

I would like to say first of all that it is a real privilege to stand before you this morning because I know that you are a very talented and hard working group. I appreciate Ed White for asking me. A few years ago I also attended Westwood Junior High. I was also privileged in having as a teacher Mr. Baird in music.

As I began to think about a lesson that might have appeal and application to this group, the idea hit me that as a group you were performers, and that makes you very special, and that the idea of performance might have some parallel in thinking about our relationship to God. And so for just a few minutes this morning, for I know that all of you are very excited about your trip, I want to explore that theme with you.

One of the first real performers that I find in the Bible was David. Let me read to you from 1 Sam. 16.14-19, and 23... David was evidently good enough at his playing to attract some national attention. We know that he wrote many of the Psalms, which were to be sung to music, and he organized the 'Levite' singers, you might say, for leading in the temple worship. But David did more than perform on his lyre. David might have had a business card which read: David, Son of Jesse: musician, poet, shepherd, giant killer' Saul decides to give him a try and one of the first things he does is kill the giant Goliath that has been making such fun of their God and their nation. As I said, David performed not only musically, but in a life of faith in God as well. These should go together.

Let's think for a minute how you prepare for a performance. There are seven things that I thought of that seemed prominent when I was in band. I was in the band throughout Junior high and High school, and I hope that you will pardon my examples which may relate more to playing an instrument than singing. But I hope that you will be able to see my point.

The first thing that we needed was knowledge. We studied the notes and their relationship to the scale. We studied the length of notes, the tempo, returns, Codas, and a whole new language to help us interpret the written music correctly. Knowledge is so important; it is a fundamental. I think perhaps that I was the first French Horn player that Mr. Baird had in school, and after I practiced at home a few weeks, I came to him somewhat despairingly because I just could not reach the high notes that were supposed to be pretty simple. Well, it turned out that I was trying to play everything an octave too high. The proper knowledge of the concert pitch for the instrument was critical to me.

The second thing that we needed was practice. Playing or singing something over and over and over again. I know that I must have surely driven my parents crazy as the same wrong phrase penetrated the cotton in their ears again and again. Trying to play the piano was the worst in that regard. My fingers had minds of their own. I could have used it more in my head. But practice is so necessary.

The third thing that we needed was concentration. You have to be aware of what is going on and keep up, or you do not know where your entrance is. Some of that music in beginning band had long rest periods, you know, where they just put a bar in the music and put a 40 over it so that you will rest forty measures. Ah, there were many times where I just moved the valves without playing, hoping to fake everyone out until I recognized where I was in the music. I needed to concentrate on the music.

Then fourthly, I think that discipline is needed. This, to me, is really a desire to get it right, a forcefulness about yourself that keeps you working until it is right. Sometimes this must be applied from the outside, as you may have experienced. But it must come from within if you really want to do a great job. We need discipline to master the music.

Fifthly we must love music, we must 'feel' what is going on. This was one of the things I really loved about the band, was that I could put my heart in it and feel good about it. There were times that I got chill bumps simply because I was responsive to the music. Now you may not think that very macho, but I think we all need to be more sensitive.

Sixthly we needed to learn that there were different voices, different parts, and different instruments, and that the combination of them all working together was what made the music truly wonderful. Sure, there are the first chair players or soloists that get some of the glory, but without the background they would not sound nearly as good. We had to learn to work together. We had to blend in and sound as one. Imagine my embarrassment in high school as we were practicing

our half-time routine, and the band director stopped the whole thing and yelled from the stands, 'Heard, quit playing so loud!' I am afraid where I lacked in talent I made up for in lung power. I needed to blend in more with the group.

And seventhly, we needed to follow the leader. There must be someone directing this group effort, and he must be watched constantly, for he is delivering the tempo and other guidance. Think how a song would sound if everyone chose a different tempo. I hate to tell another embarrassment on myself, but that is the way I learned some of these lessons. We used to have the horn section right in front of the director's podium when I was in high school. We were playing along one day and the director stopped us and said, 'Heard, your foot is too fast!'. It seemed I was tapping my foot on the podium and he could hear that louder than he could hear my playing. I was rushing the beat, and it was throwing him off by not following.

Well, as I said, we can apply each of these lessons to our relationship with God. We need the same elements to perform in life. We need to think about acting as if we were giving a performance each day to God himself as our audience. We ought to have the same sense of excitement, the same preparation, the same attempt to get things just right. But we ought to have this on all of the time rather than just periodically as we do our music. We must perform even when we don't feel like it, for there are many times in life that we just don't want to follow, but we must because of a commitment that we made. You may have had to sing when you really didn't feel like it. A life of faith is much the same.

Let's think about the seven points for just a minute. We must have knowledge, and that means that we must study our Bible diligently. We won't know it all at once; there is plenty to learn from it after years and years of study, just like the study of music. But without Bible knowledge we cannot know God. We must practice the godly life, bringing our body into subjection as Paul says. Everything becomes easier for us as we practice, and, though practice may not make us spiritually perfect, it keeps us headed in the right direction. Then we must concentrate on our life; we must examine it constantly to see if we are on the right path, listen closely to see if we are playing the right tune. Then we must have discipline so that we will always want to get it right, no matter how many mistakes we make. We must have a love of goodness, so that we get chill bumps when we hear stories of great love and sacrifice. We must particularly feel the story of the Cross and the greatest gift that has ever been made. We must be able to put aside some of our differences so that we can harmonize together, for Christ said that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. We must accept them and agree to work with them. Then last but perhaps most importantly, we must follow our leader. This leader is Christ, for he came to earth to show us the way to the Father, God, and it is only by following him that our greatest dreams can be fulfilled, and our greatest desires be satisfied. And we must love Him with every fiber of our being.

We give our performance every day. I need to mention that we all make mistakes, and that the overlooking of these as we try to walk in the light is what the grace of God is all about. In band we tried so hard, but there were so many cracked notes and reed squeaks that if Mr. Baird had a dollar for every one of them he would be a rich man now. Our preparation is so that we will not make mistakes, but they are inevitable. We must just keep going and do our best.

As we close this morning let us think for just a minute about why we go through all of the preparation. Why do we want to perform? Well, it isn't because we have to, neither band nor chorus is a required subject as far as I know. I think that there are two main reasons why: First because we love music, and the second is because we want to please our audience. If we could just transfer this to our faith then we would be way ahead. We must perform because we love God and his infinite goodness and because we want to please him, not because 'we have to'. We must view service to God as an opportunity, not a requirement. I had two older sisters who were 'encouraged' to take piano lessons. I learned myself because I wanted to. Guess who got to keep the family piano? I did, for I was the one who truly enjoyed playing it. If you live the life of a Christian for the love of the goodness and the Godhead, I can promise you the best life on earth that can possibly be, and an even better one afterwards. Think about these things as we all rejoice in song...