

Worship: More Than Just Singing

by Tom Kraeuter

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1. The problem
 - A. George Barna found that most people don't really know what worship is.
 - B. Worship is not just a suggestion in the Bible.
 1. "Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD..." (Psalm 29:2).
 2. "Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness..." (Psalm 96:9).
 3. "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve" (Matthew 4:10).
2. What is worship?
 - A. A biblical understanding* : worship honors God, is directed toward God and requires involvement.
 1. "...all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down before the LORD, worshipping the LORD" (2 Chronicles 20:18).
 2. "And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground" (Nehemiah 8:6).
 3. "Oh come, let us worship and bow down" (Psalm 95:6).
 4. "And they came up and took hold of his [Jesus'] feet and worshiped him" (Matthew 28:9).
 5. "...present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Romans 12:1).
 6. "...so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you" (1 Corinthians 14:25).
 7. "...the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever..." (Revelation 4:10).

B. Worship honors God.

1. Original English word: “worthship”
2. “We act as if the worship service were supposed to be a production done in ‘Our Royal Honor.’ But that’s as far from biblical worship as heaven is from earth.”
[Pastor Nick Ittzes, Christian Outreach Church, Hillsboro, Missouri, Sunday sermon, 25 April 2004]
3. To truly be called worship, it must honor God.

C. Worship is directed toward God.

1. “It isn’t my intent to make a judgment statement about any church service that emphasizes evangelism or body life or teaching. I do believe that such a service should not be called a *worship* service. A worship service should focus on God. This doesn’t mean that ministry to members of the body or even to unbelievers will not occur. It does mean that the emphasis is on worship of God, ascribing to Him the praise, adoration, and thanksgiving that are due Him.” [Jerry Bridges, *The Joy of Fearing God*, Colorado Springs, Colorado: Waterbrook Press, 1997].
2. Who is the worship for?
3. Worship is a transitive verb. It needs an object.

D. Worship requires involvement.

1. One time Jacob leaned on his staff and worshiped (Genesis 47:31), but that’s the exception!
2. Worship is a verb.

Guiding Your Church Through a Worship Transition

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1. Relationship with God

- A. This is primary.
- B. Don't put new paint on rotting wood.
- C. Do all that you can to cause people to grow in their relationship with the Lord.
- D. "When the heart is set upon God, true worship will not depend upon outward stimulus, it will be in constant progress" (Ronald B. Allen and Gordon L. Borrer, *Worship: Rediscovering the Missing Jewel*, Portland, Oregon: Multnomah, 1982).
- E. "Years ago, as missionaries in the Alaskan wilderness, my husband and I drew our water from an indoor pump. We were city folk, and at first we didn't understand the pump's mechanics. Once a week, we poured in a cup of water to prime it, pumped like crazy until water sprung up from underground, then filled every bucket and pot we could find.
"I well remember how an Eskimo neighbor laughed at our system. Then he explained that if we used the pump whenever we needed, it would always stay primed, ready to gush out with one easy thrust of the handle." (Tricia McCary Rhodes, "Created for Delight" in *Discipleship Journal*, November/December 2002).

2. Prayer—an essential foundation

- A. Only God can make deep, wholesale, permanent changes in individuals and congregations.
- B. "Often we do not pray because we doubt that anything will actually happen if we pray. Of course, we don't admit this publicly. But if we felt certain of visible results within sixty seconds of every prayer, there would be holes in the knees of every pair of Christian-owned pants in the world!" (Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life*, Colorado Springs, Colorado: Navpress Publishing Group, 1991).
- C. "Mining is hard work. Boring into solid rock is no easy task. It requires patience and commitment, but it is essential to the mining process. Once the boring is complete a charge is placed in the hole, and large amounts of rock are then blasted away. If the blast occurred on the surface it would not have the same impact. Many Christians today are eager to participate in lighting the fuse, but few are willing to give themselves to the difficult job of boring into solid rock. Anyone can light the fuse. It takes commitment and patience to do the hard work." [author unknown].

3. Be sure you really know why you're making changes.
 - A. Why make a change?
 1. People are lethargic
 2. It's trendy
 3. Keep up with the "competition"
 - B. Richard Webb, former associate director of evangelism for the ELCA, "The primary reason we make any changes in worship is to help seeker and believer alike experience the truth and grace of Jesus."
4. Have a vision / set goals
 - A. Where are you headed?
 - B. What types of things would you like to see happening in your church? (specific goals)
 - C. Nearly every pastor I've met whose church has been through a transition in worship stressed this point.
 - D. In churches that have a clearly defined and frequently articulated vision, there is almost always more sense of purpose.
5. Regardless of how careful you are, there will almost assuredly still be a controversy.
 - A. The music controversy is not primarily a biblical issue.* Scripture offers clear precedent for what we are doing.
 1. Colossians 3:16-17 commands us to sing "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs."
 2. Psalm 150 says we should praise God with a variety of instruments.
 3. Psalm 33:3 and several other passages tell us to sing a "new song."
 - B. Nevertheless, there will still be those who oppose.

*An argument can be made that some of the newer songs do not have a solid biblical foundation. This is true. But there are also numerous old hymns that also lack strong biblical foundations. All of this simply means that we must be *very* selective in choosing songs.
6. Finding the balance between moving too quickly and too slowly
 - A. Don't try to move ahead too quickly.
 1. If people get "burned" because of too much change too quickly, they will be less willing to move forward the next time change is suggested.
 2. People are valuable to God, and should be to us.
 3. *The Art of War*, by Sun Tzu, the oldest military treatise in the world, translated into English in 1910. In one section Tzu discusses the importance of the individuals in the army being unified. He says that by keeping them as "a single

united body, it is impossible either for the brave to advance alone or for the cowardly to retreat alone.”

B. Don't quit because of opposition or problems.

1. People don't like change. You will have opposition. Not everyone will wholeheartedly embrace the changes.
 - a. “If someone consistently and uncharitably complains about the church's worship style, it may be in the church's and that person's best interest for him or her to worship elsewhere.” Chuck Swindoll (article by Samuel Smith posted on the internet, dated 5 March 2004)
 - b. At the very least, a vocal minority should not dictate the church's style of worship. As leaders, our job is not so much to give people what they want as to provide what the church as a whole needs.
 - c. If your goal is just to endeavor to keep everyone happy, you are not being true to your calling. If you will bend at the first sign of opposition, don't even bother starting into a transition, because you *will* be opposed at some point. Just stay the course. Keep on going.
2. You will have technological glitches.
3. “If you falter in times of trouble, how small is your strength!” (Proverbs 24:10).

7. Teaching / modeling worship

A. Biblical instruction—Start with the basics

1. We too often assume that people have knowledge that they don't have.
 - a. I was honestly surprised at the number of pastors who told me they realized after starting through the transition process that many of their people really didn't even know what Scripture says regarding worship.
 - b. “The major challenge is not about how to use music to facilitate worship as much as it is to help people understand worship and have an intense passion to connect with God.” (George Barna, “Focus On ‘Worship Wars’ Hides The Real Issue Regarding Connection to God,” November 19, 2002, Barna web site).
2. Many churches practice a cultural form of Christianity rather than a biblical form.
3. Isaiah 29:13 “The Lord says, “These people come near to Me with their mouth and honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. Their worship of Me is made up only of rules taught by men.””
4. From a scriptural basis, we must teach:
 - a. what worship is
 - b. why we worship
 - c. how we worship

- B. Use demonstration and practice to supplement verbal teaching.
 - 1. Often people are unwilling to move forward simply because of a lack of knowledge.
 - 2. Offer the experience in a non-threatening situation.
 - 3. King David (2 Samuel 6:14-15) — “David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the LORD with all his might, while he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouts and the sound of trumpets.”
 - 4. King Solomon (2 Chronicles 6:12-13) — “Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in front of the whole assembly of Israel and spread out his hands. Now he had made a bronze platform, five cubits long, five cubits wide and three cubits high, and had placed it in the center of the outer court. He stood on the platform and then knelt down before the whole assembly of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven.”
 - 5. Joel Ragains, 35-year music minister veteran from Graceland Baptist Church in New Albany, Indiana: “There were some of the choir members who felt that more expressive worship was not for them. They held to the model of two hymns, a choir special and then the sermon. It was difficult for them to see themselves as worshipers first and singers second. So I kept the choir program intact, but used the first thirty minutes of the Thursday evening rehearsals as a teaching time. I started a laboratory for integrating new styles of worship into our church body. Making these gradual changes has had a powerful impact in modeling worship to our congregation.”
- C. Bring in outside speakers to confirm what is being taught.
 - 1. Even saying the same thing as the pastor can be beneficial.
 - 2. The “prophet from a far country” can be received in ways that the local folks often can’t.
- 8. Teach about God.
 - A. His love, mercy and grace
 - 1. People must understand the foundation.
 - a. Too frequently people think of God as the big ogre in the sky waiting to squash them as soon as they mess up.
 - b. As long as people have this type of picture of God they will never fully worship Him.
 - 2. Freedom for worship—When people recognize that God cares intimately for them, that His mercies are always extended to them, there comes a freedom for worship that won’t happen any other way.

B. Point people to the object of their worship: Almighty God (teach about God's attributes)

1. His greatness
2. His majesty
3. His power
4. His holiness
5. His...

When we recognize how awesome God really is, we *want* to worship Him.

C. Make teaching (about worship and God) a long-term priority

1. It is not a matter of getting to a certain point and stopping.
 - a. There are new people coming into the church.
 - b. People become complacent.
2. This should be an ongoing quest: knowing and loving God more.

9. Keep your focus in the right place.

A. People are not looking for entertainment

B. Be authentic: Worship God!

C. "One study concluded that 55% of all communication is nonverbal. The visitor is not just listening to what you say. He is intuitively observing how connected you and your group really are with what you espouse. He's looking for emotional and intellectual honesty, depth of conviction, and heartfelt compassion. How we worship reflects these things—or their absence—more than we know." Gerrit Gustafson, "Worship and the Visitor," *The Worshiper* (email newsletter) April 2004