

# PLAYING GOSPEL PIANO

## Two Main Styles of Gospel Piano

- Congregational Style

*Style of piano playing where the pianist **is** playing the melody while the congregation is singing.*

- RH plays melody (single note or octave).
- LH plays Bass note (single note or octave) and chords on appropriate beats.

- Accompaniment Style

*Style of piano playing where the melody **is not** played, and the piano is accompanying a singer/instrumentalist with rhythm using both hands.*

- LH plays bass note (single note or octave, as low on piano as possible).
- RH plays chords in middle/lower register.

## Put It All Together

- Congregational Style

*Right Hand:*

- Check out key signature and time signature.
- Play only melody note strongly (one note or octave).
- Try adding fill notes in chords after you have played melody note.

*Left Hand:*

- Play octave bass note as low as you can on piano on first beat of each measure 3/4 time signature—beats 1 and 3 in 4/4 time signature).
- Walk-up bass notes to new chord when possible.
- Play chords on beat 2 and 3 in 3/4 time, and 2 and 4 in 4/4 time.
- Play chords to any inversion in register below middle C.

*Beginner's tip:* Use root chord for starters—branch to any inversion.

*Practice Tips for Congregational Style:*

- Practice RH melody diligently alone. Write in fingering with pencil. Utilize all 5 fingers: know how to play your scales.
- Try octaves as you can.
- Know key signatures well. Memorize notes within chords instantly. Be able to play root and inversions in all “main keys”.
- Learn and maintain your scales. It will be worth it!

- Accompaniment Style

- Know your I-IV-V-V7 chord positions in main keys:  
C – G – F – D – A – B-flat – E-flat – A-flat.

*Beginner's tip:* Keys C – G – F – B-flat Major are good for starters.

- Check out key signature.
- Be able to change smoothly from one chord to another in I-IV-V-V7 positions in most keys.
- Check out time signature; use these basic rhythm patterns:

4/4:

1 count—LH Bass note, play lowest octave on piano  
(same note as chord)

2 count—RH chord (Middle C register)

3 count—LH octave Bass note

4 count—RH chord (Middle C register)

3/4:

1 count—LH Bass note

2 count—RH chord

3 count—RH chord

6/8:

Two measures of same rhythm as 3/4

*Practice Tips for Accompaniment Style:*

- Practice rhythms in easy keys before you actually play a song. Play many different hymns in same key signature to firmly know your chord changes before moving on to new key.
- Find someone else to play melody in upper register or on an instrument while you are practicing accompanying styles.

**Tips for Choosing Printed Music**

- To begin, find very simple, notated hymns with chord symbols.
  - God is So Good (Key of C)
  - Deep and Wide (Key of C)
- Check out key signature.
- Make sure there are no “surprise” chords in the piece before playing song.
- Check out time signature.
- Determine if you are accompanying or leading on the piano.
- If leading, practice RH melody alone.
- If accompanying, practice rhythms alone.
- Put directions into action slowly, speeding up as you can.
- Try singing words as you accompany yourself.
- Team up with an instrumentalist—he or she plays the melody while you accompany.
- Have fun while you are learning!