



HOW TO WRITE A
SONG FROM THE PSALMS

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GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Stay true to the text

You are responsible for how you communicate the text.
Have a theologian revise your lyrics.

2. Be a Student of Scripture

Know the history of the Bible and the context of the texts that you pick. Know which versions are closer to the original Hebrew or Greek text.

3. Use multiple translations & concordances

This will give you varied perspectives and will become a database for words and phrases.

4. Psalm selection

Select a Psalm that engages your heart.
Pay attention to your emotions.

MUSIC PRINCIPLES

1. Have a plan

Have a plan for your song structure. You may not keep it by the end, but you want to start with a clear idea in mind. I usually aim to write a couple of verses, a chorus, and a bridge.

2. Intended Audience

In this case, we're not just talking about who will listen to this song, but also about who will be singing it. Will this be congregational or soloistic in nature?

3. Capture Inspiration

Have a place where you can write your lyrics on and record music ideas: journal text app or software like word, pages, or google docs. I love using the Illuminated Scripture Journal! I record ideas on my phone.

4. Permission to "fail"

This is a learning experience! You get better the more you do it!





STORYTELLING

1. Emotional Progression

A story always has an emotional progression, often from tension to resolution.

2. Perspective

Who is speaking? To whom?

3. Time Travel

A story always happens in a timeline. Is the story happening in the past, present, or future? Pay attention to the tense of each section of your song.

4. Visualization

Use this tool to find new ways to connect emotionally to the Psalm and to relate it to your own experience. This will generate lyric ideas!

LYRIC ORGANIZATION

1. Psalm Triage

Group the passages you most identify with into the 3 groups discussed before.

2. Congruency & Clarity

Clarify the feeling and the message you want to convey, so that you select only the relevant lyric material.

3. Paraphrase

As you organize the lyric content you'll use, feel free to paraphrase, writing sentences with your own words. Make sure to not change the meaning!





PSALM 40 - LYRIC ORGANIZATION

Past: darkness to light (my situation)

I waited for You patiently

You heard my cry

When I hit rock bottom,

You lifted me up

When darkness surrounded me,

You rescued me

You set my feet upon a rock

He put a new song in my lips/praise

Present: trust (love & faithfulness)

I can trust Him

It's worth to keep His statutes

We can't put our trust on pride/arrogant people or lies

Blessed is the one who puts His trust in the Lord

You never withhold your mercies from me

Don't withhold Your mercies from me.

Your love and faithfulness always protect me

My iniquities have overtaken me and I cannot see

My heart fails me

I am poor and needy but God takes notice of me

Rich words

faithfulness, salvation, my help, Deliverer, rescue, tenderness, lovingkindness, mercy, truth, grace, goodness, mercy

Present: offerings, open heart

You're not interested in sacrifices and offerings

You want an open mind, open heart to do His will, a ear who will listen

I delight to do Your will

Your law is within my heart

I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart

Your will is my joy

Present: who I've learned God is

Your wonders are too great to count

Your thoughts toward me cannot be counted

they are more than can be told!

Too much to tell. Many are the things You've planned for us

Many, O Lord my God, are Your wonderful works

Which You have done;

And Your thoughts toward us

Cannot be recounted to You in order;

If I would declare and speak of them,

They are more than can be numbered.





SONG LYRIC ANALYSIS

Verse 1: surrounded by darkness

I waited for You patiently
When there was no floor for my feet
When all I could see was the darkness surrounding my heart



Past Tense.
Description of the problem/where I was.

Verse 2: turning point

You turned unto me, heard my cry
You lifted me out of the grime
You planted my feet on the rock of your unfailing love



Past Tense.
How the problem began to be solved. You heard my cry.

Chorus

Goodness and mercy restore my soul
Your lovingkindness makes my heart whole
When I don't know where to go
I know Your love and faithfulness protect me



Present Tense.
How I feel now.
Even when things go wrong, I know I can count on You.

You write a new song deep in my soul
Your tender mercies You never withhold
When my heart fails I won't fear
'Cause You're holding me near to Your heart

Verse 3

Your wonders are too great to count
Your thoughts for me I can't recount
If words could contain them my life would become an unending song



Present Tense.
Looking to God rather than to problems.





FINAL LYRIC STRUCTURE

V1 - V2 - CH - V3 - CH - END TAG

Verse 1

I waited for You patiently
when there was no floor for my feet
when all I could see was the darkness surrounding my heart

Verse 2

You turned unto me, heard my cry
You lifted me out of the grime
You planted my feet on the rock of your unfailing love

Chorus

Goodness and mercy restore my soul
Your lovingkindness makes my heart whole
When I don't know where to go
I know Your love and faithfulness protect me

You write a new song deep in my soul
Your tender mercies You never withhold
When my heart fails I won't fear
'Cause You're holding me near to Your heart

Verse 3

Your wonders are too great to count
Your thoughts for me I can't recount
If words could contain them my life would become an unending song

Chorus

Goodness and mercy restore my soul
Your lovingkindness makes my heart whole
When I don't know where to go
I know Your love and faithfulness protect me

You write a new song deep in my soul
Your tender mercies You never withhold
When my heart fails I won't fear
'Cause You're holding me near to Your heart

Ending Tag

When my heart fails I won't fear
'Cause You're holding me near to Your heart





WRITING THE MUSIC

IMPROVISATION IS YOUR FRIEND

1. Establish key, tempo, groove, chord progression

This will set the tone for the improvisation process!

2. "Melody is king"

Use color notes, pentatonic scale, rests. Experiment starting your melody on different notes of the scale.

3. Phrase Structure

Start with 4-bar phrases. If your song is congregational, you'll likely always write this way. to keep

4. Rhythm

Explore movement, contrast, and silence!

5. On, before, after Downbeat

Experiment starting your melodies on, before, or after the downbeat. New ideas will flow when you try this!

6. Repetition

Use repetition to create familiarity for the listener. Repetition can be a powerful tool when used with purpose.

7. Create hooks

Hooks also maintain the listener engaged in the music. Click below to understand the types of hooks there are, as well as the many ways you can use hooks in your songs. Download the PDF with all of that info!

[3 Types of Hooks](#)

[Download PDF](#)





SETTING LYRICS TO MUSIC

1. Storytelling

When setting the lyrics to melody, take into consideration the progression of the story.

2. Syllables – Natural Stress

Always remember that the natural stress of the syllables need to fall with the natural stress of the beat.

3. Decipher the Rhythm of Words/Sentences

This will help you with the previous step, but will also help generate new melodic ideas. Explore changing the emphasis of the overall "arch" of the sentence. Set a beat and speak the rhythms to find out what is most appealing.

4. Word Painting

Use chord progression to "paint" the meaning of the lyrics. This will also help create congruence between the emotions, lyrics, and melody choices.

5. "Singability" of Words

Some words are more "melodious" than others. Some are easier to sing, others can create tongue twisters.

Be aware of the sounds you naturally want to produce when you're improvising without words and try to find words that match that sound.





THE CHORUS

EMOTIONAL PEAK OF A SONG

The chorus conveys the overarching idea of the song, its main point. It's also where the emotional energy of the song reaches its peak.

1. Contrast

Differentiate a verse from a chorus by using contrast. Experiment creating contrast through the use of range, rhythms (fast-moving v. slow), rests.

2. Simplicity

Keeping it simple will help carry the message across. Simple rhythms and repetition help create simplicity.

3. Emotional Peak

Be sure to create the highest emotional peak during the chorus. This can be done in multiple ways, but using range and rhythm are among the most effective.

4. Hooks

Look for places in the song where you can create hooks. You can always start writing a song from a hook. But when you don't, be sure to craft a hook that will help your listener remember and engage with the song.

Click below to learn how to create hooks from scratch.

[Hook Generator](#)



WHAT'S NEXT?

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QUESTIONS?

I hope to continue to bring valuable content to you. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact me at

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Thanks for watching!

Happy writing! :)

