

Worship in Perspective

Reflections on how we “do” worship as the Church

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Over the years of leading or assisting various groups/churches in acts of worship, I have gleaned much, and have developed a sense of perspective and purpose in how I choose to lead groups, large or small, in worship. These are my personal reflections on how worship is offered as a church body, and often within the context of a service. This is not intended to be comprehensive, rather it is to give a glimpse into my heart and be a springboard for further conversation. Additionally, these are in no particular order of importance.

An audience of One. It's all about Him.

Deuteronomy 6:13; Luke 4:8

Our worship is first for God alone and not for our personal enjoyment or preference. While worshiping can be a joyful experience, it is not for us, but a gift given to the Creator. Individually and corporately, our worship can easily become a spectator affair if we are not careful. Our participation becomes dependent on song choice, how engaging and funny the speaker was, and if we leave feeling positive and encouraged.

As in the movie industry, let us consider the role of director, actors and audience. The director guides the actors, the actors perform, and the audience is amazed or bored depending on various preferences. Is this how we approach worship? God (director), guides the band, various leaders and speaker (actors) on stage to entertain, and the congregation (audience) is amazed or bored depending on the performance given as directed by God. So, directly or indirectly, we are either amazed or bored by God. What would change if we shifted our perspective to realize that God is our audience that we offer our worship and praise to? Those on stage equip and guide the body to rightly worship God in spirit and truth, and is given to God, our audience of one. Which is more important: that our worship is more pleasing to us, or more pleasing to Him?

We all worship something or someone.

Joshua 24:14-15; Acts 17:22-23; 1 Corinthians 10:31

God created people with the desire and ability to worship Him alone, but our ability has been corrupted and our desire misplaced. We witness the evidence

of this design and it's corruption in our culture as we worship everything from sports teams, bands and celebrities, to our own images of power and success. The question one must ask is, "Who/what is on the throne of my life?" The answer is often revealed by where we sacrifice our resources of time, money, effort and talents. We want to help people put God on the throne of their lives and offer their sacrifice of worship to Him.

Authentic worship is in spirit and truth, not simply emotion.

Psalm 128:1; Ecclesiastes 12:13; John 4:23-24; Hebrews 12:1-3

Our worship of God is grounded in truth and the leading of His Spirit. Often, deep emotions are a part of our praise and may even enrich the worship we bring to God, but it is not the center of it. The worshiper ought to take care he is not emotionally distracted, manipulated, or blinded from truth. Emotion is often the impetus of spontaneous acts of worship and gratitude, but another motivator that is just as vital is obedience. I may not always "feel" like lifting up the name of the Lord because He is worthy and deserving of praise, but I worship Him out of obedience all the same. As often with the Psalmist, I neither ignore my emotions and the circumstances that often trigger them, nor mask them with a fabricated display. Instead, I look to the Deliverer who is bigger and above it all, and in surrender I obediently submit my life to worship the One who surrendered all for me. In this way, my obedience in worship will often lead me toward joy. We aim to lead in a way that acknowledges where each person is and directs them to the God of truth who can bring healing and wholeness.

Worship is more than a concert.

Psalm 51:15-17; Romans 12:1

Expressing acts of worship can often be an incredible experience, but worship is not simply an attractional event designed for entertainment.

A concert *can* be worshipful, but worship is *not* just a concert. Authentic worship focuses our adoration on Christ, while a concert adores the band or song. Worship leads to life change, while a concert is, at best, a memorable event. Every element of a crafted worship service should have a place and purpose that puts the focus on Christ. Elements of a service (lights, sounds, images, art, videos, stage or song arrangements, etc.) should be implemented with that goal in mind. Anything that distracts to that effort should be repurposed or eliminated.

Additionally, worship can be songs, but songs aren't always worshipful. Music and other elements are selected with care and purpose to ensure they are biblically accurate, appropriate with the theme/design/flow of a service, and songs are "singable". In this, we utilize music and artistry from the past as well as what is current.

The Spirit guides in preparation as well as implementation.

2 Timothy 2:15, 3:14-17

God is honored when we submit to His leading in our preparation. Just as the pastor/speaker intentionally crafts a message given to him by God through prayerful reflection and study, the worship leader models this same pattern. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the worship leader crafts the elements of a worship service designed with purpose and forethought. Some may say they just move "where the Spirit leads" in the moment without intentional preparation. Yes, the Holy Spirit directs the worship in the moment, and may sometimes even lead in a different "direction", but He also leads in the preparation.

We lead and get out of the way.

Philippians 3:17; 1 Corinthians 2:4-5, 3:6-7

Our goal is to lead the body in a worshipful attitude that fosters a ready heart to receive God's Word that leads to life change and boldness empowered by the Holy Spirit. Led by the Spirit, we purposefully guide worshipers to see and meet with the risen Christ. To this end, we intentionally craft elements of worship that put the focus on Him, not on the talent/abilities of leaders. In other words, worship is not the place for "showboating". We want to "get out of the way" so Christ is revealed and honored.

Incorporate expressions of worship beyond music.

1 Corinthians 12

The Holy Spirit equips each part of the body with special gifts to honor God in our worship and for the building up of the body. Additionally, as worship is more than music, we want to develop a culture that encourages the involvement of gifts and other artistic expressions of worship that can stimulate a proper attitude of worship. A part of leading in worship is engaging the senses to help clarify the focus of our worship. Some people are moved through sound, others through

sight or touch, smell, etc. Images on a screen and other art that echoes a theme expressed in a particular song can reinforce the message, resonate with the worshiper, and deepen one's worship offered up to God.

Worship is expressed in a balance of unrestraint and control.

Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 14:26-40; Ephesians 5:15-20

Worshiping with unrestraint and control may seem at opposites, but I believe they go hand in hand. We ought to worship our great God with complete freedom in heart, mind and body, expressing our joy to the Lord without embarrassment or fear because He is worthy and deserving of praise. We ought to hold nothing back, as if we cannot help ourselves! At the same time, we do not lose control of ourselves, but being filled by the Spirit we are led in truth as the Spirit controls us. As we submit to the control of the Spirit, we grow in strength to no longer be controlled by unchecked emotions, life circumstances, or manipulation by others. In Christ, we are freed to worship in spirit and truth without restraint, and we are equally freed to mature in Christ, being firmly established, equipped and empowered by the Holy Spirit to do good works.

“When ministry becomes performance, then the sanctuary becomes a theater, the congregation becomes an audience, worship becomes entertainment, and man's applause and approval become the measure of success. But when ministry is for the glory of God, his presence moves into the sanctuary. Even the unsaved visitor will fall down on this face, worship God, and confess that God is among us (1 Corinthians 14:25).”
-Warren and David Wiersbe-