

Tactics of Terror

Terrorists in Iraq who behead foreigners follow an example set by Muhammad.

Strangely Warmed

Missing Weapons

We need more Christians who are “weapons” fit for the Master’s use.

How You Present the Gospel Matters

How we present the gospel may open or close the door to further discussion.

The Bible instructs us to have conversation “seasoned with salt” and to be prepared to speak up for the gospel “in season and out of season” (see Col. 4:6, 2 Tim. 4:2). Christians at times fall into the pattern of imposing the gospel message indiscriminately and gracelessly in all social settings. At

other times they are tongue-tied and embarrassed by the challenge of speaking out about “the hope that is within” them when speaking with nonbelievers.

The antidote to the second problem is to get on fire with the Holy Spirit. It then becomes very hard not to tell other people about Jesus.

The antidote for the first is more subtle. It requires us to respect others and take them seriously. Absolutely nobody wants to feel he is merely a statistic, someone who has to be “reached” with the gospel, no matter how crudely or boorishly. If a person does not feel respected, nothing on earth will induce him to listen to an explanation of what Christianity is.

There is a way of answering objections to Christian belief that opens rather than closes the door to further discussion. That way might be called “the way of graciousness.” I saw a magnificent example of that graciousness recently.

At a dinner in my home, I invited two Christian couples and one agnostic and his wife, who has recently reaffirmed her commitment to the Jewish tradition. The two Christian couples both were very mature believers who had read and even written (one was a well-known author) widely about the faith.

As I hovered over the dinner, trying to ensure everything went smoothly (my wife had cooked exceptionally well), I had little chance to participate in the conversation. But I overheard much. What struck me was the exceptional graciousness of our Christian guests in responding to the objections to Christianity voiced by the agnostic and his wife.

Everything seemed to fall into the conversational mix: U.S. policy in Iraq, The Passion of the Christ, Christianity and Islam, the faith of President Bush. Not surprisingly, the criticism of Bush, of the United States’ Iraq policy and of Mel Gibson came fast and furiously from our skeptical guests.

But I was struck by the fact that, instead of refuting the two critics head-on, the Christians skillfully deflected the attacks both with references to pertinent facts that modified the criticisms and with patient attention to all the points brought up.

No one ever said, "You're wrong in saying that!" or impugned the motives of the critics. Above all, what was conveyed was respect for the opinions of our dinner guests and a sense of the pleasure of their company. At the end of the evening the Jewish wife wrote in our guest book that the conversation had been "wonderful!" Her husband was equally effusive.

Were either of these skeptics persuaded by the arguments they heard? Probably not. Were they more disposed on leaving our house to hear more from a contrary (i.e., Christian) point of view? Almost certainly. Each felt honored and esteemed by the other guests in a way that is often quite rare during a conversation in which there is ardent disagreement.

There is surely a lesson here as we Christians attempt, sometimes daily, to engage the culture. It is certain that our manner of presenting the gospel can be even more important than the content of our presentation.

Most of us have heard strident criticism from nonbelievers of some of the programs on Christian television. Without embarrassing any particular Christian broadcaster, can we not admit that some of that criticism is legitimate?

Professions of faith, or even personal testimonies, that are loud and tasteless probably alienate more viewers than they attract to Christianity. And we all probably have been witnesses in person of presentations of the gospel that were arrogantly expressed or needlessly aggressive.

It is often said of actors or speakers that they should leave the stage with their audiences wanting to hear more from them. The same is true of a Christian testimony. Does it incline

people to turn away from faith or to want to learn more about it? Our skeptical guests the other night certainly left our home wanting to hear more.

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God Spoke Through a Man

For 50 years Bill Hamon has taught Christians how to use the gift of prophecy. But those who speak for God, he says, must learn to submit to His dealings.

Into the Arms of Love

As the number of homeless, abandoned children grows, caring Christians are reaching out with Christ's compassion.

Teen Gambling

The prevalence of gambling has desensitized our kids to its consequences.

Soul Sister

When CeCe Winans auditioned in a talent search as a child, she never dreamed God would use her to sing the gospel. Yet today she's using her platform to preach, too.

The 2 Keys for Entering God's Presence Through Music

Do you feel a void after leaving church on Sunday morning? Perhaps we are missing out on the true purpose of worship—entering God's presence.

The \$64,000 question is, "How do we attain God's presence in worship?" Although I would have to say I don't know, I do know when He's there, and I know when He's not!

Two important keys, however, are *wanting* God and *waiting* for God.

Each of us must want Him wholeheartedly and be willing to wait on Him until His presence brings the words and melody to our souls (in the case of songwriters) or touches us as we sing

(in the corporate service).

Neither of these two keys, particularly waiting, is employed much in the Christian arena today. Wanting God is something only a select few seem to do; waiting for God seems to have no place in most modern-day **worship services**. (Silence on the platform? Perish the thought!)

We should not fear waiting on God, even in public services. The best songwriter and worshipper I know about, King David, spent many of his songwriting days out in a field with a harp, waiting on God. According to the Word, he didn't always do everything perfectly, yet he was described as a man after God's own heart because he wanted God and waited for Him.

I can relate to David. I am not as holy as I would like to be and have made my share of mistakes. But it's not our righteousness that impresses God anyway; He looks at the desires of our **hearts**.

At his core, David was a lover of God. So am I, and I am hoping you are too. If we desire to come into His presence, we have to want Him and wait for Him.

As a songwriter, I have found that my most successful songs come when I am quiet before Him. It's as if the Chief Musician drops a song in my pocket from the music library of heaven. When the song comes from His throne room, rest assured it is anointed, and His presence will attend it.

One time many years ago, I was sitting in a prayer room before a Sunday night service, minding my own business, just kind of on auto pilot with the Lord. As I sat there quietly meditating on Him, I began to sing, "I sing praises to Your name, O Lord, praises to Your name, O Lord; for Your name is great, and greatly to be praised."

It suddenly dawned on me that I had never sung this little melody or the words before, so I scribbled it down and then

went out into the service and taught it to the congregation.

Before I was halfway through, the people were singing along with me. How could this be? It was one of those heaven-sent songs, and it so clicked with God's redeemed that they entered in as if they had known the song for years.

God took that little expression of worship, and now it is sung literally all over the world, sometimes in languages I have never heard. He has used the song because it has His touch, His presence, all over it.

The downside to waiting is that it might mean a new song does not come around very often. This is not always convenient for those artists and recording companies who are bent on getting a new project to the bookstores and radio stations every few months.

If I had to produce music on that sort of timetable, I would be a disaster. My attitude echoes the Scriptures: "Better is one day in [His] courts than a thousand elsewhere" (Ps. 84:10, NIV).

I may have to wait awhile to experience that "one day," but in His courts is the only place to write the music that may mean something in eternity. Anything written outside that place will not bring change to the heart of man, so why bother?

Awakening the Bride

From a worship-leading point of view, experiencing the presence of God is often more of a challenge, for it involves something outside my control: that small, "insignificant" factor called people—the people of God!

At times I have been full of the Holy Spirit and prepared to minister to the Lord, only to see the worship fall flat, with no corporate effect whatsoever. This is because there was no "draw" on the **anointing** coming from members of the

congregation.

When this happens, I believe it is because the people either are not deep into worship and the things of God or they are in such a rut from watching “church as usual” that there is no life left in them. Let’s be honest; worship in America’s churches consists largely of a “sit back and let the platform do it” mentality.

The bride of Christ does not play a vital role in worship. Worship leaders and musicians are often so into showcasing their gifts and talents that the whole is sacrificed for a very small part. This should not be! The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are jealous for the vibrant new song of the bride. It’s the people who are to be the true performers, not the five or 35 on the platform. If you want Jesus to bring His glory into a worship service, then awaken His fiancée, the bride of Christ. That always gets His attention!

I and my co-laborers in the field of worship-leading must be ever mindful of this one thing: He must increase; we must decrease.

I have found that if I want His presence to indwell our worship in any service or gathering, I have to be willing to stay out of His way. The Holy Spirit is much more capable of orchestrating genuine worship than we ever give Him credit for. If I have any part in the deal, it is in choosing songs that were birthed around the throne of God, whether my own songs or someone else’s.

Many of today’s popular worship songs consist of too many words and a key change that only music majors could hope to get right. Where does that leave Joe Just-a-Church-Guy in the eighth row? What we are left with may be really cool and **trendy songs**—but no presence. Again, why bother?

By contrast, although I have not heard the story behind Darlene Zschech’s “Shout to the Lord,” I know that it was born

out of an experience with God. One cannot write songs like that just by sitting down at the piano and composing a cute melody with some catchy words. That method rarely (if ever) produces songs that will last and penetrate the heart of man.

When my heart is touched by God, I write from that experience, and it has God's fingerprint on it. I prefer His touch to mine any day!

All the songs I have written that have been used by Him are songs directly inspired by Him. In other words, He really is the songwriter; I just try to keep a pen and paper handy to receive them.

So, my worshipping friends, let us press on to know the Lord. Let us hear the melodies of heaven and write and sing them on the earth. Let us pursue anointed songs for our personal times with God—songs that take us to the intimacy of His inner chamber.

Let the people of God “sing unto the Lord a new song.” Let us wait on Him patiently until our agenda is useless and He comes in His **majesty**. And let the bride of Christ worship the King in spirit and truth.

It's all about His presence, and whether we realize it or not, that is what all of us are craving in the depths of our souls. So come, Lord, breathe Your life upon us and dwell in our worship with Your unmistakable presence!

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Christians Urged to Care for the Earth

'Creation care' advocates say protecting the environment is part of biblical stewardship