tracks, and vocal stacking often goes unnoticed by the congregation.

Limitations

Phenomenological research in the context of worship involves a small, selectively chosen sample of worshipers, selected based on their location, involvement with prerecorded music, and specific experiences relevant to this research topic. This research encompasses several inherent limitations. Firstly, it relies heavily on individual personal perceptions and lived experiences, introducing variability and necessitating caution in generalizing the findings. Secondly, the research involves a small sample size, representing a specific segment of individuals engaged in worship using pre-recorded music technology, which may or may not reflect the broader population of worshipers utilizing stems and multitrack technologies.

The diversity of technology utilized across the eight churches introduces variations in experiences that differ from those observed within a single worship gathering. Moreover, the participant's familiarity with the use of stems and multitracks technology is confined to a specific subset of worship attendees. This limitation could hinder the ability of participants to provide clear and detailed descriptions, thereby complicating the identification of a coherent theme. The sample size could have been significantly larger with fewer time constraints, potentially enhancing the comprehensiveness of this study.

It is also important to acknowledge the researcher's background in this study. As someone who has recorded and used stems and multitracks in worship settings, this researcher understands these technologies as practical tools. However, there is an awareness of their potential to inadvertently foster a performance-centric approach to worship. Phenomenological research hinges on the interpretation of participants' lived experiences. Therefore, the researcher's own experiences, assumptions, and perspectives could significantly influence the analysis and interpretation of the data. A critical reflection on this potential bias is crucial to maintain transparency in the research process. Lastly, phenomenological research demands a substantial time commitment and intensive investigative effort. Constraints in these areas limit the volume and depth of data and experiences that can be collected and examined.

Delimitations

This study has deliberately established boundaries to mitigate limitations and ensure optimal success. The specific choices made about this research are as follows: (1) the focus is exclusively on congregations within the CSRA that utilize pre-recorded music technology; (2) participants are neither staff members nor volunteers in the worship ministry, thereby reducing potential biases related to the use of tracks and stems; and (3) the study includes 15–18 participants to maintain a manageable volume of data for comprehensive analysis. These delimitations serve to refine the focus of the study.

Qualifications of the Researcher

This researcher holds a Master of Music in Performance and brings over 35 years of experience in church music ministry leadership. Currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Christian Worship, this researcher has gained valuable insights into authentic worship through a blend of performance and ministry experiences. Holding a firm belief in the Bible as the infallible and

inherent Word of God, this researcher views genuine and authentic worship as a scriptural mandate.

Pursuing a Ph.D. demands a deep commitment to comprehensive research and a solid grasp of methodologies essential for formulating and addressing research questions. The coursework has laid a robust foundation for conducting this study, encompassing data collection, analysis, and presentation in a cohesive manner. Additionally, this researcher has played a pivotal role in mentoring and training musicians in worship ministry.

In a ministry capacity, this researcher has accumulated experience in television and online worship, including stem recording for both digital and in-person worship services. This experience spans various aspects of the elements under study in this literature, providing a well-rounded perspective in this field of research.

Summary

This chapter provides a comprehensive introduction to this phenomenological study, clearly establishing the need to evaluate authentic worship when prerecorded music is used and the phenomenon experienced by those live worshipers in the room. As stated, hermeneutics is the philosophical and interpretive approach used to focus on understanding and interpreting the lived experiences of the individuals in this study. The following chapter reviews the current literature and research on using prerecorded music in worship.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Technology has permeated nearly every aspect of daily life in this digital age, including worship practices. Churches are increasingly embracing technological tools and enhancing the production values of their worship services. It is crucial to recognize the multifaceted impact that technology has on worship. The overarching purpose of this phenomenological study is to employ a biblical worldview to evaluate and examine the authenticity of worship when prerecorded music is integrated into worship. The scope of this research is congregations in Augusta, Georgia, that use prerecorded music and the technology that accompanies this practice. This literature review considers the scriptural foundation of music in worship while investigating current research available for this study.

Technological advancements have garnered significant attention, particularly in the utilization of digital audio stems and multitracks—a trend that has become increasingly pronounced post-COVID-19. Multitracks are audio files recorded on multiple tracks, giving an engineer access to all parts of the recording for mastering and processing. These audio files represent all the recorded elements, and when combined, they make up the complete song or project.¹ Multitracks allow manipulation and easy collaboration with audio files. Audio stems are the final mix and contain all the multitracks.² This shift towards digital worship has brought about new considerations, including the competition for viewers and subscribers among

¹ Glenn D. White and Gary J. Louie, *The Audio Dictionary: Third Edition, Revised and Expanded* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2005), ProQuest Ebook Central.

² White and Louie, *The Audio Dictionary*.

churches, which were forced to migrate to digital platforms in March 2020 at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the value and potential of online worship have gained prominence, there has been a growing emphasis on presentation and the pursuit of an audience-endorsed worship performance. This literature review serves two primary purposes: first, to establish a concise biblical foundation for authentic worship in the context of this phenomenological study, and second, to explore, analyze, and synthesize existing research and data within the realm of worship and technology. Examining the existing literature provides valuable context for ongoing scholarly discussions, contributing to the additional purpose of this hermeneutical phenomenological study.

The primary objective of this literature review is to offer a comprehensive overview of the key themes, trends, and studies that have emerged concerning the use of recorded music in worship. This review seeks to address fundamental questions, such as: What is the effect on the participant's perception of authenticity and experience when the worship service uses prerecorded tracks? What does Scripture say about genuine and authentic worship? Furthermore, this review aims to shed light on the significant gap in understanding the worship experience of congregants in services that incorporate prerecorded music, primarily stems and multitracks.

Biblical Foundation of Worship

God established worship from the very beginning of human existence, according to biblical sources. This sacred relationship, in which fallen humans serve and worship a holy God, consistently faces challenges in the form of distractions, interruptions, and preferences. In the Garden of Eden, this divine relationship is put to the test. The serpent questions God's directives in Genesis: "Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God

had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God actually say, “You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?”’” (Gen. 3:1, English Standard Version). This cunning manipulation causes Eve to doubt the clear commandment, “You shall not eat” (Gen. 2:17). True worship has always been susceptible to challenges posed by the enemy and the influence of individual preferences.

Throughout history, humanity has continually tried to dictate worship. Genesis 4 provides a poignant example, as Cain and Abel present their offerings to the Lord. Abel’s offering is accepted, while Cain’s is not. God addresses Cain, saying, “Why are you angry? ... If you do well, will you not be accepted?” (Gen. 4:5–7). This passage highlights the existence of two distinct forms of worship: acceptable and unacceptable. Cain’s worship is characterized by rebellion and obligation, whereas Abel seeks to please God through faith.³ Two crucial truths emerge from this passage: (1) God can be displeased with human worship practices, and (2) the mere presence of skill, production, and enthusiasm is insufficient. Worship that pleases God necessitates a heart fully devoted to the things of God.⁴ God seeks the heart of the worshiper.

Worship is not a human invention but an initiative of God himself. A. W. Tozer articulates a foundational truth in man’s worship: “God seeks His glory” because his creation necessitates “that He be glorified.”⁵ Worship becomes the natural and inevitable response for those who have a genuine relationship with God and have experienced His transformative power.⁶ In Romans 12:1, Scripture reinforces that worship is a lifestyle; therefore, both corporate

³ John F. Walvoord & Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 33–34.

⁴ Ligonier Ministries, *Tabletalk Magazine* 36, no. 12 (2012): 62.

⁵ A. W. Tozer, *Authentic Worship: The Path to Greater Unity With God* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2023), 39.

⁶ Vernon M. Whaley, *Called to Worship* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 3–6.

and individual worship is not sporadic or an occasional act but a way of life for the believer. In the context of this research, worship is the activity of the body of Christ, not the building, architecture, or space. A solid and clear foundation for worship is indispensable; therefore, a biblical lens is required to provide the principles that guide and give a biblical perspective to this research.

Authentic Worship

One of the most seminal works in the realm of authentic Christian worship is David Peterson's *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship*, which lays a profound theological foundation for understanding biblical worship.⁷ Its importance lies in how theological perspective shapes believers' understanding of the purpose and significance of worship, particularly in its communal and participatory aspects, which are fundamental concepts in this research. Per Peterson's definition:

Acceptable worship means approaching or engaging with God on the terms that he proposes and in the manner that he makes possible. It involves honoring, serving, and respecting him, abandoning any loyalty or devotion that hinders an exclusive relationship with him.⁸

This definition emphasizes that worship transcends the need for sacraments or rituals and is devoid of performance criteria.

Genuine, authentic worship centers on God as the primary object of devotion, with congregational participation at its core, in which no one assumes the role of an audience or spectator. With God as the primary focus, authentic worship requires participation rather than

⁷ David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992).

⁸ Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 283.

performance, with worship leaders as facilitators. Authentic worship is a sincere act of the people of God and does not require feelings or emotions. Peterson states, “Worship is an act that develops feelings for God, not a feeling for God that is expressed in an act of worship.”⁹ Emotionalism is no more an indication of authentic worship than the lack of emotion signals inauthentic worship.

A crucial aspect underscored in this study is the necessity of active participation from all worshipers as an integral component of worship. Marva Dawn succinctly captures the essence of this perspective by emphasizing that worship is not for believers: “Worship is for God, and He deserves our worship whether we feel like offering it or not.”¹⁰ This viewpoint, which reinforces the claim that authentic worship requires active engagement from the congregation, is widely shared among numerous scholarly authorities in the field.¹¹ Congregational participation is rooted in the Psalm, “Let everything that has breath, praise the Lord” (Ps. 150:6).

Idolatry in Worship

To engage in the worship of any entity or object other than the one true God constitutes an act of idolatry. God himself says in Scripture, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Exod. 20:3, King James Version). Idolatry was a constant temptation for the Children of Israel in the Old Testament. The most prominent examples are the golden calf in Exodus 32, Baal

⁹ Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 54.

¹⁰ Marva J. Dawn, *How Shall We Worship? Biblical Guidelines for the Worship Wars* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003), 19–20.

¹¹ See Ian Jones and Peter Webster, “Expressions of Authenticity: Music for Worship,” in *Redefining Christian Britain, Post 1945 Perspectives* (London: SCM, 2007), 50; Daniel Thornton, “‘This is No Performance’: Exploring the Complicated Relationship between the Church and Contemporary Congregational Songs,” *Religions* 14 (2003), 578, <http://doi.org/10.3390/rel14050578>; Monique Ingalls, *Singing the Congregation: How Contemporary Worship Music Forms Evangelical Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); and David Peterson, *Engaging with God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992).

worship in I Kings 18, and Nebuchadnezzar’s golden statue in Daniel 3. In his New Testament epistles, the Apostle Paul extends the concept of idolatry to include pagan rituals (1 Cor. 10:14–22). He equates covetousness with idolatry (Col. 3:5). The New Testament addresses idolatry not just in the traditional sense of worshipping carved images but also in terms of prioritizing anything above God, anything that distracts believers from a faithful relationship. G. K. Beale writes, “Romans affirms that idol worship is the root sin of all other sins.”¹² The Apostle Paul writes, “Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man” (Rom. 1:22–23a, English Standard Version). Idolatry is not confined to the Old Testament; it remains a significant challenge for churches in this age of grace.

In current postmodern society, there is a risk of inadvertently elevating contemporary popular culture to the status of an idol. Marva Dawn acknowledges the historical challenge of keeping the church engaged with popular culture while preserving its distinct identity and mission.¹³ The church exists *in* the world but is not *of* the world. Dawn highlights how postmodern culture has influenced congregants, with media and technology as significant conduits toward a seeker-friendly, performance-driven approach to worship.¹⁴ Through all this, the church is responsible for benefiting from technological advances while keeping worship biblically focused. According to Bryan Chapell:

Our worship tools are not simply the shackles of tradition or the idols of our innovation; they are the treasures we mine to offer him radiant love and highest honor. We use them

¹² G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 277.

¹³ Marva J. Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn-of-the-Century Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995).

¹⁴ Dawn, *Reaching Out*, 60–62.

to lift to him the hope of the gospel he proves as the greatest emblem of our praise and as the greatest expression of his glory.¹⁵

In contemporary church culture, idolatry can manifest itself in various ways, from the sounds and song selection to the featured musicians and, notably, the promotion of a performance mindset. God, the object of one's true worship, can be supplanted by consumerism and a superficial approach to worship. Dawn's writings advocate for a return to rich liturgical practices that emphasize the practical applications of worship:

If the community—and each of us as individuals in that Body—focuses totally on the greatness of the Lord and His deserving to be praised, we will resist all idolatries of self and comfort and ease, all divinizing of worship leaders, all sacralizing of our tastes and preferences, all gods of power or success.¹⁶

Dawn underscores that while styles, cultural influences, and the commercialization of Contemporary Christian Music and Praise and Worship music may indeed leave an impression and influence congregational singing, they should not overshadow the central focus on the authentic worship of God, “We dare not let worship be just another consumer item for which people shop.”¹⁷ She proposes that the primary purpose of worship is to glorify God while challenging the consumer-oriented approach to worship.

Worship and the Musician

Harold J. Best stands at the intersection of faith and the arts as a prominent advocate for artistic excellence. He addresses critical themes, such as the perils of idolatry, artistic

¹⁵ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Ada, MI: Baker Publishing Group), 201.

¹⁶ Marva J. Dawn, *How Shall We Worship? Biblical Guidelines for the Worship Wars* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2003), 49.

¹⁷ Marva J. Dawn, *A Royal “Waste” of Time: The Splendor of Worshiping God and Being Church for the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 150.

completeness, and musical excellence. His work, *Unceasing Worship* and *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*, delves into the worship context, modes of expression, and the pursuit of musical excellence—all of which are essential considerations in this study.¹⁸

Best offers this research two valuable philosophical concepts: musical pluralism and musical excellence. Musical pluralism advocates for a more inclusive perspective recognizing the rich diversity of musical styles and expressions. All music traditions, genres, and forms possess value and serve as pathways to creativity and diversity. Musical excellence advocates that musicians should strive to offer their best to God through their craft with devotion and integrity.¹⁹ This encompasses nurturing both technical skills and spiritual understanding.

Best's writings guide worshipers participating in the liturgy or the work of the people, the conduit through which believers connect with the sacred, foster community, and share spiritual experiences. His philosophy suggests that the worship service should be an aesthetically compelling and spiritually transformative experience. Worship is a profound and spiritually engaging encounter that demands the best that worshipers can offer. Influenced by his writings, this study explores whether prerecorded music maintains its engagement and meaning for worshipers.

Best consistently promotes that *worship* is defined as “a continuous outpouring of all that I am, all that I do, and all that I can ever become in light of a chosen or choosing God.”²⁰ He provides a robust philosophy of authentic worship, understanding the integration of popular

¹⁸ Harold M. Best, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003); Harold M. Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith* (New York: Harper-Collins, 1993).

¹⁹ Susan R. Burgess “Music Pluralism and Excellence in Worship” (class paper submitted in WRSP 845 at Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, 2022).

²⁰ Best, *Unceasing Worship*, 18.

Christian music and technology, and offers keen insights into the power of creativity in a believer's spiritual journey. The worship landscape is anything but static; it continually evolves in response to social and cultural shifts, technological advancements, and individual preferences. Research by Shannon Baker into performance authenticity in contemporary music summarizes that the focus on production values and the availability of popular Christian recordings has shaped the expectations of congregations in worship.²¹ However, these trends and preferences may foster a form of idolatry that places the worship musician in a precarious position, in which self-centeredness takes precedence.²² Best's writings highlight the need for this study, considering that the live music in worship may not truly be live but professionally prerecorded. In his work *Music through the Eyes of Faith*, Best addresses the ethical and aesthetic issues emerging from the use of prerecorded music, stating, "They have no idea of 'live' authenticity and integrity."²³ He thus cautions that technology will overshadow man's created purpose.²⁴

This caution comes in the form of striving for excellence while guarding against inauthenticity, which Best labels as "pseudo excellence,"—"the substitution of production for content."²⁵ He states:

Through any number of technological enhancements, manipulations, substitutions, and replications, the less-than-excelling are made bigger than life ... how many times have we lip-synched Jesus?...how many musicians use taped accompaniments to enhance content, to import authenticity, and give the lie to what a local congregation should be authentically doing even if it cannot do it quite as well as the one down the street? ...perhaps we have it all backwards or upside down. Instead of little people trying to

²¹ Shannon K. Baker, "A Typology of Ad-Libbing: Performing Authenticity in Contemporary Worship," *Religions* 14, (2023): 337, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14030337>.

²² Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*, 111–21.

²³ Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*, 121.

²⁴ Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*, 14.

²⁵ Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*, 113.

become someone they are not—trying to overpower with technique—God might just be wanting all the little people, created that way in the first place, to stay their own size so that divine power can come down on them and break down the strongholds the divine way, with the straightforward foolishness of the gospel.²⁶

Best does not imply that these technologies are inherently evil but rather emphasizes that while technology can enhance participation, it should never replace the congregation's involvement. This is crucial in all areas of ministry, especially in settings that may encourage a performance-based atmosphere. Humanity was created to worship the Creator with their God-given skills and gifts. An offering from members of the congregation may be augmented or enhanced, but members of the church body should never be substituted or replaced in opportunities for worship.

Jeremy Begbie bridges the gap between music and theology, developing a model of “Christian wisdom.”²⁷ Begbie's expertise lies in systematic theology, providing a structured and logical framework for understanding the theology of making music in worship. His writings explore the theological significance of music, combining the emotional and aesthetic aspects of music with the theology of worship and thus exploring the relationship between faith and the arts.²⁸

In contemporary worship practices, which blend traditional elements with modern innovations, such as digital media and prerecorded music, Begbie's work is indispensable for gaining theological insights into the influence of these trends and practices on both musicians and worshipers. He navigates the intersection of theology and culture through the lens of

²⁶ Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*, 113–14.

²⁷ Jeremy S. Begbie, *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007).

²⁸ Jeremy S. Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time*, vol. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 5–7.

creativity inherent in music, highlighting a significant observation: “The church is one of the few places where people sing together in this current culture.”²⁹ In an era in which communal singing has become increasingly rare, the church provides a unique opportunity for this community experience. Concerning congregational participation in singing, Begbie notes, “There are parallels between that participatory element, and the participatory element in Christian faith, and therefore in theology.”³⁰ In worship and through singing together, believers are a part of greater activity. However, when performance-driven worship restricts the individual worshiper’s independence, congregational singing faces a threat.

Scholars including Dawn, Peterson, Best, and Begbie have made substantial contributions to the discourse on authenticity in worship and the development of a theology of worship. Their collective scholarship provides a robust foundation for understanding the intricacies of worship in contemporary contexts, offering valuable insights and guiding principles for those seeking to deepen their comprehension of current worship practices. As worship is increasingly viewed through a biblical lens, the influence and advancements in musical technology warrant consideration. Emerging research in this area promises to further highlight these dynamics.

Worship and Technology

In *Producing Worship: A Theology of Church Technology*, Josiah Way supports the idea that technology can enhance the ministry and mission of the church while connecting congregations to contemporary culture. He delves into Scripture using modern technology

²⁹ Jeremy S. Begbie, “The Spiritual Power of Music and Christian Theology,” *More Christ*, 2022, YouTube video, 20:18, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ztPeyq_j_E.

³⁰ Jeremy Begbie, “Ministry Corner: Interview with Jeremy Begbie,” *Stimulus: The New Zealand Journal of Christian Thought and Practice* 29, no. 2 (2022): 32. <http://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.010460376093292>.

(Exod. 35:30–36:1, Heb. 2:12–13, Col. 3:16), strengthening his hypothesis that technology is “God’s modern voice.”³¹ Way posits that technology is more than a tool; it can significantly impact worship gatherings and the sharing of the Gospel as any other element in a worship service.³²

Integrating prerecorded music technology into worship has become a fundamental and widely accepted practice, which is central to this thesis’ exploration of worshipers’ lived experiences. Peter Ward connects two key ideologies with the historical progression of technology in worship. Firstly, the rise of Contemporary Worship Music (CWM), born out of *The Jesus Movement*, played a pivotal role in popularizing this genre and simultaneously creating a marketplace for the resources it generated.

The Jesus Movement, emerging in the late 1960s and early 1970s within the United States, represented a countercultural revival within Christian youth culture. This period of considerable social turmoil saw numerous young individuals disenchanted with established societal norms, actively seeking alternative spiritual direction. Characterized by fervent evangelistic zeal, this movement emphasized direct engagement with marginalized youths, often within informal settings such as coffeehouses, which served as venues for evangelism. *The Jesus Movement* rejuvenated evangelical worship practices in the United States and profoundly influenced church practices and the development of Christian Contemporary Music (CCM). The

³¹ Josh Way, *Producing Worship: A Theology of Church Technical Arts* (Lake Forest, CA: Josiah Way, 2018), 24.

³² Way, *Producing Worship*, 27.

impact extended across various evangelical communities nationwide, marking a significant shift in religious expression and communal worship.³³

The Jesus Movement marked a significant phase in the worship music of the church. According to Ward, “The desire to lead young people to Christ in turn led evangelicals into a media-related world.”³⁴ Due to its popularity, this genre became a platform for the church to forge connections with contemporary culture and music through its use of evangelism and outreach tools. It also served as an alternative to secular music. Secondly, Ward points to the influence of popular culture on this phenomenon, observing, “Popular culture was and is a commercially orientated consumer culture.”³⁵ Music, in particular, emerged as a potent tool for evangelizing a new generation of young people.

The music of the Praise and Worship Pentecostal church of the late 1960s and 1970s, often associated with Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, California, saw the concurrent emergence of CCM that evolved into music companies and record labels, thereby establishing itself as a form of entertainment under the umbrella of Modern Worship.³⁶ Alongside this, Christian Worship Music (CWM) expanded beyond worship music, encompassing record companies,

³³ Larry Eskridge, *God's Forever Family: The Jesus People Movement in America*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013) 2–4, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195326451.003.0002>; Andrew MacDonald and Ed Stetzer, “The Lasting Legacy of the Jesus People: How an Unlikely, Countercultural Movement went Mainstream,” *Talbot Magazine*, Talbot School of Theology, Summer (2020): <https://www.biola.edu/blogs/talbot-magazine/2020/the-lasting-legacy-of-the-jesus-people>.

³⁴ Peter Ward, *Selling Worship: How What We Sing Has Changed the Church* (Bletchley, UK: Authentic Media, 2005), 35.

³⁵ Ward, *Selling Worship*, 13.

³⁶ Monica M. Ingalls, “Transnational Connections, Musical Meaning, and the 1990’s ‘British Invasion’ of North American Evangelical Worship Music,” in *Oxford Handbook of Music and World Christianities*, ed. Jonathan Dueck and Suzel Ana Riley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 425–45, online edition, <http://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199859993.013.004>; Anna Nekola, “Negotiating the Tensions of U. S. Worship Music in the Marketplace,” in *Oxford Handbook of Music and World Christianities*, ed. Jonathan Dueck and Suzel Ana Riley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 513–29.

music publishers, worship resources, and an entire industry around worship products.³⁷ Ward notes, “Christian worship music has, therefore, to some extent evolved by the creative engagement with the technologies of recording.”³⁸

Andrew Mall further underscores the commercialization of religious materials within the evangelical sector, with *The Jesus Movement* playing a pivotal role in “normalizing consumption practices” with evangelicals.³⁹ This commercialization took various forms, including merchandising, records, concert tickets, and songbooks. Mall’s research aligns with the objectives of this study by linking the actual effects and experience of worshipers in the context of technology and popular music infiltrating the sacred space of worship.⁴⁰

Swee Hong Lim and Lester Ruth use the term *Contemporary Worship* as the overarching label for religious music outside the traditional scope of worship music and the dramatic influx of technology into the church in the 1990s.⁴¹ They identify three descriptive musical qualities in contemporary worship evident in each church within this case study and symbolic of the evolving landscape of worship in the digital age.⁴² Lim and Ruth write:

While the sound may be different from church to church, what stays common is the same: fashioning the music of worship to sound like some form of popular music. This fashioning has shown itself in at least three ways ... (1) the instruments used, (2) the use of popular

³⁷ Ward, *Selling Worship*, 88.

³⁸ Ward, *Selling Worship*, 93.

³⁹ Andrew Mall, *God Rock, Inc.: The Business of Niche Music* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2020), 59, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁴⁰ Mall, *God Rock, Inc.*, 60–62.

⁴¹ Swee Hong Lim and Lester Ruth, *Lovin’ on Jesus: A Concise History of Contemporary Worship* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2017), 6–12.

⁴² Lim & Ruth, *Lovin’ on Jesus*, 47–48.

music as in replicating a popular sound, (3) the third presumptive quality is a commitment to adapt worship to match contemporary people.⁴³

Lim and Ruth's writings shed light on critical aspects of contemporary worship, including the prominent use of instruments, such as the guitar, and the replication of popular music sounds in congregational worship. These elements emphasize the importance of duplicating specific popular sounds, utilizing popular musical styles, and faithfully reproducing the sounds made by the original artists.

Lim and Ruth underscore the vital role that technology has played in worship, particularly in the ability to create and replicate professionally recorded sounds.⁴⁴ When volunteer musicians in a congregation cannot reproduce a desired sound, technology offers a solution. Prerecorded stems and multitracks can be purchased to recreate the sounds heard in recordings. If, for example, an instrumentalist struggles with elements required in a song or a crucial instrument is absent from the live arrangement, prerecorded stems can supplement these missing parts.⁴⁵ The use of multitracks allows these missing elements to be seamlessly added to the live mix in the room, resulting in congregants hearing music from instruments they may not see being played. Lim and Ruth's claims thus align with this study's objectives, as it highlights contemporary worship's reliance on and alignment with popular culture.⁴⁶

Heather MacLachlan's study on volunteers and competency includes a current worship leader using prerecorded music as a strategy to incorporate "incompetent musicians" into Sunday

⁴³ Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus*, 4–6.

⁴⁴ Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus*, 47.

⁴⁵ This is a common practice at the church where this researcher serves and at other churches with which she is familiar.

⁴⁶ Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus*, 142.

worship.⁴⁷ The volunteer's skill level may be less than competent while playing along, with mistakes and all, with the professional performance track in their ear.⁴⁸ The congregation, however, only hears the professional musician on the track supplementing the live band. This research seeks to uncover the communication and implications of using prerecorded music for congregants and volunteers, recognizing the potential value of further research into this process.

Since the introduction of performance soundtracks in the 1970s, approximately two to three generations have witnessed the frequent and accepted use of backtracking and instrumental performance tracks in worship.⁴⁹ The compact disc (CD) played a significant role in bridging the gap between analog and digital eras, ultimately paving the way for the digital age of music and data storage utilized in contemporary worship. Lim and Ruth aptly state, "Contemporary worship is imaginably the most electronically dependent form of worship in church history."⁵⁰ The evolution of technology has undeniably influenced the landscape of worship over the past half-century.

While the primary focus of this study is not meant to provide an exhaustive history of technological progress, it is crucial to recognize that the adoption of this popular cultural practice is widely accepted, with readily available products for local church ministries.⁵¹ This research

⁴⁷ Heather MacLachlan, "Church Music Leaders in the USA: Prioritizing Technical Competence and Inclusion," *Yale Journal of Music & Religion* 8, no. 2 Article 3 (2022): 71, <https://doi.org/10.17132/2377-231x.124>.

⁴⁸ MacLachlan, "Church Music."

⁴⁹ Pew Research Center conducts generational analysis as a tool in research. They define a generation as people born over a 15–20-year span. <https://www.pewresearch.org>.

⁵⁰ Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus*, 46.

⁵¹ MultiTracks.com, Worshiponline.com, LoopCommunity.com, and TheWorshipInitiative.com are all websites providing digital resources such as stems and multitracks, tutorials, podcasts, devotionals, and technology products with the intent of helping worship leaders assemble and arrange a worship set using the available technology.

intends to gain an understanding and insight into the worshiper's personal experience when digital tracks and stems are used in congregational worship. Technology has the potential to enhance the worship experience in every church body, and with that skill comes the responsibility to use technology to be "physical mediators between Christ and the church body," making this a significant area of study and exploration.⁵²

Stems and multitracks are fundamental concepts in audio production, defining the vocabulary and processes involved in creating a complete recording. Multitrack recording consists of the capability to record various individual instruments and elements onto dedicated tracks. These individual tracks are commonly referred to as *multitracks*. In Figure 1, multitracks represent the distinct, separate tracks in an audio recording. Each element, such as the rhythm guitar, electric guitar, kick drum, tom, and snare drum, occupies its own track in the recording project.⁵³

⁵² Way, *Producing Worship*, 200.

⁵³ Keith Hatschek and Veronica A. Wells, *Historical Dictionary of the American Music Industry* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018).

Name	Date Modified	Size	Kind
ACOUSTIC GTR_1.wav	Today at 12:26 PM	25.8 MB	Waveform audio
FLOOR TOM_1.wav	Today at 12:26 PM	25.7 MB	Waveform audio
HI HAT_1.wav	Today at 12:26 PM	25.7 MB	Waveform audio
KICK_1.wav	Today at 12:26 PM	25.8 MB	Waveform audio
LEAD GTR_1.wav	Today at 12:26 PM	25.6 MB	Waveform audio
LEAD VOCAL_1.wav	Today at 12:26 PM	18.4 MB	Waveform audio
ORGAN_1.wav	Today at 12:26 PM	50.3 MB	Waveform audio
OVERHEAD L_1.wav	Today at 12:26 PM	25.8 MB	Waveform audio
OVERHEAD R_1.wav	Today at 12:26 PM	25.7 MB	Waveform audio
PAD 2_1.wav	Today at 12:26 PM	55.7 MB	Waveform audio
PAD 3_1.wav	Today at 12:26 PM	55.7 MB	Waveform audio
RHY GTR 1_1.wav	Today at 12:26 PM	16.4 MB	Waveform audio
RHY GTR 2_1.wav	Today at 12:26 PM	27.8 MB	Waveform audio
RHY GTR 3_1.wav	Today at 12:26 PM	19.3 MB	Waveform audio
RHY GTR 4_1.wav	Today at 12:26 PM	19.3 MB	Waveform audio
SNARE BOTTOM_1.wav	Today at 12:26 PM	25.7 MB	Waveform audio
SNARE TOP_1.wav	Today at 12:26 PM	25.7 MB	Waveform audio

Figure 1. A multitrack project example shows multiple tracks for the same instrument. The project example is used with permission from Steven Bryant.

Figure 2 visually represents the multitrack format within Logic Pro, an advanced software developed by Apple for professional audio recording on Mac computers. It showcases the comprehensive nature of multitracks within a project. These figures indicate that a project typically comprises a significant number of individual multitracks compared to stems. Creating stems involves combining specific tracks from the multitrack group, resulting in a more condensed and manageable set of audio elements for various purposes in audio production.

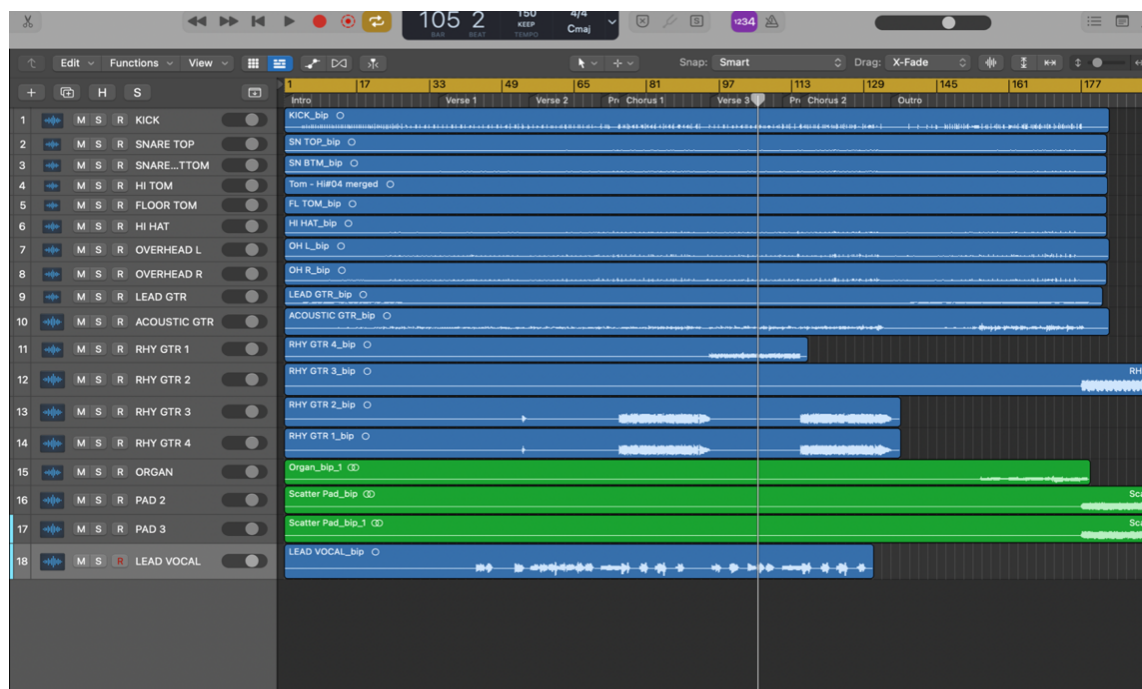


Figure 2. A multitrack project example in Logic Pro, Apple’s software program for professional recording on a Mac. Steven Bryant created the project example, which is used with permission.

The following figure provides an enhanced visualization of distinct audio files within a multitrack recording, each file corresponding to a unique recorded track. To further clarify, one might envision that each file is akin to a recording captured by a dedicated microphone, illustrating the segregation of sound sources in the recording process.

MULTITRACKS SAMPLE	
Snare Bottom	Acoustic GTR
Snare Top	PAD 2
Hi Hat	PAD 3
Kick	RHY GTR 1
Floor Tom	RHY GTR 2
Lead VOCAL	RHY GTR 3
Lead GTR	GHY GTR 4
	ORGAN

Figure 3. A chart showing instruments separated in multitracks.

As illustrated in the multitracks sample, instrument parts are duplicated, allowing each recorded part to be easily separated, mastered, and manipulated. As depicted in Figure 4, a stem is formed by combining individual multitracks. In the context of stems, elements like guitars, keys, and vocals are no longer represented as separate tracks but are consolidated into a single file. This consolidation simplifies the management of audio elements, allowing for more efficient processing and manipulation during audio production.

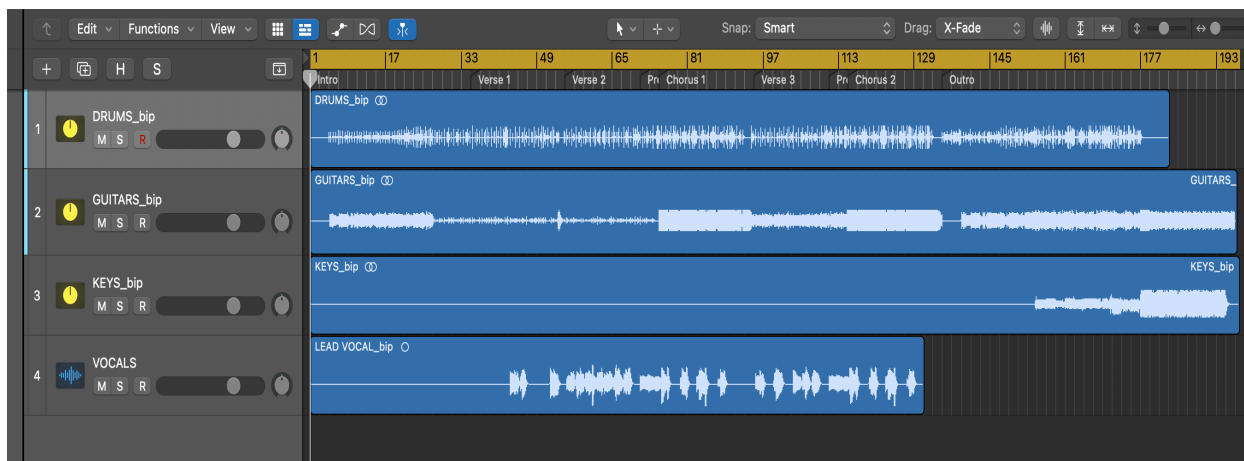


Figure 4. An example of a stem project in Logic Pro. The project example was created by Steven Bryant and used with permission.

Contrary to the preceding chart in Figure 2, which depicts individual audio files within a multitrack recording, the subsequent diagram in Figure 4 demonstrates a stem file arrangement. In this configuration, files are amalgamated based on their instrumentation. For instance, all separate drum tracks are consolidated into a singular file, thereby forming the stem. This method

simplifies the overall audio management by reducing the number of tracks by grouping them by instrument type. Figure 5 illustrates the consolidated tracks. The individual drum recordings from Figure 3—snares, hi-hat, kick, and floor toms—are combined into a single category labeled “drums.” This consolidated track is referred to as the drum stem.

STEMS SAMPLE
Drums
Guitars
Keys
Vocals

Figure 5: A sample of instrument grouping when using stems.

Using stems and multitracks is a creative boon for audio engineers, offering a streamlined and more efficient mixing process.⁵⁴ This recording technology delivers exceptional flexibility and control over the production process, enabling precise manipulation of each element. This includes the ability to isolate individual parts, which can then be used independently, separate from the rest of the tracks.

Evangelical worship ministries equipped with the necessary knowledge and access to suitable equipment can harness the potential of these tracks. They can sync and play any combination of these tracks alongside live instruments, achieving a harmonious fusion of technology and live performance. Loop Community, an online catalog of tracks and equipment

⁵⁴ “What are Stems in Music Production?,” Teach Me Sound Design, Epidemic Sound, last modified March 21, 2023, <https://www.epidemicsound.com/blog/what-are-stems-in-music-production/>.

for using tracks in worship settings, lists three positive reasons to consider utilizing tracks in church worship:

1. To replace missing musicians—any needed and wanted instrumental parts are available.
2. To keep the band together—a click track means focusing on leading worship rather than musicianship.
3. Tracks can fill out the sound—the worship sound is customizable.⁵⁵

Philosophical Perspectives on Technology and Worship

Philosopher Martin Heidegger’s concepts of *ready-to-hand* and *present-at-hand* apply to this project when considering the use of technology in worship.⁵⁶ *Ready-to-hand* describes how individuals interact with objects as tools to accomplish a task, focusing on the utility rather than the object itself. In contrast, *present-at-hand* refers to how objects are perceived when they are not being used or are broken, not in their usual function. This study explores the implementation of stems and multitracks to augment instrumentation and enhance the worship experience, questioning whether worshippers perceive these elements as a practical and meaningful (ready-to-hand) resource or merely as tools (present-at-hand). Affirming this distinction aligns with Heidegger’s idea of present-at-hand, which emphasizes the object over its integration into the activity it facilitates.

⁵⁵ Loop Community, “Three Reasons to Use Tracks in Worship,” Worship Fuel, CCLI.com/Songselect.com, <https://www.worshipfuel.com/equip/three-reasons-to-use-tracks-in-worship/>.

⁵⁶ Jeremy J. Wisnewski, *Heidegger: An Introduction* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2013), 31–39, 40–46.

Using a hermeneutic phenomenology, this study searches to interpret the meanings of these tools as experienced by the worshipers. What does the worshiper experience when the music is supplemented by instruments they hear but do not see? Heidegger refers to the tools used in this world as “equipment,” a part of experiencing, doing, and interacting in the world.⁵⁷ When these digital tools of stems and multitracks are utilized correctly, are they understood and perceived as necessary for the worship tasks? In considering Heidegger’s concept of ready-to-hand, the worshiper may not be aware of the use of this equipment until something goes wrong in the service.

While the primary focus of this study is not meant to provide an exhaustive history of technological progress, it is crucial to recognize that the adoption of this popular cultural practice is widely accepted, with readily available products for local church ministries.⁵⁸ This research intends to gain understanding and insight into the worshiper’s personal experience when digital tracks and stems are used in congregational worship. Scholars recognize that technology has the potential to enhance the worship experience in every church body, making it a significant area of study and exploration.⁵⁹

During the 2023 Global Leadership Summit held at Willow Creek in Chicago, Pat Gelsinger, the Chief Executive Office of Intel Corporation, made a significant statement, echoing

⁵⁷ Wisnewski, *Heidegger*, 40–41.

⁵⁸ MultiTracks.com, Worshiponline.com, LoopCommunity.com, and TheWorshipInitiative.com are all websites providing digital resources such as stems and multitrack, tutorials, podcasts, devotionals, and technology products with the intent of helping worship leaders assemble and arrange a worship set using the available technology.

⁵⁹ This statement is a conclusion gathered from reading journal articles by Heidi A. Campbell, Nathan Myrick, Andrew Mall, Swee Hong Lim, and Lester Ruth. In addition, the podcast by Sovereign Grace Music, *Sound Plus Doctrine*, by David Zimmer and Bob Kauflin presents an episode on the pros and cons of backtracking: <https://sovereigngracemusic.com/training/resources/backing-tracks-blessing-or-curse-or-something-in-between/>.

Aristotle’s perspective on technology by stating, “Technology is neutral.”⁶⁰ This viewpoint, often called *instrumentalism*, posits that technology is a neutral tool, an instrument used to achieve a specific purpose.⁶¹ However, Martin Heidegger presents a contrasting viewpoint. Heidegger’s philosophical concept of *Dasein*, or “being-there,” argues that technology and human existence are inextricably intertwined.⁶² He introduces an additional exploration of truth, known as *Aletheia*, which Heidegger interprets as revelation or *unconcealment*. Heidegger’s theory of truth and technology’s role as an instrument intertwined with human activity are vital aspects of this phenomenological study. According to Heidegger, truth is not merely a static representation of facts but is revealed through interactions and engagements with the world. In this context, technology cannot be considered neutral; it is not merely a set of tools but a fundamental part of daily human existence.⁶³ Technology cannot be neutral or merely an application of tools but is a part of everyday human existence.⁶⁴ Tools and instruments used in worship are woven into the fabric of the worship experience.

Additionally, the writings of Christian philosopher Jacques Ellul offer a cautionary perspective on the use of technology in worship. In his work *The Technological Society*, Ellul states that in the past, “The deficiency of the tool was to be compensated for by the skill of the worker ... everything varied from man to man according to his gifts, whereas technique in the

⁶⁰ Pat Gelsinger, “Five Practices of Leaders” (The Global Leadership Summit, Willow Creek Community Church, South Barrington, Illinois, August 3, 2023).

⁶¹ Trish Glazebrook, “From $\phi\nu\sigma\iota\varsigma$ to Nature, $\tau\epsilon\lambda\chi\eta$ to Technology: Heidegger on Aristotle, Galileo, and Newton,” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 38, no. 1 (2000): 95–118. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2041-6962.2000.tb00892.x>.

⁶² Don Ihde, *Heidegger’s Technologies: Postphenomenological Perspectives* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 29–31.

⁶³ Ihde, *Heidegger’s Technologies*, 30–39.

⁶⁴ Ihde, *Heidegger’s Technologies*, 54–55.

modern sense seeks to eliminate such variability.”⁶⁵ This prompts important inquiries regarding how replacing volunteer musicians with professional prerecorded music from skilled artists affects the worshiper’s experience. This research is therefore important because the musical impact on congregants’ worship experience is hitherto unknown; uncovering this impact is the purpose of this study.

Witkowski, Hawn, and Ingalls address a critical aspect of this inquiry.⁶⁶ They highlight the notion of performing or entertaining the congregation and the potential consequences of conflating the act of leading a congregation in worship with entertainment: “As worship leaders and musicians, we give into *performancism* when we conflate leading a congregation in worship with entertaining or pleasing a crowd.”⁶⁷ These consequences manifest in (1) taking the work of the people (liturgy) out of the hands of the people, (2) crowd-pleasing, and (3) the shift in focus from participation to perfection in the presentation.

Demand Created by the COVID-19 Pandemic

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the last months of 2019 prompted governments, including the United States, to respond with measures to reduce the spread of the virus. As a result, public gatherings were restricted, and lockdowns were implemented as part of social distancing guidelines recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

⁶⁵ Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (Toronto, Canada: Random House, 1964), 90.

⁶⁶ Deanna Witkowski, C. Michael Hawn, and Monique M. Ingalls, “Can Worship Leaders and Musicians Resist the Temptation to ‘Perform’?” *Christianity Today*, November 6, 2014. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/november/three-views-can-worship-leaders-and-musicians-resist-tempta.html>.

⁶⁷ Witkowski, Hawn, and Ingalls, “Can Worship Leaders and Musicians Resist the Temptation to ‘Perform’?” 30.

and enforced by federal authorities.⁶⁸ The consequences of this action were profound for many individuals and institutions, including churches.

During the weekend of March 15, 2020, churches nationwide decided to close their doors in compliance with the federal mandate for social distancing and quarantine. Congregations faced a choice: embrace technology in the service of the church, remain disconnected from their congregants, or defy the government's directives. This pivotal moment forced churches to participate actively in the growing digital movement that had been evolving over the past two decades.

This shift in approach heightened awareness of the potential opportunities that digital platforms offer to churches and ministries to serve and engage with their congregations. It underscored the need for a study like this phenomenological case study to explore the effects of technology on worshipers. The emergence of online digital religious communities is what Heidi A. Campbell has labeled *Digital Ecclesiology*.⁶⁹ This concept emphasizes the relationship between digital media and the church in the modern digital landscape. Campbell's perspective emphasizes that "Churches' social structures, cultural relationships, and theological understanding are all being informed by the technological landscape, even when churches attempt to avoid or limit their contact with digital media."⁷⁰

⁶⁸ "CDC Museum COVID-19 Timeline," David J. Sencer, CDC Museum, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, last modified March 15, 2023, <https://www.cdc.gov/museum/timeline/covid19.html>.

⁶⁹ Heidi A. Campbell, "Introduction: Studying Digital Ecclesiology: How Churches are Being Informed by Digital Media and Cultures," *Ecclesial Practices* 7, no. 1 (2020): 1–10.

⁷⁰ Campbell, "Introduction: Studying Digital Ecclesiology," 5.

Corporate Worship in the Digital Age

This research draws heavily on a new cohort of emerging experts in the broader field of study known as Digital Religion Studies and Digital Ecclesiology, which encompasses related but distinct areas of exploration. These scholars, including Campbell, Ingalls, Mall, Myrick, and Steuernagel, contribute invaluable insights into the intersection of technology and religion.

Digital Religion explores the broad influence of digital technology on religious aspects and how individuals interact with digital media and technology concerning their faith. It is wider than the boundaries of specific religious traditions, delving into the interaction between technology and spirituality across various belief systems.⁷¹

This field examines how technology influences online religious communities and social media platforms. While Digital Ecclesiology focuses on the impact of technology within Christian contexts, Digital Religion takes a broader perspective. It explores how technology affects religion more inclusively, considering diverse religious traditions and practices. Both fields share a common goal of understanding the consequences of technology in the realm of spirituality and religious practices.

Digital Ecclesiology, in contrast, concentrates primarily on investigating how digital technology shapes the church and its practices. It explores how technology influences the essence, operation, and structure of the Christian community.⁷² The study of Digital Ecclesiology raises questions regarding how online platforms and digital tools impact liturgical practices, the functioning of the church, and worship services, and provides critical insights into the evolving

⁷¹ Heidi A. Campbell and Wendi Bellar, *Digital Religion: The Basics* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2023), 4–6.

⁷² Campbell, “Introduction: Studying Digital Ecclesiology,” 1.

nature of corporate worship in the digital age utilizing technology.⁷³ It encompasses various topics, including online worship services, virtual faith communities, social media, and the theological implications arising from these digital interactions within the context of Christian faith and practice.

This emerging area of study seeks to address the challenges and opportunities presented by the digital era to foster a deeper understanding of how the Church can fulfill its mission within a rapidly evolving technological landscape. Anna E. Nekola advocates for a “cultural approach” in the study of “religious media,” emphasizing that digital platforms have significantly transformed church music in the twenty-first century, much like the commercialization of worship resources did following the Jesus Movement:

Similarly, in our personal and corporate worship, many people have faith that adopting new technologies in music’s performance and playback, and in our personal listening, will enhance the experience by making worship practices more attractive to outsiders and more meaningful to insiders. In this sense, faith in technology can support the cultural and spiritual mission, not to mention the economic underpinnings, of religious institutions.⁷⁴

Nekola’s perspective highlights that in both personal and corporate worship settings, many individuals are positive about adopting new music performance, playback, and personal listening technologies. Adopting technology within religious contexts, particularly in worship practices, is primarily motivated by the belief that technological advancements can significantly enhance the worship experience. This perspective aligns with the idea that faith and technology are not mutually exclusive but can complement each other to support the cultural, spiritual, and even economic foundations of religious institutions.

⁷³ Campbell, “Introduction: Studying Digital Ecclesiology,” 9–10.

⁷⁴ Anna E. Nekola, “Mediating Religious Experience? Congregational Music and the Digital Music Interface” in *Studying Congregational Music: Key Issues, Methods, and Theoretical Perspectives*, ed. Andrew Mall, Jeffers Engelhardt, Monique M. Ingalls (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2021), 45.

Approaching this integration from a critical-cultural perspective shifts the understanding of technology in worship settings. Technologies are not merely supplemental tools or passive elements of the worship experience; they are active practices that shape and are shaped by the congregation's engagement.⁷⁵ This viewpoint emphasizes that the congregation's reaction to and interaction with technology is dynamic and acknowledges that technology can influence and be influenced by a faith community's cultural and spiritual practices.

It is essential to recognize that while streaming platforms provide easy access to worship music, offering Christian entertainment and a reference for how songs should be performed, biblical worship underscores the importance of active participation. Congregational worship necessitates engagement and participation rather than passive observation. Ethnomusicologist Jeff Titon is part of a recent group of academics in the last decade interested in researching the growing field of congregational worship, noting that "Congregational singing is an aspect of culture: it is learned and transmitted from one person and generation to the next."⁷⁶ This research aims to enrich the academic dialogue on congregational worship by incorporating insights from the lived experiences of worshipers when prerecorded music is used.

Performance-Style Worship in the Digital Age

The proliferation of digital platforms, coupled with the pervasive influence of reality television phenomena, such as *American Idol* and *The Voice*, raises a compelling and multifaceted inquiry: in the current worship landscape that is increasingly perceived and structured as a competitive arena vying for the attention and following of worshipers—now often

⁷⁵ Mall, Englehardt, and Ingalls, *Studying Congregational Music*, 40–41.

⁷⁶ Jeff Todd Titon, "Ethnography in the Study of Congregational Music," in *Studying Congregational Music*, ed. Mall, Englehardt, and Ingalls, 65.

termed as *viewers* and *subscribers*—do contemporary congregations harbor an expectation and preference for worship that mirrors the performance-centric, entertainment-driven ethos of this popular cultural fixture? This question invites a critical examination of the evolving dynamics between traditional religious practices and the modern-day quest for engagement and relevance in a digital, viewer-driven world.

Multitracks.com, founded in 2006, is an emblematic example of a company designed to provide multitracks for worship leaders to incorporate into live worship services.⁷⁷ This development offers resources for ministries while also creating the potential for worship to adopt a performance-oriented dimension, enabled by contemporary pop culture tools and the abundant electronic technology resources for crafting services.

It is essential to recognize that the traditional concept of the congregation—gathering in a specific place at a designated time—is undergoing a significant transformation. The emergence of online church communities necessitates a redefinition and restructuring of the liturgy to accommodate this new virtual church body.⁷⁸ For this study, this researcher draws upon the research of scholars who focus on the impact of technology on worshipers, offering valuable insights into how technology is reshaping congregational expectations and experiences in the digital age.

Performance-Driven Worship and the Celebrity Model

As CWM and Praise and Worship music have expanded in influence, so has the commercialization and popularity of this genre, evolving from corporate worship, recordings,

⁷⁷ “Multitracks.com.” Accessed October 19, 2023. <https://www.multitracks.com>.

⁷⁸ Lester Ruth, “Unmute Yourself: Thought on the Architecture of Virtual Worship,” *Liturgy* 36, no. 3 (2021): 5–7, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0458063X.2021.1951081>.

and songbooks to encompass worship conferences and concerts. Ingalls connects CWM with the growth of the Christian music industry, resulting in what is commonly referred to as “The Worship Experience.”⁷⁹ This phenomenon is a natural outgrowth of Christian concerts, the entertainment provided by Christian radio, and the evolution of pop-rock culture within worship music.

The marketing of Christian entertainment has blurred the lines between a concert and a church worship service, effectively “collapsing the boundaries between public and personal worship.”⁸⁰ In research examining the meaningfulness of in-person ministry activities compared to an online ministry, the Barna Group finds that 65 percent of surveyed adults consider worship to be more meaningful when experienced in person.⁸¹ This suggests that the lived experience of worship is what holds significance for the worshiper. The current study projects that worshippers see the benefit of live worship, but it is unknown whether this correlates to live instrumentation in worship. A benefit of this research is to reveal any connection between the preference for live worship and the experiences of the worshiper when prerecorded music is used.

In this context, it is essential to immerse oneself in the concepts of “performance-driven worship” and the “Celebrity Model” of worship. Performance-driven worship concentrates on elements such as musicianship, spotlighting the singer, stage lighting, and production value, which are of greater importance than corporate worship and the participation of the

⁷⁹ Monique Ingalls, *Singing the Congregation: How Contemporary Worship Music Forms Evangelical Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 39–41.

⁸⁰ Constance Cherry, “One Heart and One Voice,” *Christianity Today* 63, no. 2 (2019): 74, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/march>.

⁸¹ “40% of Christians Wouldn’t Attend Their Church if It Was Solely Online,” Technology, Barna Group, last modified April 12, 2023, <https://www.barna.com/research/in-person-over-online-church>.

congregation.⁸² The Celebrity Model operates in the same vein, seeing as it similarly places great value on performance excellence and additionally incorporates a fervent use of technology, popular modern worship music, and fashionable and youthful worship leaders.⁸³ Emerging research in the field highlights the implications of the Celebrity Model of the music industry and its impact on performance-driven worship within ecclesiastical settings. Nathan Myrick characterizes this contemporary model of worship leadership as reflecting “consumer culture in Christian worship practices,” which he terms “consumer Christianity.”⁸⁴ Myrick says, “The Celebrity Model arises out of a convergence of CWM, technological developments such as IMAG [image magnification], Ableton, Spotify, and YouTube, and the success of the Christian music industry’s adoption of Modern Worship.”⁸⁵

Myrick’s Celebrity Model of worship outlines a contemporary approach to religious gatherings with several distinct attributes: (1) A strong emphasis is placed on production values, where technological enhancements and musical quality are prioritized equally, ensuring a high-caliber worship experience; (2) it incorporates songs that are popular on Christian playlists or fall within the genre of modern worship music, as categorized by Ingalls;⁸⁶ (3) the model underscores the importance of streaming technologies and digital platforms, reflecting the growing trend towards digital congregation; (4) this model features a worship leader who is both

⁸² Frank S. Page and L. Lavon Gray, *Hungry for Worship: Challenges and Solutions for Today’s Church* (Birmingham, AL: New Hope Publishing, 2014), 58–60.

⁸³ Nathan Myrick, “The Celebrity Model of Music Ministry: Characteristics and Considerations,” *The Hymn* 69, no. 3 (2018): 25–28.

⁸⁴ Myrick, “Celebrity Model of Music Ministry,” 25–26.

⁸⁵ Nathan Myrick, “Double Authenticity: Celebrity, Consumption, and the Christian Worship Music Industry” *The Hymn* 69, no. 2 (2018): 21–27, at 21.

⁸⁶ Ingalls, “Transitional Connections,” 425–45.

youthful and trendy; and (5) formal music education and training are secondary to the ability to embody and lead the desired worship style. This research utilizes Myrick's Celebrity Model, mainly focusing on its implications for the worship experience when prerecorded music plays a pivotal role.⁸⁷

In the realm of research and scholarship, several notable academics have furthered the examination of technology's heightened role in contemporary worship production, expanding upon the works of Lester Ruth and Swee Hong Lim. Scholars such as Heidi A. Campbell, Monique M. Ingalls, Ana Nekola, Andrew Mall, Nathan Myrick, Mark Potter, and Joshua Kalin Busman have made significant contributions to the exploration of the evolving landscape of contemporary congregational worship, in which technology plays an increasingly pivotal role.⁸⁸

Performance-driven worship, often characterized by celebrity-driven worship ministries, relies heavily on cutting-edge technology. One of the critical technological aspects that has gained prominence in this context is stem and multitrack technology. These scholars delve into the intricate relationship between technology, worship practices, the worship experience, and congregational participation, shedding light on the multifaceted dynamics at play within contemporary worship.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Myrick, "Celebrity Model of Music Ministry," 25–27.

⁸⁸ Joshua Kalin Busman, "Amateurism-Without-Amateurishness, or Authenticity as Vanishing Act in Evangelical Worship Music," in *Ethics and Christian Musicking*, ed. Nathan Myrick and Mark Porter (New York, NY: Routledge, 2021).

⁸⁹ Monique M. Ingalls, Andrew Theodore Mall, and Anna E. Nekola, "Christian Popular Music, USA," *The Canterbury Dictionary of Hymnology* (2013); Lim & Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus*.

Summary

This literature review highlights the pressing need for more research on the lived experience of worshipers when stems and multitracks are utilized in worship settings. As previously stated, the overarching purpose of this phenomenological study is to employ a biblical worldview to evaluate and examine the authenticity of worship when prerecorded music is integrated into worship services in Augusta, Georgia. This study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the intricate relationship between prerecorded technology and worship, seeking to shed light on the multifaceted dynamics at play in contemporary worship settings.

The reviewed literature emphasizes the importance of developing a solid theology of biblical worship. It underscores the fundamental notion that worship is primarily for God, and the congregants' participation should prioritize the offering of their work (liturgy) as an act of worship. Opportunities for congregations to actively engage in worship should not be viewed as opportunities to replace volunteers or enhance musical performance. The desire and opportunity for worship, as exemplified by King David's heart, should drive the worship experience. As King David notes:

I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the Lord; the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. O Magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together (Ps. 34:1–3, KJV).

Scholars such as Ingalls and Myrick have begun to research this topic, exploring such aspects as congregational singing across musical styles and the influence of the celebrity worship framework on congregational worship. However, more research is needed to examine how the integration of technology, especially prerecorded music, affects the worship experience of congregants.

The onset of COVID-19 restrictions, the proliferation of technology, and the perpetuation of the Celebrity Model framework have led to certain positions in worship being entrusted to select vocalists on the platform, potentially sidelining volunteers in the pews. While online resources and worship band enhancements are valuable tools for worship practitioners, there is a pressing need to investigate how these practices impact the congregants' experience in the pew. This research seeks to uncover the effects, if any, of these practices on the worshiper during live, in-person worship.

Ingalls touches the surface of this topic in her recent research focusing on congregational singing that crosses cultural practices, religious experiences, and musical styles, opening the door to this research and examining the experience of the worshipers. Myrick expands on the concept and dynamics of the Celebrity Model introduced by Taylor, highlighting the atmosphere of performance that impacts congregational worship.

While much of the existing research explores the role of technology within online or digital worship formats, emphasizing the dynamics of virtual congregations, this study shifts the focus toward the lived experiences of worship in live, in-person settings. This study follows the surge in research over the last decade that explores congregational singing and music-making. The review of existing literature provides a comprehensive understanding of the research landscape, emphasizing key areas such as technology, biblical worship, and the Celebrity Model, all of which contribute to the groundwork for this phenomenological study.

In conclusion, this literature review highlights a substantial body of research and literature on worship. However, it also identifies the need for additional research focusing on the intersection of technology and worship, particularly using stems and prerecorded tracks, and its impact on congregants' worship experience. This review underscores the importance of

addressing the question: “What is the effect on the participant’s perception of authenticity and experience when the worship service uses prerecorded tracks?” Recognizing the theoretical concept of Heidegger’s *ready-at-hand* and *present-to-hand*, introduced in chapter one, this research aims to uncover the phenomenon of the lived experience for worshipers in Augusta, Georgia, providing valuable insights for worship leaders to apply in their ministries.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study employs a phenomenological methodology to explore the lived experiences of individuals engaged in worship with prerecorded music. This chapter delineates the study's methodological approach, detailing the steps involving phenomenological tools and the overarching research design. The research comprises one primary objective: to gain insight into the lived experiences of worshipers within a worship setting that incorporates prerecorded music. The phenomenological methodology serves in this research as the lens for seeking deep insights into the meaning and significance derived from data collection and analysis about the lived experiences of congregants in worship services using stems and multitracks. The primary goal is to unveil the congregation's encounter with "invisible" instruments through prerecorded music during the live worship service.

Research Questions

This study is embedded in Heidegger's existential phenomenology, using the hermeneutical method as the framework of interpretation.¹ The central research question utilized through in-person interviews is: "What is the effect on the participant's perception of authenticity and experience when the worship service uses prerecorded tracks?" This researcher poses open-ended questions, enabling participants to speak freely and capture the words and emotional responses given with the objective of data collection. The sub-questions that facilitate the individual narrative are:

1. What does Scripture say about genuine and authentic worship that may be related to the use of prerecorded music in worship services?

¹ Henrik Gert Larsen and Philip Adu, *The Theoretical Framework in Phenomenological Research* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 125–27.

2. What are the worshiper's perceptions and feelings about the use of prerecorded music in worship services?
3. How does the worshiper describe his or her worship experiences when facilitated by the use of prerecorded music during worship services, when compared with his or her recollection of their experience of worship services that were not?
4. How does the worshiper explain the reasons for a worship leader's use of prerecorded music in the worship service?
5. How does prerecorded music influence the worshiper's sense of authenticity compared to worship led by live volunteers from within the congregation?

At the core of the phenomenological methodology lie in-depth interviews, which offer participants the platform to articulate their experiences. These semi-structured interviews provide the requisite opportunity and flexibility to capture the intricacies of lived experiences. The role of this researcher in this context is that of an active listener, fostering a dialogue that encourages participants to convey the subtleties of their experiences. In an interpretive phenomenological study, the interview serves as the standard and primary instrument for data collection. It holds a prominent position in this research due to its status as the foremost method for extracting "firsthand accounts of participants' experiences," aligning with the core aim of understanding the lived experiences and discerning significant patterns and themes.² The follow-up interview is also a significant component of this research, contributing to the data-collection process. This additional step enhances understanding by utilizing the insights gained during initial interviews for data clarification and further interpretation, a crucial aspect of hermeneutical phenomenology.

² Larsen and Adu, *Theoretical Framework*, 106.

This research utilizes an additional framework in conjunction with the hermeneutical method of interpretation, drawing upon insights from Nathan Myrick’s Celebrity Model framework.³ Termed a “new model of congregational song leadership,” this approach integrates music industry technology and audio/visual enhancements.⁴ Crucially, the Celebrity Model embraces modern technology and CWM, significantly emphasizing their roles in shaping congregational song leadership.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative phenomenological approach, a methodology selected for several compelling reasons supported by academic research scholars.⁵ Firstly, the research’s primary focus is gaining insight into the lived experiences of worshipers within a worship setting that incorporates prerecorded music. Phenomenology is well-suited for delving into the profound depths of these human experiences. Secondly, phenomenology promotes a holistic perspective, as exemplified by Heidegger’s exploration of *Dasein*—the essence of being.⁶ It recognizes that human existence is intricately linked to the environment, capturing the complexity and dynamic interplay among elements contributing to the process of meaning-making.

³ Nathan Myrick, “The Celebrity Model of Music Ministry: Characteristics and Considerations,” *The Hymn* 69, no. 3 (2018): 25–28.

⁴ Nathan Myrick, “Double Authenticity: Celebrity, Consumption, and the Christian Worship Music Industry,” *The Hymn* 69, no. 2 (2018): 21.

⁵ Highlights for using the phenomenological methodology in this research are gathered from the following resources: Jenrik Gert Larsen and Philip Adu, *The Theoretical Framework in Phenomenological Research* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2022); Cheryl Tatano Beck, *Introduction to Phenomenology: Focus on Methodology* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2021); John W. Creswell and David J. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2018).

⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010), 37–38.

Thirdly, a phenomenological study strongly emphasizes enabling participants to articulate their experiences in intricate detail. This emphasis on descriptive analysis facilitates the unveiling of meaningful patterns and themes that naturally emerge from participants' narratives. Lastly, phenomenology embraces a subjective understanding of the world, permitting individuals to interpret and make sense of their experiences in a manner that is not constrained by external frameworks. This approach respects and values the unique perspectives through which individuals navigate and comprehend their world.

Phenomenology, a philosophical and research approach, explores human experiences and consciousness. Its central objective lies in uncovering the very existence of lived experiences and investigating how individuals interpret and derive meaning from the world surrounding them. Given this researcher's desire to delve into the subjective experiences of individual worshipers during a service in which prerecorded music is employed, the choice of a study employing phenomenology as its methodology is appropriate and highly desirable.

A phenomenological study has been selected as the research methodology for this study, primarily influenced by insights from Henrik Gert Larsen and Philip Adu's work.⁷ These scholars expound upon phenomenological research, particularly interpretive phenomenology, stating that it is not solely concerned with interpreting participants' experiences but also with delving into the meaning of their existence, namely, their "being."⁸ Also, Larsen and Adu call for exploratory questioning in a qualitative study to search for the meaning of *being*. The semi-structured interview format presented in their research is a standard for this type of phenomenological investigation and, therefore, provides a blueprint for the current study in order

⁷ Larsen and Adu, *The Theoretical Framework*.

⁸ Larson and Adu, *The Theoretical Framework*, 191.

to ensure a rigorous and methodologically sound approach to exploring the essence of human experience in worship involving prerecorded music.

Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) and Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002)

Martin Heidegger made profound contributions to phenomenology, concentrating on examining human experience and the intricate structures of consciousness. His work elevated phenomenology to a level he termed *phenomenological ontology*, specifically concerning human existence.⁹ Heidegger’s philosophy is mainly concerned with exploring human existence, often referred to as *Dasein*—essentially the ontology of being.¹⁰ According to Heidegger, individuals cannot be separated from the world they inhabit. He asserts that “*Dasein* always understands itself in terms of its existence, in terms of its possibility to be itself or not to be itself. *Dasein* has either chosen these possibilities, stumbled upon them, or in each instance, already grown up in them.”¹¹ These possibilities are chosen consciously, stumbled upon, or ingrained, shaping individual meaning and reality.

Heidegger’s concept of “being in the world” signifies active engagement with one’s surroundings and activities. He distinguishes between *ready-to-hand*, in which objects are seamlessly integrated into practical tasks, and *present-at-hand*, in which objects are considered in isolation. As Heidegger posits, “A hammer is understood as a tool for driving nails to the extent that it is immediately manipulated for that purpose. The hammer as a brute physical object emerges only when one stands back from the practical task and ‘just looks’ at it, removing it

⁹ Stephen Michelman, *The A to Z of Existentialism* (Toronto: Scarecrow Press, 2010).

¹⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010).

¹¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 11.

from the context of significance within which it is normally understood.”¹² In studying lived experiences, understanding how individuals interpret tools, objects, and tasks becomes integral to uncovering the phenomenon. In this study, the worship service represents the ready-to-hand, and prerecorded music serves as the present-at-hand.

Heidegger establishes the philosophical foundation of *Dasein*, literally translated as “being there”—a concept Heidegger emphasized as “being in the world” to underscore the interconnectedness of humans and the world to which they belonged.¹³ Hans-Georg Gadamer further elaborates on Heidegger’s influential work, particularly in hermeneutics, which centers on understanding. Understanding encompasses cognitive, practical, and linguistic aspects. It is both contextual and circular in nature. At the core of Gadamer’s concept of understanding lies the hermeneutical circle.¹⁴ Gadamer’s philosophy revolves around the notion that interpretation is an intrinsic aspect of human existence, permeating all facets of life. He emphasizes that dialogue and conversation are pivotal in the interpretive process believing that “conversation is the primary way to understand phenomena.”¹⁵ According to Gadamer, this fusion of horizons enables a more profound and greater understanding of the subject matter, transcending individual perspectives and giving rise to a collective meaning.

Gadamer’s contribution to the hermeneutical circle and his emphasis on the pivotal role of dialogue and conversation in the interpretative process significantly enrich this research study.

¹² Michelman, *The A to Z of Existentialism*, 67.

¹³ Beck, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 14.

¹⁴ James Risser, “Philosophical Hermeneutics, Language, and the Communicative Event,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, ed. Robert Dostal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 93–94, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108907385>.

¹⁵ Katarzyna Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation: A Step-by-Step Guide* (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications, 2021), 115.

Language is essential in Gadamer's hermeneutics; he aptly expresses that "Beings that can be understood is language."¹⁶ In his perspective, it is not merely about using the same language but, more importantly, about comprehending the language employed. While he aligns with Heidegger's philosophy, Gadamer's conception of understanding adds a more profound clarity to the descriptive method of hermeneutical phenomenology applied in this study. His insights underscore the essence of meaningful dialogue and the shared understanding of language as essential components in uncovering the profound layers of human experience and interpretation.

Due to the limited availability of research and studies on worship practices involving prerecorded music, there is a degree of uncertainty regarding whether participants are aware of this practice, are familiar with relevant terminology, or recognize that the music is not performed live. A noteworthy criterion for participation in these interviews is that individuals cannot be involved in the worship ministry. Consequently, they may lack the musical knowledge or training to discern differences between auditory and visual elements in this context. This is an advantage of the semi-structured interview process. Heideggerian theory advocates that human beings relate to the world around them and interact with their surroundings without necessarily understanding their nuances or details.¹⁷

This researcher believes that most participants qualify their worship based on their experiences and preferences when they think about the use of prerecorded music. This is a positive aspect of this process, as it highlights the participants' perceptions and experiences. The

¹⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. J. Weinsheimer and D. G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2006), 474.

¹⁷ Lesley Dibley, Suzanne Dickerson, Mel Duffy, and Rozanne Vandermause, *Doing Hermeneutic Phenomenological Research: A Practical Guide* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2020), 15–30, <http://doi.org/10.4135/9781529799583>.

foundation of a phenomenological case study is about exploring the participant's experience, not their understanding of the meaning of that experience.¹⁸

A Biblical Worldview

This research navigates through the theoretical model of Heidegger and Gadamer, particularly Heidegger's exploration of "being in the world" and Gadamer's application of the hermeneutic circle, which highlight the lived experiences of worshipers and serve as foundational elements in this study. However, this investigation uniquely interprets these phenomenological insights from a biblical worldview perspective, ensuring that every aspect of the research process—from data collection to interpretation and analysis—is examined through a biblical lens.

A biblical worldview, recognizing Scripture as the ultimate authority, offers the interpretive framework for this study, providing clarity "to make sense of all other knowledge and experience."¹⁹ The Word of God provides the ultimate authority on truth. The Apostle John writes, "Thy word is truth" (John 17:17). Therefore, clarity and understanding of this lived experience must be seen; data must be discerned and interpreted through Scripture.

Scripture guides the processing and interpretation of information and lays the foundational premise for the researcher: to ensure that the inquiry aligns with the truth of God's Word. The Bible delineates humanity's ultimate purpose—to glorify God—which, in turn, sheds light on the essence of authentic worship. This study employs the authoritative lens of Scripture,

¹⁸ Larsen & Adu, *The Theoretical Framework*, 114–15.

¹⁹ David S. Dockery, "Worldview Thinking, The Christian Intellectual Tradition, and the Pattern of Christian Truth," in *Christian Worldview Handbook* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2019), 71.

underpinning the conviction that Scripture is the definitive guide to discerning the nature of true worship.

The Bible delineates meaning and purpose in life, asserting that humanity upholds the *Imago Dei*, namely, that it is created in the image of God. Scripture offers guidance in understanding one's place in God's creation, diagnoses the human condition as inherently sinful, and offers redemption through Jesus Christ. Humanity's identity is inextricably linked with how God perceives humanity by providing answers to life's fundamental philosophical inquiries.²⁰ Francis Schaeffer views worship as a comprehensive response to God, the ultimate source of answers to a myriad of questions. According to Schaeffer, "Our primary calling is to truth, and it is rooted in God, His acts, and revelation and if it is indeed truth, it touches all of reality and all of life, including an adequate basis for and some practice of, the reality of community."²¹

In this context, the idea of the congregation can be substituted for the community. Phenomenology presents a valuable approach, emphasizing holistic understanding and the lived experience. However, a biblical worldview offers a comprehensive lens for interpreting every aspect of the worship experience in light of Scripture. This perspective is particularly pertinent in discussions of biblical worship.

Worship is the act of glorifying God, encompassing all aspects of life as outlined in the Old Testament. "Love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deut. 6:5). This holistic approach to worship is echoed in the New Testament, in which the Apostle Paul encourages believers to "present your bodies a living sacrifice ... which

²⁰ C. Fred Smith, *Developing a Biblical Worldview: Seeing Things God's Way* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2015), 7–9.

²¹ Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who is There* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 208.

is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1). Moreover, Scripture guides the believer’s understanding of lived experiences by affirming that humanity is not isolated; man exists with purpose, and the Christian existence in this world carries a divine calling. As Paul continues to state in Romans, “For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself” (Rom. 14:7), highlighting the interconnectedness and higher purpose of individuals’ lives. Thus, Scripture serves as the guide to worship and life, answering the question, “How then shall we live” (Ezek. 33:10)?

Research Design

Worship has traditionally been led in-person with congregation members. Even with the advent of performance soundtracks, there has remained an understanding that this technology supported singers who required accompaniment or groups benefiting from its use. Companies offering professional musicians’ services can supply congregations with prerecorded worship music, tailoring a worship soundtrack for corporate worship to meet all needs. This development promotes questions about whether the practice diminishes the role of congregants volunteering for church worship activities and its impact on the congregation’s worship experience. This phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of worshipers engaging with prerecorded music during worship services.

This methodology enriches the research in two significant ways. Firstly, it demands rigorous reflection and scrutiny by the researcher during the data interpretation and examination phases, promoting a careful approach to understanding the worshiper's experience. This continuous, thoughtful engagement with the data ensures a thorough analysis. Secondly, the hermeneutic circle is instrumental in unraveling the embedded meanings within individual experiences, thereby refining the process of capturing and interpreting participant insights. Using the hermeneutic circle engages the researcher to constantly revise their interpretations as she

gains a deeper understanding of the data. Neglecting any part of these challenging inquiries means overlooking the truths inherent in these experiences.

Hermeneutics is the study of understanding, emphasizing the interpretation of texts. The search for understanding the experience is “entrusted to interpretation.”²² The hermeneutic circle is pivotal in this research for explaining how individuals interpret texts, whether they be written or spoken words. This dynamic process of interpretation is traditionally depicted as circular; however, describing it as a spiral or dialectical motion more accurately captures its essence.²³ The hermeneutic circle encourages a deep dive into the whole text and its individual components, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study.²⁴

Population and Sample Selection

The sample population used in this study is individuals who actively participate in worship in the Central Savannah River Area (CSRA), in which prerecorded music is utilized, spanning various demographics and ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The CSRA is a region in the southern United States encompassing parts of Georgia and South Carolina, centered around the Savannah River. This area is not strictly defined by specific geographic boundaries but generally includes Augusta, Georgia, and its surrounding metropolitan area.²⁵ The CSRA includes thirteen counties in Georgia and five in South Carolina. The region benefits from a diverse economy that includes education, healthcare, military, energy,

²² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 162.

²³ Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation*, 33.

²⁴ Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation*, 32–34.

²⁵ This information is cited from several government websites including <https://www.augustametrochamber.com>, <https://csrarc.ga.gov>, and <https://www.augusta.edu>.

manufacturing, and agriculture sectors. All these elements provide diversity in the pool of participants.

Given the nature of this research, aiming to dive into worshipers' lived experiences and perceptions, a purposeful sampling is employed using the following criteria: (1) The participant must attend a local church in the CSRA; (2) the participant may not be currently involved in the worship ministry of their respective church; and (3) the participant does not require knowledge of stems, multitracks, or particulars of the worship ministries in their church. This approach facilitates a selection of participants who provide rich, detailed insights based on their firsthand experiences with live and prerecorded music during worship.

The anticipated sample size includes approximately 15–18 participants. This range is considered adequate for meeting the goals of this study, capturing the nuances of lived experiences, and achieving data saturation—a point at which no new information or themes are discovered through interviews and subsequent follow-ups.²⁶ This sample size allows for a manageable yet diverse collection of perspectives, balancing a depth of inquiry with the practicalities of comprehensive data analysis.

The initial interviews last between 45–60 minutes and take place at a location chosen for participant convenience. A crucial aspect of qualitative research is aligning the sampling strategy with the study's objectives. To this end, this study employs a mix of snowball and purposive sampling techniques. Snowball sampling begins with a select group of participants who then refer others.²⁷ This method helps reach congregation members otherwise unknown to this researcher. Purposive sampling is based on specific criteria that individuals are most likely to

²⁶ Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation*, 49–50.

²⁷ Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation*, 49.

provide insightful and meaningful data regarding this phenomenon.²⁸ By integrating these meticulous sampling methods, this study ensures a comprehensive collection of data essential for achieving the research goals.

Instrumentation

Phenomenology seeks to explore and understand the lived experiences of individuals. The instrumentation in phenomenology is qualitative and flexible, enabling this researcher to best capture the human experiences. The primary instrumentation in this qualitative research is direct engagement with study participants through interviews, analysis of texts, follow-up interviews, and journaling. The interview is the primary research tool, formulated in light of Gadamer's emphasis on the significance of language in this type of research—"Conversation is the process of coming to an understanding."²⁹ Through such conversations, understanding and revelations emerge from participants. Interviews enable flexibility and follow-up questions based on the participants' responses, encouraging participants to describe their experiences in detail.

As the interviewer, this researcher remains engaged and asks semi-structured interview questions about feelings, moods, and significant experiences in worship to unveil the truth (*Aletheia*) of the experience.³⁰ Through journaling, this researcher notes nonverbal cues, context, and subtleties of the data collected. This journaling, which takes place during the interview and while transcribing the interview recording and reading through the transcripts, tracks personal biases in this process, providing a transparent and reflective approach to data interpretation.

²⁸ Dibley et al., *Doing Hermeneutic Phenomenological Research*, 54–55.

²⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 403.

³⁰ Robin Small, ed., *A Hundred Years of Phenomenology: Perspectives on a Philosophical Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2001), 78–80, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315100104>.

In addition to the initial interview and journaling, the follow-up interview enables the researcher to clarify gaps within the initial interview, allowing participants to explain and elaborate further on the experience. This researcher follows the prompts that Max van Manen recommends for data gathering: (1) Avoid generalization or causal explanations; (2) describe the feelings, mood, and emotions in the experience; and (3) concentrate on a specific example of the experience.³¹

The main research question is, “What is the effect on the participants’ perception of authenticity and experience when the worship service uses prerecorded tracks?” The additional questions used in these interviews are as follows:

1. What does Scripture say about genuine and authentic worship that may be related to the use of prerecorded music in worship services?
2. What are the worshiper’s perceptions and feelings about the use of prerecorded music in worship services?
3. How does the worshiper describe his or her worship experiences when facilitated by the use of prerecorded music during worship services when compared with his or her recollection of those experiences that are not?
4. How does the worshiper explain the reasons for a worship leader’s use of prerecorded music in the worship service?
5. How does prerecorded music influence the worshiper’s sense of authenticity compared to worship led by live volunteers from within the congregation?

³¹ Cheryl Tatano Beck, “Max van Manen’s Hermeneutic Phenomenological Approach,” in *Introduction to Phenomenology: Focus on Methodology* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2021), 74, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071909669>.

Role of the Researcher

This researcher has an extensive background spanning over 30 years in local church worship ministries. Interest in this study area was sparked by witnessing the use and adaptation of technologies in church ministry. In discussions with peers in various positions of worship leadership, this researcher recognizes the burden on worship staff to prepare and grow ministry volunteers, equip the congregation as commanded in Scripture, and use the tools available to prepare God-honoring worship service. The task revolves around finding the delicate balance between integrating technology effectively and maintaining a genuine spirit of worship, all while continuing to engage, retain, and develop volunteers in the worship community.

This researcher's practical experience is multifaceted, encompassing recording tracks, utilizing these tracks for in-person and digital worship settings, and years of involvement in church television ministry, in which the expectation for post-production quality is notably high. This blend of hands-on experience and observation provides a unique perspective on the intersection of technology, worship, and community building within the church. This researcher remains connected with local worship pastors to ensure that participants feel appreciated and are treated with the highest respect throughout this process.

Validity and Reliability

Validity is defined as the quality of being well-founded on fact or established on sound principles and thoroughly applicable to the case or circumstances.³² In this hermeneutical phenomenology research, the concept of validity is crucial to ensure the trustworthiness and applicability of these research findings in this study context. This research follows Yvonna S.

³² Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "validity (n.)," <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/7389259203>.

Lincoln and Egon G. Guba's method for establishing trustworthiness through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility includes the process of member-checking. Each participant reviews a transcript of his or her interview to ensure the findings can be trusted.³³ Transferability, or the extent to which the findings can be generalized to other settings or populations, is accomplished by providing thick descriptions offering comprehensive and nuanced accounts of the research environment and participant experiences. Finally, data dependability is attained by having a PhD peer in phenomenology research review the data and assess the results. Confirmability is achieved through the consistent and detailed steps maintained in this research. The clear and transparent description of the research steps is called the *audit trail*.³⁴ This research achieves credibility through the practice of these four criteria. Such detailed reporting in this research enables others to assess the applicability of these findings.³⁵ The pursuit of trustworthiness enhances this study's rigor, providing meaningful insights and strengthening the overall research.

Data Collection and Management

Data collection and management in this research is executed through a structured approach using the following: (1) Semi-structured interviews offer the needed flexibility to probe deeper into responses and explore topics that emerge during discussions; (2) This researcher seeks to maintain an unbiased and objective stance, serving as both facilitator and observer

³³ Oko Chima Enworu, "Application of Guba and Lincoln's Parallel Criteria to Assess Trustworthiness of Qualitative Research on Indigenous Social Protection Systems," *Qualitative Research Journal* 23, no. 4 (2023): 372–84, <https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-08-2022-0116>.

³⁴ Thomas A. Schwandt and Edward Scott Halpern, "Constructing an Audit Trail," in *Linking Auditing and Metaevaluation* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1988), 71–103. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412984768>.

³⁵ Beck, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 117–18.

throughout the interviews; (3) All interviews are transcribed directly from digital recordings to ensure accuracy and identify areas requiring further clarification; and (4) Journaling during and after the interviews involve thorough reading and re-reading of the transcripts to enhance understanding and analysis.

The data-collection process is outlined in the following steps. Step 1 involves contacting Worship Leaders in the CSRA to compile the names of potential participants. This step also presents an opportunity to employ the snowball sampling method, as these individuals can recruit others within their fellowship to participate in the study. Additionally, to conduct this research, the social media platform Facebook is used to post announcements, acting as a digital bulletin board to attract volunteers who meet the study's inclusion criteria, thus leveraging both snowball and purposive recruitment methods.

Step 2 involves confirming and finalizing each participant's interview schedule and location. Although this research is exempt from Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, it adheres to the guidelines specified in the IRB application. The timing and venue of the initial interview are arranged according to the participants' convenience and availability, with confirmation communicated via text, email, or Facebook Messenger.

Step 3 is conducting the interview. The interviews are digitally recorded, which is crucial for accurately transcribing and journaling the interviews. Post-interview reflection on these recordings helps identify discrepancies or areas requiring further clarification through follow-up interviews. Step 4 involves transcribing the recorded interviews, journaling during and following the interviews, and conducting necessary follow-up interviews to ensure comprehensive data collection and analysis. Following these close and consistent steps throughout the data-gathering phase guarantees the production of credible and reliable research.

Data Confidentiality

The confidentiality of the participants is ensured through rigorous management of all documents and data. Interview audio recordings and transcripts are stored electronically on a password-locked device with all identifying information removed and replaced by a coded identifier. Journaling and field notes are typed and uploaded to a digital file. No paper copies of this interview process remain. Each participant is assigned a coded identifier to connect demographic information with interview responses within the data. The use of these identifiers is maintained in journaling, field notes, and aggregate data. All files in this research will be destroyed three years after the start of this study.

Interpreting the Data/Explication

The role of this researcher is to be fully immersed in the exploration of the targeted phenomenon. Heidegger calls this “dwelling.”³⁶ Heidegger claims, “To philosophize means to be entirely and constantly troubled by and immediately sensitive to the complete enigma of things that common sense considers self-evident and unquestionable.”³⁷ This means clarifying the complexities of the phenomena and articulating their significance by spending time with them. A hermeneutic phenomenological study is a reflective and interpretative journey requiring that the researcher remain engaged with the data.³⁸ Following Gadamer’s insights, the researcher cannot

³⁶ Martin Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking,” in *Basic Writings: Martin Heidegger*, ed. D. F. Krell (London: Routledge, 1993), 349. The full quote: “When we speak of dwelling, we usually think of an activity that man performs alongside many other activities. We work here and dwell there. We do not merely dwell – that would be virtually inactivity – we practice a profession, we do business, we travel and find shelter on the way, now here, now there.”

³⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Logic: The Question of Truth*, trans. T. Sheehan (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 18.

³⁸ Rasha Alsaigh and Imelda Coyne, “Doing a Hermeneutic Phenomenology Research Underpinned by Gadamer’s Philosophy: A Framework to Facilitate Data Analysis,” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 20, (January–December 2021): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211047820>.

be separated from the phenomenon being studied and operates as a crucial component of an “instrument of understanding.”³⁹ The researcher must dwell on the data and live through the study’s participants’ descriptions, using the answers and narrative gained in the interviews. The hermeneutic circle describes a method of oscillating between the parts of a text to inform an understanding of the whole, moving back and forth, in and out, to deepen comprehension. The interpretation is refined through this continuous motion, weaving in and out of the data.

Limitations and Delimitations

Phenomenological research in this context involves a small, selectively chosen sample of participants. This researcher is confident that the chosen sample size is sufficient to achieve saturation, and the semi-structured interviews facilitate further discussion, enabling a deeper exploration of the worship experience. A primary limitation of this study stems from the participants’ knowledge regarding the use of prerecorded music in worship as an understanding of stems and multitracks technology is limited to a select group of worship attendees. This weakness is beyond any control and manifests in three ways. Firstly, because the participants are unaware of the practice of stems, are worshipers able to identify the use of stems and multitracks? As congregants participate in worship, can they separate the worship (*ready-to-hand*) from the tools (*present-at-hand*)? Secondly, without knowledge of this technology, the description of the worship experience may be limited. Discovering a theme may present a unique challenge. If the participants have limited knowledge and language, the researcher must be extra careful in the interpretation and diligent in the exploration of the gathered data. Lastly, relying on

³⁹ Dibley et al., “Data Analysis and Interpretation,” 115.

personal perceptions and lived experiences introduces variability and necessitates caution in generalizing the findings.

Drawing on Gadamer's ideas of hermeneutical interpretation, this study acknowledges that one's preunderstandings can facilitate comprehension. However, in this context, a participant's lack of familiarity with the technology in this research might limit their understanding.⁴⁰ Conversely, this research has intentionally set boundaries to mitigate such limitations: (1) Only congregations that utilize stems and multitracks within the CSRA are considered; (2) participants are neither staff nor volunteers in the worship ministry, minimizing preconceived notions about using tracks and stems; and (3) the study involves between fifteen and eighteen participants to ensure a manageable volume of data for in-depth analysis. These delimitations are designed to refine the focus of the study, acknowledging Gadamer's perspective that preunderstandings shape interpretation while limiting the influence of such preunderstandings to gather unbiased insights into the technology's impact on worship practices. In addition to the criteria for participants, this researcher is familiar with the use of stems and multitracks. This knowledge is an asset in the interview, journaling, and analysis process.

This study collects data using semi-structured interviews that are recorded for accuracy. After each interview, the information is transcribed, and a follow-up interview is scheduled with the participant if necessary. All written and recorded information is securely stored on a password-protected digital device, maintaining participant anonymity and trust in the research procedure. Data from this research is retained for three years after the study is completed before being deleted. To ensure credibility in handling the data, transcripts, journaling, and analysis, the

⁴⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Historicity of Understanding," in *Critical Sociology, Selected Readings* (Westminster: Penguin Harmondsworth, 1976): 117–33.

framework used by Alsaigh and Coyne, rooted in Gadamer’s hermeneutic phenomenology, is adopted.⁴¹ Figure 6 presents an illustration of the workflow.

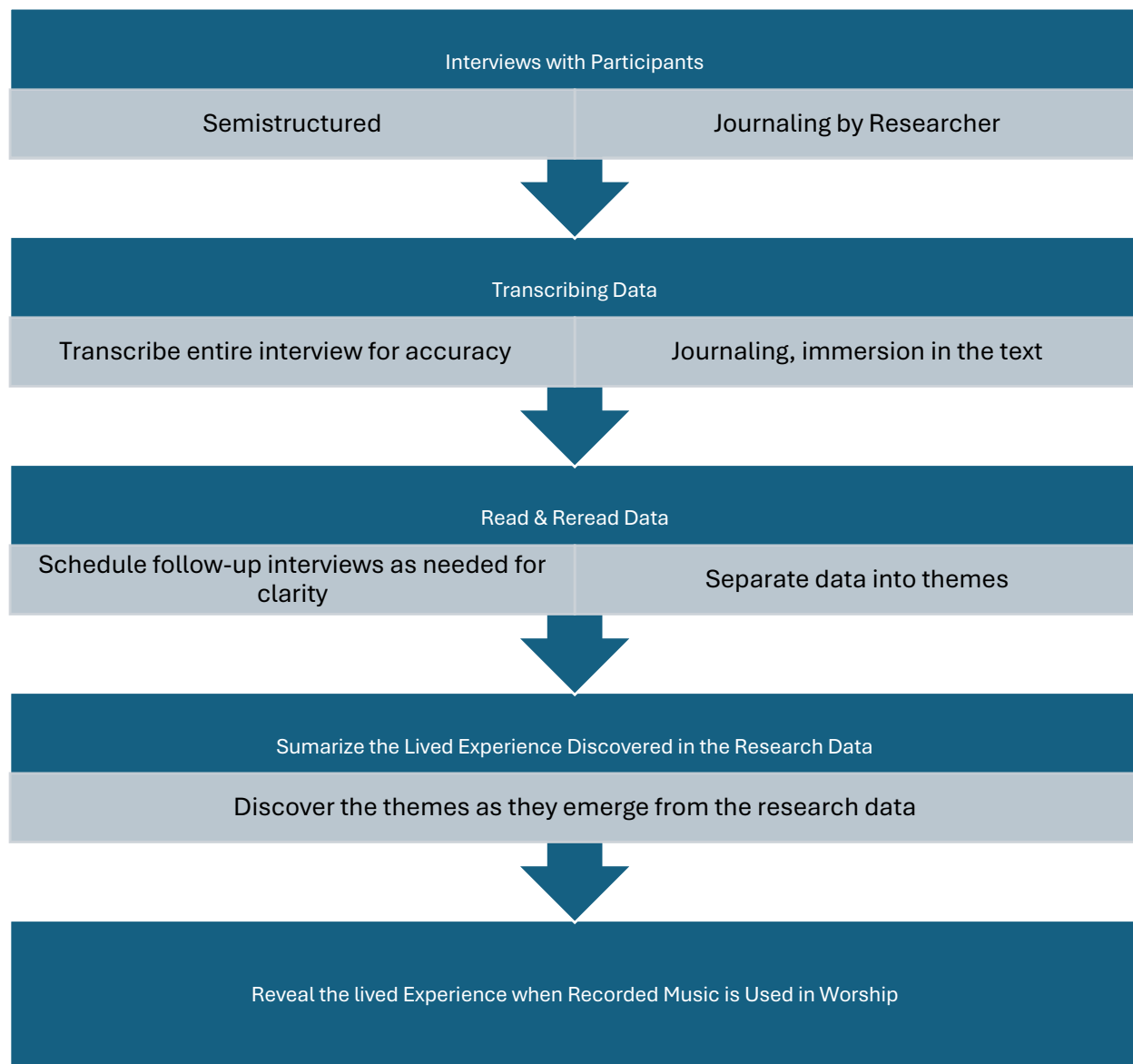


Figure 6. Research workflow.

⁴¹ Alsaigh and Coyne, “Doing a Hermeneutic Phenomenology Research,” 20.

Summary

This chapter delineates the methodological framework employed in this study, focusing on a qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of worshipers when prerecorded music is used in worship at church. Hermeneutic phenomenology is suitable and preferred for uncovering the deep meanings embedded in participants' experiences, aligning with the research objectives.

Data is collected through semi-structured interviews, which are audio-recorded and transcribed. This approach allows flexibility in exploring clarity and deeper insight into the participants' experiences. A combination of snowball and purposive sampling strategies is employed to select individuals in the CSRA who have directly encountered worship in which stems and multitracks are used.

The interpretation of data follows the principles of hermeneutic phenomenology, emphasizing reading, reflective journaling, and thematic analysis. This chapter also outlines the measures taken to ensure trustworthiness and credibility. Following the above-described foundation, established through applying phenomenological principles and the meticulous steps implemented in chapter four, the research data is presented and explored in depth.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

As presented in chapter one, this phenomenological research project explores the lived experience of worshipers when pre-recorded music—primarily stems and multitracks—is used in the worship setting. This chapter details the rich narratives and themes that emerged from the fifteen semi-structured interviews conducted, exploring each theme within the data to reveal the essence of the worship experience in churches in Augusta, Georgia, when pre-recorded music is used. In addition, chapter four explains the thematic structures identified through the systematic interpretation, guided by the phenomenological principles of the hermeneutic theoretical framework of Heidegger and Gadamer, and the characteristics of Nathan Myrick’s Celebrity Model.

Purpose of This Research Study

This study is important because worship is important. While previous studies have examined various areas of worship in the New Testament church, this research in Augusta, Georgia, examines worshipers’ lived experiences and perceptions by focusing on two specific aspects of worship: (1) exploring participants’ views on authentic worship based on Scripture and (2) examining the lived experiences and perceptions when pre-recorded music is used. Fifteen participants from the Augusta, Georgia, area, representing eight churches, provide a representative cross-section of ages. A semi-structured interview serves as the primary instrument for data collection and provides the required opportunity to capture the details of the lived experiences of these worship participants.

This chapter presents the findings, which are systematically organized into six sections to comprehensively analyze the data. The first section details the participants, and the Augusta, Georgia, area, referred to as the Central Savannah River Area (CSRA). The CSRA encompasses

the area along the Savannah River through Georgia and South Carolina, covering Columbia, Aiken, and Edgefield counties, where these churches are located (see Appendix B). The second section details the context and details of the interviews. The third section describes the overall content of the interviews and data treatment. The fourth section identifies the initial codes revealed in the interviews, accompanied by participant narratives (see Appendix C). The fifth section offers a table summarizing the theme development alongside the general descriptions from all fifteen participants (see Appendix D). The final section integrates two frameworks into the data analysis: the hermeneutic framework and the Celebrity Model. This includes applying Heidegger's *Dasein*, fore-sight/fore-conceptions, and the hermeneutic circle. Additionally, the Celebrity Model, discussed in chapter two, is used as a secondary framework in analyzing the data, as allowed in hermeneutic phenomenological studies.

The Participants

As presented in chapter one, the participants in this study are from the surrounding area of Augusta, Georgia, referenced as the CSRA. These fifteen participants are from churches on both sides of the Savannah River, including North Augusta, South Carolina. This study initially sought congregants from the three largest Baptist churches; however, because of recruiting on Facebook's platform, participants were gathered from eight churches representing four denominations, all utilizing various levels of musical technologies in their worship ministry. This strengthens the gathered data, providing a greater cross-section of churches and participants from this area.

These participants, comprising eleven females (73%) and four males (27%) aged between 24 and 74, were recruited either by worship leaders who personally informed them about the study or through a social media Facebook post inviting qualifying worshipers to participate. Nine

participants (60%) were recruited from Facebook, and six (40%) were recruited by their worship leaders. The age demographic is evenly split, with eight participants under the age of 50 and the remaining seven over 50 years old.

As outlined in chapter three, the criteria for participation in this research are: (1) The participant must attend a local church in the Central Savannah River Area (CSRA); (2) The participant must not be currently involved in the worship ministry of their respective churches; (3) The participant does not need to have knowledge of stems, multitracks, or specific aspects of the worship ministries in their church. Twenty-four participants volunteered for this study, but only fifteen met the criteria. Of these fifteen, nine individuals responded to the Facebook post, and leaders recruited the remaining six from their worship ministries.

An identifier was assigned to each participant in this study to ensure anonymity. The use of pseudonyms serves critical purposes: (1) to protect the confidentiality of the participants, (2) to aid in the organization and management of data, thereby facilitating the tracking of responses and ensuring consistency in the analysis process, and (3) to facilitate the replication of this study.

To maintain reader engagement with the data and to underscore the human experience and perspective central to this study, participants were assigned pseudonyms corresponding to the last names of notable hymn writers from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The participant identifiers are Elliot, Crosby, Clarkson, Spafford, Adams, Scudder, Steele, Bliss, Bates, Warner, Lowry, Winkworth, Havergal, Kirkpatrick, and Hawks. Table 1 represents the demographic information of each participant with the identifier.

Table 1: List of Participant Details

Participant Identifier	Age	Gender	Church Identifier
Elliott	74	Female	H
Crosby	56	Female	D
Clarkson	61	Female	D
Spafford	70	Male	G
Adams	66	Female	C
Scudder	42	Female	F
Steele	55	Female	E
Bliss	68	Male	A
Bates	61	Female	B
Warner	38	Female	G
Lowry	28	Male	G
Winkworth	24	Female	G
Havergal	42	Female	E
Kirkpatrick	36	Male	C
Hawks	35	Female	C

Data Collection

Upon recruitment, interviews were scheduled at locations convenient for the participants. The chosen locations provided a safe environment, allowing participants to speak freely with confidentiality. At the interview, participants were provided with a copy of the research questions and a glossary of terms, including definitions for *backtracking*, *backtracks*, *multitracks*,

performance-driven worship, and *stems*. This was done as a courtesy, acknowledging that while most participants were familiar with the process, they may find knowing the specific industry terminology helpful. However, all participants understood using pre-recorded music, so the terms *stems* and *multitracks* were recognized as advancements in this technology. The fifteen interviews conducted for this study averaged 45 minutes in duration. Thirteen interviews were conducted in person, while two were conducted by phone to accommodate the participants. All interviews were audio recorded to ensure accuracy in the data transcription.

These interviews were pleasant, and participants were at ease. The comfortable nature of the interviewees is exemplified by the personal stories the participants shared to support their feelings and experiences. These stories are meaningful worship experiences as they recalled leaders and volunteers by name. There were no challenges in these interviews, and all participants were willing to answer all the research questions.

Three follow-up interviews were necessary to clarify data from three participants and served as a tool to revisit and refine the data. This aligns with the hermeneutic circle approach, which emphasizes understanding the parts to understand the whole. Journaling was employed to remain immersed in the data, facilitating a deeper understanding and thorough analysis. Additionally, interpreting this data through the lens of Scripture allowed for the vital incorporation of a Biblical worldview.

Data Analysis/Explication

Each participant's interview was transcribed twice following each interview; the first time, the audio-to-text transcription software Cockatoo was used to create a complete transcript from the recorded interview with a time stamp. Next, using the full transcript, a second transcription was typed by hand to ensure accuracy since the interviews were in a public place

with background noise. During the second transcribing, the filler words such as “um,” “uh,” and “hmmm” were omitted. The phrases “you know” and “like” were omitted when appropriate.

Reading and re-reading these interview transcripts was essential to the interpretation process, requiring this researcher to stay immersed in the data. Journaling proved to be a valuable tool for understanding the meanings behind participant responses to this study’s research questions. Transcribing and repeatedly reading the text, reflecting, and journaling facilitated focused engagement with the research. Notes from these interviews highlighted the depth of commitment among worshipers in the CSRA.

Manual coding was chosen as the primary method for transferring the data to the findings. Following transcription, the open coding process began, consisting of three stages: (1) thoroughly reading and re-reading the data to become deeply immersed in the text, 2) examining the data line by line to identify consistent vocabulary, themes, and shared experiences within the text, 3) categorizing these themes and identifying patterns that emerge across the data. This inductive (open) coding was a meticulous and time-consuming process, but it yielded a comprehensive and presumably unbiased perspective of the data. Consistent with hermeneutical phenomenology, this research explored the experience to reveal *Dasein*, encompassing the individual’s perceptions and experiences.

As stated earlier in this chapter, multiple interview transcriptions were made. This process of multiple transcriptions, combined with the observation notes from the actual interviews and journaling through the data, allows broad themes to emerge in the participants’ vocabulary. This initial coding was the first significant data to stand out from the research. At this point, continuing to read and journal through the transcripts, the meaning units were grouped

into themes that captured the essence of the participants' experience. Figure 7 illustrates the workflow that follows the pattern for phenomenology data analysis suggested by Peoples.¹

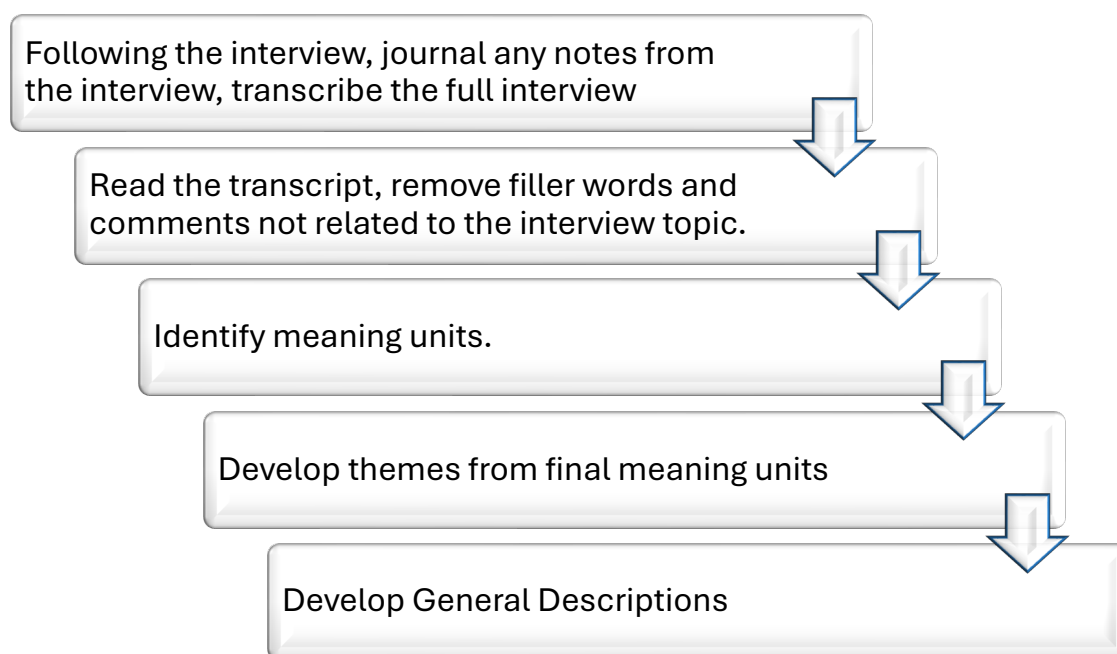


Figure 7. Workflow for data analysis.

The themes are generated from these interviews using a thematic analysis with an inductive approach. This means the data alone produces the themes critical to hermeneutic phenomenology. Weaving in and out of the data, immersed in the participants' own words, the text, feelings, experiences, and nuances of individual experiences begin to emerge. From these themes, the next step is to arrive at the general descriptions or the theme development for which phenomenological research is searching. To ensure accuracy and provide additional validity and trustworthiness in this research, Kevin Danko, Senior Organizational Development Advisor at

¹ Katarzyna People, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation: A Step-by-Step Guide* (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publication, 2021), 59.

Savannah River National Laboratory and Adjunct Faculty at Lander University, provided oversight of this data gathering and analysis.

Presentation of the Findings

Through meticulous analysis, the significant attributes of these experiences have been reduced to themes that capture the core of the participants' encounters in a worship service using pre-recorded music. All fifteen participants provided valuable and insightful answers to the research questions. The following is a summary of the information gathered from each participant in the interview. Their participant identifiers label them to ensure confidentiality.

Elliott

Elliott faithfully attends worship services on Sunday mornings and during special seasonal occasions such as Christmas Eve, Christmas, and Easter. Although she confesses she should be better versed in what Scripture says about worship, she values real music, recognizing that pre-recorded tracks enhance the worship experience. She prefers live music in worship, emphasizing the importance of quality and talent. She is familiar with pre-recorded music in the form of full soundtracks but needs to understand the technology behind stems and multitracks. A full soundtrack is her frame of reference. She praises the musical talent within her church and supports the use of pre-recorded music for significant services like Christmas and Easter.

Identifying as a non-musician, she acknowledges that her worship experience is enhanced when music is supplemented with digital products. She finds it beneficial and cautions that it be incorporated for its value to the presentation rather than for performance's sake. This participant frequently references specific individuals in the worship ministry, indicating that the worship leaders are significant to her. As an avid concert attendee, both religious and secular, her vocabulary includes terms such as entertainment and performance, reflecting her appreciation for

high-quality presentations. She understands that technology reserved for special services and seasonal concerts can enhance the presentation. The better the talent and quality of presentation, the better her worship experience.

Crosby

Throughout her interview, Crosby consistently expresses her passion for worship and her desire to worship alongside those who share this commitment. While she does not cite specific Scriptures regarding the use of technology in worship, she emphasizes the importance of Scripture in having the right heart and motives. She has no reservations about using pre-recorded music. She often can only distinguish when tracks and stems are used if there is a technological failure, which she finds distracting and a hindrance to worship at that moment.

Her primary focus is that worship music should facilitate genuine worship, regardless of its form. She consistently highlights the importance of the worshiper's heart. Having grown up in a small church with various talents, she values when individuals use their abilities, regardless of their skill level. She recalls that finding volunteers in her small church is often challenging, leading her to appreciate the necessity of technology in facilitating worship.

Clarkson

Clarkson defines worship as anything that praises God, encompassing music, prayer, Bible study, and daily fellowship with God. She acknowledges that God could use a variety of elements through Scripture, including technology, in worship. She also recognizes that music has evolved significantly over the years, with new music presenting a more significant issue than pre-recorded music. For her, the worship experience is enhanced when the congregation is familiar with the songs and can actively participate. The use of tracks is less important than congregational participation.

Clarkson feels strongly that spontaneity and freedom are more crucial to the worship experience than the use of stems and multitracks. She enjoys all forms of worship and recognizes stems and multitracks as valuable resources for worship leaders. She notes that some leaders might use these resources because they are currently popular and effective methods. Pre-recorded music, which she recognizes matches the sounds people hear on the radio, is essential, primarily when her worship ministry uses songs by popular artists. She finds she is more engaged in the worship experience when she knows the song, noting that pre-recorded music can encourage congregational worship because the sound is familiar.

Additionally, Clarkson shares a heartfelt story of a past worship experience which she equates to genuine and authentic worship. It involves a volunteer singing one of her favorite songs. She does not perceive perfection in worship as a requirement; a heartfelt offering from volunteers and worship leaders enriches her experience.

Spafford

Spafford makes a critical connection between scriptural worship, the use of technology, and spontaneity in worship. He equates the Holy Spirit with spontaneity, expressing that pre-recorded music often diminishes this sense of freedom. He acknowledges the advantage that pre-recorded music is consistently in tune, yet he notes that its constant use can hinder volunteers from improving and growing in their skills.

In worship, Spafford admits to questioning the motives of the worship ministry in choosing to use pre-recorded music. However, he also recognizes that familiar song selections facilitated by stems and multitracks could make performances less problematic. The distinction is the congregation's familiarity with a song. He is the first participant to refer to pre-recorded music as "canned music," suggesting that he perceives worship leaders who rely on the use of

stems or multitracks might be lazy and unwilling to engage volunteers. He further indicates that pre-recorded music allows worship leaders to replicate the artist's version heard on the radio, bringing him back to questioning the motives behind using stems and multitracks.

Spafford becomes emotional while sharing stories of his worship experiences, exhibiting a profound connection between song lyrics and his life experiences, significantly influencing his worship experience. While he prefers live musicians, viewing the opportunity to play live as a training ground for young musicians and a service opportunity for all volunteers, he understands that pre-recorded music can fill gaps when more instrumentation is needed. This participant experiences worship best in an atmosphere of sincerity and spontaneity.

Adams

The participant Adams perceives live music as more natural. Her favorite moment in worship occurs when the worship leader steps back from the microphone, allowing the congregation's voices to be heard prominently. While she prefers live music, her most cherished moment involves no instruments but rather the collective voices of her church family. Adams believes, like Spafford, that the Holy Spirit desires for worship to be led by Him, highlighting freedom from not adhering to a pre-scripted song order.

Adams recounts a particularly meaningful worship experience that did not involve pre-recorded tracks. In this instance, the singer had the potential to transform the moment into a performance but chose not to do so. She emphasizes that the significance of the worship experience was attributed to the singer's influence rather than the absence of tracks.

Adams feels discomfort when she hears drums without seeing a drummer on stage. She acknowledges the importance of drums in maintaining the band's rhythm and admits that she cannot distinguish between other instruments. For instance, she may not differentiate the various

sounds of keyboards or guitars, and when she sees a guitar, she does not distinguish between bass, rhythm, or lead guitars. Consequently, she often cannot recognize which, if any, additional tracks are incorporated. According to Adams, the worship leader is responsible for supplementing these instruments when they are essential to a particular song. In such moments, she feels pre-recorded music serves as a valuable resource.

Adams observes that when volunteers encounter difficulties performing their roles due to lack of skill or preparedness, it negatively impacts the quality of the worship experience and can be distracting. She places significant responsibility and emphasis on the worship leadership's decision. For Adams, a sense of unity in worship is greatly enhanced when she witnesses members of her church community actively leading and playing music, and she is particularly encouraged by hearing the congregation sing.

Scudder

Scudder asserts that biblical worship encompasses instruments and voices but emphasizes that it must be performed wholeheartedly. She perceives a distinct connection between pre-recorded music and worship ministries that aim to create a particular worship experience. Scudder believes that the churches she has attended often employ pre-recorded music and are generally seeker-friendly, emphasizing producing a performance-like atmosphere. This perception has led to her recently changing churches.

Scudder argues that pre-recorded music should be based on necessity rather than being a foundational element of worship. She recounts an instance of singing in a small church in which a soundtrack was the only means to incorporate special music. Scudder acknowledges that pre-recorded music can fulfill the needs of small churches that lack adequate resources to produce live music.

Scudder is unique among the participants in noting that instruments can synthesize other instruments' sounds. For instance, a keyboard can replicate the sound of a B-3 organ, or a piano can mimic a guitar part. She views this as an effective use of both technology and volunteer resources. However, Scudder often finds herself disconnecting during worship services that utilize pre-recorded music, choosing to listen rather than engage. She believes that worship should foster a sense of connection rather than resemble a performance, a sentiment she most frequently experiences with live music.

Steele

Steele posits that Scripture mandates worship be conducted honestly and joyfully through music, which she believes is the foundation of praise. She is generally indifferent to using pre-recorded music unless there is a noticeable discrepancy between what she hears and sees. When such inconsistencies occur, Steele feels deceived, leading her to question the motives of the entire congregation—whether they attend for genuine worship or merely for the sake of popularity. This creates a distraction for her.

Steele admits that she has occasionally found herself passively enjoying a presentation, only to realize that her role in worship demands active participation. She acknowledges that contemporary worship music resembles popular music, which, in her experience, necessitates many volunteers, leading to staffing or commitment challenges. She concedes that worship leaders might have no alternative but to use technology to recreate specific sounds. For her, this often involves secular songs that resonate with younger audiences. In these instances, she believes the quality of the band's sound is crucial.

Bliss

Bliss fervently believes that God has specific expectations for people in worship. He maintains that God does not require a polished, professional product but rather an offering that represents our best effort, given sincerely from the heart. Bliss finds pre-recorded music challenging and perceives that the congregation shares his sentiment, often due to the selection of songs. He has a more fulfilling experience when the worship service reflects the identity and character of the congregation. However, he frequently finds that worship services prioritize other elements such as performance, volunteers seeking to showcase their talents, a sense of production, and a specific aesthetic presented by the volunteers. When these factors dominate, Bliss finds worship exhausting, feeling that it strives to be something other than what it should be.

There is a recognition of the significant advances in technology and their practical applications, particularly noting how the introduction of the microphone has enabled the message to reach large audiences. However, Bliss expresses concern regarding how much technology should be employed. While technology can enhance and create a professional sound akin to a recording studio, Bliss contends that he does not respond to this approach; for him, it is not conducive to genuine worship. He feels that those who play and sing should offer their talents to the Lord sincerely and authentically, singing from the heart with their natural abilities.

Bliss is one participant who shares a narrative of a meaningful worship experience. In this account, he recalls an experience that is not a polished or professional performance but is deeply heartfelt and genuine. Bliss frequently uses terms such as *show*, *look*, and *spectacular* throughout his interview. He feels that many people have motives other than giving their best to God, focusing instead on aesthetics and meeting the expectations of those in the pews. Bliss

concur with Scudder's observation that churches employing extensive technology seem to be competing with other local churches. He views this emphasis on production value as a marketing tool for the church. Additionally, his perception is that worship leaders align with the pastor's desire for a well-produced worship service.

Bates

Like most participants in this research, Bates prefers live musical instruments over pre-recorded music, asserting that the latter does not constitute authentic worship. She perceives that pre-recorded music is frequently overutilized, particularly within the context of her smaller choir. According to Bates, professionally produced tracks pose a challenge for synchronization with a volunteer choir.

Bates acknowledges that the choir encounters difficulties in performing well with pre-recorded music, which adversely impacts her worship experience, often rendering it tense. She finds authenticity in worship facilitated by live music, which contributes significantly to her overall worship experience. Bates emphasizes the importance of observing the musicians during worship, which enhances her worship as she watches others give their talents. Her apparent preference for traditional music presents a struggle as she navigates the transition toward more contemporary worship practices.

Warner

The participant Warner possesses a robust understanding of biblical worship, articulating that worship extends beyond music to embody a lifestyle that cultivates a heart inclined towards worship and an emphasis on divine matters. Warner remains unaware of pre-recorded music unless it is evident that no instruments are on the stage. She prefers live performances, as her

worship experience is significantly enhanced, and she is more engaged through observing those who lead the worship.

In addition to her devotion to worship, Warner emphasizes the significance of the motives of every worshiper. This consideration is particularly crucial for her when discussing volunteerism in worship. She asserts that the responsibility for this discernment lies with the worship leader, and the decision to use stems and tracks instead of live instruments is critical. Warner believes that live music represents an additional form of worship by employing the volunteers' gifts to glorify God. However, while Warner acknowledges her preference for live music, she concedes that pre-recorded music holds value and does not detract from her worship experience.

Warner emphasizes the lyrics of the worship set, paying less attention to the musical accompaniment. Echoing Adams, she asserts that minimizing distractions and interruptions is crucial for maintaining focus. Warner acknowledges that pre-recorded music, which is consistently performed correctly and can enhance the presentation, effectively avoids distractions. She recognizes the apparent contradiction in preferring live music while endorsing tracks. However, she reiterates the importance of the intentions of those making these decisions, stating that she feels it is not wrong to use pre-recorded music, but it is wrong to use this rather than someone who has a talent and gift desiring to serve.

Lowry

Lowry demonstrates a profound understanding of biblical worship, aligning with Warner's belief that worship is a lifestyle extending beyond the Sunday morning service. He asserts that all elements and practices of worship should be evaluated based on their treatment of the Gospel. For Lowry, his worship experience is enhanced through a program that amplifies and

supports the Gospel message. Although he has limited knowledge about using stems and multitracks or how pre-recorded music is used in his worship setting, this does not detract from his worship experience. A primary concern for Lowry is maintaining biblically sound worship, viewing the use of stems and multitracks as only supplementary tools that can enhance the worship ministry.

Lowry acknowledges the potential risks associated with using packaged products that provide a produced sound in worship. He considers these resources to be *God-given*, emphasizing the importance of their responsible use. It concerns Lowry when technology replaces human involvement, advocating for using these tools with integrity to ensure the goal remains authentic rather than a produced sound. His genuine worship experience originates from a heart that seeks God's heart, referencing King David, and he believes that contemporary church worship music should strive for the same, regardless of prevailing trends and tools. Like Steele and Warner, Lowry emphasizes that the intentions behind decisions in worship ministry planning are paramount to these participants.

Winkworth

The participant, Winkworth, is the first to use the term *idolatry* when describing her authentic worship experience. Winkworth comprehends that genuine worship originates from an intimate relationship with Christ, recognizing that He alone is worthy of adoration and praise. She conveys that her worship experience lacks authenticity when there is a disparity between what she hears and what she sees. Winkworth admits that such discrepancies distract her during worship, causing her focus to shift from active engagement to mere observation.

For Winkworth, Old Testament references to the use of instruments in worship emphasize the importance of live instrumentation in contemporary worship practices. She argues that pre-

recorded music can induce feelings of inferiority and discouragement among volunteers. Additionally, she questions why a ministry would not invest in or cultivate the talent within the local congregation. For Winkworth, this concern reflects on the leader on stage and whether they possess a genuine heart for worship. In her experience, a worship leader and his or her volunteers can accomplish what a track cannot—guiding others in authentic worship.

Havergal

Havergal grew up in a traditional worship setting with a choir and live instrumentation. She now attends a more contemporary worship environment with a full band, no choir, and a concert-like setting. She acknowledges that she tends to sit back and is less engaged, comparing the experience to listening to the radio while driving. Havergal is not alone in connecting the music played on the radio with the music used in congregational worship.

This participant is unaware of the use of pre-recorded music in her current worship ministry, noting that the only discernible difference at times is the presence of additional voices. Havergal says she experiences worship music that is planned and executed well and is impressed by the number of volunteers involved in the ministry. This encourages her in worship. Havergal is among the majority of participants who desire heart and passion in worship. She attributes much of this heart and passion to the volunteers, believing their genuine worship translates to a meaningful experience for her.

Kirkpatrick

Kirkpatrick is identified as one of the two participants who emphasize using instruments as outlined in the Old Testament examples of worship. He posits that contemporary worship may consider pre-recorded music as a form of instrumentation, noting the scriptural encouragement for using instruments. Kirkpatrick maintains a neutral stance regarding pre-recorded music in

worship, asserting that the primary criterion for its inclusion should be the quality of the music and its offering, as subpar music may detract from the worship experience. He expresses that his worship experience is consistently positive when the musical accompaniment is executed proficiently, regardless of whether it involves a single instrument, background pads, or a full band.

Kirkpatrick acknowledges the significance of volunteers in worship activities but acknowledges the difficulty of consistently attaining the desired quality with volunteer musicians. Despite the desire and intention to involve congregation members, Kirkpatrick finds himself distracted when volunteers are ill-prepared or lack proficiency in their musical abilities. Consequently, he advocates for incorporating stems and multitracks to augment the quality and precision of worship programs.

He emphasizes that this stance is pivotal to him, indicating his belief that worship leaders might opt for pre-recorded music not necessarily to enhance quality but also due to pressure from senior leaders who seek a sonic standard that cannot be achieved with the current pool of volunteers. Using pre-recorded music rather than volunteers does not alter or change this worshiper's experience. Kirkpatrick admits that he can worship anywhere; the authenticity of worship for him is not affected when the music is recorded.

Hawks

Hawks articulates a profound dissatisfaction with her worship experience in services that utilize pre-recorded music, characterizing it as lacking spontaneity. Similar to the majority of participants, she exhibits a preference for live musicians while not entirely opposing the use of pre-recorded music. Hawks describes her worship experience with tracks as uninspiring and the

environment as disengaging. She attributes a significant portion of the responsibility for the worship atmosphere to the leadership.

Hawks observes that leadership opts to use these tracks to achieve a fuller sound, compensate for missing instruments, and produce a more expansive auditory experience, potentially to elicit a heightened emotional response. Clarkson endorses this sentiment, noting that such tracks are frequently employed to evoke emotional reactions. This is not a predominant theme, but it is noteworthy as two participants mention experiencing it.

Codes and Themes

During the coding process, relevant vocabulary, phrases, and sentences from the data were identified and categorized, resulting in the creation of a series of codes. These codes serve as the foundational elements in the analysis, encapsulating key aspects of each participant's response. This research yielded fifty-one initial codes, which were subsequently organized into seven broad categories. Tables 2 and 3 present these seven codes developed from the transcripts. The initial coding phase is crucial as it establishes the groundwork for further refinement and synthesis, leading to the identification of overarching themes that are discussed in the following sections.

Table 2: Initial Codes 1–4

<i>Heart for Worship</i>	<i>Distractions</i>	<i>Need/Tool</i>	<i>Performance/show/entertainment</i>
Crosby	Kirkpatrick	Hawks	Spafford
Clarkson	Winkworth	Scudder	Adams
Winkworth	Lowry	Adams	Warner
Adams	Warner	Havergal	Bliss
Scudder	Bliss	Bliss	Lowry
Biss	Steele	Elliott	Clarkson
Bates	Adams	Spafford	Scudder
Havergal	Spafford	Warner	Havergal
	Crosby	Lowry	
		Kirkpatrick	

Table 3: Initial Codes 5–7

<i>Prefer to be Led by Volunteers</i>	<i>Engagement</i>	<i>Song Choice/Familiarity</i>
Elliot	Havergal	Clarkson
Spafford	Spafford	Bliss
Adams	Scudder	Spafford
Winkworth	Bates	Steele
Hawks		Bates
Scudder		Warner
Steele		
Bliss		
Clarkson		

Themes were identified through the grouping of similar codes, the recognition of patterns, and the merging of related codes. This research yielded nine distinct themes, which were refined and validated through continuous engagement with the data. Table 4 presents these nine themes, each assigned a concise and informative name that conveys its essence. These themes represent the key insights, or “A-ha” moments, revealed by the research. The following narrative is structured around these themes, providing a comprehensive analysis of the findings.

Table 4: Themes from the Research

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Participants</i>														
	<i>Elliott</i>	<i>Crosby</i>	<i>Clarkson</i>	<i>Spafford</i>	<i>Adams</i>	<i>Seudder</i>	<i>Steele</i>	<i>Blis</i>	<i>Bates</i>	<i>Warner</i>	<i>Lowy</i>	<i>Winkworth</i>	<i>Havergal</i>	<i>Kirkpatrick</i>	<i>Hawks</i>
The Heart of Worship		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
The Role of the Worship Leader	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x
A Biblical Call to Worship		x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
Distraction		x		x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x
Technology Meets a Need	x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		x	x	x
Prefer to Be Led by The Volunteers	x			x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x		
Encourages Performance			x	x	x	x		x		x			x		
Pre-recorded Music Affects Engagement				x	x	x		x	x			x	x	x	
Song Choice	x		x	x			x	x	x	x					

Theme One: The Heart of Worship

All participants interviewed directly or indirectly reference the heart when describing and detailing their worship experiences. Winkworth remarks, “Lifting praise to the Lord is ultimately what’s going on in your heart.” Similarly, Crosby states, “Worship is the point; worship is from the heart.” Whether it is the lifestyle of worship, as referenced by several participants, or the emphasis on maintaining a pure heart and motives in worship, it is evident that every participant comprehends the crucial role of a heart devoted to worship.

Theme Two: The Role of the Worship Leader

One of the interview questions specifically asked participants to describe why a worship leader would use pre-recorded music. This enabled each participant to discuss the role of their worship leader. Although the information in their responses varies, every participant attributes the motives and use of pre-recorded music to their worship leader. One participant notes, “One reason he or she might use stems and multitracks is because they do not want to recruit volunteers.” Another participant observes, “Why wouldn’t you use pre-recorded music if you want to meet people’s expectations?” This research shows that participants experience the choices of the worship leaders, from song choice to using live volunteers in worship.

Theme Three: A Biblical Call to Worship

None of the participants could specifically cite scriptural references regarding the use of technology in worship. However, all but one acknowledge that worship is a biblical mandate, and they recognize that the Scriptures provide guidelines that can be applied to the use of technology in worship. Havergal remarks, “Worship is to bring honor to God, uplift and encourage the Gospel; it should be done with integrity.” Steele says, “Worship is to be truthful, honest, and in

His name.” Additionally, Bliss expresses, “I cannot provide chapter and verse, but I have strong convictions about what I believe God expects from us.”

Theme Four: Distraction

Several participants used performance vocabulary in their interviews. Their words were *performance*, *show*, *spectacular*, and *look*. The common denominator among these comments is that stems and multitracks may cause a distraction to authentic worship. While some worshipers may feel differently, as Warner remarks, “I do not notice and do not care whether they use pre-recorded music or not,” most participants recognize that it could be a distraction. Lowry remarks, “When I hear a noise, but I don’t see anyone, it throws me off, and then I start to pay attention to what’s actually not there, and it can actually distract me.” Another similar response from Winkworth: “It’s certainly a distraction. The first word that comes to mind is inauthentic experience and a bit of a distraction for sure because your focus is just like if you see someone lip-syncing.” These participants continue to worship in a service with distractions, yet they recognize that it does not feel authentic when what is happening on stage does not match what they see and hear.

Theme Five: Technology Meets a Need

All participants demonstrate an understanding of the use of pre-recorded music. Many recall being part of congregations in which singers initially used cassettes, which later advanced to CDs. Participants recognize that the pre-recorded music is sometimes necessitated by the unavailability of volunteers due to illness or the lack of alternative options in specific ministries. Most participants grew up in smaller ministries with limited resources where pre-recorded music was often the only feasible option for special music performances. While these participants

acknowledge technology as a helpful tool, they generally do not prefer it, recognizing its value only in specific circumstances.

Spafford remarks on the advantages of pre-recorded music, stating, “It will be in tune all the time.” Additionally, Crosby highlights the benefit of mobility associated with using pre-recorded music, explaining that “It’s easier to pack it up and move it on so other people can enjoy it too,”—referring to missions, nights of worship, revivals, and opportunities at other venues.

Theme Six: The Preference to be Led by Members of Their Congregation

The participants prefer being led by their congregation/volunteers during worship services. They articulate that a live worship experience fosters a sense of authenticity and engagement. Havergal remarks, “I feel like it’s easier for me to believe that I’m an actual participant in the worship when I’m responding to live music.” Winkworth agrees, stating, “I get more out of it when there’s the heart and passion behind it, and that passion comes from a volunteer.” The participants believe every member has a role and contributes to the collective expression of worship.

Theme Seven: Pre-recorded Music Encourages Performance

Over half of participants believe pre-recorded music encourages a performance-oriented approach to worship. This perception is partly attributed to the pressure to achieve a modern *look*. Bliss notes, “I look back.... people were bringing the talent of their ability to worship, and it wasn’t all about how it looked.” Kirkpatrick comments, “An expectation is that we want it to look like something we’ve seen [elsewhere].” Reflecting on a particular service, Elliott remarked, “It was like you had a concert of the Trans-Siberian Orchestra.” Technology and the

elevated platform create an environment conducive to performance, a tendency recognized by worshipers in the CSRA.

Theme Eight: Pre-recorded Music Affects Engagement

All fifteen participants acknowledge the importance of congregational worship, and each one of these worshipers maintains consistent attendance at their church. However, they recognize that prerecorded music can sometimes affect their level of engagement in worship. One significant area of concern is the lack of spontaneity. Clarkson says, “We must ‘perform’ the same song, with all the repeats” each time because pre-recorded tracks constrain them. Spafford agrees, remarking that constraints could inhibit the work of the Holy Spirit and the potential for revival, as “pre-recorded music is fixed.” Adam adds, “There is no flexibility; it’s a little irritating, like karaoke.”

Theme Nine: Song Choice is Important When Using Pre-recorded Music

This theme is exemplified by Clarkson, who remarks, “Music has changed significantly over the last twenty years; we never sang songs in church that we would hear on the radio.” Several participants indicated that song choice has a more significant pre-recorded music, asserting that “The recorded music doesn’t matter if we know the songs.” Clarkson continues her sentiment: “If the pre-recorded music is familiar to everyone, it is likely less problematic than if it consists of new material that only a few people recognize.”

Results

Worship is a unique and personal experience. An interpretive phenomenology study focuses on interpretation and meaning, providing the appropriate methodology for this study, which seeks to explore the lived experiences of individuals. This approach facilitates personal

interviews, allowing participants to articulate their experiences in their own words. All participants demonstrate a profound understanding of the significance of worship, recognizing it as more than just music. Worship is identified as encompassing singing, praying, and cherishing special moments as gifts from God. Participants acknowledge that worship extends beyond the confines of a church building, occurring in various forms, such as walking with God in nature, performing acts of kindness, or singing and praying while driving. Worship is perceived as a lifestyle. Although the Bible does not provide explicit guidance on the use of technology, it is understood that these tools are instrumental in carrying out ministry work.

Participants exhibit a profound awareness of their own concept of *Dasein* in worship. Their comprehension of authenticity, consistency, focus, and obedience to divine requirements is evident in each interview. Worship is described as a planned activity, with considerable thought and care dedicated to each worship service. Nonetheless, flexibility and spontaneity are also deemed necessary, attributed to the guiding influence of the Holy Spirit, which is recurrent in the data. The term *heart* appears frequently in the transcripts, highlighted by several participants recounting worship experiences characterized by genuine, unembellished performances. One participant even recites an entire chorus from memory while sharing a story. Recollections of worship experiences emphasize that the messenger often has as significant an impact as the delivery method.

The role of the worship leader emerges as a significant theme. Participants offer varied responses when asked about the reasons behind a worship leader's use of pre-recorded music. However, all participants consistently emphasize the substantial responsibility borne by the worship leader. The reasons are identified as the desire for a fuller sound, the choice of song requiring extra help, a potential reluctance or inability to train volunteers, lack of familiarity with

alternative options, specific directives from the head pastor, and issues related to the commitment and availability of volunteers.

The term *distraction* emerges as a fascinating and recurrent theme, mentioned by fourteen of the fifteen participants for various reasons. Primarily, most participants are only aware of using pre-recorded music once an issue arises. Clarkson recounts an incident in which the words (vocal stems) began before the choir started singing. Lowry notes that he only becomes aware of pre-recorded music upon hearing an unexpected noise that does not originate from the stage. Such incidents distract him from worship as he begins looking around to identify the source of the sound. While all participants acknowledge a difference in sound when pre-recorded music is used, it does not detract from the worship unless a failure occurs.

Another noteworthy reference to the term *distraction* pertains to the quality and preparedness of volunteers. While every participant prefers being led by live volunteers from their congregation, as it allows individuals to use their gifts and talents for God, they acknowledge that the music might not always be perfect or professional. In contrast, pre-recorded music is consistently in tune and free of missed notes, eliminating distractions. Bliss and Spafford identify this context as a training ground for volunteers, emphasizing this is the only way for them to improve.

Despite potential distractions and a preference for live musicians, the participants in this study acknowledge that the pre-recorded music fulfills particular needs under various circumstances. The situations identified in the interviews include illness, lack of volunteers, vacations, limited ability, lack of commitment, and lack of opportunity. Although every participant prefers being led by live members of the congregation, they recognize that this is sometimes challenging. In small congregations, the number of available volunteers is limited.

Additionally, a worship ministry may be constrained by the skill level of its volunteers, which also influences song choice, a related second theme. Furthermore, the commitment of volunteers is a critical factor; even the most skilled individuals cannot contribute if they do not attend. Uncontrollable factors such as illness and vacations are also acknowledged as part of managing a volunteer-based program.

At the outset of this research, this researcher had a preconceived notion (fore-conception) that using pre-recorded music would foster a performance-oriented environment in worship. A secondary framework labeled the Celebrity Model, which emerged out of the Christian music industry and was introduced by Nathan Myrick, is applied in this study. The Celebrity Model relies on contemporary worship music, modern technology, and the rise in the commercialization of modern worship music. Four of the congregations in this study align with the criteria of the worship model: (1) an emphasis on production in the worship set, (2) utilizing modern worship music or writing original repertoire, (3) the utilization of technology, (4) the look of the worship leader, and (5) an emphasis on performance over musical training.

Myrick's criteria are represented in these fifteen interviews. Several participants connect worship music heard on the radio to the same worship music in their services, along with screens and elevated sound systems. Other participants reference the worship look of their young worship leaders on the team, and the lack of any proper musical training is referenced as a possible roadblock to building and using volunteers within their congregation.

While exploring this theme of vocal and instrumental tracks in this research, it is revealed that this practice holds less significance for the participants than initially anticipated. Over half of the participants acknowledge that pre-recorded music encourages a performance atmosphere and impacts engagement but is not overwhelmingly influential. Participants feel they are less

likely to engage because it feels more like a performance or concert, a sentiment particularly noticeable during special events and seasonal concerts.

Summary

Chapter 4 explores the lived experiences of worshipers engaged in worship ministries in Augusta, Georgia, focusing on the multifaceted emotions and experiences associated with pre-recorded music. Through in-depth interviews with fifteen participants from eight area churches, the study identifies themes such as heartfelt worship, an appreciation for live worship, involving congregational volunteers, and the significant responsibilities of worship leaders. These responsibilities encompass leadership and training of volunteers and the critical task of selecting songs for worship ministries.

The participants in this study acknowledge that, while technology can enhance worship, pre-recorded music may encourage a performance-oriented approach and affect congregational engagement. The narratives emphasize the participants' profound commitment to worship, revealing that although they may have personal preferences and find pre-recorded music distracting at times, these worshipers do not allow the use of stems and multitracks to diminish or impede their worship experience.

In chapter 4, the results of the phenomenological study are presented, detailing the participants' lived experiences and capturing the essence of their narratives. The findings highlight several themes and patterns, offering a comprehensive overview of the phenomena of the lived experience of worshipers when pre-recorded music is used, primarily stems and multitracks. In chapter 5, the focus shifts to a deeper analysis and interpretation. The next chapter includes a dissection of the identified themes, contextualizing them within the existing body of literature, and exploring their broader implication. This analysis aims to provide a nuanced

understanding of the findings, shedding light on their significance and potential impact on the field.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This chapter revisits the information presented in chapters 1 and 2, integrating it with the methodologies and results examined in chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 5 delineates the key findings of this study, correlating them with the existing literature, summarizing the outcomes, and discussing the implications of this research. The chapter concludes with areas of potential future research and a summary. As demonstrated in chapter 1, this qualitative phenomenological study aims to evaluate the lived experience of participants participating in worship when prerecorded vocal and instrumental tracks are used. This researcher posits that the worship experience is significant because the act of worship is essential.

Summary of the Study and Purpose

Technology integration in worship practices has significantly evolved and is influenced by consumer culture, reality television, and digital media. In the post-COVID era, worship services are frequently broadcast on digital platforms, creating opportunities to expand audiences and attract new members and volunteers. This study examines the experiences of worshipers in Augusta, Georgia, focusing on services utilizing pre-recorded music technology. The findings provide insights into the impact of this technological adoption on live worship activities within worship spaces throughout the CSRA.

Additionally, Nathan Myrick's Celebrity Model of worship is introduced as a supplementary framework for this study. As discussed in chapter 2, this contemporary approach to worship gatherings has distinct attributes and aligns with the practices of worship ministries utilizing pre-recorded technology in their services. This model provides a valuable lens for understanding the dynamics and implications of using such technology in modern worship contexts.

The criteria for participants as outlined in chapter 3 are: (1) the participant must attend a local church in the CSRA, (2) the participant may not be currently involved in the worship ministry of his or her respective church, and (3) the participant does not require knowledge of stems, multitracks, or other particulars of the worship ministry in his or her church. To formulate and evaluate the lived experience of participants, focus and attention is given to the feelings, moods, and descriptions communicated during these interviews. To ensure confidentiality, names of popular hymn writers are used in chapter 4 as participant identifiers and unique identifiers are assigned to each participant.

The central research question of this study is, “What is the effect on the participant’s perception of authenticity and experience when the worship uses prerecorded tracks?” The following sub-questions that led the participants to answer this central research question are:

1. What does Scripture say about genuine and authentic worship that may be related to the use of prerecorded music in worship services?
2. What are the worshiper’s perceptions and feelings about the use of prerecorded music in worship services?
3. How does the worshiper describe his or her worship experiences when facilitated by the use of prerecorded music during worship services when compared with his or her recollection of those experiences that are not?
4. How does the worshiper explain why a worship leader uses prerecorded music in the worship service?
5. How does prerecorded music influence the worshiper’s sense of authenticity when compared to worship led by volunteers from within the congregation?

Summary of Findings and Prior Research

The participant interviews resulted in fifty-one initial codes, organized into seven broad categories provided in chapter 4. From this point in the research, codes were developed into thematic categories and then organized into nine descriptive themes, detailed in chapter 4. The nine themes are *The Heart of Worship*, *The Role of the Worship Leader*, *A Biblical Call to Worship*, *Distraction*, *Technology Meets a Need*, *Participants Prefer to Be Led by Their Volunteers*, *Pre-recorded Music Encourages Performance*, *Pre-recorded Music Affects Engagement*, and *Song Choice*. Further analysis and synthesis of the data presented in this summary demonstrate three dominant interpretations of these themes that reveal the worship experiences of the participants. They are (1) the heart of worship, (2) technology meets a need, and (3) pre-recorded music encourages performance. These factors explain the worship experience and offer insights into the multifaceted nature of this experience. The interview questions provided the data for thematic analysis, revealing the themes. The following research questions guide the summary presentation of the findings.

RQ 1: What Does Scripture Say About Genuine and Authentic Worship That May be Related to the Use of Pre-recorded Music in Worship Services?

This researcher used this question to assess the participants' knowledge of biblical worship and understanding of how his or her worship experience aligns with the integration of technology in worship practices. This researcher did not anticipate or expect participants to possess comprehensive knowledge of the scriptural foundations of worship, technology, or the biblical principles that underpin worship. Instead, this researcher used this question as an entry point for discussion. Most participants demonstrated an understanding of biblical worship, which means having a genuine heart for worship and recognizing this is something Jesus desires from

us. While some participants expressed uncertainty addressing the biblical implications of technology, all were acutely aware of the biblical mandate to worship, emphasizing the importance of the heart's condition in the worship experience.

The New Testament exemplifies Jesus addressing a group of people and calling out their motives. Jesus said, "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me" (Matt. 15:8, King James Version). In the book of Psalms, King David writes, "For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it; thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Ps. 51:16–17). The heart is emphasized over the outward appearance or presentation: "Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God" (Joel 2:13). The Apostle Paul says, "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness" (Rom. 10:10).

In this modern worship climate, the youthful appearance of the worship leader is often desirable, with several participants in this study recognizing this trendy appearance as a *look*. Despite the pressure to fit in with trends and culture, this is not a significant criterion for biblical worship standards. Myrick's Celebrity Model notes that churches with an age demographic of between 20 to 40 are the ones that adopt this model; however, in this research, this phenomenon was noticed by participants in congregations with a solid representation of members over 50 years of age. For participants, a heart of worship matters most.

Authentic worship originates in the heart, fostering a lifestyle dedicated to worship. The participant identified as Winkworth asserts, "Worship genuinely focuses on the Lord, from the heart, from an intimate relationship with Christ." All participants share this perspective,

emphasizing that worship is more than music. As Crosby notes, “[Technology really doesn’t matter] as long as you’ve got your heart in the right place because worship is the point.”

There is agreement and clarity among worshipers in the CSRA of the scriptural mandate to worship. God established fellowship and worship from the beginning of human existence—we are created to worship. Marva Dawn writes, “There is a Law in the cosmos from the beginning of God’s creation that relates to human culture, and that is the Law of Worship.”¹ The participants in the study faithfully engage in their worship services and understand the importance of corporate and individual worship. Understanding the biblical call to worship gives credibility to these participants’ experiences.

There is a profound desire for authentic worship grounded in an awareness of God’s goodness in the lives of the participants. For this group, biblical worship is centered on and exalts God. Bryan Chapell articulates this concept, stating, “Corporate worship is nothing more, and nothing less, than a re-presentation of the gospel in the presence of God and his people for his glory and their good.”² This sentiment aligns with the participant’s experience of corporate worship emphasizing both God’s glory and their benefit. Worship is perceived as a response from transformed and grateful hearts, characteristic of those with a genuine relationship with God. This idea is explored further in a subsequent theme within this research.

Considering the work of Harold Best, introduced in chapter 2, as a foundational source for biblical worship, Best writes, “It is the spiritual condition of the worshiper that determines whether or not God is at work.”³ Worship is the priority, and the heart is the essential starting

¹ Marva J. Dawn, *In The Beginning, God: Creation, Culture, and the Spiritual Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), loc 101, Kindle.

² Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 154.

³ Harold M. Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith* (New York: Harper-Collins, 1993), 146.

point for authentic worship. Additionally, congregations understand that worship is a lifestyle. The Gospel of Matthew provides the greatest commandment, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (Matt. 22:37). True worship emanates from the whole of the individual whose heart has been reconciled to God and who has relinquished control in every area— heart, soul, and mind—to God, cultivating a lifestyle of worship rather than confining worship to a specific hour.

RQ 2: What are the Worshiper’s Perceptions and Feelings About the Use of Pre-recorded Music in Worship Services?

Responses to this question are polarized, ranging from indifference towards using stems and multitracks to solid opposition against any form of pre-recorded music. Initially, this seems to present a simple binary opposition; however, continuous immersion in the interview transcripts reveals that the issue is not the tool itself but how pre-recorded music is utilized.

As previously mentioned, participants’ responses to this question vary from indifference, with comments such as “There is nothing wrong with it,” to outright disapproval, with statements such as, “I dislike it,” and, “[It’s] not true worship.” Participants recognize the value of using pre-recorded music, citing improved quality, better instrument tuning, and providing necessary quality in certain situations. Havergal labels this worship as a show yet recognizes pre-recorded music as often “the only choice.”

There is a recognition that technology has brought change, with participants citing technologies incorporated into worship ministries, such as microphones, speakers, and keyboards. Technology can be a good thing. Participants desire that technology be used to enhance and add value to the ministries. Lowry offers a guiding question for evaluating the use of any technology in worship: “Will this uplift or discourage the Gospel?” When building a

ministry around Myrick's Celebrity Model, the incorporation of technology is required. Production and technology are essential elements of this model.

In her research on congregational worship, Monique Ingalls examines the transformation of the church worship service into what she calls a *worship experience* influenced by concerts and CCM.⁴ This shift is noticeable to the participants, who feel that ministries often exceed their capabilities to keep up with trends and cultural expectations. The result is what participants refer to as the *show*. This is not to imply that participants want to remain old-fashioned or archaic; this is interpreted as participants wanting these technologies to match their congregations and fit their needs. When the elements of worship do not fit the congregation, this is a detriment and distraction in worship.

Participants in this study mention various types of distractions: the occasions in which technology fails or mistakes are made by people on the platform which interrupts the flow of worship, poor quality in the presentation, and not being familiar with the songs. A failure in technology and presentation is inevitable and often cannot always be prevented when using technology. Participants are forgiving in these moments. For example, participants are aware when the tracks cut out in the middle of a song, or the live music is not in sync with the stems. These occurrences are unavoidable when using technology. Lowry remarks on hearing the voice prompts from the tracks through the speakers in the house. The participant Warner says when a technology failure occurs, it "Just makes me giggle for a moment." Others are distracted and become investigators, wanting to know what happened or what is creating the noise. As a whole, participants are more forgiving of people's occasional mistakes than technology failures.

⁴ Monique Ingalls, *Singing the Congregation: How Contemporary Worship Music Forms Evangelical Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 39.

Spafford recognizes that tracks will “always be in tune,” while Clarkson understands that with a popular worship song in the worship list, “With some songs you need the tracks to hear them [as] they sound on the radio.”

The commonality in responses to this research question is that even though they prefer live music, participants can only pick out the strategic use of instrumental and vocal stems if there is a technological mishap or it is evident by the look on the stage. For instance, there is a disparity between sight and hearing when there is the sound of a full band with only three people on the platform. Hawks says, “I’m hearing more than I see.” Participants recognize and appreciate a fuller and more consistent sound, which participants label *quality*. Yet, church worship services experience a lack of authenticity and a loss of opportunities for their volunteers when pre-recorded music is used liberally. Elliott recommends saving the use of multitracks for a big day such as Christmas or Easter.

RQ 3: How Does the Worshiper Describe His or Her Worship Experiences When Facilitated By the Use of Pre-recorded Music During Worship Services When Compared With His or Her Recollection of Those Experiences That Are Not?

Answers to this question are not surprising considering the age demographic of the participants. Those over the age of 40 reference piano, organ, and even handbells. Those between the ages of 20 and 40 have little experience in services without pre-recorded music. Oddly, church membership does not align with this demographic as three participants in the older age group worship in two of this group’s most contemporary worship settings, and two of the youngest participants attend a blended service incorporating band and orchestra.

The phrase “recollection of worship” in the question clarifies the analysis significantly. Congregants seek places of sincere and meaningful worship experiences to share with their

church community. The assessment formulated here is that the focus is on the essence of the worship experience rather than the absence of pre-recorded music, with an appreciation for the worship with which they were raised, evoking a strong sense of nostalgia.

This study reveals that popular music, such as Christian music heard on the radio, requires more instrumentation to match the sound to what people hear on the radio. The volunteer and staff pool is smaller than what most ministries have available. Reflecting on the past, Clarkson remembers, “You never heard a song on the radio that you sang in church.” This is a keen observation as she connects it with the importance of song choice. Several participants recounted moments in worship when they stood and looked at the screens because they were unfamiliar with the songs.

Song selection should prioritize encouraging congregational participation as the primary objective of corporate worship is to engage the congregation rather than to feature the latest song releases. Pre-recorded music offers a reliable method for worship leaders to introduce new songs, as stems and multitracks provide robust support and sound, which some of these participants admit enhances the congregation’s confidence. However, introducing new songs too frequently can hinder congregational engagement. The data indicates that a balanced approach, integrating new songs with the repetition of familiar material, is more effective and appreciated by the congregation.

RQ 4: How Does the Worshiper Explain Why a Worship Leader Uses

Pre-recorded Music in the Worship Service?

This study reveals that adequate and capable leadership is of great value in worship. One participant expresses that in her worship experience, the leader can dictate the atmosphere in the room and, subsequently, her feelings and receptiveness in worship. Other participants feel that

how worship leaders conduct themselves and the songs they choose affect their worship experience more than the use of pre-recorded music. When songs are selected to feature soloists or draw attention to an individual's gifting, this is off-putting to congregational worship.

Participants appreciate talent yet will spot individuals who treat the worship platform like an *American Idol* audition. Participants associate this practice with the use of pre-recorded music.

Participants occasionally feel disconnected from their worship leaders due to the actions and choices made by those leaders. This issue holds greater significance for these participants than the use of technology. It appears that worship leaders emulate what is modeled for them, an action Monique Ingalls calls *performancism*. "When we conflate leading a congregation in worship with entertaining or pleasing a crowd."⁵ There is pressure on the worship leader to copy the worship artist, and the participants feel this has become an expectation from congregations. Participants in the CSRA recognize this phenomenon and articulate it in various ways when describing their specific worship services.

Participants understand that one person holds administrative responsibility and biblical oversight of the worship ministry. However, an intriguing observation from this research indicates that participants in this study consider everyone on stage to be a worship leader. Participants employ various terms to identify worship leaders, including organist, orchestra, choir, praise team, worship leader, worship staff, singer, soloist, platform leader, and worship pastor. To the average person in the pew, each individual or group on the platform serves as a leader. This researcher believes this nuanced perspective reflects a high level of biblical maturity in recognizing all present on the platform as worship leaders.

⁵ Deanna Witkowski, C. Michael Hawn, and Monique M. Ingalls, "Can Worship Leaders and Musicians Resist the Temptation to 'Perform'?" *Christianity Today* 58, no. 9 (2014): 31.

In ministries, leadership responsibilities are frequently delegated solely to staff positions, neglecting to hold volunteers on the platform to equivalent biblical standards. The Bible says otherwise. According to Romans 12:1, every believer is to “Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God.” Every believer is to worship through a lifestyle of faithfulness and obedience to the Word of God. Those on the platform are not exempt. On the contrary, the platform represents a place of reverence and responsibility where the Word of God is proclaimed. Volunteers are given the added privilege of guiding the church family in worship.

What is required to lead others in biblical worship is not musical skill, giftedness, or title but the acknowledgment of the redemptive work of Christ with a desire to worship with humility, sincerity, and excellence. Scripture provides the importance of pursuing these qualities. The prophet Micah defines the responsibility of believers to walk in humility. “He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God” (Micah 6:9). In the New Testament, Paul adds, “For if a man thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself” (Gal. 6:3). Regarding sincerity, Scripture reminds the reader to “Serve him in sincerity and in truth” (Josh. 24:14). Psalms says, “The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth” (Ps. 145:18). When pursuing excellence, Scripture clearly instructs, “Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men” (Col. 3:23). The platform is an elevated space with elevated responsibilities.

In these interviews, several participants call worship leaders by name, citing examples of choices and actions that impact their worship. Another set of participants refers to instrumentalists who have become an extension of their worship. Bates states, “I love being able to watch [the musicians] and see their expressions; to me, that’s true worship music.” For

participants in this study, viewing volunteers on the platform as fulfilling the role of a worship leader indicates that volunteers are valued and serve in obedience to God’s Word by using their talents. This perspective represents a mature biblical understanding.

Best writes, “Corporate worship can become empty—it can turn into an abstraction—outside of each individual worshiper taking on full responsibility, for each person is the church, and it is the church that is to be at worship, individual by individual.”⁶ When the platform mirrors an engaged congregation, it is an example of biblical corporate worship rather than a group of spectators and performers. This underscores the collective and individual responsibilities in corporate worship recognized by the participants in this study. As Clarkson says, “Hearing others [sing] encourages our singing.” The worship leader is a facilitator, not a performer.

Pre-recorded music is accessible, and participants feel that little work is required. A worship leader might use these products for several reasons. A primary consensus of the data aligns with a quality from Myrick’s Celebrity Model that today’s worship leader may not have the formal training but rather the trendy look and “proficiency in a certain style.”⁷ An additional reason is a leader’s lack of desire and ability to build and invest in volunteers, or maybe they do not know any differently. It could simply be that using pre-recorded music is easy and accessible and provides the desired result—a quality performance.

Worship is about the community’s opportunity and connection to meet with a sovereign and holy God. When members of a congregation are not involved, they lose the opportunity to be

⁶ Harold M. Best, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts* (Downer Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 60.

⁷ Nathan Myrick, “The Celebrity Model of Music Ministry: Characteristics and Considerations,” *The Hymn* 69, no. 3 (2018): 25.

obedient and to offer their talents and gifts. While tracks can enhance and encourage a ministry, this technology should never replace the opportunity for church members to worship together. Worship is, first and foremost, the privilege given to the gathering of the saints. Therefore, any reasons for removing opportunities for volunteers to serve in worship should be carefully considered in light of Scripture and the scriptural mandate to worship.

RQ 5: How Does Pre-recorded Music Influence the Worshiper's Sense of Authenticity When Compared to Worship Led by Volunteers From Within the Congregation?

Thirteen of the fifteen participants desire to be led by fellow congregation members in worship, consistently favoring leadership by their own congregation members. As previously noted, participants tend to disengage when they perceive a professional sound and observe leaders in a performative stance. The most impactful worship experiences are those led by congregation members who genuinely embody the heart and mission of the ministry. There are exceptions to this preference. Occasionally, worship leaders may face circumstances in which relying on volunteers is not feasible. Factors such as illness, vacations, skill level of the players, and work commitments can challenge the ability to provide live music consistently. In such instances, participants may find pre-recorded music acceptable as an alternative.

Participants value leadership that invests in its volunteers and engages the local church community. For most participants, witnessing leaders on the platform utilizing their gifts and talents for God fosters personal worship and engagement. Conversely, participants tend to disengage when the platform environment transforms into a performance. This shift is not binary but rather a spectrum; the worship setting, with its elevated platform, microphones, and prerecorded music closely resembling studio recordings, lights, screens, and amplified sound, can easily transition into a concert-like experience. Almost half of the participants in this study

are acutely aware of this shift when it happens and often disengage and begin to observe rather than participate. Scudder says, “I can’t be caught up in watching a performer; I need to be connected to worship.”

A performance mindset robs worshipers of one of the most important biblical responsibilities: worship. The object of true worship is the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul states, “That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ” (Eph. 1:12). Performance-driven worship can dangerously steer the focus away from God as the object of worship to achieving performance standards. The musician’s skill and presentation quality can override the heart’s spiritual condition, making worship resemble a concert more than a service. Best labels this as *pseudo excellence*—when excellence in content is replaced by production or presentation.⁸ When the presentation takes priority, the result is often an impressive emotional experience, but the true object of worship is overshadowed by mere performance. A. W. Tozer’s idea of eclipse is applicable here. He writes:

When a thing is in eclipse, it doesn’t mean that its light has diminished, nor that its glory has diminished. It means that there is somebody between us, and that shining frame is said to be eclipsed. When the sun is eclipsed, the sun is not one degree cooler than before...nor the flames flash out from its surface one inch shorter than before. Because it’s not the sun that’s eclipsed, it’s us. So the eclipse of the sun means the eclipse of us.⁹

The improper motives and actions behind the use of technology can tempt worshipers to perform, which causes an eclipse for the worshiper. This eclipse hinders intimate worship and leaves many worshipers questioning the motives and sincerity of the worship leaders.

God requires worshipers to offer their best, not perfection. When perfection and performance become the standards, an essential aspect of worship is lost. Ministry is

⁸ Harold M. Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith* (New York: Harper-Collins, 1993), 25.

⁹ A. W. Tozer, *Authentic Worship: The Path to Greater Unity with God*, ed. James L. Snyder (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2023), 67.

fundamentally about people and eliminating opportunities for involvement removes a crucial element of worship. Participants in this research value quality and are disheartened when individuals are unprepared or lack the necessary skills for their roles. In such instances, using stems and multitracks can significantly benefit the ministry. Participants advocate for volunteers to be given all opportunities in which they are qualified and prepared. As Warner expresses, “There is room for everybody.”

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study carry significant implications for theoretical frameworks, practical applications, and future research within the field of worship. Understanding these implications provides insights that can guide future research and ministry practice, ensuring that the outcomes of this study are effectively utilized. These implications also highlight the potential for enhancing worship experiences and volunteer engagement through informed strategies and practices. This study contributes significantly to two areas of research, first in refining the framework and second in guiding future research.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs a phenomenological methodology to explore individuals’ lived experiences, using the hermeneutical method as the framework for interpretation. Phenomenology uniquely contributes to this study in several ways. Firstly, it allows the research to delve deeply into the participants’ lived experiences, providing rich, detailed insights into their worship practices. Secondly, the intentional conversations focus on individual perceptions and feelings, capturing aspects often missed by quantitative methods. Lastly, the phenomenological approach yields rich descriptions that animate the complex dynamics of worship, making the findings relatable. This study is beneficial for future research as it contributes to existing

knowledge by offering a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the critical issue of worship authenticity when pre-recorded music is used, balancing performance and genuine worship.

In addition to the phenomenological approach, Myrick's Celebrity Model is incorporated as an additional framework. Myrick's framework offers a more holistic analysis by bridging theological concepts with the musical practices of the celebrity model of worship. This integration helps to understand how these worship practices align or diverge from biblical principles. By incorporating Myrick's framework, the study adds the cultural and contextual factors of modern worship services, providing a deeper understanding of the effects of pre-recorded music in worship. Considering contemporary worship practices in evangelical churches today, Myrick's model enhances the conceptual clarity and scope of this research. As research in the field of worship and the use of pre-recorded music continues, this framework can further expand and refine the understanding of the worship experience.

Practical Application

This study provides a comprehensive framework for integrating pre-recorded music in worship ministries, helping enhance the worship setting by effectively supplementing live worship with pre-recorded music. These six practical applications are (1) balancing authenticity and performance, (2) encouraging active participation, (3) enhancing worship quality, (4) maintaining theological alignment, (5) cultural and contextual sensitivity, and (6) ethical considerations.

The rich descriptions provided by the participants offer valuable insights into the importance of balancing the use of pre-recorded music with live or authentic worship practices. Achieving the correct balance ensures that the focus remains on spiritual engagement rather than

performance quality alone. Next, by emphasizing the value of involving volunteers and congregants in worship, this data suggests that technology should complement rather than replace live worship, thereby fostering a more inclusive worship environment.

Thirdly, the findings further indicate that pre-recorded music can enhance worship quality without overshadowing the spiritual aspects of the service. Worship leaders must make thoughtful decisions about when and how to incorporate this technology. By integrating Myrick's framework, this study provides a fourth practical application that ensures worship practices, including the use of technology and other qualities of the Celebrity Model, align with biblical principles and theological foundations.

The fifth application of this research underscores the importance of considering cultural and contextual factors when implementing pre-recorded music. Ministries must tailor their worship practices to suit their congregational needs. Worship leaders must know the congregants they lead. This leads to the final practical application, ethical considerations. Through the detailed insights and descriptions, this study brings attention to the ethical implications of performance-driven worship, encouraging all worship leaders to prioritize the spiritual well-being of their congregants over the aesthetics or entertainment value.

Future Implications

This research does not find widespread opposition to pre-recorded music. Specifically, 60% of participants are ambivalent about its use, while the remaining 40% say they prefer live music but do not express strong objections to the use of stems and multitracks. This study's findings suggest a need to re-evaluate the proper use of pre-recorded music in worship. There is potential for a balanced integration of live music and pre-recorded music to enhance the worship experience.

Implementing the recommendations from this research could lead to the development of programs for worship leaders. These programs would emphasize the effective integration of stems and multitracks while retaining authenticity in worship. This approach could encourage ministries to thoughtfully and successfully incorporate these resources while remaining authentic to individual congregations, providing practical benefits such as relief for existing volunteers, and overcoming limitations related to volunteer availability. As a result, the worship experience could become more consistent and meaningful, thereby improving engagement among congregants.

Limitations and Strengths of the Study

This study employs a phenomenological methodology relying heavily on individual subjective perceptions and experiences. This approach introduces variability and necessitates caution in interpreting the general findings. Additionally, the findings of this study are based on a small sample size, which may not represent the broader population of the evangelical church. The variability in the use and integration of technology across different congregations, along with time constraints and the scope of the investigation, also pose limitations by reducing the sample size. Furthermore, while Myrick's Celebrity Model adds value, its specific focus may not encompass all relevant worship practices and congregational engagement.

The strengths of this study significantly enhance its practical applicability within the field of worship. First, the phenomenological methodology yields intricate and profound insights, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of participants' perceptions and emotions. Integration of Myrick's Celebrity Model further enriches the study's conceptual framework, bolstering its analytical depth in the study of worship dynamics. Additionally, the research provides actionable recommendations for worship leaders, including developing training programs and strategies to

balance live and pre-recorded music effectively. Combining phenomenological methodology with an additional framework ensures that the subject matter is thoroughly explored. Moreover, the study's insights promise to enhance the consistency and meaningfulness of worship experiences while paving the way for further investigation into using pre-recorded music in worship contexts.

Recommendations

The following recommendations offer avenues for extending this research, enabling a broader exploration of diverse contexts and perspectives within the field of worship studies. Firstly, additional study should investigate the effects of various technologies beyond pre-recorded music in modern worship services. While extensive research on digital worship has been done by Monique Ingalls, Andrew Mall, Heidi Campbell, and others, further exploration into the broader spectrum of technological applications during live worship remains a promising area for study. Secondly, undertaking ethnographic research would provide insights into the cultural and social dynamics associated with integrating pre-recorded music in worship settings. This approach could involve examining which denominations, congregational types, and communities embrace such technological innovations.

Next, this research underscores the necessity of enhancing the effectiveness of training and educating worship leaders to foster sustained engagement with congregants and cultivate a robust volunteer base. This study highlights that participants look beyond superficial trends and desire modern worship leaders to understand biblical worship principles and effective methods for connecting with their congregations rather than merely duplicating popular radio hits. Establishing programs that nurture a genuine passion for worship among leaders is crucial to fostering meaningful worship experiences. These are the things that matter to a congregation.

Finally, this study focuses on the lived experiences of participants rather than worship volunteers. Further investigation into the impact on volunteer dynamics would examine how the incorporation of pre-recorded music influences volunteers within worship teams, encompassing factors such as motivations for engagement, levels of satisfaction, and retention rates. These recommendations aim to extend the current research and contribute to the existing body of knowledge in the field of worship.

This research also contributes to the practical and theoretical implications of using pre-recorded music in worship by examining the worshiper's lived experiences in August, Georgia. It underscores the necessity for ongoing theological education, effective use of volunteers, and the development of inclusive worship standards. The study opens avenues for further research, particularly in technology integration, the long-term effects of pre-recorded music in live settings, and comparative studies across different worship styles and cultural contexts.

Dissertation Summary

This research contributes to the field of worship studies by providing insights into authenticity and worship technology, specifically when pre-recorded vocal and instrumental tracks are employed in worship services. According to Merriam-Webster, the term *authentic* is defined in three ways: (1) not false or imitation, real; (2) true to one's own personality, spirit, or character; and (3) worthy of acceptance or belief as conforming to or based on fact, conforming to an original so as to reproduce essential features, made or done in the same way as the original.¹⁰ From a biblical worldview, the first definition is axiomatic: authentic worship is

¹⁰ Merriam-Webster, s.v. "authentic" (adjective), accessed July 17, 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com>.

founded on the Word of God and must be true. As stated in John 4:24, “They that worship him must worship him in Spirit and in Truth.” Jesus affirms this in John 17:17, “Thy Word is truth.”

However, the second definition Merriam-Webster provides is inadequate for defining biblical worship. Personal preferences, pleasures, or human efforts are not elements of authentic worship. The worldview of pursuing our authentic self has no place in worship. True worship centers not on the worshiper but on the one true object of worship, as expressed in Psalm 29:2, which says, “Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name.” The hymn writer, Augustus Toplady, echoes this sentiment: “Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to thy cross I cling.”¹¹ Authentic worship is a response to the mighty works and deeds of the triune God, necessitating a definition aligned with the third definition of *authentic* from the dictionary, which says, “Worthy of acceptance or belief as conforming to or based on fact, conforming to an original to reproduce essential features, made or done in the same way as the original.”¹²

Bruce Leafblad, Harold Best, and Daniel Block provide substantial definitions for worship, overarching the purpose of worship and the role of the worshiper. Leafblad says, “Worship is communion with God in which believers, by grace, center their minds’ attention and hearts’ affection on the Lord, humbly glorifying God in response to his greatness and his word.”¹³ Best says, “Worship is the continuous outpouring of all that I am, all that I do, and all that I can ever become in light of a chosen or choosing god.”¹⁴ Block says, “True worship

¹¹ Augustus Toplady, “Rock of Ages” in *The Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1991), 342.

¹² Merriam-Webster, s.v. “authentic” (adjective), accessed July 17, 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com>.

¹³ Bruce Leafblad, “Nature of Worship” (video Lecture in WRSP 835, Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, January 12, 2022).

¹⁴ Harold M. Best, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 18.

involves reverential human acts of submission and homage before the divine Sovereign in response to his gracious revelation of himself and in accord with his will.”¹⁵ These scholars and the participants in this study recognize that the act of worship is an extraordinary opportunity and calling.

This noble calling necessitates that we possess a heart for worship with a singular purpose and focus: to exalt the name of Jesus and to make His name known (I Chron. 16:8; Ps. 106:8). Participants in this study indicate that pre-recorded music functions as a tool, and its usage holds significant importance. The response is favorable when it is utilized to develop and enhance the worship experience. Conversely, when used to elevate a program, style, audience, or leader, it distracts and detracts from worship engagement. All worship leaders can successfully employ appropriate and available technology when it serves to direct people toward Jesus. When worship leaders prioritize other agendas, the focus shifts to performance. Authenticity in worship begins with the condition and motives of the heart. When these align with the Word of God, all other aspects of proper worship naturally follow. “Glory ye in his holy name: Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord (I Chron. 16:10).

¹⁵ Daniel I. Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 55.

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Appendix A: IRB Exempt Documentation



September 29, 2023

Susan Burgess
Scott Connell

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY23-24-224 Authenticity and Worship Technology: An Evaluation of the Use of Prerecorded Vocal and Instrumental Tracks in Worship in Augusta, Georgia

Dear Susan Burgess, Scott Connell,

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).

For a PDF of your exemption letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your information sheet and final versions of your study documents can also be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.

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 B: Participants

Participant Identifier	Age	Gender	Church Identifier
Elliott	74	Female	H
Crosby	56	Female	D
Clarkson	61	Female	D
Spafford	70	Male	G
Adams	66	Female	C
Scudder	42	Female	F
Steele	55	Female	E
Bliss	68	Male	A
Bates	61	Female	B
Warner	38	Female	G
Lowry	28	Male	G
Winkworth	24	Female	G
Havergal	42	Female	E
Kirkpatrick	36	Male	C
Hawks	35	Female	C

Appendix C: Codes

<i>Heart for Worship</i>	<i>Distractions</i>	<i>Need/Tool</i>	<i>Performance/show/entertainment</i>
Crosby	Kirkpatrick	Hawks	Spafford
Clarkson	Winkworth	Scudder	Adams
Winkworth	Lowry	Adams	Warner
Adams	Warner	Havergal	Bliss
Scudder	Bliss	Bliss	Lowry
Biss	Steele	Elliott	Clarkson
Bates	Adams	Spafford	Scudder
Havergal	Spafford	Warner	Havergal
	Crosby	Lowry	
		Kirkpatrick	
<i>Prefer to be Led by Volunteers</i>	<i>Engagement</i>		<i>Song Choice/Familiarity</i>
Elliot	Havergal		Clarkson
Spafford	Spafford		Bliss
Adams	Scudder		Spafford
Winkworth	Bates		Steele
Hawks			Bates
Scudder			Warner
Steele			
Bliss			
Clarkson			

Appendix D: Themes

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Participants</i>														
	<i>Elliott</i>	<i>Crosby</i>	<i>Clarkson</i>	<i>Spafford</i>	<i>Adams</i>	<i>Scudder</i>	<i>Steele</i>	<i>Blis</i>	<i>Bates</i>	<i>Warner</i>	<i>Lowry</i>	<i>Winkworth</i>	<i>Havergal</i>	<i>Kirkpatrick</i>	<i>Hawks</i>
The Heart of Worship		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
The Role of the Worship Leader	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
A Biblical Call to Worship		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Distraction		X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Technology Meets a Need	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X	X	X
Prefer to Be Led by The Volunteers	X			X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		
Encourages Performance			X	X	X	X		X		X			X		
Pre-recorded Music Affects Engagement				X	X	X		X	X			X	X	X	
Song Choice	X		X	X			X	X	X	X					

Appendix E: Curriculum Vitae

SUSAN BURGESS

PROFILE

Minister of Worship, Musical Performer, Ph.D. in Christian Worship with significant musical teaching and leadership experience in classroom and church settings. Music leadership has been woven into the fabric of my career, teaching and mentoring advanced students who became professional musicians. Steinway Teacher of the Year 2017, 2022.

Strengths: Musical Teaching, Musical Performance, Musical Arranging, Mentoring, Planning, Budgeting, Collaboration, Project Management, Communications, Writing, Qualitative Research, Finale Software, Community Outreach

EDUCATION

Ph.D., Christian Worship , Liberty University	Aug 2024
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Completed 45 coursework hours (Oct 2021–Mar 2023) to strengthen research and writing skills. ▪ Conducted a phenomenological qualitative study investigating authenticity in worship in Augusta, GA, where pre-recorded stems and multitracks are used. Recruited research participants from six congregations (600-1800 parishioners in each church). Tools: Nathan Myrick’s Celebrity Worship model, hermeneutical framework. 	
M.M., Piano Performance , University of Miami	1986
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Taught Class Piano (4 semesters). Accompanist for Frost School of Music. Earned Graduate Assistantship 	
B.M., Piano Performance , Augusta University	1984

CERTIFICATION

Sacred Music , Virginia Wesleyan University	2017
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RESEARCH INTERESTS

Christian worship, Congregational worship

EXPERIENCE

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH NORTH AUGUSTA North Augusta, SC	2019–June 2024
Minister of Worship and Creative Arts Office Administrator	
<p>Lead, manage, and plan blended worship services inclusive of band, orchestra, and choir performances; collaborate with senior pastor; plan and manage \$40k worship budget; oversee children and student worship; and plan and direct 3 seasonal concerts and events annually. Assigned added responsibility of Office Administrator due to team leadership and organizational strengths. Mentor and influence 2 full-time employees to help them reach their full potential.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Musical teaching: Teach and develop musicians in their musicianship and skills. Direct and conduct ~four major special musical performances annually beyond weekly services. Mentor Orchestra Director. ▪ Volunteer recruitment: Recruited and managed a team of 100 volunteers, mentoring and developing them to build a strong and effective worship team. 	

- **Digital outreach:** During Covid-19 pandemic, transformed music delivery. Recorded services and produced digital content for four services/week.
- **Outreach:** Created and directed three-city mass choir in partnership with two local churches. Directed ~100-person choir to perform twice in 2024 (to date).
- **Time management:** Work full-time while earning a Ph.D. in Christian Worship.

GRACE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH | North Augusta, SC

2014–2019

Director of Music Ministries

Planned and produced all weekly services for a congregation of 1,000 with weekly traditional and contemporary services. Recruited and managed a team of 40 volunteers. Selected music according to the liturgical calendar and ensured the overall direction of the worship ministry supported the pulpit. Attended weekly leadership team meetings.

- **Musical leadership:** Directed musical rehearsals, played organ or piano for all traditional services, mentored choir members, oversaw contemporary musical performances, and produced three concerts annually.
- **System upgrade:** Led a major sanctuary sound system upgrade installation. Completed project on time and on budget (~\$45k).
- **Financial leadership:** Managed endowment fund (\$50k), aligning spending with strategic goals.

LIGHTHOUSE BAPTIST CHURCH | Aiken, SC

2008–2009

Director of Music

Planned and managed every aspect of worship through music for all services (350 parishioners). Managed and directed adult choirs and special music. Recruited and built musical leadership with volunteers for corporate worship (main worship service) and prepared annual music budget for finance committee and partner.

- **Musical performance:** When not directing, served as keyboardist for special musical performances.
- **Collaboration:** Partnered with minister in service planning and chose music to complement message and calendar.

THE PIANO STUDIO | North Augusta, SC

1990–2005

Owner & Operator

Taught and trained pianists (60–80 students concurrently, in both private and group lessons) while performing all administrative duties of owning and growing a business, including scheduling, billing, and marketing.

- **Suzuki and Kindermusik piano lessons:** Established successful Suzuki and Kindermusik programs along with master classes and training for advanced students. Sold Kindermusik program after successful growth.
- **Premier private music teaching:** Brought quality musical training to North Augusta. Kept a waitlist of clients seeking private lessons. Developed a reputation for working with the most talented pianists in the region, some of who progressed to studying music as undergraduate students.
- **Group teaching:** Developed curriculum for and taught lessons to classrooms of 8–10 students.

LAKESIDE BAPTIST CHURCH | Clearwater, SC

1986–2008

Director of Music

Managed church-wide worship program for a 600-member congregation and coordinated all platform-related activities. Directed various adult and choir ensembles and introduced recorded productions. Led children's choir program, conducting two productions a year. Managed all volunteers in worship ministry and collaborated closely with the Minister to ensure goals were aligned and achieved.

- **Musical program leadership:** Established church orchestra program to create a pipeline of talent when county music program was eliminated. Initiative was successful and still ongoing.
- **Administration:** Managed music schedules and recording for weekly television program; assisted in producing weekly television program recorded at local studio—a cutting-edge offering at the time.

SERVICE

STORYLAND THEATRE | Augusta, GA

1991–2022

Musical Director and Composer

Composed original music with a local playwright for a community theatre attended by 750k children. Directed 11–13 performances of each production and led all music rehearsals. Conducted and performed for each show. Theatre was Voted Family Favorite Performing Arts Group by Augusta Family Magazine (2017) and Voted #1 Local Performing Arts Group in Augusta Magazine (2015) until it reduced productions due to pandemic-related funding/safety issues.

- **Leadership:** Served on Board of Directors (1992–2022); contributed to the Theatre’s strategic direction.
- **Musical teaching:** Directed musical rehearsals (16+ per production) and coached actors and singers for performance (e.g., diction, projection, tempo, interpretation).
- **Pianist:** Performed live for ~36 times annually from 1991–2002 and 2008–2009.

PERFORMANCES *(SELECTED)*

Pianist, Friday Night Hymn Sing Live, Facebook/YouTube Live on Fridays Mar 2020–present

- Perform hymns live and by request each Friday evening. Garnered 13k followers between Facebook and YouTube with ~205 live weekly attendees and ~19k/weekly views.

Mass Choir Conductor, Schermerhorn Symphony Center, Nashville, TN

Oct 2023

Pianist, Concert tour in Italy with Houston First Baptist

Jun 2022

Solo Recording Artist, Recorded Three Solo Piano Projects (most recent: Hymn Sing Project)

2020

Keyboardist, Musical Director, Organizer, Mayor’s Prayer Breakfast

May 2022, May 2023, May 2024

- Selected to organize a collective group of area musicians for the National Day of Prayer