

CCLI 2015 Top 100 Songs for United Methodist Congregations

CCLI Top 100 Vetting Team

Chuck Bell, Taylor Burton-Edwards, Kim Chapman, Constance Cherry, Nelson Cowan, Jackson Henry, Swee Hong Lim, Robert McMichael, Janice McNair, and Lester Ruth

One of the most significant indicators of the use of newer music in Christian congregations in The United States is the CCLI Top 100 list. CCLI is the nation's leading provider of licensing services for churches that reproduce songs in print or on screen for congregational singing.

As a list, the CCLI Top 100 only indicates what copyrighted songs congregations subscribing to the CCLI license are using the most. The list provides no information about the quality of the songs, either theologically, musically, or in terms of their use of language for humanity and God.

The majority of the contemporary/modern worship corpus reflected in the CCLI Top 100 list is generated by artists whose theological traditions are not generally Wesleyan-Arminian. Most could be described as charismatic, Pentecostal, Calvinist, or neo-Calvinist. These traditions have not fully shared and sometimes have taken positions opposite to our core commitments as United Methodists. These commitments include:

- ◆ an understanding of salvation in which ongoing sanctification and making use of the means of grace are seen as crucial
- ◆ a practice of corporate worship and discipleship in which sacraments are central
- ◆ an attentiveness to doctrinal and biblical accuracy in lyrical form
- ◆ the importance of *congregational* singing, and
- ◆ the use of language for God that is expansive, inclusive, non-patriarchal and that consistently respects persons of all cultures, ethnicities, and physical and mental abilities.

We have sought to be generous in vetting this collection of songs to affirm those we believe we **can** sing as United Methodists and that can be good for us to sing. We have used criteria of adherence to Wesleyan theology, appropriate use of language for God and humanity, and singability.

Here we present two lists of songs, all of which we commend for United Methodist congregations to consider for use in worship. The **Green List** includes those that generally scored 3.5 or higher on a five point scale across our criteria and that we have agreed present few if any obstacles for our congregations to sing with confidence. The **Yellow List** includes songs that have one or more significant issues we believe may require some conversation between musicians and pastors about whether or how to include them in worship, but are generally sound. The italicized items at the bottom of this list may require additional attention, either because they include language that could be understood as racist, or overuse exclusively male images of God, or could be interpreted as theologically problematic. We still commend them, but we especially encourage further conversation to occur around how these might be performed. Songs that appear in the 2015 CCLI Top 100 but not on either of these lists we have chosen not to commend. All of our scoring and comments on all 100 songs will be published later this spring on the Discipleship Ministries website.

The corpus of hymns and worship songs keeps expanding. We hope our work to generate these lists and the fuller detail that will appear on our website will be a useful toolset that helps you, our pastors, musicians and worship planners and leaders, discover and evaluate and help your congregations sing old and new songs that are both true to our United Methodist commitments and most appropriate for your particular contexts.

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2015 CCLI Rankings appear in parentheses.

Green List (No or Minor Reservations)

The Wonderful Cross (57)
Because He Lives (58)
Jesus Messiah (22)
Great Is Thy Faithfulness (51)
Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone) (13)
Christ Is Risen (59)
10,000 Reasons (1)
Blessed Be Your Name (14)
Everlasting God (15)
Never Once (80)
Our God Saves (99)
Relentless (91)
You Never Let Go (48)
Cornerstone (6)
You Are My All in All (69)
You are Good (Houghton) (77)
How Great Thou Art (21)
One Thing Remains (Your Love Never Fails) (7)
Here I Am to Worship (17)
Your Grace Is Enough (18)
Better Is One Day (85)
Before the Throne of God Above (94)
Glory to God Forever (42)
Lord, I Lift Your Name on High (50)
We Believe (49)
Open the Eyes of My Heart (33)
Oceans (Where Feet May Fall) (3)
Shout to the Lord (41)
You Are My King (Amazing Love) (34)
Today Is the Day (78)
Set a Fire (75)

Yellow List (Some Reservations)

I Will Rise (97)
Forever (30)
Breathe (87)
Hosanna (27)
At Your Name (66)
We Fall Down (70)
God of Wonders (64)
Forever (We Sing Hallelujah) (24)
How Great Is Our God (4)
Hosanna (Praise Is Rising) (16)
Mighty to Save (9)
Your Name (54)
Lord I Need You (8)
Stronger (43)
Man of Sorrows (53)
Alive (28)
Desert Song (93)
You Are Good (Riddle) (81)
I Give You My Heart (86)
Indescribable (84)
How Deep the Father's Love for Us (26)
Build Your Kingdom Here (47)
Victory in Jesus (72)
This Is Amazing Grace (2)
Your Love Never Fails (McClarney) (32)
Love Came Down (100)
Revelation Song (12)

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Comments on Cautions for Yellow List

1. I Will Rise—Theology: Concerns raised about first verse, that the assurance that “I will rise” seems to be understood as based on the “peace I’ve come to know,” with no mention of sanctification, and an unclear connection to discipleship.

2. Forever—Singability and Language: Verse low and complex, chorus high, limits congregational participation. Many “his” references to God.

3. Breathe— Language: Unclear who “You” is. “I’m desperate for you” may be understood as an indication of a poor relationship, and more indicative of sexual than spiritual intimacy.

4. Hosanna—Language: Concerns raised about “King of Glory” language in the way it is used—not as in the Psalms, but as a replacement for “Son of Man” in Daniel/Revelation/synoptics. This kind of usage sounds biblical, but isn’t. Several suggested the Hosanna section could be extracted and used as a Sanctus for communion if the arrangement were acoustic and toned down enough. The song as a whole, as typically performed, may overwhelm the celebration of the sacrament.

5. At Your Name-- Language: Using the name Yahweh for God is historically and inter-religiously problematic. The historic name for God (YHWH in Hebrew) is never pronounced. What makes this more problematic is this song only praises the power of YHWH, while the most common phrase used in association with the divine name in the Old Testament is “full of compassion, abounding in steadfast love.”

6. We Fall Down-- Theology, Language and Music: Trinitarian collapse: The term Holy is ascribed to “the One who sits upon the throne” (the Father) in Revelation, or the “Lord God” in the Old Testament and not to Jesus (Lamb). Yet this song says “we fall down... at the feet of Jesus.” Again the language sounds biblical but isn’t. Musically, there is an apparent misfit between the text (“we fall down”) and the tune (a rising motif).

7. God of Wonders—Language: In later verses (not included in Worship & Song), 3rd person pronoun references are exclusively masculine. Easy to address by not including or singing these verses, but enough of an issue in the full score from Song Select to raise a caution.

8. Forever We Sing Hallelujah—Singability and Theology: The vocal range of this song may be too large for most congregations. The verses are pitched fairly low and the chorus remains very high for extended periods of time. Verse 2 could be read to underwrite salvation without sanctification.

9. How Great Is Our God-- Theology and Language: While, unlike many modern worship songs, this one is explicitly Trinitarian, it only celebrates God’s power and never mentions God’s love, which is at the center in Wesleyan theology. The reference to “darkness” in verse one, as opposed to light, could be understood to be racist. All pronouns for God are masculine.

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10. Hosanna (Praise Is Rising)—Theology and Language: It is unclear to whom the song is addressed until the end of the chorus. The line “have your way among us” could in some settings be misconstrued in a sexual sense inappropriate for corporate worship.

11. Mighty to Save—Theology and Language: The phrase “Jesus conquered the grave” is not biblical. It leaves out the work of the Father to raise him. The New Testament refers to Jesus as King rarely, but this song does so with great frequency. This is another song that sounds biblical in its use of language, but is not.

12. Your Name—Theology and Language: The Name we are praising is actually never named until verse 2. This makes the initial intention of the address unclear. The song is also unclear how salvation is in “your Name.”

13. Lord I Need You—Singability: This is a strong song textually, but the musical setting presents problems for congregational singing. Octave leaps are almost never a good idea for generating power in a song as they tend to cut out half of the singers (male or female). The range of the song, with the octave leaps, is too wide to transpose down and still keep the whole song singable by all. We suggest singing the chorus without the octave leap, perhaps having a female voice double it as written while a lower lead voice stays in the same octave as what came before.

14. Stronger—Theology: The frequent repetition of “sin is broken” *could* be taken as a repudiation of our need for sanctification and growth in holiness.

15. Man of Sorrows—Theology: Bridge seems to emphasize justification as the endpoint of salvation. In our theology, sin still has a strong hold on us that it takes sanctifying grace to continue to unloose. Consider performing without the bridge or making bridge instrumental to eliminate this problem.

16. Alive—Theology and Accompaniment: Inconsistent “you” references. Unclear lyrics seeming to be more driven by rhythm and tune than theology. Probably requires a full, skilled band to perform well.

17. Desert Song—Language: Generally Wesleyan in thought with a Pentecostal twist. Objections may be raised in some contexts to use of battle/conqueror language.

18. You Are Good (Riddle)—Theology: May be seen as too individualistic. If you delete “to me” in the *performance* of the song (you may not legally change printed/projected lyrics without permission of the copyright holders) the song works well as a generic hymn of praise. Riddle himself deletes “to me” in his more recent performances of this song.

19. I Give You My Heart: Theology: Some may find this song focuses too much on human activity and human initiative in salvation. It’s a bit unclear who “you” is in the song, and so this could be read as a collapse of the Son and the Spirit. Could be useful as a song of commitment or a prayer song.

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20. Indescribable— Theology: One word is theologically problematic— “unchangeable.” While God’s *faithfulness* is *unchanging*, and Hebrews 13:8 affirms “Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever”, the Bible overall does not portray God as *unchangeable*.

Songs Requiring Additional Caution

21. *How Deep the Father’s Love for Us*—Language and Theology: All language for God is masculine, and “bring many sons to glory” (Hebrews 2:10) in verse 1 requires serious attention. Could be altered in performance (but not legally in print or on screen without permission from the copyright holders) to something like “bring sinful ones to glory.” Atonement imagery of the Father turning his face away derives from Calvinism not the Bible and may be seen as problematic.

22. *Build Your Kingdom Here*—Language: The line “Let the darkness fear” in the chorus could be read as having racist overtones. Could be modified in performance (but not legally in print or on screen without permission from the copyright holders) to something like “Let all evil fear” and the issue would be resolved.

23. *Victory in Jesus*—Theology: The eschatology in this song seems to focus primarily on going “up there” to heaven when we die rather than resurrection and new creation. There is no mention of sanctification. Some may find the language of “cleansing flood” related to “blood” problematic.

24. *This Is Amazing Grace*—Theology and Language: The references to God seem to collapse the Father onto the Son, generating a sort of unitarianism of the second person of the Trinity. The whole song, and the bridge in particular, emphasizes “king” language, which is a fairly rare way of referring to Jesus in the New Testament. The Bible never refers to Jesus as “the king of glory.”

25. *Your Love Never Fails (McClarney)*— Theology: The song never specifies who “You” is. This raises concerns about collapsing the persons of the Trinity. Odd use of biblical language in asserting the unspecified You makes “all things work together for *my* good” in the bridge (reference to Romans 8:28).

26. *Love Came Down*-- Theology and Singability: The song generally keeps the Father (God) and Son distinct until the bridge, then seems to collapse all onto Jesus. If bridge is simply deleted the theological problem vanishes and the song has a strong Wesleyan character, focusing as it does on God’s love. The music of the verses is choppy, making it a bit challenging for congregations to sing.

27. *Revelation Song*— Theology, Language and Singability: Possible Trinitarian collapse. The scriptures ascribe the term “worthy” to the Lamb (Jesus) but ascribe “holy” only to either the Trinity as a whole, to the “One who sits upon the throne” (Father, or Lord God). Since verse 3 is addressed to Jesus, singing the chorus after it seems to heighten the confusion of persons. King of kings language is overused relative to biblical usage. Syncopation and rhythms may be challenging for some congregations to sing.