The Church Pianist

Taking the Anxiety Out of Reading Chord Charts

by Daniel Carl Heister

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How to Use This Book and Media Resources

This book is designed to be used alongside audio and video examples. Throughout the chapters you will find references to recordings and demonstrations.

If you are using a **digital version** of this book, you can access these examples through the provided links.

If you are using a **printed version**, you can scan the QR codes using your phone or tablet to open the same recordings and demonstrations.

These examples are designed to help you **hear how chord charts sound in real musical settings** and to give you practical models for practice.

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Introduction

If you are a classically trained or church pianist, chances are you learned music in a very specific way. You were taught to read every note on the page, follow the printed rhythms, and reproduce what was written as accurately as possible. Hymns, classical pieces, and fully notated accompaniments formed the foundation of your musical training.

That training is valuable. It builds discipline, musical awareness, and technical skill.

But for many pianists, it also creates a challenge.

When you first encounter chord charts, you may feel unprepared.

Instead of seeing every note written out, you see letters, numbers, and symbols. Instead of a complete accompaniment, you see a framework. You are suddenly expected to **fill in the blanks** using knowledge that may never have been formally explained.

You may find yourself thinking:

“I can read difficult music, but I don’t know what to do with this.”
“I know how to play what’s written, but this feels vague.”
“I’m afraid of playing the wrong thing.”

As a result, many capable pianists feel uncertain, frustrated, or even inadequate when asked to play from chord charts.

This book was written for you.

My Story

My own musical background includes both traditional training and extensive experience in worship, jazz, and contemporary music. Over the years, I have worked as a performer, accompanist, and educator in many church and community settings.

I have spent countless hours playing from written music, lead sheets, and chord charts. I have also worked with many pianists who were highly skilled readers but uncomfortable with chord-based playing.

Again and again, I saw the same pattern.

Talented pianists would hesitate when faced with a chart.
They would doubt themselves.
They would overthink simple progressions.
They would feel behind, even though they were not.

What they were missing was not ability.

It was translation.

They had never been shown how to convert symbols into sound.

The Real Problem

The challenge is not that classically trained pianists lack musical understanding. In fact, they often have strong foundations in harmony, rhythm, and form.

The challenge is that chord charts use a different language.

Written music tells you exactly what to play.
Chord charts tell you what harmony is happening.

Both describe the same musical reality. They simply approach it from different directions.

When you learn to translate between them, everything changes.

What This Book Is Designed to Do

This book is not about turning you into a jazz specialist or a professional improviser.

It is about giving you fluency.

By the end of this book, you should be able to:

- Look at a chord symbol and understand what it means
- Build the correct notes quickly
- Choose practical voicings
- Move smoothly between chords
- Adapt to different worship styles
- Play confidently in live settings

You will learn how to turn symbols into music.

No advanced theory is required.
No improvisation background is assumed.
No special talent is needed.

Only steady practice and clear guidance.

A Practical, Real-World Approach

This book focuses on how chord charts are actually used in churches and worship teams.

You will learn:

• The symbols you are most likely to see
• The voicings that work in real settings
• The patterns that appear again and again
• The habits that build confidence

You will also be encouraged to listen, observe, and learn from recordings and live musicians. With today's technology, these tools are readily available and easy to use.

This is not an abstract theory book.

It is a working manual.

You Are Not Starting Over

One of the most important truths I want you to understand is this:

You are not starting from zero.

If you can read music, you already understand harmony.
If you have played hymns, you have already played chord progressions.
If you have accompanied singers, you already know how to support music.

You are not learning new sounds.

You are learning a new way to recognize them.

How to Use This Book

This book is designed to be worked through gradually.

Read one chapter at a time.
Practice the exercises.
Listen to recordings.
Play along.

Do not rush.

Fluency develops through repetition and experience.

Some concepts will feel easy. Others will take time. That is normal.

Progress matters more than speed.

A Final Word

Music in worship is not about technical perfection.

It is about supporting voices, serving the congregation, and helping create an atmosphere of unity and reverence.

When you play with confidence and clarity, you free yourself to focus on what truly matters.

My hope is that this book will help remove anxiety, build understanding, and give you the tools you need to serve with joy and assurance.

You are capable.
You are equipped.
And you are ready to grow.

Chapter 1

How Chord Charts Work

If you were trained in classical piano or grew up playing hymns from a hymnal, you are used to seeing every detail written on the page. Every note is printed. Every rhythm is notated. Every voice is assigned. Your job is to reproduce what is written as accurately as possible.

Chord charts are different.

A helpful way to think of a chord chart is this:

A chord chart is musical shorthand.

Instead of writing out every note, the chart summarizes the music using symbols. It focuses primarily on harmony and structure. One chord symbol can represent several notes. One line of chords can represent an entire accompaniment pattern.

At first, this can feel incomplete, as if important details are missing. In reality, the chart is simply presenting the music in a more compact form. It shows you what chords are being used and how they move from one to another. This gives you a clear understanding of what is happening harmonically in the song.

Some charts are very simple. A lyric chart may contain only words and chord symbols. This gives you the harmonic outline but leaves stylistic details to be learned by listening.

Other charts, often called **lead sheets**, include a written melody along with chord symbols. These melody-driven charts give you more information. Seeing the melody and the chords together helps you understand how the harmony supports the tune and how the song fits together musically.

Whether simple or detailed, chord charts are designed to give you a broad picture of the song. They show you the progression of chords and the structure of the music. From that foundation, you build the accompaniment.

Today, recordings of worship songs are widely available. Listening to these recordings helps you hear how long each chord lasts, where changes occur, and what kind of piano style fits the music. The chart provides the harmonic framework. The recording helps you hear how that framework is used in context.

Understanding Time in a Chord Chart

Unlike traditional notation, chord charts usually simplify the way rhythm is displayed.

Most charts are divided into measures using vertical bar lines:

```
| G | D | Em | C |
```

Each section between bar lines typically represents one measure. If the song is in 4/4 time, you can generally assume each chord lasts four beats unless otherwise indicated.

Sometimes two chords appear in the same measure:

```
| G D/F# | Em C |
```

In this case, the measure is divided between the chords. Most often, each chord receives half of the measure. Listening to a recording will confirm how the rhythm is divided.

Chord charts assume that you can keep steady time. They do not replace your rhythmic skills — they rely on them.

Repeats and Shortcuts

To keep charts clean and readable, shorthand symbols are often used to indicate repetition.

You may see repeat signs marking the beginning and end of a section. This simply means to play that section again.

A percent sign **(%)** or a series of slashes **(////)** usually means to repeat the previous chord or pattern for another measure.

These shortcuts reduce clutter on the page and make it easier to follow the form of the song without unnecessary duplication.

Song Structure and Sections

Most worship songs are organized into sections such as:

Intro
Verse
Chorus
Bridge
Tag
Ending

These labels are important. They help you navigate the song and respond if the worship leader repeats or skips a section.

Example:

```
Intro
| C | C |
Verse
| C | G | Am | F |
Chorus
| F | C | G | Am |
```

Understanding the structure allows you to move confidently through the song, even if the order changes in a live setting.

Following the Singer

Chord symbols are usually placed above the word or syllable where the harmony changes. When the singer begins that word, the chord changes.

This is especially important in worship settings. The goal is not mechanical precision but musical support. If a singer delays a phrase slightly or emphasizes a word, your chord change should support them.

Reading is important. Listening is just as important.

When in doubt, follow the singer.

Your Role at the Piano

If you are playing with a band, you are part of a larger sound. The bass often plays the root of the chord. The guitar fills the middle register. Your role is to reinforce harmony and support rhythm without overwhelming the texture.

This means you do not need to play every possible note of every chord. Clarity is more important than density.

If you are playing alone, you may fill more space. If you are playing with others, you may simplify.

Musical sensitivity is part of reading a chord chart well.

Practice: Reading from a Chart

Before moving on to specific chord types, practice reading from a chart format.

Play each progression slowly and evenly:

Chapter 1 example 1

```
| C | F | G | C |
| G | D | Em | C |
| D | A | Bm | G |
```

Focus on clean transitions and steady time.

Chapter 1 example 2

Next, try speaking or lightly singing lyrics while changing chords at the correct words:

```
 G                C          G
Amazing grace how sweet the sound
     G                   D
That saved a wretch like me
```

Chapter 1 example 3

Finally, practice reading sections:

```
Intro
| C | C |
Verse
| C | G | Am | F |
Chorus
| F | C | G | Am |
```

Move from section to section without stopping. Repeat the chorus. Practice maintaining flow.

Summary

Chord charts communicate harmony in a streamlined way. They do not eliminate musical responsibility — they shift it.

You already understand rhythm, keys, and scales. Now you are learning to read harmony in a compact format.

In this chapter, you learned:

- What a chord chart is
- The difference between lyric charts and lead sheets
- How time is represented
- How repeats and shortcuts work
- How to follow structure and singers

In the next chapter, we will begin decoding the most common symbols you will see: **major and minor chords.**

These form the foundation of nearly every worship song you will play.

Chapter 2

Major and Minor Chords

Nearly every worship song is built on two basic chord types: **major** and **minor**. Before learning about more complex chords, it is essential to become comfortable with these two. If you can recognize and play major and minor chords quickly in any key, most chord charts will already feel manageable.

In this chapter, you will learn what major and minor chord symbols mean, how they are built, and how to find them anywhere on the keyboard.

What a Major Chord Means

When you see a chord symbol with just a letter name, such as **C**, **G**, or **Ab**, it represents a **major chord**.

For example:

C means **C major**
F means **F major**
Bb means **B-flat major**

No additional markings are needed. By default, a letter name alone indicates a major chord.

A major chord is built from three notes:

- The root
- The major third
- The perfect fifth

For **C major**, these notes are:

C – E – G

These three notes form the basic major sound that is heard throughout most music.

What a Minor Chord Means

When you see a lowercase **m** after the letter name, the chord is **minor**.

For example:

Am means **A minor**
Dm means **D minor**
F#m means **F-sharp minor**

The lowercase **m** always indicates minor.

A minor chord is also built from three notes:

• The root
• The minor third
• The perfect fifth

For **A minor**, these notes are:

A – C – E

The only difference between a major and minor chord is the middle note. In a minor chord, the third is lowered by **one half step**.

Building Major Chords on Any Note

Every major chord follows the same pattern:

Root → Major Third → Perfect Fifth

In terms of keyboard distance:

Root to third = **four half steps**
Third to fifth = **three half steps**

For example:

D major
D → F# → A

Eb major
Eb → G → Bb

F# major
F# → A# → C#

The letter names change, but the spacing stays the same.

Learning this pattern allows you to build major chords anywhere on the keyboard.

Building Minor Chords on Any Note

Minor chords follow a slightly different pattern:

Root → Minor Third → Perfect Fifth

In terms of keyboard distance:

Root to third = **three half steps**
Third to fifth = **four half steps**

For example:

E minor
E → G → B

Bb minor
Bb → Db → F

C# minor
C# → E → G#

Again, the spacing is consistent, even though the notes change.

Sharps, Flats, and Enharmonic Names

Some notes can be named in more than one way.

For example:

F# and Gb are the same key on the piano keyboard.
C# and Db are the same key on the keyboard.

These are called **enharmonic equivalents**.

Chord charts may use either spelling, depending on the key of the song. It is important to recognize both.

For example:

F# major and **Gb major** sound the same on the keyboard, even though they are written differently.

Do not be discouraged by unfamiliar spellings. Focus on finding the correct keys and building the correct pattern.

Playing Major and Minor Chords Smoothly

When reading a chart, your goal is not only to play the correct notes, but to move between chords **smoothly**.

Avoid unnecessary jumping.

If two chords share common notes, try to keep those notes in the same place.

For example:

C → Am

C = C E G
Am = A C E

These chords share **C** and **E**. You can keep those notes and move only one finger.

This creates smoother transitions and a more connected sound.

You will learn more about this skill in later chapters, but begin developing it now.

Practice: Major and Minor Chords

Exercise 1: Build and Play

Chapter 2 example 1

Play the following chords in **root position**:

C G D A E
F Bb Eb Ab Db

Play each chord slowly. Say the note names out loud if needed.

Exercise 2: Minor Chords

Chapter 2 example 2

Play the following minor chords:

Am Em Dm Bm F#m
Cm Gm Bbm Ebm Abm

Focus on the **lowered third** in each chord.

Exercise 3: Alternating Major and Minor

Chapter 2 example 3

Play:

C Am F Dm G Em C

Maintain steady time. Listen for the difference in sound between major and minor.

Exercise 4: Listening Practice

Choose a familiar worship song.

Listen carefully and identify where **major and minor chords** appear. Notice how the mood changes with each type.

Then play along using the chart. *(note: if you don't have charts ask your worship leader or search online at a chords and lyrics website like Worshiptogether.com or Ultimate guitar.com.)*

Summary

Major and minor chords form the **foundation of chord-chart reading**.

In this chapter, you learned:

• How to recognize major and minor symbols
• How to build each chord type
• How to locate notes quickly
• How to move between chords smoothly

With these skills, you can already play the **majority of worship songs**.

In the next chapter, you will learn two less common but important chord types: **diminished and augmented chords**.

Chapter 3

Diminished and Augmented Chords

After learning major and minor chords, most chord charts will already feel much more readable. However, you will occasionally encounter chords that look unfamiliar or intimidating, such as diminished and augmented chords.

These chords appear less often than major and minor chords, but they are still important. When they do appear, they usually serve a specific purpose in the song. Learning to recognize and play them confidently will help you feel prepared instead of surprised.

In this chapter, you will learn what diminished and augmented symbols mean, how these chords are built, and how to play them comfortably on the keyboard.

What a Diminished Chord Means

A diminished chord is usually marked with **“dim”** or a **small circle symbol (°)**.

Examples include:

Bdim
C#dim
F°

All of these indicate a **diminished triad**.

A diminished chord is built from three notes:

• The root
• The minor third
• The diminished fifth

Compared to a minor chord, the **fifth is lowered by one half step**.

For example:

B diminished

B – D – F

C# diminished

C# – E – G

These chords have a **tense, unstable sound**. They are often used to create movement toward another chord.

Building Diminished Chords on the Keyboard

Diminished chords follow a consistent pattern:

Root → Minor Third → Diminished Fifth

In terms of half steps:

Root to third = **three half steps**
Third to fifth = **three half steps**

This creates a **stacked minor thirds** pattern.

Once you learn this spacing, you can build diminished chords anywhere on the keyboard.

Where Diminished Chords Commonly Appear

In worship and popular music, diminished chords are often used as **passing chords**. They connect two more stable chords.

For example:

C → C#dim → Dm

Here, **C#dim acts as a bridge between C and Dm**.

You may also see diminished chords leading into dominant chords.

Do not over-analyze their function. In this book, your goal is simply to **recognize and play them cleanly when they appear**.

What an Augmented Chord Means

An augmented chord is usually marked with **"aug"** or a **plus sign (+)**.

Examples include:

Caug
F+
G#aug

All of these indicate an **augmented triad**.

An augmented chord is built from:

• The root
• The major third
• The augmented fifth

Compared to a major chord, the **fifth is raised by one half step**.

For example:

C augmented

C – E – G#

F augmented

F – A – C#

These chords have a **bright, unsettled sound** and often create a sense of tension.

Building Augmented Chords on the Keyboard

Augmented chords follow this pattern:

Root → Major Third → Augmented Fifth

In half steps:

Root to third = **four half steps**
Third to fifth = **four half steps**

This creates **evenly spaced intervals**.

Because of this symmetry, augmented chords repeat their shapes across the keyboard.

Learning this shape makes them easy to recognize.

When Augmented Chords Are Used

Augmented chords are often used to **lead into another chord** or to create dramatic color.

For example:

C → Caug → F

Here, the raised fifth of **Caug creates tension that resolves into F**.

You may also see augmented chords used briefly in **introductions, transitions, or endings**.

Again, your main responsibility is not to analyze why they are used, but to **recognize and play them accurately**.

Playing Diminished and Augmented Chords Comfortably

Because these chords appear less often, many pianists hesitate when they see them. The key is to treat them like any other chord type.

Do not rush.
Do not panic.
Do not avoid them.

Find the root.
Build the pattern.
Play cleanly.

With repetition, these chords will feel natural.

Practice: Diminished and Augmented Chords

Exercise 1: Diminished Triads

Chapter 3 example 1

Play these diminished chords in root position:

Bdim Cdim Ddim Edim Fdim
F#dim Gdim Abdim Adim Bbdim

Say the **note names out loud** as you play.

Exercise 2: Augmented Triads

Chapter 3 example 2

Play these augmented chords:

Caug Daug Eaug Faug Gaug
Abaug Aaug Baug Dbaug Ebaug

Notice the **even spacing between notes**.

Exercise 3: Connecting Chords

Chapter 3 example 3

Play slowly:

C C#dim Dm
F F#dim Gm
G G#dim Am

Then:

C Caug F
D Daug G
E Eaug A

Listen carefully for the **tension and release**.

Exercise 4: Listening Practice

Choose a worship song that contains **diminished or augmented chords**.

Listen for how briefly these chords appear and how they lead into the next chord.

Then play along using the chart. (note: If you cannot find songs with these types of chords try using an AI music generation platform like Suno.com and prompt it to make a worship song with the chords you want. I have tried and it usually will work. You can also use ChatGPT and ask for songs that use these type of chords.)

Summary

Diminished and augmented chords may look unusual, but they follow simple patterns.

In this chapter, you learned:

- How to recognize diminished and augmented symbols
- How to build each chord type
- Where these chords commonly appear
- How to practice them confidently

With these skills, you can now handle **most of the triads found in chord charts**.

In the next chapter, we will expand these ideas by **adding sevenths to chords**.

Chapter 4

Seventh Chords Explained

After learning major, minor, diminished, and augmented triads, you now understand the basic building blocks of harmony. Many songs, however, use chords that contain more than three notes. The most common of these are **seventh chords**.

Seventh chords add one extra note to a triad. This added note gives the chord more color and emotional depth. In most forms of music, seventh chords are used constantly to create warmth, movement, and direction.

In this chapter, you will learn how to recognize the most common seventh chord symbols, how they are built, and how to play them comfortably.

What Is a Seventh Chord?

A seventh chord is created by **adding a seventh note to a triad**.

Every seventh chord contains:

- A root
- A third
- A fifth
- A seventh

The type of seventh that is added determines the **quality of the chord**.

There are **five main types of seventh chords** you will see in chord charts:

- Dominant seventh
- Major seventh
- Minor seventh
- Half-diminished seventh
- Fully diminished seventh

You will encounter the **first three most often**.

Dominant Seventh Chords (C7)

A dominant seventh chord is written with **just the number 7**.

Examples:

C7
G7
D7
Bb7

If you see a letter followed by **“7” with no other markings**, it is a **dominant seventh chord**.

A dominant seventh chord is built from:

• Root
• Major third
• Perfect fifth
• Minor seventh

For example:

C7 = C – E – G – Bb
G7 = G – B – D – F

These chords have a **strong, unsettled sound** and often lead into another chord.

Major Seventh Chords (Cmaj7)

A major seventh chord is written with **“maj7”** or sometimes **“Δ7.”**

Examples:

Cmaj7
Fmaj7
Bbmaj7
EΔ7

Both symbols mean the same thing.

A major seventh chord is built from:

• Root
• Major third
• Perfect fifth
• Major seventh

For example:

Cmaj7 = C – E – G – B
Fmaj7 = F – A – C – E

Major seventh chords sound **smooth and rich**. They are often used in **slower worship songs and reflective moments**.

Minor Seventh Chords (Cm7)

A minor seventh chord is written with **"m7."**

Examples:

Am7
Dm7
F#m7
Cm7

A minor seventh chord is built from:

• Root
• Minor third
• Perfect fifth
• Minor seventh

For example:

Am7 = A – C – E – G
Dm7 = D – F – A – C

These chords sound **gentle and relaxed**. They are extremely common in **worship and pop music**.

Half-Diminished Seventh Chords (Cm7♭5)

A half-diminished chord is written with **"m7♭5"** or sometimes with a **slashed circle symbol (ø)**.

Examples:

Bm7♭5
F#m7♭5
Cø7

These symbols indicate the same chord type.

A half-diminished chord is built from:

• Root
• Minor third

• Diminished fifth
• Minor seventh

For example:

Bm7♭5 = B – D – F – A

These chords appear less often than the other seventh chords, but they still occur regularly in **worship and gospel-influenced music**.

Fully Diminished Seventh Chords (C°7)

A fully diminished seventh chord is written with a **small circle and the number 7**.

Examples:

Cdim7
Bdim7
F#°7

Do not confuse this with **m7♭5**. Although they look similar, they are **different chords**.

A fully diminished seventh chord is built from:

• Root
• Minor third
• Diminished fifth
• Diminished seventh

The **diminished seventh** is **one half step lower than a minor seventh**.

For example:

B°7 = B – D – F – Ab

Compare this to:

Bm7♭5 = B – D – F – A

The only difference is the **top note**. In the fully diminished chord, the seventh is lowered **one additional half step**.

Why Fully Diminished Chords Are Unique

Fully diminished seventh chords are built entirely from **stacked minor thirds**.

Root → +3 half steps → +3 → +3

Because of this symmetry, the chord **repeats itself every three half steps**.

For example:

B°7, D°7, F°7, and Ab°7 contain **the same notes in different order**.

This makes fully diminished chords **very flexible for transitions**.

When Fully Diminished Chords Appear

Fully diminished seventh chords are often used:

- As passing chords
- In key changes
- In dramatic transitions
- In traditional or gospel-influenced music

They create **strong tension** and usually resolve quickly to another chord.

Building Seventh Chords on the Keyboard

All seventh chords are built by **stacking thirds above the root**.

Once you know the triad, you simply **add the appropriate seventh**.

For example:

C major → **Cmaj7** (add B)
C major → **C7** (add Bb)
C minor → **Cm7** (add Bb)

Learning to see these relationships **speeds up reading**.

Choosing Practical Voicings

Although seventh chords contain **four notes**, you do not always need to play all four.

In many band settings, the **bass player supplies the root**. This gives you freedom to simplify.

For example, you may omit:

• The root
• Or sometimes the fifth

and still preserve the sound of the chord.

Examples:

Cmaj7 can be played as: **E – G – B**
Am7 can be played as: **C – E – G**

These **shell voicings** create clarity without clutter.

You will explore voicing choices **more deeply in later chapters**.

Practice: Seventh Chords

Exercise 1: Build and Play

Chapter 4 example 1

Play these chords in root position:

C7 G7 D7 A7 E7
F7 Bb7 Eb7 Ab7 Db7

Then:

Cmaj7 Gmaj7 Dmaj7 Amaj7 Emaj7

Exercise 2: Minor Sevenths

Chapter 4 example 2

Play:

Am7 Em7 Dm7 Bm7 F#m7
Cm7 Gm7 Fm7 Bbm7 Ebm7

Maintain **steady time**.

Exercise 3: Mixed Practice

Chapter 4 example 3

Play slowly:

C Cmaj7 C7 Cm7
F Fmaj7 F7 Fm7

Listen to how **each chord color changes**.

Exercise 4: Listening Practice

Choose a worship song that uses **seventh chords**.

Listen for:

• Major seventh warmth
• Dominant seventh tension
• Minor seventh softness

Then play along using the chart. *(note: if you don't have charts ask your worship leader or search online at a chords and lyrics website like Worshiptogether.com or Ultimate guitar.com.)*

Summary

Seventh chords expand the basic triads you learned earlier and add depth to your playing.

In this chapter, you learned:

• The four main seventh chord types
• How to recognize their symbols
• How to build them
• How to simplify voicings

With these skills, you can now play **most of the extended chords found in music**.

In the next chapter, we will explore **suspended, added, and omitted tones**.

Chapter 5

Suspended, Added, and Omitted Notes

As you continue reading chord charts, you will often see symbols that look familiar but include extra markings such as **“sus,” “add,” or “no.”** These markings do not indicate completely new chord types. Instead, they tell you to adjust a basic chord by **replacing, adding, or removing certain notes**.

These modified chords are extremely common in music. Learning to recognize them quickly will make many charts feel much easier to read.

In this chapter, you will learn how suspended, added, and omitted chords work and how to play them confidently.

Suspended Chords (Csus2 and Csus4)

A suspended chord **replaces the third of the chord** with another note.

Instead of using a major or minor third, a suspended chord uses either:

• The second (**sus2**)
• The fourth (**sus4**)

Examples:

Csus2
Csus4
Dsus4
Asus2

If a chord is written simply as **“Csus,” it usually means Csus4**.

Building Suspended Chords

Start with a **major chord**.

Then **replace the third**.

Example:

Csus4

C – E – G → **C – F – G**

Csus2

C – E – G → **C – D – G**

Notice that the **third (E) is removed and replaced**.

Suspended chords have an **open, unresolved sound**. They are often used to create anticipation before returning to a major or minor chord.

Resolving Suspended Chords

In many songs, a suspended chord **resolves to a major chord**.

For example:

Csus4 → C
Dsus4 → D

You may hear this as a **gentle release of tension**.

When playing, listen carefully for when this resolution occurs and match the timing of the band.

Added-Tone Chords (Cadd9 or Cadd2)

An added-tone chord **keeps the basic triad and adds one extra note**.

The most common added chord is **add2 (or add9)**.

Examples:

Cadd2
Fadd2
Gadd2

A **Cadd9 or Cadd2 chord** contains:

C – D – E – G
or
C – E – G – D

Notice that the **2nd (D) is added without removing any notes**.

This is different from **C9**, which is a **dominant seventh chord with added tones**.

Building Added Chords

To build an **add9 or add2 chord**:

1. Start with a **major chord**
2. Add the **ninth** (the same note as the second, one octave higher)

In practice, you can often play the ninth in **any comfortable register**.

The goal is to create a **bright, spacious sound**, not to stack notes awkwardly.

Add Chords vs. Ninth Chords

It is important to understand the difference between an **added-tone chord** and a **ninth chord**, because they look similar but function differently.

Compare these two symbols:

Cadd2 (or C2)
C9

Although both involve the **second (or ninth)**, they are **not the same chord**.

Cadd2: A Triad with an Added Note

A **Cadd2 chord** is built from:

• Root
• Major third
• Perfect fifth
• Added second

Cadd2 = **C – D – E – G**

It is essentially a **major triad with one extra note added**.

There is **no seventh** in the chord.

Because of this, add2 chords sound **open and simple**. They blend easily into worship music and do not create strong harmonic tension.

C9: An Extended Seventh Chord

A **C9 chord** is built from:

• Root
• Major third
• Perfect fifth
• Minor seventh
• Ninth

C9 = **C – E – G – Bb – D**

Notice that this chord includes both the **third and the seventh**.

These notes define the **character of the chord**.

A ninth chord is **not just a triad with an added note**. It is a **dominant seventh chord with an added extension**.

Because of this, ninth chords sound **fuller and more complex**. They are often used in **gospel, jazz, and more harmonically rich styles**.

Why This Difference Matters

If you play **Cadd2 when the chart says C9**, the chord will sound **too plain**.

If you play **C9 when the chart says Cadd2**, the chord will sound **too heavy**.

Each symbol tells you **exactly how much harmony the music needs**.

Reading it correctly helps you **match the intended style**.

Practical Tip

In many worship settings, you will see **add2 much more often than 9**.

When you see **add2**, think:

“Triad plus color.”

When you see **9**, think:

“Seventh chord plus extension.”

This simple distinction will prevent many **common mistakes**.

Exercise: Hearing the Difference

Chapter 5 Hearing the Difference

Play:

Cadd2 → C9 → Cadd2 → C9

Listen carefully to how **each chord feels**.

Then try:

Fadd2 → F9
Gadd2 → G9

Notice the **difference in color**.

Omitted-Note Chords (Cno3, Cno5)

Sometimes a chart will tell you to **leave out a note**.

Examples:

Cno3
Dno5

These instructions mean:

Cno3 → play **C without the third**
Dno5 → play **D without the fifth**

Omitted chords are often used to create a **more open sound** or to avoid clashes with other instruments.

When and Why Notes Are Omitted

In a band setting, **not every instrument needs to play every note of a chord**.

For example:

• If the **guitar emphasizes the third**, you may leave it out.
• If the **bass is playing strong roots and fifths**, you may simplify your part.

Omitted-note symbols help **coordinate the sound of the group**.

They are **not limitations — they are guides**.

Combining Modifiers

Sometimes you will see **more than one instruction in a chord symbol**.

Examples:

Cmaj7sus4
Dadd9/F#
G7no5

Read these symbols **from left to right**.

Start with the **main chord type**, then apply each instruction in order.

With practice, these combinations become **easy to decode**.

Choosing Practical Voicings

When playing modified chords, **clarity matters more than completeness**.

You do not need to include every possible note.

Examples:

Cadd9 can be played as:

C – E – G – D
or simply
E – G – D

Csus4 can be played as:

C – F – G
or
F – G – C

Choose shapes that are **comfortable and fit the musical context**.

Practice: Modified Chords

Exercise 1: Suspended Chords

Chapter 5 example 1

Play:

Csus4 C Dsus4 D
Gsus4 G Asus4 A

Listen for the **release when the chord resolves**.

Exercise 2: Added Chords

Chapter 5 example 2

Play:

Cadd9 Fadd9 Gadd9 Dadd9
Aadd9 Eadd9 Bbadd9

Experiment with **different voicings**.

Exercise 3: Omitted Notes

Chapter 5 example 3

Play:

Cno3 → C
Dno5 → D
Fno3 → F

Notice how the **sound changes**.

Exercise 4: Mixed Practice

Chapter 5 example 4

Play slowly:

Csus4 Cadd9 C
Fadd9 Fsus4 F
Gsus4 G7no5 G

Maintain **steady time**.

Exercise 5: Listening Practice

Choose a worship song that uses **suspended or added chords**.

Listen for:

• Where suspensions occur
• How they resolve
• How added tones create brightness

Then play along using the chart. (note: if you don't have charts ask your worship leader or search online at a chords and lyrics website like *Worshiptogether.com or Ultimate guitar.com.)*

Summary

Suspended, added, and omitted chords modify basic triads and seventh chords to create **color and movement**.

In this chapter, you learned:

- How suspended chords work
- How added tones function
- How omitted notes affect texture
- How to read combined symbols

With these tools, you can now **read most modern worship charts with confidence**.

In the next chapter, we will explore **extended chords such as 9ths, 11ths, and 13ths**.

Chapter 6

Extensions: 9ths, 11ths, and 13ths

As you read more chord charts, you will eventually see numbers larger than **7**. Chords such as **C9, F11, or G13** may look complicated at first glance. In reality, these chords follow predictable patterns.

These numbers are called **extensions**. They extend a seventh chord by adding additional notes above it.

In this chapter, you will learn what these numbers mean, how extended chords are built, and how to play them in a practical way.

What Extension Numbers Mean

When you see a number higher than **7** in a chord symbol, it indicates that additional notes are added beyond the seventh.

For example:

C9
F11
G13

These numbers refer to **notes in the scale counted upward from the root**.

Instead of continuing to count past seven as **8, 9, 10, and so on**, music theory continues stacking thirds and simply numbers them accordingly.

For example:

1 – 3 – 5 – 7 – 9 – 11 – 13

These numbers represent **scale tones**.

You do not need to memorize complicated theory to use them. You only need to understand how they relate to the **basic seventh chord**.

Important Principle: Extensions Build on Seventh Chords

A crucial rule to remember:

When you see 9, 11, or 13, the chord includes the seventh unless otherwise specified.

For example:

C9 is built from:

- Root
- Major third
- Perfect fifth
- Minor seventh
- Ninth

C9 = **C – E – G – Bb – D**

If the chart simply says **C9**, it is **not the same as Cadd2 or Cadd9**.

The presence of the **seventh** changes the sound and function of the chord.

Ninth Chords

A ninth chord is essentially a **dominant seventh chord with an added ninth**.

Examples:

C9 = C7 + D
G9 = G7 + A

These chords are common in **gospel and soul-influenced worship music**.

You do not always need to play all five notes. In most practical settings, you will **simplify**.

Example:

C9 can be played as:

E – Bb – D

The **root** may be played by the bass.

The **third and seventh define the chord**, and the **ninth adds color**.

Eleventh Chords

An eleventh chord adds the **eleventh scale degree**.

C11 is built from:

C – E – G – Bb – D – F

In practice, this chord is **rarely played with all six notes**.

The **eleventh (F)** often clashes with the **third (E)**.

For that reason, pianists frequently **omit either the third or the eleventh**, depending on the style.

In worship music, 11 chords are often **simplified and voiced to avoid harsh dissonance**.

When you see **11**, think:

Seventh chord plus color.

Thirteenth Chords

A thirteenth chord extends even further.

C13 is built from:

C – E – G – Bb – D – F – A

Again, you will **almost never play every note**.

In practical playing, a **C13** may look like:

E – Bb – A

This keeps the **essential notes (third and seventh)** and adds the **color tone (13th)**.

What Notes Matter Most?

When simplifying extended chords, remember this order of importance:

1. Third
2. Seventh
3. Extension (9, 11, 13)
4. Fifth
5. Root (if a bass player is present)

The **third and seventh define the character** of the chord.

Extensions add **color**.

The **fifth is often optional**.

The **root may already be covered by the bass**.

Understanding this hierarchy removes much of the fear of large chord symbols.

Simplifying Extended Chords

When you see a complex chord:

Do **not** try to stack every note immediately.

Instead:

1. Identify the **base chord** (usually a seventh).
2. Add the **extension**.
3. Omit **unnecessary tones** if needed.

Example:

G13 → Start with **G7** → Add **E**

Then simplify if necessary.

Practice slowly and listen for **clarity**.

Practice: Extended Chords

Exercise 1: Ninth Chords

Chapter 6 example 1

Play:

C9 F9 G9 D9
A9 Bb9 Eb9

Use **simplified voicings**.

Exercise 2: Thirteenth Chords

Chapter 6 example 2

Play:

C13 F13 G13
D13 A13

Focus on **smooth transitions**.

Exercise 3: Mixed Progression

Chapter 6 example 3

Play slowly:

C9 F13 G9 C
Dm9 G13 Cmaj7

Listen for **richness without clutter**.

Exercise 4: Listening Practice

Choose a **gospel-influenced worship song**.

Listen for **extended chords**.

Notice how often they are **simplified in the keyboard part**.

Then play along with the chart. (note: if you don't have charts ask your worship leader or search online at a chords and lyrics website like *Worshiptogether.com or Ultimate guitar.com.)*

Summary

Extensions expand seventh chords by adding additional **color tones**.

In this chapter, you learned:

- What **9, 11, and 13** mean
- That extensions **include the seventh**
- How to **simplify extended chords**
- Which notes are **most important**

With this understanding, large chord symbols should **no longer feel intimidating**.

In the next chapter, we will explore **altered chords and special symbols**.

Chapter 7

Altered and Special Symbols

As you become more comfortable reading chord charts, you may occasionally encounter symbols that look unusual or unfamiliar. These symbols often indicate **small changes to a familiar chord** rather than an entirely new type of harmony.

In music, altered and special chords appear less frequently than basic triads, sevenths, and extensions. However, when they do appear, it is helpful to understand what they mean so you can respond confidently and accurately.

In this chapter, you will learn how to recognize the most common altered and special symbols and how to handle them in practical playing situations.

Flat and Sharp Alterations (♭5, ♯5, ♭9, ♯9)

Sometimes a chord symbol will include a **flat (♭)** or **sharp (♯)** sign next to a number. This indicates that one note of the chord has been **raised or lowered**.

Examples:

C7♭9
G7♯5
D7♯9
F7♭5

These symbols modify notes that are normally part of the chord.

For example:

C7♭9 = **C – E – G – Bb – Db**
G7♯5 = **G – B – D# – F**

Most altered chords are built on **dominant seventh chords**.

Understanding Altered Dominant Chords

In many cases, altered chords are simply **dominant seventh chords with modified extensions**.

Examples:

C7♯9
C7♭9
C7♯5
C7♭5

All of these are **variations of C7**.

They add **tension and color**, especially in **gospel-influenced and more harmonically rich worship music**.

You do not need to analyze why they are used. You only need to **recognize how they are built**.

Practical Simplification of Altered Chords

When you see an altered chord, do not feel pressured to play every possible note.

Focus first on:

• The **third**
• The **seventh**

These define the chord.

Then, if possible, include the **altered tone**.

Example:

C7♭9 can be simplified to:

E – Bb – Db

The **root may be covered by the bass**.

This gives you the **essential sound without clutter**.

Slash and Compound Symbols

Some chord symbols combine **multiple instructions**.

Examples:

D7/F#
Cmaj7♯11
G9sus4
F13♭9

Read these symbols **in steps**.

1. Start with the **main chord type**
2. Apply each **modification**

Example:

G9sus4 means:

Start with **G9**
Replace the **third with the fourth**

Breaking the symbol into parts prevents confusion.

N.C. and Special Performance Markings

Some symbols **do not describe a chord at all**.

N.C. (No Chord)

When you see **N.C.**, do **not play**.

This usually occurs in:

• Breakdowns
• Vocal-only sections
• Transitions

Silence is **part of the arrangement**.

Hold, Push, and Stop

You may also see markings such as:

Hold
Push
Stop
Shot

These indicate **how long or how suddenly a chord should be played**.

Follow the **recording or leader for timing**.

When to Keep It Simple

Not every altered chord needs full treatment.

In many band settings:

• The band may already cover the tension
• Simplicity sounds better
• Clarity matters more than complexity

If you are unsure, **play a clean seventh chord first**.

Then add color as you grow more confident.

Musical support is more important than harmonic completeness.

Practice: Altered and Special Chords

Exercise 1: Altered Dominants

Chapter 7 example 1

Play:

C7♭9 F7♯9 G7♭5 D7♯5
A7♭9 Bb7♯5

Use **simplified voicings**.

Exercise 2: Compound Symbols

Chapter 7 example 2

Play:

G9sus4 Cmaj7♯11 F13♭9
D7/F# E7♯9

Decode each symbol **before playing**.

Exercise 3: Context Practice

Chapter 7 example 3

Play slowly:

Dm7 G7♭9 Cmaj7
Am7 D7♯5 Gmaj7

Listen for **resolution**.

Exercise 4: Listening Practice

Choose a **worship or gospel-style song** that includes altered chords.

Listen for **how briefly they appear** and how they **resolve**.

Then play along with the chart. *(note: if you don't have charts ask your worship leader or search online at a chords and lyrics website like Worshiptogether.com or Ultimate guitar.com.)*

Summary

Altered and special symbols modify familiar chords to create **tension and color**.

In this chapter, you learned:

• How **flat and sharp alterations** work
• How to **read compound symbols**
• How to **simplify altered chords**
• When to **prioritize clarity**

With these skills, even unusual chord symbols should feel **manageable**.

In the next chapter, we will focus on **slash chords and bass-note control**.

Chapter 8

Understanding Slash Chords

As you continue reading chord charts, you will frequently encounter chord symbols that include a slash, such as **C/E** or **D/F#**. These are called **slash chords**.

Slash chords indicate two pieces of information:

• The **chord** to be played
• The **bass note** to be emphasized

Learning to read slash chords confidently will greatly improve your ability to support singers and bands.

In worship music, slash chords are extremely common. They are used to create **smooth bass lines, gentle transitions, and subtle harmonic movement**.

How to Read a Slash Chord

A slash chord is written in this format:

Chord / Bass Note

Examples:

C/E
G/B
D/F#
Ab/C

The **letter before the slash** is the chord you play.
The **letter after the slash** is the bass note.

Example:

C/E means:

Play a **C major triad** with **E in the bass**.

Left Hand and Right Hand Roles

In most settings, your hands have different responsibilities when playing slash chords.

Left Hand: Plays the bass note
Right Hand: Plays the chord

Example:

C/E

Left hand: **E**
Right hand: **C chord**

This separation keeps the sound **clear and organized**.

If you are playing with a bass player, you may sometimes **omit the left-hand bass note** and allow the bass to handle it. However, you should still understand what the slash indicates.

Why Slash Chords Are Used

Slash chords are often used to create **stepwise bass movement**.

Example:

C G/B Am G

The bass moves:

C → B → A → G

This creates a **smooth descending line**.

Without slash chords, the progression would sound **more abrupt**.

Slash chords help **connect chords naturally**.

Common Slash Chord Patterns

Certain slash chords appear frequently in worship music.

Stepwise Bass

C C/B Am Am/G
F F/E Dm Dm/C

Dominant Preparation

G/B → C
D/F# → G

Passing Motion

C → C#dim → Dm
(also written as **C/C# → Dm**)

Learning these patterns makes chord charts **easier to anticipate**.

Inversions Without Theory Language

Many slash chords are simply **inversions of basic chords**.

Examples:

C/E = C in **first inversion**
G/B = G in **first inversion**

You do not need to think in terms of inversion numbers.

Simply think:

"Same chord, different bass."

This keeps reading **simple and practical**.

Playing Slash Chords Smoothly

When playing slash chords, aim for **smooth bass movement and stable harmony**.

Avoid jumping unnecessarily.

If the bass moves **by step**, let your **left hand move by step**.

Keep the **right hand close to its previous position** whenever possible.

This creates a **connected, flowing sound**.

When You Can Simplify

If you are playing with a **full band**, you may not always need to play the bass note in your left hand.

In those situations you may:

• Play the **chord only**
• Let the **bass player handle the slash note**

However, you should still **understand what the chord means**, even if you simplify.

Practice: Slash Chords

Exercise 1: Basic Slash Chords

Chapter 8 example 1

Play:

C/E G/B D/F# F/A
A/C# Bb/D Eb/G

Focus on **hand coordination**.

Exercise 2: Stepwise Motion

Chapter 8 example 2

Play slowly:

C C/B Am Am/G
F F/E Dm Dm/C

Maintain **steady time**.

Exercise 3: Progression Practice

Chapter 8 example 3

Play:

G/B C Am D7
D/F# G Em A7

Listen for **smooth resolution**.

Exercise 4: Listening Practice

Choose a **worship song that uses slash chords**.

Listen for:

• Bass movement
• Chord stability
• Transitions

Then play along with the chart. *(note: if you don't have charts ask your worship leader or search online at a chords and lyrics website like Worshiptogether.com or Ultimate guitar.com.)*

Summary

Slash chords communicate **bass movement and harmonic direction**.

In this chapter, you learned:

• How to read **slash symbols**
• How to **coordinate both hands**
• Why slash chords are used
• When **simplification is appropriate**

With these skills, slash chords should **no longer interrupt your playing**.

In the next chapter, we will focus on **playing chords in different positions for smoother transitions**.

Chapter 9

Playing in Different Positions

So far, you have learned how to recognize chord symbols and build the correct notes. The next step is learning how to **move between chords smoothly and efficiently**.

Many pianists who are new to chord charts play every chord in **root position**. While this is correct, it often leads to unnecessary jumping across the keyboard. This can make your playing sound disconnected and can increase the chance of mistakes.

In this chapter, you will learn how to play the **same chord in different positions** so that your hands can stay close and your transitions can sound natural.

Same Notes, Different Order

A chord contains the same notes **no matter how you arrange them on the keyboard**.

For example, a **C major chord** contains:

C – E – G

These notes can be arranged in different ways:

C – E – G
E – G – C
G – C – E

All of these are **C major chords**. They simply place different notes on top.

Changing the order of notes does not change the chord. It changes **how it feels under your hands and how it sounds in context**.

Why Position Matters

When chords are **close together**, your hands move less.

When your hands move less:

• You make **fewer mistakes**
• You maintain **better rhythm**

• You sound **more connected**
• You feel **more relaxed**

Playing in different positions is not about showing off. It is about **playing efficiently**.

Staying Close Between Chords

When moving from one chord to the next, look for **shared notes**.

Example:

C → Am

C = C – E – G
Am = A – C – E

These chords share **C and E**.

Instead of jumping to **A – C – E** in root position, you can **keep C and E and move only one finger**.

This creates a **smoother transition**.

Choosing the Nearest Shape

Before changing chords, ask yourself:

"Where is the closest place I can play this next chord?"

Often there are several options.

Choose the one that requires **the least movement**.

Example:

C → F

Instead of:

C – E – G → F – A – C (large jump)

Try:

E – G – C → F – A – C (small movement)

This keeps your hand in a **comfortable area**.

Using the Middle Register

Most piano playing sounds best in the **middle of the keyboard**.

Avoid staying too low, where the sound becomes **muddy**.

Avoid staying too high, where the sound becomes **thin**.

Using different positions allows you to **stay in this balanced range**.

Combining Positions with Slash Chords

Slash chords work best when combined with **efficient positioning**.

Example progression:

C/E → Am → F → G

Keep your right hand near:

E – G – C → C – E – A → F – A – C → G – B – D

This allows the **bass to move while the harmony stays stable**.

When Root Position Is Still Useful

Root position is **not wrong**.

It is useful when:

- Starting a song
- Making a strong entrance
- Playing alone
- Teaching beginners

Think of root position as your **"home base."**

Use it when **clarity is needed**. Move away from it when **smoothness is needed**.

Developing Muscle Memory

With repetition, certain chord shapes will become **automatic**.

You will begin to recognize **patterns instead of individual notes**.

This is called **muscle memory**.

It develops through **slow, consistent practice**.

Do not rush this process.

Accuracy comes before speed.

Practice: Chord Positions

Exercise 1: Close Movement

Chapter 9 example 1

Play:

C Am F G
D Bm G A
E C#m A B

Choose positions that **keep your hand close**.

Exercise 2: Shared Notes

Chapter 9 example 2

Play:

C → Am → F → Dm
G → Em → C → Am

Keep **as many notes as possible** between chord changes.

Exercise 3: Register Control

Chapter 9 example 3

Play:

F Bb C F
D G A D

Try playing in:

- **Low register**
- **Middle register**
- **Higher register**

Notice how the sound **changes in each range**.

Exercise 4: Listening Practice

Choose a **worship recording**.

Observe where the **piano part sits on the keyboard**.

Notice how rarely it **jumps unnecessarily**.

Then play along with the chart.

Summary

Playing chords in different positions allows you to **move efficiently and sound connected**.

In this chapter, you learned:

- That chords can be **rearranged**
- Why **position matters**
- How to **stay close between chords**

• When to **use root position**
• How to develop **muscle memory**

With these skills, your playing will begin to sound **more fluid and confident**.

In the next chapter, we will explore **common hand shapes and voicings used in worship piano**.

Chapter 10

Common Hand Shapes and Voicings

After learning how to move between chords smoothly, the next step is developing **reliable hand shapes**. These are the chord "grips" that your hands return to again and again.

Connecting Chord Playing to Your Classical Training

As you begin using chord shapes and voicings, you may notice something interesting. Many of these sounds will start to feel familiar.

If you have spent years reading written music, you have already played countless chords, progressions, and textures. You have played them in **hymns, classical pieces, and accompaniment parts**. You simply encountered them in **written form instead of symbol form**.

Now, as you learn to read chord charts, you are recognizing those same musical ideas in a **different language**.

A broken chord pattern you once read from the page may now appear as a **chord symbol**.
A progression you once learned in a hymn may now appear in a **modern worship song**.
A texture you once played in a classical piece may now appear in a **pop-style arrangement**.

Because of this, many styles of music will begin to feel more familiar as you gain experience with chord charts. You are **not learning completely new sounds**. You are learning how to **access sounds you already know**.

This is one reason **classically trained pianists often progress quickly** once they understand chord symbols. Their musical background gives them a strong foundation for recognizing patterns and textures.

Most experienced worship pianists do not think about **individual notes** while playing. They recognize **familiar shapes and patterns**. These shapes allow them to respond quickly to chord changes without hesitation.

In this chapter, you will learn the **most common hand shapes used in worship piano** and how to use them comfortably.

What Is a Voicing?

A **voicing** is the way the notes of a chord are arranged under your fingers.

Two pianists can play the same chord using different voicings, and both can be correct. The difference lies in **texture, balance, and comfort**.

Good voicings are:

• Easy to reach
• Clear in sound
• Easy to move from
• Balanced in tone

Your goal is not to find one **"perfect" voicing**, but to build a **small vocabulary of reliable shapes**.

Three Basic Right-Hand Shapes

Most piano voicings can be built from **three basic right-hand shapes**.

Shape 1: Root-Based Shape

This shape includes the **root in the right hand**.

Example (C major):

C – E – G

This shape is **clear and stable**. It works well at the **beginning of songs and in solo settings**.

Shape 2: Third-Based Shape

This shape begins on the **third**.

Example (C major):

E – G – C

This shape is **smooth and flexible**. It works well when **moving between chords**.

Shape 3: Fifth-Based Shape

This shape begins on the **fifth**.

Example (C major):

G – C – E

This shape sounds **open and light**. It is useful in **gentle or reflective moments**.

Applying Shapes to Seventh Chords

These same shapes also work with **seventh chords**.

Example: **Cmaj7**

Root-based: C – E – G – B
Third-based: E – G – B – C
Fifth-based: G – B – C – E

Learning these variations gives you **multiple options without adding complexity**.

Left-Hand Support Shapes

The **left hand usually provides foundation rather than detail**.

Common left-hand options include:

Single Root

C

Simple and clear. Works well with **bands**.

Octaves

C – C

Adds **strength without clutter**.

Fifths

C – G

Creates **fullness without heaviness**.

Root and Seventh

C – Bb (for C7)

Adds **color in slower settings**.

Choose left-hand shapes that **support the music without competing with other instruments**.

Combining Hands Effectively

Good voicing is about **balance**.

Avoid:

• Both hands crowded in the same range
• Both hands playing too many notes
• Excessive doubling

Aim for:

• Clear separation
• Middle-register focus
• Consistent tone

Think of your hands as **partners, not duplicates**.

Adapting Shapes to the Song

Different songs require **different textures**.

Example approaches:

Quiet verse → light **third-based shapes**
Full chorus → **root-based shapes with octaves**
Bridge → open **fifth-based shapes**

Learn to adjust **without stopping**.

This flexibility separates **fluent players from hesitant ones**.

Practice: Hand Shapes

Exercise 1: Shape Rotation

Chapter 10 example 1

Play C major using:

Root → Third → Fifth → Root

Then repeat in:

G
D
F

Exercise 2: Seventh Shapes

Chapter 10 example 2

Play:

Cmaj7 Am7 Dm7 G7

Use **different shapes for each chord**.

Exercise 3: Left-Hand Variety

Chapter 10 example 3

Play:

F Bb C F

Try each left-hand option:

• Single note
• Octave
• Fifth

Notice the **difference in texture**.

Exercise 4: Texture Practice

Chapter 10 example 4

Play:

C Am F G

First play **softly with light shapes**.
Then play **strongly with fuller shapes**.

Exercise 5: Listening Practice

Listen to several **worship recordings**.

Focus on how the pianist **changes texture between sections**.

Then apply those ideas in your own playing.

Summary

Reliable hand shapes make chord-chart reading **faster and more natural**.

In this chapter, you learned:

• What **voicings** are
• Three **core right-hand shapes**
• Common **left-hand support patterns**

• How to **balance both hands**
• How to **adapt to musical context**

With these shapes in your hands, chord symbols become **easier to translate into music**.

Chapter 11

Left-Hand Approaches

In earlier chapters, you learned how to build chords, move between them smoothly, and use practical hand shapes. Now it is time to focus more closely on the **role of the left hand**.

For many classically trained pianists, the left hand is used to playing written bass lines, inner voices, and counterpoint. In chord-chart playing, the role of the left hand is usually **simpler and more supportive**.

Learning how to use your left hand wisely will improve your **sound, timing, and ability to work with other musicians**.

In this chapter, you will learn several **practical left-hand approaches used in worship piano** and how to choose the right one for each situation.

The Primary Role of the Left Hand

In most worship settings, the left hand provides **foundation rather than detail**.

Its main job is to:

- Support the harmony
- Reinforce the rhythm
- Anchor the sound

It is not usually responsible for **complex melodies or thick textures**.

A **steady, clear left hand** creates confidence for the entire band.

When a Bass Player Is Present

If you are playing with a **bass player**, your left hand has **less responsibility**.

In this situation:

- The bass player usually supplies the **root**
- The groove comes from the **rhythm section**
- Your main role is **harmonic support**

Because of this, you may often **simplify your left-hand part**.

Sometimes you may play **only occasional bass notes**.
Sometimes you may **not play the left hand at all**.

This is not weakness. It is **good ensemble playing**.

Single-Note Bass

The simplest left-hand approach is playing **single bass notes**.

Example:

Left hand: **C**
Right hand: **C chord**

This approach is:

• Clear
• Clean
• Easy to control
• Effective with bands

Single-note bass works especially well in:

• Fast songs
• Busy arrangements
• Full-band settings

Octave Bass

Playing **octaves** adds strength without adding clutter.

Example:

C – C

This creates a **fuller sound while remaining focused**.

Octaves work well in:

• Choruses
• Strong endings
• Solo piano settings

Use them carefully. **Too many octaves can become heavy**.

Fifth-Based Bass

Another common approach is playing the **root and fifth**.

Example:

C – G

This creates **fullness without excessive density**.

Fifths are useful when:

• You want **strength**
• You want **clarity**
• You want **space**

They are especially helpful when **no bass player is present**.

Root and Seventh

In slower songs, you may sometimes include the **seventh** in your left hand.

Example (**C7**):

C – Bb

This adds **subtle color and depth**.

Use this sparingly. It works best in **reflective or gospel-influenced settings**.

Broken Bass Patterns

Sometimes the left hand plays **simple patterns** instead of sustained notes.

Examples:

C – G – C
C – E – G

These broken patterns add **motion and interest**.

They are useful in:

• Ballads
• Solo piano
• Light accompaniment

Avoid making them **too busy**.

Coordinating Both Hands

Good left-hand playing depends on **balance with the right hand**.

Avoid:

• Both hands crowded in the same register
• Both hands playing dense chords
• Competing rhythms

Aim for:

• Separation
• Clarity
• Complementary motion

Think of the **left hand as the foundation** and the **right hand as the decoration**.

Choosing the Right Approach

There is no single **"correct"** left-hand pattern for every song.

Instead, ask yourself:

• Am I playing **alone or with a band**?
• Is the song **quiet or energetic**?
• Is the texture **full or sparse**?

Then choose the **simplest approach that fits the situation**.

Simple and steady is almost always **better than complex and uncertain**.

Practice: Left-Hand Techniques

Exercise 1: Single Notes

Chapter 11 example 1

Play:

C Am F G

Use **only single bass notes**.

Exercise 2: Octaves

Chapter 11 example 2

Play:

F Bb C F

Use **octaves in the left hand**.

Exercise 3: Fifths

Chapter 11 example 3

Play:

D G A D

Use **root and fifth**.

Exercise 4: Mixed Approaches

Chapter 11 example 4

Play:

C G Am F

Try:

- Single notes first
- Then octaves
- Then broken patterns

Notice the **difference in sound and texture**.

Exercise 5: Listening Practice

Listen to **worship recordings**.

Focus on what the **pianist does with the left hand**.

Notice how often it is **simple and supportive**.

Then imitate that approach.

Summary

The left hand provides the **foundation** for chord-chart playing.

In this chapter, you learned:

- The **main role** of the left hand
- Common **bass patterns**
- How to **balance both hands**
- How to **choose appropriate approaches**

With a **strong left hand and flexible right hand**, your playing will sound **confident and grounded**.

In the next chapter, we will explore **basic comping styles for different worship settings**.

Chapter 12

Basic Comping Styles for Worship

Reading chord charts accurately is only part of playing well. **How you play the chords — the rhythm, feel, and texture — matters just as much as which notes you choose.**

Different worship songs call for different styles. A reflective ballad requires a different approach than an energetic praise song. Learning a few basic comping styles will help you adapt quickly to many musical situations.

In this chapter, you will learn several **common worship piano styles** and how to apply them using chord charts.

What Is Comping?

"Comping" is short for **"accompanying."**

When you comp, you provide **rhythmic and harmonic support** for singers and other instruments. You are not playing the main melody. You are helping the song move forward.

Good comping is:

- Steady
- Supportive
- Tasteful
- Consistent

It draws **attention to the song, not to itself**.

Ballad Style (Slow and Reflective)

Ballad-style playing is common in **prayerful or emotional worship songs**.

Characteristics

- Slow tempo
- Gentle dynamics
- Sustained chords
- Simple rhythms

Typical Approach

Left hand: **single notes or octaves**
Right hand: **soft broken chords or light pads**

Example pattern:

Left: **C — — —**
Right: **E – G – C** (arpeggiated)

Focus on **smoothness and tone**.

Pop/Rock Style (Steady and Driving)

Many modern worship songs use **pop or rock rhythms**.

Characteristics

• Moderate to fast tempo
• Strong pulse
• Repetitive patterns
• Clear accents

Typical Approach

Left hand: **steady roots or octaves**
Right hand: **rhythmic chord patterns**

Example feel:

"1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and"

Keep your rhythm **consistent** and **lock in with the drummer**.

6/8 Style (Flowing and Expansive)

Some worship songs use a **6/8 or 12/8 feel**.

Characteristics

• Triplet-based rhythm
• Flowing motion
• Emotional build

Typical Approach

Left hand: **dotted-quarter pulse**
Right hand: **rolling chords**

Example feel:

"ONE-two-three FOUR-five-six"

Let the rhythm **breathe naturally**.

Gospel-Influenced Style (Warm and Expressive)

Many worship songs include **gospel elements**.

Characteristics

• Rich harmony
• Syncopation
• Expressive dynamics
• Strong endings

Typical Approach

Left hand: **roots and fifths**
Right hand: **seventh and extended voicings**

Use this style **tastefully and in context**.

Pad Style (Atmospheric and Supportive)

Sometimes the piano functions more like a **pad instrument**.

Characteristics

• Sustained tones
• Minimal rhythm
• Blended texture

Typical Approach

Left hand: **occasional bass notes**
Right hand: **wide, gentle voicings**

This works well behind:

• Prayer
• Scripture reading
• Quiet transitions

Listening and Imitation

The best way to learn style is **by listening carefully**.

Choose **strong reference recordings**.
Study the **piano parts**.
Notice **patterns and textures**.

Then imitate.

Over time, these patterns will **become natural**.

Listening to the Guitar and Blending Well

In many worship settings, the **guitar and piano occupy a similar range of sound**. Both instruments often play chords in the **middle register**, and both can carry rhythm and harmony.

Because of this, it is important to **listen carefully to what the guitar is doing**.

If both instruments play the same type of pattern at the same time, the sound can become **cluttered or unfocused**.

Instead, aim to **complement the guitar rather than compete with it**.

For example:

If the guitar is **strumming steady rhythms**, the piano can:

• Use lighter arpeggios
• Hold sustained chords
• Emphasize main beats
• Play simple pulses

This allows the guitar to provide the **rhythmic drive** while the piano adds **texture and support**.

If the guitar is playing **light, sparse parts**, the piano may take a **more rhythmic role**.

If the guitar is playing **arpeggios**, the piano may use **fuller chords**.

Think of the instruments as **parts of a conversation rather than duplicates of each other**.

One leads.
One supports.
Both listen.

Good worship piano playing is **not about filling every space**. It is about **fitting into the overall sound**.

Practice: Comping Styles

Exercise 1: Ballad

Chapter 12 example 1

Play:

C Am F G

Use **slow, sustained voicings**.

Exercise 2: Pop

Chapter 12 example 2

Play:

D A Bm G

Use **steady eighth notes**.

Exercise 3: 6/8

Chapter 12 example 3

Play:

G D Em C

Count in **6/8** and use **rolling patterns**.

Exercise 4: Pad

Chapter 12 example 4

Play:

F Bb C F

Hold **wide voicings**.

Exercise 5: Mixed Styles

Chapter 12 example 5

Play:

Verse: **C** **Am** **F** **G** (Ballad style)
Chorus: **C** **G** **Am** **F** (Pop style)

Switch styles **smoothly between sections**.

Exercise 6: Listening Practice

Listen to several **worship songs in different styles**.

Identify which style is being used.

Then try to **match the style at the piano**.

Summary

Comping styles shape **how chords feel and function** in worship music.

In this chapter, you learned:

• What **comping** is
• Four major **worship styles**
• How to **change styles**
• How to **learn through listening**

With these tools, you can **adapt to many band settings with confidence**.

In the next chapter, we will focus on **reading charts in real time and responding in live situations**.

Chapter 13

Reading Charts in Real Time

In a live worship setting, things rarely go exactly as planned. A song may be repeated, shortened, slowed down, or extended. A leader may change keys, skip a section, or respond to the moment.

Being able to read and respond in real time is one of the most important skills for a church pianist.

In this chapter, you will learn how to stay oriented in a chart, how to recover from mistakes, and how to remain calm and musical in live situations.

Thinking Ahead While You Play

When reading a chord chart, your eyes should be slightly ahead of your hands.

Try to see:

- The next chord
- The next section
- Any upcoming changes

This allows your hands to prepare in advance.

Avoid staring only at the current chord.

Good readers are always looking forward.

Recognizing Patterns in Each Section

As you read through a chart, look for patterns in the progression.

Most worship songs are built from repeating harmonic patterns. The verse often follows one progression. The chorus often follows another. The bridge may introduce a new pattern, but even that usually repeats.

For example, a verse might follow:

C – G – Am – F

while the chorus follows:

F – C – G – Am

Instead of thinking about each chord individually every time, recognize the pattern.

Once you see it repeat, allow your hands to develop familiarity with that sequence. Over time, your muscle memory will begin to anticipate the next chord before you consciously think about it.

This reduces hesitation and increases confidence.

Train yourself to think in progressions, not isolated chords.

Following the Worship Leader

In worship music, the leader often determines the flow of the song.

They may:

- Repeat a chorus
- Extend a bridge
- End early
- Change dynamics

Watch for visual cues.

Listen for verbal cues.

Learn the leader's habits.

Your role is to support their direction.

Handling Repeats and Changes

Many charts include repeat signs, codas, or written instructions such as *repeat as needed.*

In practice, these sections are often flexible.

Be ready to:

- Loop sections
- Skip sections
- Jump to endings

If you lose your place, stay in the key and keep playing simply until you reorient yourself.

Do not stop.

Recovering from Mistakes

Everyone makes mistakes.

What matters is how you respond.

If you play a wrong chord:

- Do not freeze
- Do not apologize
- Do not overcorrect

Simply move on to the next chord.

Most listeners will never notice.

Confidence covers small errors.

Simplifying Under Pressure

When you feel uncertain, simplify.

Play:

- Fewer notes
- Slower rhythms
- Clear roots
- Stable patterns

Simple playing gives you time to think.

Complex playing increases stress.

Clarity builds confidence.

Reading with Limited Preparation

Sometimes you will be asked to play a song with little notice.

In these situations:

- Scan the chart quickly
- Identify common progressions
- Notice key changes

- Look for repeated sections

Then rely on your fundamentals.

Your training in earlier chapters prepares you for this.

Preparing Before Rehearsal

One of the most effective ways to improve your confidence is to prepare before rehearsal.

Today, this is easier than ever.

You can search for nearly any worship song online and listen to it immediately. Play along with the recording. Notice:

- The tempo
- The groove
- The chord patterns
- The transitions between sections

Often the recording will already be in the key your church is using. If it is not, you have options.

If you use a digital or MIDI keyboard, you can adjust the key temporarily to match the recording.

Alternatively, many platforms allow you to adjust the playback key so it matches your chart.

Use these tools to your advantage.

Listening and playing along before rehearsal helps you:

- Internalize the feel
- Anticipate section changes
- Recognize progression patterns
- Reduce anxiety

Most church leaders provide charts and song lists ahead of time. Use that time wisely. Even fifteen focused minutes with a recording can make a dramatic difference.

Playing with Confidence, Not Perfection

Worship is not a performance contest.

Your goal is not technical perfection.

Your goal is musical leadership and support.

A calm, steady pianist helps the entire team feel secure.

Mistakes matter far less than attitude.

Practice: Real-Time Reading

Exercise 1: Look Ahead

Play through a chart while consciously reading one measure ahead.

Exercise 2: Section Loops

Choose a song.

Loop the chorus for two minutes without stopping.

Practice staying focused.

Exercise 3: Recovery Drill

Intentionally play a wrong chord.

Immediately recover.

Train yourself not to panic.

Exercise 4: Limited Preparation

Choose a new chart.

Give yourself two minutes to scan it.

Then play.

Exercise 5: Listening Practice

Watch a live worship video.

Notice how musicians adapt in real time.

Then apply those ideas.

Developing an Effective Practice Routine

Efficient preparation builds confidence.

Instead of randomly playing through a chart, try this approach:

1. Listen to the song once without playing.
2. Identify the verse, chorus, and bridge patterns.
3. Practice each section separately.
4. Loop difficult transitions.
5. Play along with the recording.

Short, focused preparation is more effective than long, distracted practice.

When you walk into rehearsal already familiar with the structure and sound of the song, you will feel calm and ready.

Confidence grows from preparation.

Summary

In this chapter, you learned:

- How to think ahead
- How to recognize progression patterns
- How to prepare effectively
- How to follow leaders
- How to recover from mistakes
- How to simplify under pressure

Chapter 14

From Hymn to Chord Chart

Many church pianists learned to play by reading hymns, classical pieces, and written accompaniments. These traditions emphasize careful notation, four-part harmony, and structured voice leading.

Modern worship music often uses chord charts instead of fully written scores. At first, this can feel like a completely different approach. In reality, both systems describe the same musical ideas in different ways.

In this chapter, you will learn how to connect your experience with hymns and written music to chord-chart style playing.

Understanding the Harmony in Hymns

Most hymns are written using four-part harmony:

- Soprano (melody)
- Alto
- Tenor
- Bass

When you play from a hymnal, you are already playing chords. They are simply spread out across four voices.

For example, a typical hymn chord might include:

C – E – G – C

This is a C major chord, even though it appears in different octaves and voices.

When you recognize these patterns, you begin to see hymns as chord progressions rather than isolated notes.

Identifying Chords in Written Music

Take a familiar hymn and examine one measure at a time.

Look at all the notes that sound together.

Group them into a chord.

For example:

If you see:

C – E – G – B

You are playing **Cmaj7**.

If you see:

D – F – A – C

You are playing **Dm7**.

This process teaches you to translate written harmony into chord symbols.

Over time, you will begin to recognize these patterns instantly.

Simplifying Four-Part Textures

Hymns are often harmonically rich. When adapting them to chord charts, you do not need to play every voice exactly as written.

Instead, extract the essential harmony.

Focus on:

- Root
- Third
- Seventh (if present)
- Melody (when appropriate)

This creates a cleaner, more modern texture.

You are not removing meaning. You are reshaping it.

Creating a Chord Chart from a Hymn

You can practice this skill by creating simple chord charts from hymn arrangements.

Start with a short hymn.

Write the chord name above each measure.

For example:

| C | G | Am | F |

Over time, this becomes faster and more intuitive.

This exercise strengthens your understanding of harmony and chart reading.

Adapting Hymns for Modern Worship

Many churches use hymns in contemporary worship settings.

When adapting a hymn:

- Simplify dense textures
- Add gentle rhythmic patterns
- Use modern voicings
- Incorporate pads or arpeggios

For example, a traditional block-chord hymn can become:

- A flowing ballad
- A gentle pad
- A rhythmic praise song

This allows hymns to blend naturally into modern services.

Respecting the Melody

In hymn playing, the melody is sacred.

This remains true in chord-chart settings.

Always support the melody.

Avoid voicings that clash with the sung line.

If needed, include the melody in your right hand.

The melody leads. The harmony follows.

Using Your Classical Skills as an Advantage

Your classical training gives you strengths that many chord-chart readers do not have:

- Strong rhythm reading
- Awareness of voice leading
- Sensitivity to dynamics

- Understanding of musical form

These skills transfer directly into worship piano playing.

As you learn chord charts, you are not abandoning your training. You are expanding it.

Practice: Hymn Adaptation

Exercise 1: Chord Identification

Choose a hymn.

Write the chord above each measure.

Play using simple voicings.

Exercise 2: Texture Reduction

Play a hymn.

Then replay it using only:

- Root
- Third
- Fifth
- Melody

Compare the sound.

Exercise 3: Style Conversion

Play a hymn in three ways:

- Traditional block chords
- Ballad style
- Pad style

Notice how the same harmony fits different styles.

Exercise 4: Listening Practice

Listen to modern arrangements of hymns.

Notice how harmony is simplified and stylized.

Then apply those ideas.

Summary

Hymns and chord charts describe the same harmonic language in different formats.

In this chapter, you learned:

- How to recognize chords in written music
- How to simplify four-part harmony
- How to create basic charts
- How to adapt hymns for modern worship
- How to use your classical background as an advantage

With these skills, you can move comfortably between traditional and modern worship styles.

In the next chapter, we will work with complete practice songs and apply everything you have learned throughout this book.

full chart examples.

Chapter 15

Complete Practice Songs

Throughout this book, you have learned how to read chord symbols, build chords, choose voicings, play in different positions, use effective left-hand patterns, and adapt to different musical styles.

This chapter brings all of those skills together.

Here you will work with complete practice songs designed to help you apply what you have learned in realistic worship settings.

These examples are not meant to be performances. They are learning tools.

Focus on **steady progress rather than perfection.**

How to Use This Chapter

Before playing each practice song:

1. Read through the chart.
2. Identify the key.
3. Notice the form (verse, chorus, bridge).
4. Look for repeating chord patterns.
5. Listen to the reference recording if available.

Then begin playing **slowly and deliberately**.

Increase the tempo only after accuracy and comfort develop.

Practice Songs

Practice Song 1 — Gentle Ballad

📺 *I Praise You My Savior*

Style: Reflective / Prayerful
Tempo: Slow
Key: B♭ Major

Practice Song 2 — Upbeat Praise

Everyday I Praise You

Style: Pop / Praise
Tempo: Medium–Fast
Key: D Major

Practice Song 3 — 6/8 Worship Flow

Take Us Home King of Glory

Style: Flowing / Expansive
Tempo: Moderate
Key: G Major

Practice Song 4 — Gospel-Influenced Worship

Faithful Again

Style: Warm / Expressive
Tempo: Medium
Key: E♭ Major

Practice Song 5 — Hymn Adaptation

All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name

Style: Traditional → Modern
Tempo: Moderate
Key: G Major

Building Your Own Practice Songs

After working through these examples, begin creating your own practice material.

You might choose:

• a familiar worship song
• a hymn
• a simple chord progression

Write out the chart and experiment with different approaches.

Try:

• different styles
• alternate voicings
• new left-hand patterns
• different rhythmic feels

This process builds independence and confidence.

Practicing with Recordings

Whenever possible, practice with recordings.

Playing along with recorded music helps simulate real worship situations.

Try the following:

• Play along with the recording.
• Adjust the tempo if necessary.
• Loop difficult sections for focused practice.

This type of practice strengthens timing, listening skills, and musical awareness.

Using AI Tools for Practice Ideas

In addition to practicing with recordings, modern AI music tools can provide another helpful practice resource.

Platforms such as **Suno** and similar music-generation tools allow you to create short songs in specific musical styles. For example, you might generate a track described as:

• modern worship ballad
• upbeat praise song
• gospel-influenced worship
• atmospheric prayer music

These generated examples can give you fresh ideas for rhythm, texture, and accompaniment patterns.

Some tools also allow you to separate the **instrument stems**, which means you can isolate and listen closely to individual parts such as the piano or keyboard. By studying these parts, you can observe how pianists support the harmony, interact with the rhythm section, and build patterns that work well in worship settings.

You can also use AI tools to generate simple practice material by prompting a song with a specific feel, tempo, or chord progression. This can help you experiment with:

• different rhythmic patterns
• new comping ideas
• alternate voicings
• stylistic variations

These tracks are not meant to replace real musicians or live worship settings. Instead, they serve as **practice laboratories** where you can explore ideas and strengthen your musical instincts.

Used thoughtfully, AI tools can become another valuable resource for developing creativity, confidence, and stylistic awareness.

Summary

Working with complete songs allows you to combine technique, theory, and musicianship into practical musical skill.

In this chapter, you learned:

• how to approach full chord charts
• how to practice songs systematically
• how to apply different musical styles
• how to evaluate your own progress

You now have the tools to serve confidently as a worship pianist.

In the final section of this book, we will explore how to continue growing beyond these pages.

Final Chapter

Continuing to Grow as a Worship Pianist

By this point, you have learned how to read chord symbols, build chords quickly, move smoothly between them, choose practical voicings, adapt to different styles, and function confidently in live worship settings.

That is no small accomplishment.

If you can open a chord chart and play through it with steady rhythm and supportive harmony, you have crossed an important threshold. What once felt unfamiliar now feels manageable. What once looked confusing now feels readable.

But growth does not stop here.

This chapter offers guidance for continuing to develop your skill, confidence, and musical sensitivity as a worship pianist.

You Already Knew More Than You Thought

If you are classically trained, you may now recognize something important:

You were never starting from zero.

You already understood:

- Harmony
- Voice leading
- Musical form
- Rhythm
- Balance

What you needed was translation.

Chord charts are simply another way of organizing musical information. Now that you understand how they work, you can move freely between written notation and symbolic harmony.

That flexibility is a powerful strength.

Develop Your Ear

As you grow more comfortable with chord charts, begin listening more actively.

Try to:

• Identify chord changes without looking
• Hear when a suspension resolves
• Recognize common progressions
• Anticipate the next chord

The more your ear develops, the less you will depend on written charts.

Listening builds confidence and musical awareness.

Expand Your Repertoire

Choose songs in different keys and styles.

Play:

• Traditional hymns
• Modern worship songs
• Gospel-influenced songs
• Simple pop arrangements

Each new song reinforces your skills.

Over time, musical patterns become familiar, and new charts become easier to read.

Strengthen Your Rhythm

Rhythm is often more important than complexity.

Practice:

• Playing with a metronome
• Locking in with recordings
• Keeping steady time under pressure

A steady pianist builds trust within the band and supports the entire worship team.

Keep Your Playing Simple and Supportive

As your skills grow, you may be tempted to add more notes, faster runs, or heavier textures.

Remember:

Clarity serves the song.
Simplicity supports the congregation.

The goal of worship piano is not display. It is direction.

Your role is to support the singers, the band, and the congregation as they participate in worship.

Build Efficient Practice Habits

Short, focused preparation is powerful.

When learning a new song:

1. Listen to the recording first.
2. Identify the chord patterns.
3. Practice sections separately.
4. Play along with the recording.

Even ten to fifteen minutes of focused preparation can build confidence.

Consistency matters more than length.

Grow in Musical Sensitivity

Technical skill is only part of worship leading.

Continue growing in your ability to:

• Listen to other musicians
• Respond to the moment
• Adjust dynamics
• Support vocalists

Music in a worship setting is a conversation.

The more you listen, the better you will play.

Move Toward Fluency

At first, reading chord charts required conscious effort.

Over time, it will begin to feel natural.

You will start to:

• Recognize common progressions instantly
• Anticipate musical patterns
• Adjust voicings automatically
• Respond without hesitation

This is musical fluency.

It develops gradually through repetition, experience, and consistent playing.

You Are Equipped

If you have worked through this book carefully, you now have:

• A clear understanding of chord symbols
• Practical voicing options
• Ensemble awareness
• Real-time reading skills
• Style flexibility

You are equipped to serve confidently as a worship pianist.

Continue practicing.

Continue listening.

Continue learning.

But most importantly, continue playing.

Final Encouragement

Do not measure your progress by comparison.

Measure it by confidence.

If you can sit at the piano, open a chart, and support your church with steady, thoughtful playing, you are doing meaningful work.

Music in worship is not about perfection.

It is about participation.

Keep growing.
Keep serving.

Glossary

Arpeggiate
To play the notes of a chord one at a time rather than all together. Arpeggiating chords is a common way pianists fill space in worship accompaniment.

Augmented Chord
A chord built from the root, a major third, and an augmented fifth (a fifth raised by a half step). Augmented chords have a tense, unstable sound and are often used to lead into another chord or create movement in a progression.

Bass Note
The lowest note played in a chord. In slash chords, the bass note may be different from the root of the chord.

Chord Chart
A simplified form of musical notation that shows chord symbols and song structure rather than writing out every note. Chord charts give the harmonic outline of a song and allow the musician to choose how to play the accompaniment.

Chord Symbol
A shorthand symbol that indicates what chord should be played. Examples include C, Am, F, or G7.

Diminished Chord
A chord built from the root, a minor third, and a diminished fifth. Diminished chords often create tension and are commonly used to lead into other chords.

Groove
The rhythmic feel or style of a song. In worship music, groove refers to how the rhythm section plays together and how the pianist fits into that rhythmic pattern.

Harmony
The combination of notes played together to create chords and chord progressions. Harmony supports and enriches the melody.

Inversion
A rearrangement of a chord where a note other than the root is the lowest note. Inversions help create smoother movement between chords.

Lead Sheet
A form of notation that includes a written melody with chord symbols placed above the staff.

Major Chord
A chord built from three notes: the root, the major third, and the perfect fifth. Major chords typically sound bright or stable.

Minor Chord
A chord built from the root, the minor third, and the perfect fifth. Minor chords generally have a darker or more reflective sound.

Perfect Fifth
The interval between the root and the fifth note of a major scale. It is a foundational part of most chords.

Progression (Chord Progression)
A sequence of chords played in order within a song. Many worship songs use simple progressions that repeat throughout the song.

Root
The main note that a chord is built from and named after.

Rhythm Pattern
The way chords are played rhythmically. For example, chords may be played on every beat, held for a measure, or broken into smaller rhythmic patterns.

Seventh Chord
A chord that includes the seventh note above the root in addition to the basic triad. Seventh chords add color and tension to harmony.

Slash Chord
A chord symbol that indicates a specific bass note. For example, **C/E** means a C major chord with E played in the bass.

Suspended Chord (Sus Chord)
A chord where the third is replaced by either the second or the fourth. Suspended chords often create a feeling of tension that resolves when the third returns.

Triad
A basic three-note chord consisting of the root, third, and fifth.

Voicing
The way the notes of a chord are arranged on the keyboard. Different voicings of the same chord can create different textures and colors.

Quick Reference: Common Chords in All Keys

This chart summarizes the most common chord types used in chord charts. Each chord is built from the **root, third, and fifth**, with additional notes added for color.

Major Triads

Root – Major 3rd – Perfect 5th

C — C E G
Db — Db F Ab
D — D F# A
Eb — Eb G Bb
E — E G# B
F — F A C
Gb — Gb Bb Db
G — G B D
Ab — Ab C Eb
A — A C# E
Bb — Bb D F
B — B D# F#

Minor Triads

Root – Minor 3rd – Perfect 5th

Cm — C Eb G
Dbm — Db E Ab
Dm — D F A
Ebm — Eb Gb Bb
Em — E G B
Fm — F Ab C
Gbm — Gb A Db
Gm — G Bb D
Abm — Ab B Eb
Am — A C E
Bbm — Bb Db F
Bm — B D F#

Diminished Triads

Root – Minor 3rd – Diminished 5th

Cdim — C Eb Gb
Dbdim — Db E G
Ddim — D F Ab
Ebdim — Eb Gb A
Edim — E G Bb
Fdim — F Ab B
Gbdim — Gb A C
Gdim — G Bb Db
Abdim — Ab B D
Adim — A C Eb
Bbdim — Bb Db E
Bdim — B D F

Augmented Triads

Root – Major 3rd – Augmented 5th

Caug — C E G#
Dbaug — Db F A
Daug — D F# A#
Ebaug — Eb G B
Eaug — E G# C
Faug — F A C#
Gbaug — Gb Bb D
Gaug — G B D#
Abaug — Ab C E
Aaug — A C# F
Bbaug — Bb D F#
Baug — B D# G

Suspended Chords

Sus2: Root – 2 – 5
Sus4: Root – 4 – 5

Csus2 — C D G
Csus4 — C F G

Dsus2 — D E A
Dsus4 — D G A

Esus2 — E F# B
Esus4 — E A B

Fsus2 — F G C
Fsus4 — F Bb C

Gsus2 — G A D
Gsus4 — G C D

Asus2 — A B E
Asus4 — A D E

Seventh Chords

Dominant Seventh
Root – Major 3rd – Perfect 5th – Minor 7th

C7 — C E G Bb
D7 — D F# A C
E7 — E G# B D
F7 — F A C Eb
G7 — G B D F
A7 — A C# E G
B7 — B D# F# A

Minor Seventh
Root – Minor 3rd – Perfect 5th – Minor 7th

Cm7 — C Eb G Bb
Dm7 — D F A C
Em7 — E G B D
Fm7 — F Ab C Eb
Gm7 — G Bb D F
Am7 — A C E G
Bm7 — B D F# A

Major Seventh
Root – Major 3rd – Perfect 5th – Major 7th

Cmaj7 — C E G B
Dmaj7 — D F# A C#
Emaj7 — E G# B D#
Fmaj7 — F A C E
Gmaj7 — G B D F#
Amaj7 — A C# E G#

Additional Learning Resources

https://www.musictheory.net/

https://chord.rocks/piano/chords

https://chordidentifier.com/app/

https://suno.com/

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Daniel Carl Heister is a musician, arranger, and educator with a passion for helping musicians grow in both skill and confidence. With years of experience playing and teaching piano, brass, and contemporary worship music, he has worked with many church musicians who want to learn to play from chord charts with freedom and understanding.

Dan's teaching focuses on practical musicianship—helping classically trained pianists bridge the gap between traditional notation and the chord-based approach used in modern worship settings. His goal is to make music theory approachable and useful so that musicians can serve more effectively and creatively in their churches. In addition to teaching, Dan composes and produces original music and develops educational resources designed to help musicians train their ears, understand harmony, and play with greater confidence.