

# Some Thoughts on Praise & Worship

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## ***The Philosophical***

- I believe that we were all made to worship God. Isaiah 43:7 tells us that we were all created for His glory. Hebrews 13:15 says that we are to “...continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess his name.” Philippians 3:3 reminds us that it is we, the brethren (the Church) “...who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus.” And of course Romans 12:2 tells us clearly that our spiritual act of worship is to “present ourselves to Him as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to Him.” Worship is not a service we go to, but rather a lifestyle to be cultivated. Worship leader and recording artist, David Crowder, calls this process developing a “praise habit.” (David Crowder, *Praise Habit*, NavPress, 2005)
- For me, corporate worship through song is the closest we can get to heaven in this life and hindered by this flesh. Scripture gives us glimpses of heaven and describes the heavenly host as singing God's praises. Isaiah and Revelation depict seraphs singing “day and night,” “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty. The whole earth is full of His glory.” Psalm 22:3 tells us that God “inhabits” or is “enthroned on” the praises of His people. He makes a home in our praises!
- It is in worship that I am happiest, and Psalm 16:11 explains why: “In [God's] presence is fullness of joy.”
- Worship = “Worth-ship.” Showing God what He is worth to us; esteeming him. Or as John Piper puts it, we should have a “passion to enjoy and display God's supremacy in all things for the joy of all peoples” (*Don't Waste Your Life*, Crossway, 2007).
- I believe in a holistic approach to worship. In other words, I do not believe that worship is “the part of the service when we sing,” but rather it is a “Worship Service” wherein we worship God in a variety of ways: through praise (music), the Word (message), tithes and offerings, communion...it is all worship. Ideally praise selections should support the message/service theme.
- A worship leader must first be the lead worshiper. I believe one cannot lead others in worship unless one is worshipping.

- What makes a time of worship successful is quite simply the presence of the Holy Spirit. Matthew 18:20 says, “For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.” The key here is “...in my name.” Those who presume to lead worship must do so for the glory of God – in His name. They thereby invite to Spirit to join them, and this is felt. When there is any other motive at work – when it's not in *His name* – the danger is that the Spirit will not be present, and no amount of skill or preparation can replace that element. And this, too, is felt by all.
- Psalm 33 reminds us to “play skillfully” for the Lord, but many have used this as an excuse to make worship ministry an exclusive, elite ministry. Musical competence and preparedness are vital, but they are not nearly as important as a heart that longs to exalt God and to call others to do likewise. A praise team made up of people with hearts that yearn to praise God and modest musical skill can yield sweet, sweet times of worship, if those skills are given wholly unto the Lord, especially when coupled with some diligent preparation.
- Worship leaders (meaning anyone involved in the worship ministry) should be professed Christ-followers who (in the words of Pastor Kurt Horting of Still Water Community Church in Rowlett, TX) are “experiencing more victories than defeats.” Worship is a Spiritual endeavor and a ministry of the church. The praise team itself is not a mission field! :) I've seen praise teams disintegrate after allowing a non-believer to participate in the hope that it would be a good influence. This is not necessarily because the non-believer was malicious or a “bad person,” but rather because the enemy gains a foothold whenever this happens, and he'll use it to undermine, much like he would try to use a Christian's marriage to a non-believer.

### ***The Practical***

- Worship must be accessible for the worshiper(s), whether a congregation, youth group, small group, or just your family camping in the woods. Some things to consider in an effort to make worship accessible are:
  - Rhythms that are not too complex
  - Lyrics with memorable refrains
  - Keys that are not too high, not too low. Services contain men, women, young people, and mature people. Selecting keys that are comfortable for most people (usually in the E, F, or G family) will keep people singing!

- Songs that emphasize vocals over instrumentation. Instruments are wonderful, and I can worship God in, for, and through a killer guitar solo! But we must remember that we are “leading” others in worship, and the only instrument the congregation has with which to “follow” is the voice.
- Avoid fringe genres. When deciding upon a worship style for a particular service, broader is generally better. Traditional, contemporary, modern are all good. But you probably shouldn't have a “bluegrass service” or a “heavy metal service.” These are great genres with great music to offer, but they are narrow in focus, with limited appeal.
- People like to hear (and sing along with) songs that they know. It is important to introduce new songs to the congregation, but this should be balanced in favor of familiar songs that have been in worship before or are being played on Christian radio. As people learn songs by heart, it becomes easier to focus on worship instead of focusing on remembering or reading the words.
- Best to stick with “Worship” music. There's a wealth of music written specifically for worship, and for the most part it meets the “accessibility” criteria above. And it is written with a reverence for God and sensitivity to worship that not all genres have. It may be traditional, contemporary, modern, or progressive, but it should definitely be “worship” music. In my opinion, you cannot take just any “Christian” song and insert it into a worship service and call it worship. It doesn't mean the song is a bad song, it just means it may not have been designed with worship in mind. It may be edifying and great for special music, though.
- What's more, I believe we have to be very careful when adapting secular music for worship purposes. I believe there is a consecration of sorts that occurs during the writing process when a song is being written specifically to glorify God. Bringing music into your worship service that lacks that consecration should not be done without prayerful consideration. I love a lot of secular music and listen to it often. But it has it's place, and that may not be in our worship services.
- Limit “distractions.” During a time of musical worship, worshipers seek to commune with God. Unnecessary distractions can hinder this:
  - Again, we're reminded to “play skillfully” (Psalm 33). While virtuosos or professional caliber singers/musicians are not required, a certain level of skill is a must. Poorly played music is distracting!

- Practice, both individually and as a group, is a must. A praise team must have a sense of ensemble and cohesiveness. It's a praise “team,” not a collection of individuals competing on stage. It can be very distracting when players are using different rhythms, singing in different keys or out of tune, playing at different tempos. The lower the skill level of the musicians, the more group practice is needed.
  - Practices should be focused and efficient. Just showing up, goofing off for 45 minutes, and then doing a quick run-through of the worship set before heading home is not practice! :) Use this time to develop excellence, to make your songs worthy offerings to set before the Lord.
- Be sensitive to volume. Worshipers should be able to hear the words, immerse themselves in the music, and not hear a conversation in the hallway. But too loud can be distracting and even painful! Your sound person should set a reasonable volume. To remove all doubt, buy an inexpensive decibel meter (\$20 at Radio Shack) and set your volume to around 90-95 decibels in the middle of your sanctuary. 100, max. 60 is a normal conversation, and 120-140 is rock concert. Somewhere in between is good worship! ;)
- A good mix is crucial! This means not too loud and not too soft (see above), but it also means a good balance among the instruments and vocals, both in the mains and in the monitors. Remember, vocals should be the focus, followed by lead instruments (guitars, keys, etc.), and then the rhythm section (bass, drums). When a rhythm instrument overpowers a lead instrument or an instrument overpowers the vocals, it's a huge distraction.
- The monitor mix plays a big role in achieving and maintaining a good mains mix. The singers and musicians need to be able to hear themselves and the other team members adequately. If they can't hear the other players then rhythm, tempo, and even key can be off. If they can't hear themselves, then key will almost certainly be off, or they will sing or play louder to compensate and thereby mess up the mix and cause a distraction.
- A skilled sound person or team can help avoid this. The musicians should not have to be responsible for both the monitor and mains mix.
- Complex is not always better. One person with a single instrument can lead worship effectively and powerfully, and this type of simplicity creates an intimacy that is harder to achieve with a larger group. That being said, large elaborate bands can be wonderful, if done well.
- Practice, practice, practice!

- Pray, pray, pray! Every element of – and participant in – a worship service should be soaked in prayer. If they are not, then it should come as no surprise when the service is stale and ineffective, if not a complete disaster. And when the Spirit is present and moving in spite of our lack of prayer, it is indeed a mercy that we should never take for granted.

Keep the faith!

Lee