

Every Nation, Tribe and Tongue

How multicultural praise gives us glimpses of heaven—and how to foster it in your church (even if you're not a leader)

As humans, we don't like change. That spills over into every area of our lives. Church is no exception. We like singing the same songs because we know them, and repetition feeds that familiarity we all crave. It's how the brain works. But I'm one to try new things, learn new songs and explore new ways of expression. I feel that the average congregation today is a lot smarter than we give them credit for being. Even though it may seem risky to learn new songs or expand the worship or musical style in church, the pros far outweigh the cons.

I often think about what heaven is going to be like. Many verses give us clues, but here are three I like:

Colossians 3:16: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing *one another* in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (emphasis added).

Philippians 2:9-11: "Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus *every knee* should bow ... and ... *every tongue* should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (emphasis added).

Revelation 7:9-10: "I looked, and behold, a great multitude ... of *all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues*, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" (emphasis added).

A Celebration of Differences

God's message is always one of *inclusion*. If God desires every nation, tribe, language and people to worship Him, then we can start doing it that way in the church. That's done only by embracing and celebrating our differences—a tall order when churches generally are held captive by tradition.

I look at the music portion of the service as a good meal. We all enjoy a five-course meal: an appetizer, a salad, cup of soup, main course, dessert, and maybe coffee to cap it off. How boring the experience would be if every time you ate dinner, you had five courses of desserts. You'd enjoy it for a while, but eventually you'd get tired of it.

Worship can be the same. Many church members go a long time without experiencing a "full course" worship experience.

In my prayer life, I often thank God for the gift of music. I thank Him for not only giving me the gift of music, but also for giving the human race the gift of music. We enjoy it on all sorts of levels. It's up to the body of Christ to be responsible enough to use it the way God intended.

Seeing God in a New Light

Because God gave each person the will to choose, we all have different tastes—and it's often said that Sunday is the most segregated day of the week. When we think of what heaven is going to be like, it's hard not to wonder if God is disappointed with that statistic. Music is definitely a contributing factor to our segregation, but it can also be a unifying factor in a church service.

The worship experience can help a congregation see God in a new light. It can give us a fresh sense of who God is. It can also make our entire church experience healthier by pushing us outside of our four walls. Being intentional about involving people of different races and cultures helps the congregation

embrace the differences God created and helps prepare us for eternity.

It also fosters God's greatest command: to love. Loving people for who they are because God created them is not a natural thing in today's society. The more we model that love in our churches, the more we can help change the world outside our churches.

Jesus said in Mark 16:15, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." It's difficult to do that without a genuine love for people. The worship experience is one area where diversity in music, styles and personnel can teach us to love.

As members of the body of Christ, we should always be looking for ways to impact the kingdom of God. Keeping an open mind allows God the opportunity to stretch us in ways that may seem uncomfortable at first. Learning new songs, or singing songs of a different style that isn't our "cup of tea" may also seem uncomfortable or even unnecessary, but it can be an important step in getting the heart of God.

My desire when leading a worship service or worshipping from the pew is to touch the heart of God. We can't even fathom what God hears on a particular Sunday from all of creation. It's my prayer that what He hears and feels from me is pure and authentic. The more a congregation experiences the diversity of God's creation in the worship service, the more appreciation they will have and the closer we all get to God.

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