

How Worship Can Help You Fully Surrender to the Holy Spirit

The opening moments of a worship gathering often set the pace and direction for the entire service. Worship leaders and pastors have a solemn obligation to focus the initial moments on the best things, guiding the congregation in real New Testament worship.

Too often, music pastors seem to feel an obligation to get the crowd motivated to experience the Holy Spirit through the energy of the songs. Such an effort is likely sincere but actually a confusion of New Testament teaching.

Professor Ed Steele comments, "C. S. Lewis spoke about how dogs generally won't look to what you point at with your finger, instead, they go sniff the finger, missing your intentions. Worship, for many, is like that. They begin to focus on worship itself, rather than the God to whom all worship belongs." In our intentions and implementation of singing, we would be wise to point back to the finished work of Christ that has provided the indwelling presence of the Spirit. We should also point forward to the goal of the glory of Jesus in every service, as the purpose of the Spirit's work in us.

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The Indwelling Person of the Holy Spirit

I believe we could experience a transformation in our worship services by pausing in the opening moments to clearly acknowledge the indwelling person of the Holy Spirit resident in the heart of every believer. (The same is true of our personal worship on a daily basis.) This clarification does not seem to be an emphasis in our modern worship experience. Rather, we tend to welcome people to the building, speaking as if it is a holy temple. Then we sing songs about the Holy Spirit coming from some other location, as if He is somehow absent.

If congregants were led to consciously recognize, then fully surrender to the indwelling person of the Holy Spirit, several important outcomes would occur:

- The Spirit would guide our hearts to Christ and His glory, which is His purpose in all things (John 16:14).
- Every believer would feel empowered and even obligated to actually participate in personal ministry via their gifts, manifesting His life to others as taught in 1 Corinthians 12:6-7.
- The Spirit would produce deep worship expressed in song as He works in, through and among us.

These benefits are taught in depth in my new book, but in this devotional, let's focus on the third.

The Spirit of Truth Who Produces Song

We do not sing in order to be filled with the Holy Spirit. We are filled with the Holy Spirit so that we might sing. Ephesians 5:18-19 commands us to "be filled with the Spirit" with the result of "addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart." Colossians 3:16 tells us that the gospel and biblical truth in our minds and heart likewise overflow in song: "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.”

Writer Bob Kaufflin makes an insightful observation: “For those of us who think of worship primarily in terms of musically driven emotional experiences, Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman would be eye-opening. Jesus is talking about ‘true worshipers’ and he doesn’t reference music once. Not a whisper of bands, organs, keyboards, choirs, drum sets, guitars, or even lutes, lyres, and timbrels. Period. Music is part of worshiping God, but it was never meant to be the heart of it.”

Mediating the Spirit Through Song?

In recent years, it has become common to view music as the means by which we are “brought into God’s presence.” This emphasis eclipses and confuses the overwhelming New Testament teaching that His presence has already been placed in us by the Holy Spirit through the sacrifice of Christ.

In truth, there is no New Testament verse teaching that music is a means of mediating the presence of the Holy Spirit. In some gatherings I’ve witnessed, it appears that the worship leaders are trying to “channel” the Holy Spirit through the songs, which is far more akin to mysticism than to biblical Christianity.

Christ Made and Makes It Possible

The lyrics of clear biblical truth in music can certainly deepen our worship and positively affect our emotions. (I have an entire chapter in *Transforming Presence* teaching on the vital role of emotion.) Yet, the Bible is clear that it is the work of Christ alone that has mediated the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Further, any diversion from the truth of what really mediates God’s presence (other than Christ) dilutes the glory of the gospel and diminishes the power and truth of all His cross has accomplished for us.

Jesus gave His life and shed His blood to bring us into a new covenant relationship so that we would live with compelling assurance of the Spirit's indwelling. It is the Spirit in us, the very power that raised Christ from the dead, that produces worship, transformation and supernatural gospel impact (Rom. 8:11).

Vaughan Roberts clarifies that music "is not the means by which we enter the presence of God, but it is one of the ways in which we can express our joy at the wonderful truth that we are already there, in his presence, in Christ." Worship leader Pete Ward has observed that in many circles today the praise and worship is being taught as the place of encountering God. Many have referred to this as the "sacramentalization of singing"—worship singing becomes the new sacrament. This is a growing point of confusion across the spectrum of evangelical Christianity.

The Holy Spirit's control in us will produce heartfelt worship expressed in song for the glory of Christ. The truth in the songs can certainly inform and inspire our worship but the song is not the key to the "Presence."

Michael Horton notes, "Vagueness about the object of our praise inevitably leads to making our own praise the object. Praise therefore becomes an end in itself, and we are caught up in our own 'worship experience' rather than in the God whose character and acts are the only proper focus."

A Better Start

So I pray that next weekend church services across the nation will begin with the great truth of the person and promise of the indwelling Spirit. His work in us will point us to Christ and awaken real worship "in spirit and in truth." Even if we are not led in this way, we can individually embrace these truths. Our surrender to Him will produce better singing, greater focus on Jesus, and authentic heart-to-heart ministry

to one another for the glory of Christ and the supernatural advancement of the gospel.

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