

# The Proverbs

## 27:17 Song Critique

From the book: *How to Be a Worship Songwriter* by Steve Cass  
<https://songs4god.net/how-to-be-a-worship-songwriter/>

### Worship Song Analysis Form

Substance – Structure – Melody – Prosody – Viability

*As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another*

- Proverbs 27:17

**Use this form to self-evaluate**

**Use this form to evaluate for others**

**Use this form to craft your song**

If you're giving answers for another writer's song, remember the more specific you are, the greater help you'll be to the writer for the revision process.

## Substance

### **Intended Use**

What is the intended use/audience (congregational singing, large or small group gathering, recording, coffee house, club, personal praise and worship, etc.)?

If corporate worship, how and when could it be used during a worship gathering (Call To Worship, Communion Song, etc.)?

### **The Power of One Idea**

What is the song about? Does it revolve around a central idea or event? Is it implied or stated?

Is the subject unclear or obscure? Do the lyrics serve this central theme or are they scattered?

**No Story, No Song (not every song is a story song, but every song is about a story)**

Do the lyrics tell a story?

Is the lyric and hook one central idea?

Does each line pass the, "so what?" test (does each line point to the hook or the main idea)?

Do you get the feeling that the writer is telling you a story, or is the song just making statements?

Does the song portray accurate scriptural truth?

What is the one central emotion, or central set of emotions?

## Structure

### **Song Form**

What is the form or structure of the piece: verse/chorus/verse, AAA or AABA?

Does it have a bridge, a pre-chorus, etc.?

Does the form suit the piece?

In a verse/chorus format, is the chorus the logical conclusion to the verses?

Does the bridge (if existing) add a new dimension to the story?

## **A Strong Start**

Are key questions answered so that people know what's going on (the schema: who, what, when, where, why)?

Is there a clear schema unfolding, or are there points of confusion?

Is there a strong or interesting first line?

Would a later part of the song (perhaps the second verse) make for a better opening?

## **Rhyme**

Is the rhyme scheme consistent?

Are there tricky or unnatural rhymes?

Do the rhymes serve and enhance the story, or has the story been sacrificed for the sake of rhyme?

Do any of the rhymes distract you from the message?

Are there any "Your father he is" sentences constructed for the sake of rhyme?

## **Poetic Devices**

Do you use vivid, concrete images?

Do the metaphors and similes serve the theme?

Are there scriptural allusions, quotes, or paraphrases?

Does the writer make use of sound repetition to good effect, or are they distracting?

- (a) Assonance (repetition of vowel sounds)?
- (b) Consonance (repetition of consonant sounds)?
- (c) Alliteration (repetition of the initial consonant sound)?
- (d) Are key words or phrases repeated?

Are strong and direct nouns and verbs allowed to carry the lyrics (does the subject of each line strongly relate to the story or the hook)?

Are there clichés or trite statements or comparisons? It might be ok if the writer is playing off of them to make a fresh statement from an old one. (The two are very similar. Trite: lacking freshness because of overuse. Cliché: trite and stereotypical statement that's lost its impact due to overuse.)

Are there trendy, but ultimately dated, slang expressions?

### **Syntax**

Is the diction consistent? Are verb tenses consistent? Pronouns correct? Any word choices that distract you from the message?

Is it clear who's speaking (is the writer speaking to God or to someone else)?

Is it always clear who's expressing the thought or action?

### **A Memorable Title**

Is the title a summary of the song?

Would listeners know what the title was after one hearing?

Is the title the same as the hook? If not, why?

Is the delivery of the title/hook saved so it's a part of the payoff?

### **Building to a Payoff**

Does the plot develop with each verse, or the same idea presented over and over?

Does the story/plot progress logically?

Are any of the lyric lines "filler"? Do they seem to exist only for the sake of rhyme or maintaining form?

Is the chorus the logical conclusion to the verses?

If it's a AAA or AABA form, does the first or last line of the stanza provide a logical conclusion?

If there's a bridge, does it add a new dimension or a new viewpoint lyrically?

Are the chorus lyrics a great summary of the song?

Does the plot progress to a satisfying conclusion?

Does every line point to the hook?

### **Word Economy**

Are there clutter words that could be removed (at, the, sort of, very, somewhat, etc.)?

Could the song benefit from reducing unwanted words?

Could the writer pack a punch with fewer words?

## **Melody**

### **Crafting Memorable Melodies**

Is it singable by the untrained masses?

Is there too much variety of melody for congregants to remember?

Does the melody provide a strong hook?

Is it memorable and “catchy,” yet musically interesting?

Give comment on the following aspects of the melody:

- The range – the note range and "singability."
- The repetition – how certain elements repeat
- The rhythm – the prosody with the spoken cadence of the lyric. Also, does the underlying beat of the music complement or compete?
- The shape – the visual structure

Draw a dot for each note of the melody. Don't worry about being super accurate. The idea is to create a basic shape after you connect the dots with a line. Below are some blanks for you to use, plus an example. Check out the *Student of Melodies* section of *How to Be a Worship Songwriter* on page 44 to see some ideas.

Re	Song Name	Verse
Do		
Ti		
La		
So		
Fa		
Mi		
Re		
Do		
Ti		

Re	Song Name	Chorus
Do		
Ti		
La		
So		
Fa		
Mi		
Re		
Do		
Ti		

Re	Song Name	Bridge
Do		
Ti		
La		
So		
Fa		
Mi		
Re		
Do		
Ti		





Do the lyrics and melody belong together (ex. Happy lyrics, happy melody)?

Is the lyric conversational? Is the emphasis on the right syllable when singing?

Are there sustained notes on unimportant words? Unpleasant vowel/consonant sounds?

If they are open vowels on sustained notes, are they pleasant to hear and sing? Or are they a distraction?

Do you feel that the words used convey the intended emotion?

Could a singing congregation breathe and phrase correctly (is it "singable")?

Are there any tongue twisters (ex. she sells sea shells by the sea shore)?

How is the harmonization? Do the melody and the harmonies (chords) work well together?

Does the melody soar when the lyric soars emotionally?

*Manage this suite of tasks – how the language affects the emotion, how the emotion affects the music, how the music affects the message – throughout the framework of your song.*

# Viability

Can the chorus stand alone? Does it feel like "home"? Does all of the lyric and music point toward the chorus?

Does the song end well, or does it seem abrupt, forced, or too long?

Is there a better way to end the piece?

Can the song be tightened in any way?

Could any parts of the song be developed more?

Does the rhythm/melody/chord pattern change from verse to chorus to bridge?

Which lines, if any could be cut?

Which ideas or images need expansion?

What alternate chords could be used?

Would you characterize the song as congregational? Please comment:

Does the overall song provide memorable musical, melodic, and lyrical hooks? Please comment:

Do the lyrics speak of our higher calling to seek the gospel? And by that, I mean, the gospel story itself AND/OR how biblical truths impact our life today?

Are the lyrics from the heart?

## **Commercial Viability and Overall Impact**

Not all songs need to be prepared for commercial radio. And not every congregational song should go to radio. But this list is a proven barometer for how songs are accepted by the untrained masses. Generally, assess the song in front of you in the light of acceptability of people at your church:

Is the length of the song appropriate for commercial radio (3-4 minutes)? Is the song lyrically simple, or are there too many words? Commercial radio will never play a 'wordy' song. You may never find an artist that will be interested in recording your song if there are too many words.

The song must be easy to sing.

- 1) A Short Intro (8-12 seconds is good)
- 2) Total song length for upbeat songs: try not to exceed 3-3.5 minutes. For slow/ballad type songs: try not to exceed 4 minutes
- 3) Strong hook. This should be in every song regardless of the song form.
- 4) Great chorus. The chorus should stand alone. Someone should be able to look at the chorus alone and know exactly what the song is about.
- 5) Short bridge. When going for commercially viable/radio ready, it's good to keep the bridge about half the length of the verse.
- 6) Stay on topic. Stay focused on each line and make sure everything points to the hook.
- 7) Get to the chorus in less than a minute. In fact, try to make it in 40 seconds or so for an upbeat song if possible.