
Understanding Worship Part 14

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The Styles of Worship

Colossians 2:6-12

The key to *impacting worship* is not about style or preference. It is not to be rushed or coerced. It is not reciting empty platitudes, nor is it manipulating or a chore. What I mean by *impacting* is not style; it is our involvement in and with The Substance behind it. It is the passion and power from the Spirit that moves people from the desire to please themselves toward a desire to please God and praise Him. It is living a holy lifestyle to and for Him. It is giving God the best of what we have because He has given us the best that He has. It is the moving of our preferences of seeking what we want and what is exciting to us to being excited for who Christ is. What does this mean in a church service? You can fully engage in the pipe organ, have a full 100-piece orchestra, have a guitar and keyboard, or have no music at all. The style and instruments are not the key; it is the heart, approach, and passion behind it. The people, you and me, worshiping Christ must see it as a glorious duty by gratitude. The worship leaders must be there for our Lord and for no other reason. *Impacting worship* is not about preference or pretence; rather, it is seeking His presence. People must be willing and able to be play to the Lord, not to please an audience. Worship that impacts is an offering by praising Christ collectively for what He has done in us all.

There are, of course, many different styles of worship in music and arrangement. There are as many ways to engage in church-centered worship as one can count. Each denomination has its own distinctions and each church its own variations. There are also new contemporary ways that keep coming out. Some of the ways are more popular than others. For example, more and more people are becoming attracted to a contemporary praise band, replacing the organ. But that does not mean the organ is bad, or that we should stop using it. Nor does it mean that doing whatever the current trends are is the right thing to do. What it does mean is that we need to look at starting and providing a service that is primarily focused on pleasing and worshiping God, and secondary to be focused on attracting people.

The main focus is to be our love and passion for Christ as our Lord, and what He has done for us fervently being made known. We are to pour out our hearts and minds with gratitude and adoration. The object of the worship experience is our Lord. And, I cannot make this point any clearer: the object is not arrangements, talent, or personalities. The object is not is the style or the people who are singing and playing the instruments. We are not putting on a performance just to entertain others; we are performing for our Lord. The worship experience must never be just a show. Yes, we are to perform our best for His glory, but not by the sacrifice of the main thing!

Worship is not just music. It is a tool that we use to express our love and devotion to Him. Worship also consists of reading Scripture, prayer, preaching and even the sacraments. If you leave out prayer, you are leaving out a vital component. If you are not using Scripture and only sing songs, you are not worshipping God with the best

that He has given you. It would be like making a sandwich with cheese and mayonnaise and leaving out the bread and meat. Music is one component and tool that we can use to express our love for Him. Music is very important as it has the power to move us emotionally that the other components may not do. We are created as emotional beings. Expressing our emotions in worship is important, as long as we do it with order and out of gratitude (1 Cor. 14). Worship is about what God has done for us; it is not about putting on a show.

Remember, it is not about style. I'm always running into young people who like various things such as the gothic and liturgical style as well as the contemporary. At first a desire for what is traditional amazed me, as I did not like that stuff when I was young. So you need to find your church's personality and distinction and express yourself accordingly. Find out what your people want. What are their needs? What style are you able to do? And, also make sure you educate them on the principle reasons of why we worship. Most Christians just do not know and that is why we have so many aberrant ways of doing it. You may need to have two distinct services to appeal to more people as long as the primary focus is maintained.

Traditionally there are five main “styles” into which most of today’s and yesterday’s worship formats fit.

There is the “**Traditional**” that incorporates more classical music such as hymns, choir or Psalter (signing of Psalms), and a formal order in which each service follows. There are certain prayers, liturgies, and parts of the service that are repetitious each week. These services have an organ and piano and rarely would have any more modern instruments. They are rooted in Scripture, tradition, and usually follow denominational and theological guidelines.

The ‘**Liturgical**’ style is seemingly even more rigid. It incorporates formal hymns and readings from a prayer book or missal. Robes, incense, and perhaps “alter boys” all contribute to the service. These first two styles have a distinction of a sense of majesty and honor to God, a sense of holiness that provides the worshipping congregation with the impression that they are in the presence of God, as worship is meant to do. One of the reasons some people do not like this form is that it also creates a sense of over-separation between God and the people. They feel they are not a part of it; the distance is too vast for them to comprehend and worship with a cheerful heart. This is the perspective from various people’s feelings and experiences. However, the traditional service can be just as impacting as a contemporary-orientated one if the heart and passion are there—perhaps even more so.

The **Praise and Worship** style has less formality and more of a free flowing, upbeat atmosphere. Newer forms of music, arrangements, and instruments provide the tone. They may incorporate some of the same aspects as a traditional service but be more personal. A sense of closeness is given to the congregation. Thus, people tend to think this form of worship is more pleasing to God because they feel better in it. In actuality however, this form, though it has great merit to it, may miss many key, essential elements of what God requires (to be discussed in Part Three, coming in the Fall). Multi-media may be used, such as PowerPoint instead of hymnals. The congregation does most of the singing instead of a choir; there may be a few

praise/song leaders.

One of the newer formats is called the **Seeker-Sensitive** service. Its distinction is even more of a casual atmosphere than the praise style. Some churches may have only a few songs with the addition of drama. The choice of songs tends to be secular to create familiarity with the new churchgoer, and then gradually flows into more Christian music. It is viewed as a cushion that prepares people who are far, far from Him to worship God. These people may never have even set foot in a church, and the *seeker service* is more conducive in getting them ready so they are not culturally shocked away from the church. However, the ongoing research we have been doing at Into Thy Word Ministries has not found any credible credence to this theory; rather, people are attracted to a church, not by its style or song choice, but by the people who are there. It is about being hospitable, treating others with respect in love, being authentic, and quality, and uncompromising Bible teaching. When the Bible is watered down, more people may be attracted, but disciples are not made, nor is authentic faith built that Christ called us to. Even with the best teaching and worship, if you ignore people, treat them as second class citizens, or are judgmental, you will soon be in a pew all by yourself (Matt. 28:18-20).

Sometimes in the *Seeker-Sensitive* service, the congregation does not sing at all, and a performance style or “concert” feel takes that place as if they were at a play or in a theater. This is also done to attract the un-churched who might feel more comfortable in a less formal setting. When this style is properly designed (by not compromising the Word), it gradually generates trust with new people and then filters them into small groups or other services or adult classes with more “meat.” One of the drawbacks to this style is seemingly a loss of holiness and awe that the more traditional forms yield.

The last category is a “**Blended**” style that incorporates two or more of the previous styles. This form is becoming more popular as smaller churches are sometimes unable to have more than one service, so they create a combination service to accommodate more needs in their congregation. These services tend to be more spontaneous, with a hymn and then a praise chorus accompanied by an organ and a guitar. This can be a phenomenally great way to worship God (as my church does a great job at doing), or it can be a mess.

A lot of these styles will overlap and vary between denominations and churches. I’m not saying one is better than another. Some styles are better suited to a particular congregation at a particular time. Some people feel closer to God in a liturgical setting, and others prefer the closeness they receive from a contemporary service. You are dealing with feelings and perceptions based on experiences and what people feel comfortable with in their views and understandings together with what they think worship is about (again, this is why it is very important that you and your congregation know what God seeks in worship.) Ultimately, people will come, grow, and worship when the main purpose of pouring self out to God is the central theme and not just accommodating a style or putting on a performance.

Find your niche, do it with love and passion, and be uncompromising in His precepts. I once did a church plant with a top Church Growth “guru.” We had the finest musicians, a band from a famous music group. Yet, the church down the street with

amateur keyboards and a guitar attracted more people because their hearts were in the right place; ours was not. We were putting on a performance; they were praising God. What is your church doing? Are you praising the Holy God of the universe? Are you expressing your love to Christ? This is what *impacting worship* is all about.

Questions to Ponder

Read Colossians 2:6-12

1. Why is worship not just about music? Why do so many Christians think it is?
2. How has music been an effective tool to express your love and devotion to Christ?
3. Can you give examples of Christians reciting empty platitudes?
4. How can music be an ineffectual tool to express your love and devotion to Christ?
5. How is it when a church just expresses emotion in worship services be a dishonor to God?
6. Of all these various worship styles, which of these most appeals to you?
7. What has been your mindset and main focus in worship?
8. Do you know what Christ has done for you? How can worship be a platform for you to let Christ fervently know about it?
9. For you, what is exciting in worship? What do you want in your church services? How does this line up to being excited for who Christ is?
10. What have you done about seeking His presence? What can you do?
11. What happens in a church when the worship leaders are there for themselves? What can be done to help them change their thinking so they are there for our Lord and for no other reason?
12. How is worship a glorious duty by gratitude?
13. Why is it that the worship styles and instruments of music not the key to glorify Christ? What is?
14. How important is the heart, approach and passion behind our worship experience? What about the leader's agenda?
15. Are you excited for who Christ is? What does this mean in a church service?
16. What can your church leadership do to motivate people to move their

preferences of seeking what we want in worship to seeking what Christ wants?

17. How does your church practice giving God the best of what they have because He has given us the best that He has?

18. What is the passion and power of the Spirit? How does He move people from the desire to please themselves toward a desire to please God and praise Him?

19. Why is *worship* not to be about style or preference?

20. What is your favorite worship song or hymn and why? How does this song help you focus on worshiping Christ? Why are music and song important in your church?