

One Thing That Will Totally Destroy Your Worship Experience

We've all experienced it. It never set us up for success. We loved it in the moment but were disillusioned when it left us empty. What am I talking about?

Hype.

It's crazy how much our services can resemble an atmosphere of sentimentality over spirituality. But how do we know we're participating in the real thing? How do we really know when the Holy Spirit is moving or if we're just being moved by the talent on stage? How do we know we're engaging in spirit & truth worship or if we're simply emotionally responding to melodies that move us?

- Are we chasing worship celebrities or Jesus?
- Are we singing to God or singing because it makes us feel good?
- Are we Spirit-led or sentimental-led?

Important questions, right?

Because hype never helped anyone. It's fleeting. It's a memory. But it won't change your life. I'm more interested in a faith that weathers the storms. I want to give my life to a ministry that anchors hearts to the Savior. Because I remember close friends I stood with at the altar of youth events who are no longer following Jesus.

Is hyped up worship to blame? I'm not sure, but it's worth exploring.

How do we plan and lead services that are Spirit-led, Spirit-driven? The real thing?

5 Ways to Evaluate If Your Services Are Spirit-Led

I'm always wondering, pondering and evaluating this topic. I ask the question, "Was that Spirit-led and Spirit-driven or were we simply being passionate with songs we love?"

Here's a few ways to evaluate your services:

1. Did We Coach People to Biblical Action?

Corporate worship isn't corporate worship if everyone is watching the band perform worship songs. It becomes corporate when the focus is less about the band's "anointed" performance and more about the raised voice of God's people. As a worship leader, see yourself as a coach. Your success depends on their success. Coach them to sing, to lift their hands, to bow, to kneel. The problem is most of us are focused only on our performance as worship teams.

There's something Biblical and powerful about the people of God coming together in the Presence of God to lift high the praises of God. Don't settle until that is happening. And still, never settle for anything less.

2. Did We Utilize God's Word?

Worship divorced from God's Word is no longer worship. It's hype. God's Word should permeate our worship gatherings. Of course, in our song choices. But also in our spoken words, slides, vision casting, and devos. The Bible brings context – context to trials, joys, sorrows, and shame. We have to stop leaning so heavily on our musical vibes, especially if there's no Bible to back it up.

I've gotten in the habit of carrying a physical Bible around with me at church. Mainly to make everyone else feel shame for not bringing theirs. Just kidding. In all seriousness, carrying a physical Bible keeps me dependent on the Spirit as a leader. I read it more myself. I read it more with my team.

It helps me live Proverbs 3:5-6:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths."

3. Did We Connect Worship to Real Life?

The shout of praise and celebration is only a small part of Biblical worship. If you look at the context of the Bible you see plenty of lament, sorrow, loss, and questions. Let's not be afraid of these in our corporate gatherings. Of course, it's important to plan these well. Kicking off Sunday morning with a depressing lament may not be the greatest idea. But map out your worship vocabulary to include these kinds of songs, prayers, and questions. This can actually help people connect worship to their daily lives when dance anthems may not serve their terminal diagnosis.

4. Did Our Songs Breathe?

Too many worship teams are simply playing worship songs. I have no problem playing great songs like the recording. But our creativity and rehearsal can't stop there. Our rehearsals need to be filled with moments where we learn to flow – where we don't just learn how to regurgitate a song but we learn to own it, pastor it, use it, minister it. Of course, this starts in our day to day lives where we walk with Jesus and songs become more the breath we breathe than a mask we wear. Learn how to give space before a song, within a song, and after a song.

This doesn't have to mean longer. Sometimes it will. But it's more about using a song for the purpose of worship rather than just singing the song itself. Learn to rise above and prophetically declare a song over a congregation. Sing to the brokenhearted. Ministry to weary hearts. Bring them along. Practice speaking before songs, giving vocal cues within

songs, and learning how to engage people in instrumental moments.

5. Did We Exalt the Savior?

There's nothing more important than exalting the Savior. That's where you want to direct hearts, anchor lives, and shine a light. A Christ-exalting song can do more than simply inspire someone. It gives them truth to turn in their minds. It's an opportunity for a heard heart to be softened. Beyond being cool, relevant, guest-friendly, and current, exalt the Savior. Sing the songs that magnify Christ. Revel in describing Him and ascribing to Him greatness.

How do you keep your services anchored in the Spirit? How do you keep from mere sentimentality and emotionalism?

Do you agree with this list? What would you add? What is missing?

Let's talk it out. {eoa}

David Santistevan *is a worship pastor at Allison Park Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.*

This article originally appeared at .