



## Rehearsals

A few years ago I began performing songs twice a month at an open mic night at a local tap-house. The event is run by pros who play a few tunes themselves, run the sound system, offer occasional accompaniment and generally set an upbeat tone for the evening. Occasionally I'll play something I've written, but mostly I'll cover arcane rock songs from the 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s. Normally there are eight or ten amateur (and pro) musicians who do three songs each. If you're thinking karaoke, don't. This is much different. Some even get booked for paying gigs, but others never will. I won't say which category I fall into.

Yet it's also work. A few folks show up and wing it, but I follow a more rigorous way. I plan my playlist a couple of weeks in advance. I record and mix my own bass, drums and backup vocals well ahead of time. And then I rehearse and rehearse and rehearse. I tweak lyrics, keys, chords and rhythms until the product feels presentable. That's *the way* it works.

The more I rehearse to an imaginary audience (and my dog), the less anxious I feel about the actual performance. The reason I might feel anxious (aside from some rudimentary sense of professionalism) is that I don't want to look completely stupid—which ensures that I rehearse even more. But the reality is that even if I think I have it perfect, the final performance will *never be perfect*.

You've heard the old aphorism, *practice makes perfect*? It doesn't. I'll forget a line, botch a chord or have an equipment malfunction. I may have to improvise, or even start the song over again! In any case, the audience is often too busy talking and drinking beer to notice. I could sing complete nonsense and many wouldn't know the difference. I think it's more accurate to say (in my case) *practice makes adequate*—or on a good day, *not bad!*

Even so, all of us find ourselves rehearsing something all the time. If you want to be a lawyer, you'll do mock trials in law school. If you want to be a soldier, you'll endure basic combat training. If you want to be an athlete, you'll condition and compete. If you want to be a chef, you'll labor for years over a hot stove. If you want to be a pilot, you'll spend countless hours in a flight simulator. Name any

profession, and you'll rehearse for years before you are prepared to deal with whatever challenges the world throws at you. Even then, you're still rehearsing. Name any major life event, and you'll find yourself mulling it over ahead of time. That's *the way* it works.

Which brings us to Christianity. Can you rehearse to be a better Christian? Well, not the way you might think. Some try hard to become better Christians through rigorous rehearsing of self-improvement and good behavior. Nothing wrong

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with self-improvement or good behavior, but *that's not the way* to become a “better” Christian. Our behavior (what we do or don't do, or how well we do it) has *nothing whatsoever to do* with becoming a follower of Jesus. It has everything to do with faith in what Jesus has *already done*, what he is doing and how well he did it (perfectly).

So *the way* to rehearse for Christianity is to *rehearse Jesus*—his birth, his humanity, his work, his ministry, his teaching, his love, his sacrifice, his resurrection, his ascension and sending of the Holy Spirit. Thankfully, *this way* is covered in the annual cycle of celebrations that Christians have observed for two millennia. *This way*—this story—has taken the form of the written and spoken word, music, art, symbolism and even architecture, expressed diversely in countless traditions and cultures. There are few places on the planet where these resources are not available in *some way*, even if you're merely contemplating the life and teachings of Jesus in your own living room.

Isn't that something to be radically thankful about? *By the way*, what we do (our better behavior) proceeds naturally from our thanksgiving for what Jesus has already done. That's *the way* Jesus works. □

—Monte Wolverton