

How to Actually Experience God During Worship

Every church, whether traditional, formal, contemporary or free-flowing, should meet for one reason: to worship God. After all, it is the chief end of man to glorify God and enjoy Him forever according to 1 Cor. 10:31 and Psalm 73:25-26.

Yet, I have noticed that in many different churches in America and around the world there is a lack of the power that God intended for them to have. Recently, I felt a cry in my heart exclaiming, “How can we get more of the presence of God in our churches?”

In answer to that cry, I believe if we diligently use three specific values as the grid by which we evaluate our own church’s services, we can increase the capacity of our congregation to experience the presence of God each time we meet. These three markers are:

1. Orient the worship toward God and His satisfaction. People-pleasing has never worked in the kingdom of God. Neither has ignoring the needs of people. The tension between these two has existed since the church began; that is because both have value.

The Us-Four-and-No-More Church ignores the needs of the people out of their desire to please God. As noble as this desire sounds, this type of church does not grow and becomes less and less of any earthly good.

The Gotta-Get-Em-In-Here Church tends to pour resources toward the latest, the greatest and the best to lure people to its sanctuary. The Wow Factor can be very effective and churches may grow in number quickly. Yet, if not careful they can find themselves lacking in encountering God’s presence and moving people forward in true discipleship.

I believe that today's church must marry these two streams of focus. A healthy balance can be struck as we focus on God and only do what we see Him doing (John 5:19), while keeping an eye toward being relevant and attractive to the culture. Jesus' teaching stories were always relevant to the crowd. In other words, most parts of the service should be planned to please God, while at the same time, certain parts of the service should be oriented toward unbelievers. There is an order Paul prescribes in 1 Corinthians 14:22-40 that speaks to balancing church services to accommodate both members and the newcomers.

2. Ensure your worship flows out of prayer and devotion.

Pastors should provide multiple opportunities for people to pray and grow in their devotion to God. As leaders, we cannot assume everyone is growing in spiritual maturity. We have the mandate to turn hearts toward God in prayer and worship. It would behoove us to evaluate just how much time is spent on Him in a unique way by the majority of our congregation.

With the pressures of careers, family and ministry, people need places and times that can work with all they juggle. Therefore, creating pockets of prayer among people who work in the same vicinity allows them to participate during their lunch hour. Early-morning prayer times can catch some people on their way to work, while all-night prayer watches give others a time of concentrated focus.

If devotion to God is fostered among the people, they will quickly set their sights on things above. God always responds to hearts that are longing for Him both individually and in corporate worship settings.

3. Create an environment that has an absence of conflict.

I believe in the truth of Psalm 133—unity begins at the head and flows down. It is precious, like a costly gem. It brings blessings from God and everlasting life. As a pastor, I need to spend time with leaders and give them time to bring issues

to the table in a safe environment. As we experience God's answers together, the anointing that flows from God to me will continue to move across the leadership team. As we seek God's heart and command His blessings on our work, they will receive an enduring deposit of His vision for our church.

When any groups of people come together, there will be opposing opinions. Instruct your congregation to take anyone aside who they are having struggles with so that the body can be one when ministering. The benefits are phenomenal: just think of the temple of Solomon when unity was paramount (2 Chronicles 5:11); and the apostles in the upper room when they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 2). These should be benchmarks for our people. Being in one accord means each person must die to self, providing a foundation for the sacrifice of praise.

We can labor in our services with all our energy and yet not see the results we so desire. I believe God's evident presence will increase exponentially as you work to put these guidelines in place. In short, as we look up, pray up and hook up, I am convinced that the God factor will intensify in our services.

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