

# The Scale

## Lesson 1

### A. Tone

When we sing, our voices produce tones. A **tone** is a musical sound produced by regularly vibrating airwaves. Every tone has four basic properties. You will be primarily studying the first two properties, which are essential to reading music.

#### *Four Basic Properties of a Tone:*

1. **Pitch** – how high or low a tone is
2. **Duration** – how long a tone is held; often referred to as *timing*
3. **Volume** – how loud or soft a tone sounds
4. **Timbre** – pronounced “tam’•bər”; also called *quality* or tone color; distinguishes one voice or instrument from another; varies according to how the tone is produced

### B. Pitch

In music, tones are represented by **notes** placed on a **staff** (see *Figure 1.2*). The pitch of a note is indicated by its position on the staff.

### C. Shaped Notes

A system of shaped notes has been devised to make music easier to read. Hymnals intended for four-part congregational singing often use this system. This *Rudiments of Music* course is based on the shaped-note system.

### D. The Scale

The **scale** is a series of notes or tones, each with a different pitch. Each note has a specific pitch relative to the other notes of the scale.

The term *scale* usually refers to the **diatonic scale**, which has eight notes, beginning and ending with *do*. *Figure 1.1* shows the notes of the scale.

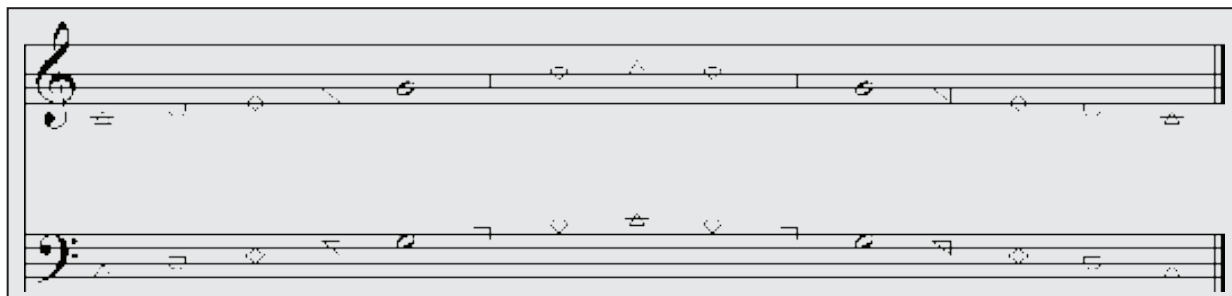
**Figure 1.1: The Notes of the Scale**



## E. The Scale and the Staff

Figure 1.2 shows one of many ways the scale may appear on the staff. The position and pitch of each note is relative to the position and pitch of *do*.

**Figure 1.2: The Scale on the Staff**



### Just for Interest

#### Scale tonality

Each note in the scale has its own tonality or feel. Scale tonality can be summarized as follows:

- △ *do* strong, restful
- ◻ *re* rousing, hopeful, restless
- ◇ *mi* calm, gentle, mild
- ▽ *fa* awe-inspiring, devotional, desolate; *or* bold
- *so* bright, joyous, brilliant
- ◻ *la* sad, mournful, foreboding
- ◇ *ti* restless, piercing, unsettled

#### Resting and Active Tones

*Do*, *mi*, and *so* are considered resting tones.



*Re*, *fa*, *la*, and *ti* are considered active tones.



## F. Singing the Scale

Practice singing up and down the scale with your instructor. With practice it becomes more natural to adjust your voice to the right pitch.

Now you should be ready to try the following exercise. The vertical bars are not part of the music, but simply show where you can break between each group of notes.

The image displays six staves of musical notation, each containing a sequence of notes and rests. The notes are represented by various symbols: circles, diamonds, squares, and triangles. The staves are divided into three measures each by vertical bar lines. The notes are arranged in a way that suggests a scale exercise, with some notes being beamed together. The symbols used are: circles, diamonds, squares, and triangles. The staves are arranged vertically, and each staff contains a sequence of notes and rests. The notes are arranged in a way that suggests a scale exercise, with some notes being beamed together. The symbols used are: circles, diamonds, squares, and triangles.

# Toward Better Singing

## Lesson 8

### A. The Beauty of Holiness

Is it worth the effort to learn to sing better? We know we cannot impress God by merely improving our singing. But let it be our goal to reverently and joyfully accept His beautiful gift of music and use it well, both in expressing our worship and in ministering to others.

True worship springs from a holy heart that acknowledges God in all its ways. Think about your singing habits in light of the following checklist. Other pointers in this lesson have no power in themselves to make our singing more effective if it lacks the beauty of holiness.

1. Do I complain about the songs that are chosen: too old, too new, too familiar, too unfamiliar, too easy, too difficult, too few, too many? *I choose to treasure each song I have opportunity to sing, finding nuggets of truth and blessing in each one.*
2. Do I focus on the song leader, wishing he would speed up the songs, or slow them down, be more expressive, or less, pay closer attention to accuracy, or not be so picky? *I choose to notice and appreciate all willingness and effort on the part of the song leader, and humbly follow his directions.*
3. Do I foster irritation by classifying other people's singing as too sloppy, too precise, or too loud? *I choose to love and honor every fellow singer, as Christ has honored me with His love.*
4. Do I habitually pass lightly over the expressions of reverence, thanksgiving, commitment, and trust in the songs I sing? *I choose to daily seek the face of God and renew my devotion to Him, so that my singing can be an expression of my heart to God.*

### B. Congregational Singing

Congregational singing is good practice for congregational living. We sing together, not in unison, but in harmony, where each is responsible for contributing a particular part. We do not try to hide our voices beneath the volume of everyone else's; neither do we seek to be heard above the rest. We aim to blend our hearts and voices together to produce a sound well-pleasing to our Lord, by worshiping in unity.

A group sings together best when following a capable leader. But it is not uncommon for a song leader to be practically ignored. When he attempts to pick up the speed or

drop the volume at some spot in a song, the congregation continues singing along, either so engrossed in the song or so absent-minded that they fail to notice. Learn to pay attention to the song leader.

## C. Posture

Good posture not only enhances singing; it is healthy. But many of us don't naturally practice good posture most of the time, sitting or standing. It is a habit to be learned, and it requires diligence. Here are some pointers:

1. Sit and stand erect; neither stretched nor slouched, but comfortably erect. Keep your head centered, not to the front, back, or either side.
2. Keep both feet on the floor. When standing, your weight should be primarily forward toward the balls of your feet, not on the heels.
3. Shoulders should be comfortably up, neither straining up nor drooping down; neither tense nor fully relaxed.
4. To improve airflow for breathing and singing, you want to feel that you are keeping your chin level and your chest high and expanded.

## D. Breathing

The human voice is the most intricate musical instrument. It is operated by wind; in fact, by our breath. When we exhale and allow air to pass over our vocal cords, they vibrate and produce sound. Since breathing and singing are so intricately connected, poor breathing habits can cause stress to the voice.

Good breathing, of course, begins with good posture. Good, natural breathing is controlled by the diaphragm, a muscle between the chest and abdomen. When the diaphragm drops down, it creates a vacuum to draw air into the lungs. The diaphragm then controls the exhaling as it pushes up.

It is important to recognize that movement of the abdomen, *not* of the chest, is a sign of good breathing. It shows that the diaphragm is controlling the breathing. Check your breathing by standing with good posture, one hand on your chest and one on your abdomen. The chest should remain expanded and stable while the abdomen expands for each breath.

## E. The Sound

A good sound begins in the mind of the singer. Know what quality of sound you expect to produce; then let it come out!

When we sing for the glory of God, we want to produce pleasant sounds from a clear and free heart. We seek to develop expressive voices that can reflect both the song's message and our feelings about it. When our spirits are in tune with God, our voices will be raised energetically, and our song will flow forth vibrantly.



This will be all the more natural as we increase familiarity with the basics of music and have less need to concentrate on them. Learn the rudiments, and discipline yourself to maintain good posture, breathe correctly, and produce good, vibrant sounds.

Follow these general pointers about sound production and articulation.

1. Be conscious of the kind of sounds you want to produce. While singing, you might occasionally think of words such as *bright*, *vibrant*, *solemn*, or *flowing*, as appropriate to the message and tune you're singing.
2. Rather than stretching for high notes, picture them well within your range. Then, as one singing teacher used to say, "Get up there and sit on it." Likewise, picture the low notes well within your range.
3. Try to maintain a relaxed lower jaw, with the tip of the tongue lightly touching the bottom of the teeth when not in use. Good vocal production is not tense, but relaxed.
4. Always hold the vowel sounds, taking care to keep the sound pure, pronouncing the consonants just as you are ready to proceed to the next syllable. For example, say "L-o-o-r-d," not "L-o-r-r-d."

## F. Dynamics Symbols

Sometimes you will see symbols above a note or section of song suggesting how to interpret the music with your voice. This list shows a few of these **dynamics symbols**, the Latin terms they represent, and what they mean.

<b>Term</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Symbol</b>
<i>Pianissimo</i>	very soft	<i>pp</i>
<i>Piano</i>	soft	<i>p</i>
<i>Mezzopiano</i>	medium soft	<i>mp</i>
<i>Mezzoforte</i>	medium loud	<i>mf</i>
<i>Forte</i>	loud	<i>f</i>
<i>Fortissimo</i>	very loud	<i>ff</i>
<i>Crescendo (cres.)</i>	from soft to loud	
<i>Diminuendo (dim.)</i>	from loud to soft	
<i>Staccato</i>	short, distinct, detached	,
<i>Legato (leg.)</i>	smooth and connected	(no symbol)
<i>Ritard (rit.)</i>	slowing down	(no symbol)
<i>Accelerando (accel.)</i>	speeding up	(no symbol)

## G. Repeats

To prevent confusion, you need to be aware of markings guiding you to repeat sections of music. Here are a few you will see, with their meanings:

*D.C.* Return to the beginning of the song.

*D.S.* Return to the place indicated in the song.

§ Indicates where to return to after a *D.S.* There are several recognizable variations of this symbol.

*FINE* (“fee-nay”) The end of the song after any repeat, *D.C.*, or *D.S.*

*Figure 8.1* illustrates a common repeat symbol, using two or four dots arranged vertically. These symbols are easy to overlook, so watch for them. When singing a song, go all the way to the second set of dots, then return to the first set and repeat that section before continuing on.

**Figure 8.1: Repeat**



# John Wesley's directions for congregational singing<sup>1</sup>

1. **SING ALL.** See that you join with the congregation as frequently as you can. Let not a slight degree of weakness or weariness hinder you. If it is a cross to you, take it up, and you will find it a blessing.
2. **SING LUSTILY,** and with a good courage. Beware of singing as if you are half-dead or half-asleep; but lift up your voice with strength. Be no more afraid of your voice now, nor more ashamed of it being heard, than when you sang the songs of Satan.
3. **SING MODESTLY.** Do not bawl, so as to be heard above or distinct from the rest of the congregation – that you may not destroy the harmony – but strive to unite your voices together so as to make one clear melodious sound.
4. **SING IN TIME.** Whatever time is sung, be sure to keep with it. Do not run before nor stay behind it; but attend close to the leading voices, and move therewith as exactly as you can; and take care not to sing too slowly.
5. **ABOVE ALL, SING SPIRITUALLY.** Have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim at pleasing Him more than yourself or any other creature. In order to do this attend strictly to the sense of what you sing, and see that your heart is not carried away with the sound, but offered to God continually; so shall your singing be such as the Lord will approve of here, and reward you when He cometh in the clouds of Heaven.

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*

Colossians 3:16

<sup>1</sup> *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. XIV, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, p. 346.