

What's Wrong With Contemporary Worship?

Worship—it's the hottest fad to hit the Christian music industry since contemporary Christian music came into its own more than 25 years ago. Worship music heads the lists of many musical surveys and reports that come across my desk. Even artists who are known for other types of music have jumped on the worship bandwagon.

Bands are doing worship tours around the country. Christian radio stations are adding more and more worship to their programming, and compilations of the top worship songs of the year sell like hotcakes and zoom to the top of the charts.

Worship has also invaded Sunday church services. When I was a kid, worship was limited to singing a hymn about the deity of God. The rest of the song service was spent singing testimonial and feel-good songs.

Nowadays, worship songs and choruses based on Scripture dominate the church gathering. Traditional churches offer special services featuring contemporary worship, and charismatic and Pentecostal churches tout their worship programs as the No. 1 way to get new members.

Let's face it—worship is all the rage. It's everywhere. It's taking over. Wow!

But wait a minute. I have sat through countless church services and listened to thousands of songs (on the radio as well as on CDs, tapes and even long-play records). In light of my observations, I must ask this question: What about His presence?

As I see it, true worship is designed for (or at least offers the byproduct of) entering the **presence of God**. I am not

talking about the popular word *presence* found in many Christian lyrics. I am talking about the felt, manifest presence of Jehovah, the Creator of the universe, the eternal and everlasting King, the passionate lover of every believer's soul.

Where is His presence?

Does your soul feel a void after listening to Christian music for a while or after leaving church on Sunday morning? Does anyone recognize the gaping hole? My friend, we are missing out on one of the greatest and most powerful gifts freely available to the body of Christ today—His presence, His glorious presence!

Music fads sometimes become so popular that the listener loses the true message by getting caught up in the fad itself. This is what British worship leader Matt Redman was writing about when, during a fast from all music in his church, he penned the lyrics "I'm coming back to the heart of worship/And it's all about You/It's all about You, Jesus." I believe Matt had a wake-up call one day—a revelation that although they were singing songs and playing instruments in his church, God's presence was nowhere to be found.

True worship is not a fad; it never has been and never will be. True worship is **eternal**. Other trends come and go, but spirit-and-truth worship always has been what the Father is seeking (John 4:23), and it always will be the unending song of the elders, the angels and the redeemed that will ring throughout heaven for all eternity.

Why should we seek this often-elusive gift from on high? In the worship experience, the presence of God is what transforms the heart of man. When you truly **encounter** Him, you cannot help but be changed. It's automatic.

Why? It's so simple. Big God, little man. When the presence of the Creator of all visits your space, anything can happen.

Terry MacAlmon is an accomplished worship leader, songwriter and recording artist and the founder of Terry MacAlmon Ministries. He has released several worship CDs, including Visit Us and The Sound of Heaven. For more information, go to

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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