

The Gospel Project & the Children's Ministry



How to respond to hot topics with grace & truth

Updates on Harbor Network

HAPPENINGS

Learn more and sign up for events at graceb3.org/events

GSM FOOD DRIVE

Students in Life Groups will be competing against each other to see who can collect the most items for the North Liberty Community Food Pantry's top ten most needed items list. Students will be bringing in items from Nov 6 until Dec 4.

.....

WOMEN OF GRACE CHRISTMAS GATHERING

Enjoy delicious snacks, fellowship, and be encouraged by short teachings. Dec 6 | 7-9pm

.....

GSM CHRISTMAS PARTY

Students will have a special night to wrap up our 2024 gatherings and celebrate the Christmas season with worship, a gift exchange, snacks and games. Dec 11 | during Refill

.....

FAMILY SIT-TOGETHER DEC 24 & 29

Services on Christmas Eve and Dec 29 are family sit-together. Care provided for children in the Nursery and 2's classroom. All older children attend service with their families. The 5pm Christmas Eve service is family sit-together for all ages.



CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE

1pm // 3pm // 5pm

Invite your friends, neighbors, and family to join us on Christmas Eve for worship and a message of hope from the Bible.

Services will be about an hour and held at: 1pm • 3pm • 5pm

All services are family sit-together. Care provided for children in the Nursery and 2's classroom. All older children attend service with their families. The 5pm service is family sit-together for all ages.

No registration is needed for this free event. Come as you are – family, friends, and community members are welcome!



What do I say when...?

By Student Ministry Director Brian Hagedorn



In our rapidly changing culture, there are seemingly no rules and standards, and yet, simultaneously, there are many rules dictating how we are to think, speak, or act in response to every cultural hot topic. Do you ever feel overwhelmed, unsure of what to say, or even completely clueless? You're not alone!

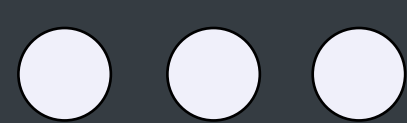
Recently, I read a book called, *"What Do I Say When...? A Parents' Guide to Navigating Cultural Chaos for Children & Teens"* by Andrew and Christian Walker. I want to

highlight it briefly and encourage you to check it out. Andrew and Christian tackle ten topics that have been focal points of controversy and, for many, have felt challenging to navigate at times: abortion, gender, sexuality, and transgenderism, to name a few. Their aim is to **balance truth and love and provide a biblically faithful understanding of each topic in a way that is simple to understand and easy to read** and to be a resource to help parents enter into critical conversations with their children as they seek to disciple them and raise them to know, love, and follow Jesus.

I really enjoyed how they set up each chapter by giving an introduction to the topic, an overview of what the Bible teaches, followed by a memory verse on the topic. The last portion of each chapter is designed to help us as parents navigate the topic at hand at a **biblically faithful, age-appropriate level**. For each topic, Andrew and Christian bullet point some key biblical truths and share some conversation starters for three different levels, each aimed at helping parents interact and talk about these foundational truths at appropriate depth with their children based on age and maturity. They outline the age ranges they had in mind for each level, but ultimately, you, as the parent, are the ones who will know what your children need and are ready for.

Like any book (that isn't the Bible), there are some points or thoughts that I wasn't fully on board with. But, overall, I would highly recommend this book to all parents looking to **engage in conversations with their children on topics that they face every single day to one degree or another.**

The most important thing is that we have these conversations and consistently **provide a safe place for our kids to ask questions and talk about these things openly.** We need to **show them how to seek God's word for wisdom and direction** as we pray and ask for his help to submit to him and walk in obedience to him over our fears, feelings, or cultural movements. 🌿



GROWING THE CHURCH

By Executive Pastor Josh Haveman

GRACE COMMUNITY CHURCH JOINED HARBOR NETWORK IN JANUARY. THIS ASSOCIATION OF CHURCHES IS GATHERED AROUND A COMMON COMMITMENT TO GROWING THE BODY OF CHRIST. HARBOR NETWORK CHURCHES ARE COMMITTED TO CHURCH PLANTING AS AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF CHURCH GROWTH.

As a member of Harbor Network, Grace has **connected with many pastors and church planters** who have worked to start new churches. We also have access to **training resources, conferences for our pastors and leaders, and money to help pay the salaries of church planters.**

In September, four of Grace's pastors met with other local pastors and Harbor Network representatives to develop collaborative church-planting approaches. Harbor knows from experience that many churches that want to plant new congregations are too small to do the work alone. While Grace is not too small, other churches in our area might be. The September meeting **began the process of churches in the greater Iowa City area working together to plant churches throughout Eastern Iowa.**

Then, in October, we sent several staff and lay elders to Harbor Network's bi-annual conference in Louisville, Kentucky. The focus of the conference was to promote the value of godly friendship in the church. Though this may seem like an obvious value that all churches would naturally embrace, Harbor did a great job of teaching and leading participants toward a more nuanced understanding of the importance of healthy friendships within the church. The speakers and sessions pointed out that **a culture of godly friendship is a prerequisite for communities to work well together—including working to plant new churches.**

Harbor Network is not a denomination. It also doesn't hold any authority over our


church, and our participation is completely voluntary. Since our official activities with the network are likely to wax and wane over time, you might not hear about things that are happening in the network frequently, but updates are always available. Part of Pastor Jason Blackley's job is to be the church's official liaison with the network. Feel free to ask him questions about Harbor Network at jasonb@graceb3.org. 🌿



WINTER THRIVE CLASSES

By Spiritual Formation Pastor Dave Kirk

**“If the Spirit of him who
raised Jesus from the
dead dwells in you, he
who raised Christ Jesus
from the dead will also
give life to your mortal
bodies through his Spirit
who dwells in you”
Romans 8:11**



Romans 8:11 speaks to a foundational truth of our relationship with Christ: when we trust Christ as our Savior, he comes and lives in us and we are hidden in him. This is called union with Christ, a union which brings many essential benefits. For one, the Spirit gives us life, not only eternal life but also abundant life *now* in the Spirit, even as we go through trials and struggles. We can walk daily in the Spirit minute to minute and experience the joy, peace, and freedom that comes from him. But how?

What does walking in the Spirit look like? What does it mean for my everyday relationship with Jesus?

Beginning this winter, as we walk through a sermon series on Romans 8 about “Union with Christ,” we will offer simultaneous Thrive classes that will build upon and help to work out the how-tos of walking in the Spirit.

WHAT IS A THRIVE CLASS?

Thrive classes help you grow in your relationship with Christ by teaching you how to apply God's word and connect with others as you walk through the class together. Thrive classes are like a tool shed—each teaches you a skill (or 'tool') to help you grow in your walk with Christ and as a disciple-maker. Thrive classes are short, focused learning opportunities rather than never-ending classes. They are typically ten weeks (though some are shorter) and are offered twice a year, in the fall and winter.

I am excited about the Thrive classes we plan to offer this winter semester, **beginning on Sunday, January 19, and ending on or before March 23.** On behalf of the elders at Grace, I want to encourage and invite you to register for a Thrive class this semester, as there is something for everyone, regardless of age, experience, or where you are in your spiritual journey.

A list of upcoming Thrive classes is below. I look forward to seeing how the Spirit will bring life as you discover and learn how to walk in him this semester. 🌿

**REGISTER FOR A
THRIVE CLASS HERE**

WINTER THRIVE CLASSES

Jan 19 - Mar 23

8:30AM

PRACTICAL DISCIPLE MAKING

Jesus' last words to his closest followers were, *"Go and make disciples."* But how? How do you personally and practically make disciples who make disciples? How do you reach your friends, neighbors, and family with the gospel and help them do the same? Join us to learn principles, practical tools, and practice experiences as you pursue others to multiply your life.

Teachers: Scott Heemstra & Austin Ward

GROWING IN CHRIST

- *“I really want to grow in Christ but I am not sure how.”*
- *“I am a newer Christian so what do I do now?”*

If you find yourself saying either of these two statements to yourself, then this class is definitely for you. We will explore what it means to grow in Christ and help you understand some key things about your union with Christ, your identity in Christ, and living out your faith. This is a must for those who want to grow in Christ.

Teachers: Dave Kirk

10:15AM

VISUAL THEOLOGY GUIDE TO THE BIBLE, PART 2

This class for 7th-12th graders is a wonderful introduction to the Christian life and a helpful guide for understanding and living out your faith. You'll learn how the Bible is put together, why we can trust it, and how to answer common criticisms of the Bible. Each week, we'll have a mix of teaching and table discussion. Even if you didn't attend Part 1, you can still attend this class.

Teachers: Brian Hagedorn & Grace Student Ministry leaders

WALKING WITH GOD THROUGH PAIN AND SUFFERING

Why is there so much pain and suffering in the world? How do we handle it in a way that won't destroy us, but could actually make us stronger and wiser? In this class, we will read and discuss selected portions of Tim Keller's book *Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering*, exploring the philosophical problem of suffering, the Bible's teaching on suffering, and the experience of dealing with suffering in practical terms.

Teachers: Peter Chidister & Jacob Varvel
Cost: \$9 for book

11:30AM

PREMARITAL COUNSELING CLASS

This class is for couples who are preparing for marriage or who never had premarital counseling. We will look at all aspects of God's design for marriage and give biblical evaluation tools to help you determine if you are ready to be married. This is a fun interactive class that will help you evaluate your relationship and help you grow deeper in your walk with Christ and community.

Teachers: Dave Kirk
*Cost: \$10 for the book *Tying the Knot**



family sit-together

dec 24 & dec 29

All services are family sit-together. Care provided for children in the Nursery and 2's classroom. All older children attend service with their families. The 5pm Christmas Eve service is family sit-together for all ages.

Questions?

Contact Natasha Miller, Children's Ministry Lead Coordinator at natasham@graceb3.org

How We Use THE GOSPEL PROJECT IN CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

*By Children's Ministry Lead Coordinator
Natasha Miller*

Have you ever wondered what the kids are learning in Children's Ministry classes? Did you know our faithful volunteers do so much more than babysit? We use a wonderful curriculum created by Lifeway called The Gospel Project. It is a Christ-centered, chronological curriculum that points to the good news of the gospel in every lesson.

Each week, whether we are studying Genesis, Revelation, or any book in between, the lesson makes it clear how Jesus is the center of the story. We love that The Gospel Project is age-aligned, heart-transforming, and theologically rich.

The beauty of using the same curriculum across the age levels is that no matter how old the children are, they have all heard the same lesson on any given Sunday. This provides an easy way for parents to engage their children and have family discussions about what was learned on Sunday. There are several key parts of the curriculum that work together to provide a full picture of the gospel each week.

Key Passage

This is the memory verse for the unit. The various ages do activities in class to learn the verse, and we encourage the children to continue working on memorizing it at home.

Big Picture Question

This question and answer ties together the lessons in the unit and teaches a foundational truth about God. The current big-picture question is “Who is God? God is our Creator and the King of Everything.”

Christ Connection

This ties the lesson of the week to Jesus. For example, when the children learned about Noah, the Christ connection was “God rescued Noah and his family from the flood. The story of Noah points to an even greater rescue. God’s Son, Jesus, came to take the punishment for our sin. By trusting in him, we are saved from the power of sin and death.”

Story Point

The main point of the lesson for that week. This helps the teachers stay focused while preparing during Sunday morning busyness.

Not only are the children learning about Jesus and the storyline of the Bible, but the curriculum encourages the teachers to dive deep into the passage as they prepare for the upcoming lesson. We see the beauty of how God can teach all ages through the same passage of Scripture.

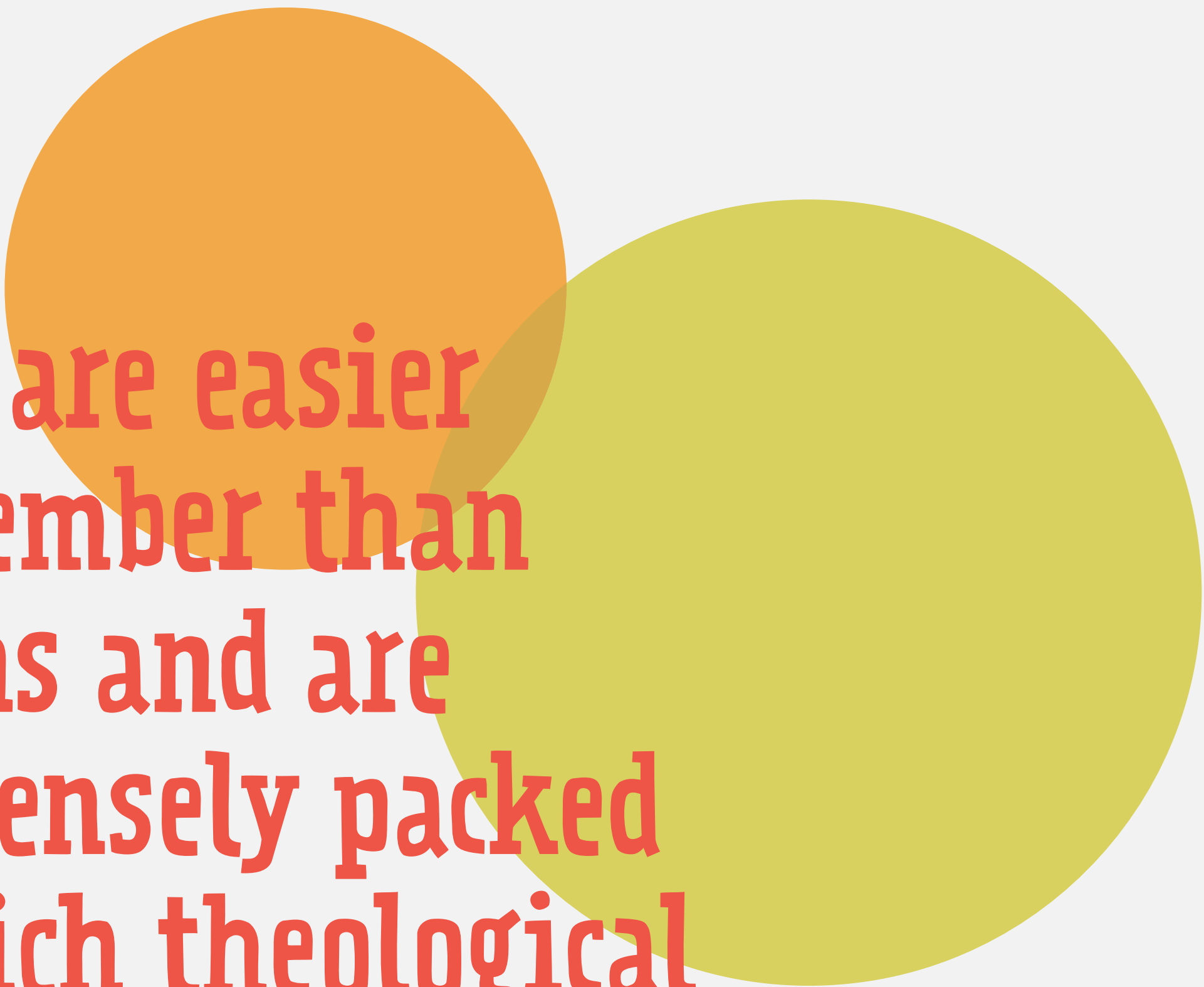
If you have children in the Children’s Ministry classes, ask them about their lesson, their memory verse, or big picture questions. I think you will be surprised by how much they remember. 🌿



What Will We Sing?

By Worship Director Zack Stanton

WHAT WILL WE SING
AS A CHURCH?
WHICH SONGS?
WHAT KINDS OF SONGS?
OBVIOUSLY, WE'RE GOING TO
SING TO GOD AND ABOUT GOD,
BUT WHEN YOU ZOOM IN
TO THE ACTUAL SONGS,
WHAT ARE WE LOOKING FOR?



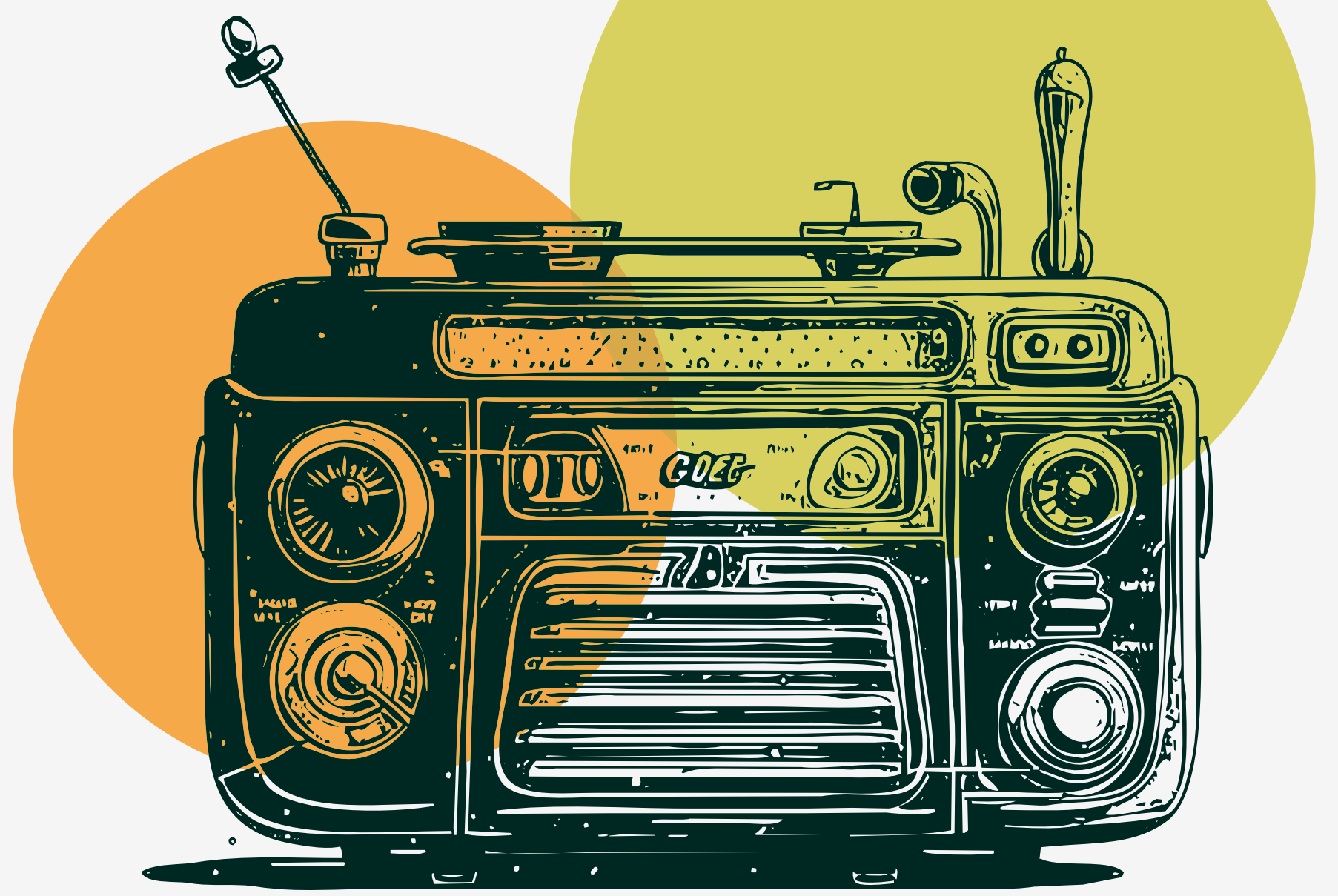
"Songs are easier to remember than sermons and are often densely packed with rich theological truths. This is why they are so important and powerful."

With literally hundreds of thousands of songs to choose from, we have to be selective about what we sing. We learn from the Book of Psalms that there is variety to the songs we sing together in worship, and Colossians 3:16 commands us to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.


If you've attended Grace for even just a few weeks, you've probably noticed that we sing old hymns, new hymns, and "contemporary Christian" songs. You may have noticed that we sing songs of praise, songs of thanksgiving, songs of confession, songs that rehearse the gospel, songs that express the character of God – you get the idea. What is our aim?

First and foremost, in our worship of God, we aim to sing true things. A church's repertoire

expresses its theology. When we offer praise to the Lord or sing about who he is and what he's done, we must make sure that what we sing is true. Songs are easier to remember than sermons and are often densely packed with rich theological truths. This is why they are so important and powerful. God doesn't want us to sing falsehoods, and **we don't want to ingrain falsehoods through memorable melodies or rhyme schemes.**



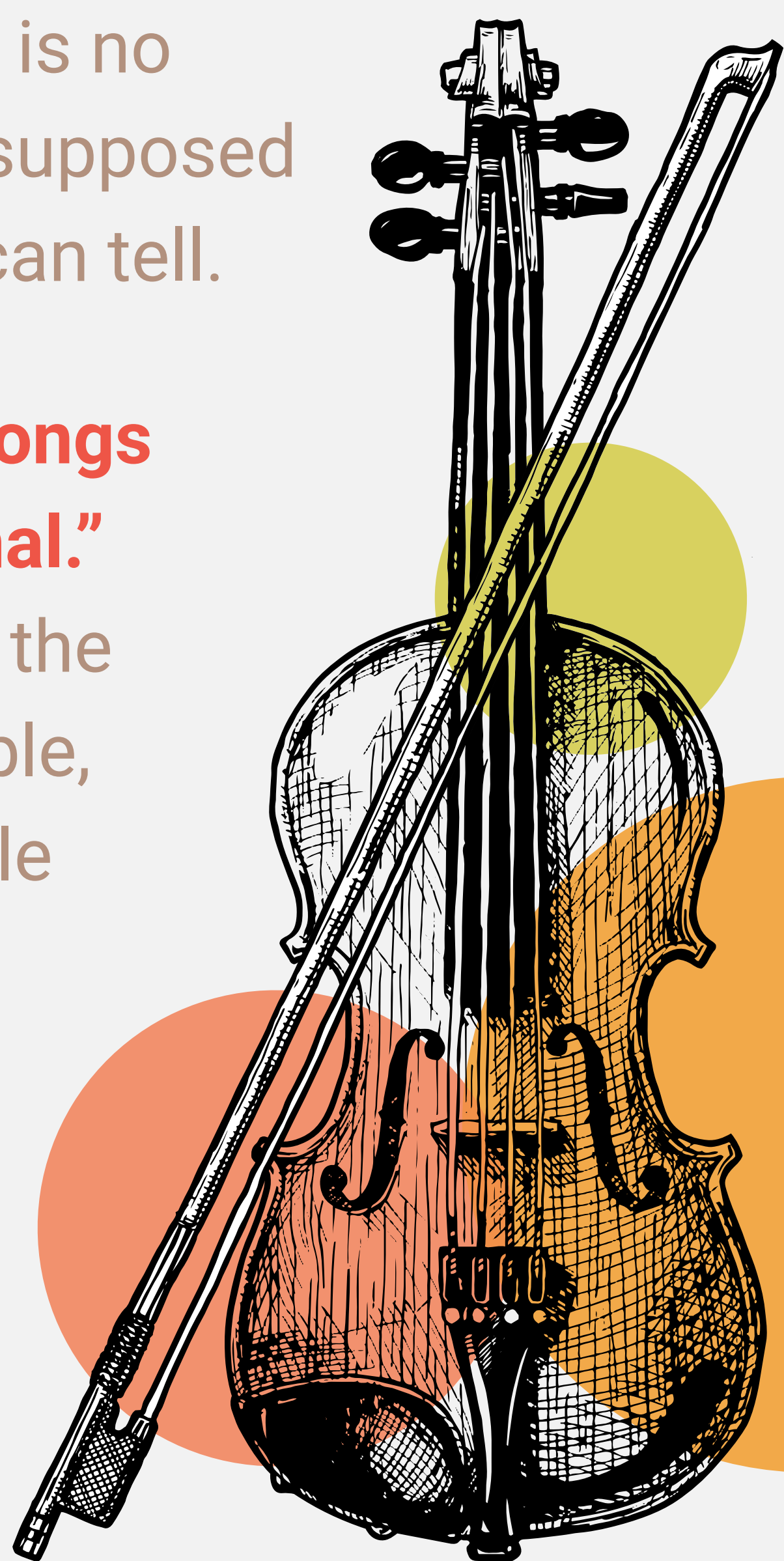
Our second aim is that **our songs be God-centered**, not human-centered. Many new songs skew the other direction with this and focus on “what God will do for me.” Don't get me wrong; it's good to sing about what God has done and is doing! But if we center our worship around what God is doing or will do for us, our worship is focused on us — we are worshiping God for what we will get. While we want to express gratitude and proclaim to others how God's actions affect our lives, we also want to worship God for who he is and what he has already done.



One worship leader shared that their worship team surveyed the types of songs they sang as a church and then noted congregational engagement in connection with those types. They found that when the church was singing with the highest level of engagement, those were Sundays when the songs focused most on God, his glory, and his character. But on Sundays when the singing was lackluster, the songs leaned more toward “what God will do for me.” It’s awe-inspiring to sing of the glory of a transcendent and loving God. Singing about ourselves? Not so much. This isn’t to say we shouldn’t sing about our relationship with God and what he will do in our lives. The Book of Psalms often uses the first-person singular when addressing God — I, me, my. We should sing about our relationship with God, about his work in us, about our response to him. But when we focus too much on ourselves, our worship is no longer doing what it’s supposed to do. And our hearts can tell.

A third aim is to sing **songs that are “congregational.”**

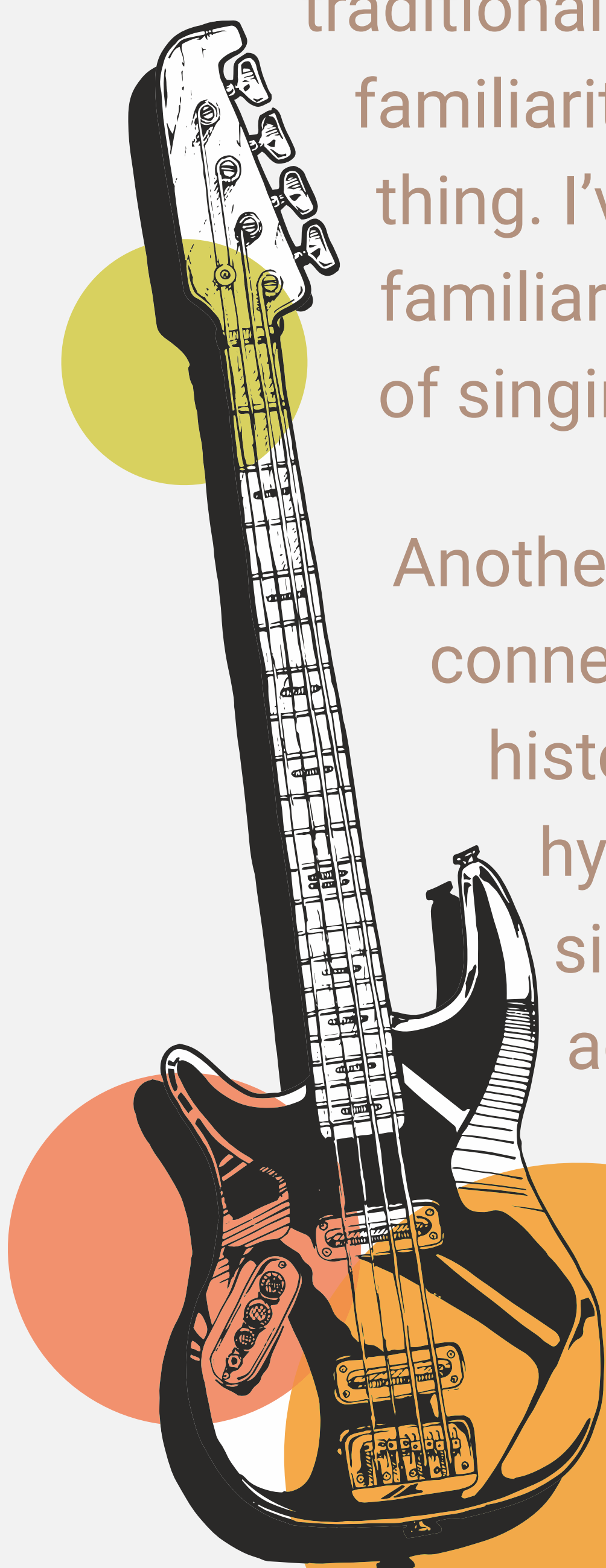
What I mean by that is the melodies are memorable, engaging, and enjoyable to sing. I don’t say “singable” because anything is “singable”



if we like it. Take “The Star-Spangled Banner.” That song is HARD. But because we know it, we can sing it. That said, many songs on the radio are simply not designed to be sung by congregations. The melody is too involved, too generic, too reliant on vocal riffs, or is a “performance.” There is nothing wrong with a song like this if the lyrics are true and encouraging. There are a lot of great Christian songs that I love but are too difficult to sing as a large group. That’s not what those songs are designed for.

We also aim to **sing both old and new songs with a sense of purpose and vision.** We sing old songs for many reasons. They tend to be richer in theology than newer songs (not always, though!). Also, many people who grew up in the church grew up singing traditional songs, and there is a deep familiarity with them. That is a powerful thing. I’ve noticed that when we sing a familiar hymn on Sunday, the volume of singing goes up!

Another reason is that these songs connect us with saints across church history. We sing some of the same hymns that our brothers and sisters did hundreds of years ago. This reminds us that the



church is bigger than our culture, our time in history, and our stylistic preferences. It reminds us that across the last two millennia, Christians have experienced the same struggles and the same joys that we have.

We sing new songs with intentionality as well. All songs were new at one point, and when they were written, they were a product of their own time and culture. While the church transcends culture, church still happens in the context of culture. Though some new songs are good, many writers of Christian songs tend to write quickly and with an eye toward radio play. This comes with a host of problems, which I won't get into. As we vet new songs, we have to make sure they are worth singing. It's not enough for them to be "current." One thing good hymns have taught us is that if a song is going to have any staying power, it needs to have some element of timelessness. New songs are being written today that have a timeless quality, have rich theology, address things that songs of the past haven't, and all the while feel like they are a product of our time and culture. That's hard to do!

Finally, we want to **sing a variety of songs knowing that there is a lot of variety in our congregation** — people are in different places in their walk with the Lord, are going through different things, and have different backgrounds. From another perspective, not everyone loves hymns, and not everyone loves contemporary Christian songs. This is an opportunity for us to remember that what we do as the gathered church isn't about our preferences. If you don't like hymns, remember that when we sing them, many are deeply encouraged by them. The same is true if you don't like contemporary Christian music. This is an opportunity to serve one another. A writer I greatly respect had this to say regarding this issue: "A mature Christian is easily edified." His point was that if we rely on the music we like in order to worship, we're saying the Holy Spirit can only work through the music we prefer. But what matters most is the truth of what we sing. **May we never allow our preferences to dictate our ability to worship with our brothers and sisters. This is an important way for us to practice unity.** Let us love one another by singing together the powerful truths of the gospel, whether that be an old hymn from centuries past or a song that newly captures the beauty of our God. 🌿

