

Remember That God Takes Center Stage in Worship

Let's be honest. How often do you really feel like worshipping in church? Don't worry; it's just you and me here; there is nobody to impress.

What kinds of messages typically fly unabated through your mind when, at 10:30 on Sunday morning, your church's worship leader utters those two fateful words: "Let's stand"?

Thus, the war begins within us each week. Our sedentary frame suddenly feels about as easy to raise as the Titanic. Amidst groaning and grunting and proper wardrobe adjustments, we assume the worship position, singing and clapping appropriately. We do our best to appear enthusiastic.

However, most of song No. 1 is spent regretting our delay in going to sleep the night before. At midnight we rationalized we just had to get the scores before we went to bed. Or we just had to catch the first half hour of the sketch comedy show.

Now, *Saturday Night Live* has given way to Sunday Morning Lifeless. Our spastic mind doesn't help. The cerebral cortex switches channels on us by the millisecond, challenging our spiritual focus. On paper, our worship appears thus:

"Beautiful win 6 to this is their show hasn't been funny since the writing especially 's for lunch?...my soul must sing."

To those of you who regularly fight the good fight of corporate worship, I have good news; you're not alone. While we may think that enduring such challenges should relegate us to the spiritual bleachers, our Father understands. More than anyone, He knows the battle for our hearts and minds because He fought it centuries ago. And He will fight it for us if we

let Him.

We live in a “feeling” generation. Have you ever noticed how the words “think” and “believe” have been replaced by “feel” in sentences?

For instance, “I feel it’s important that we table this issue,” or “It’s my feeling that the Lord would have us ...,” and so on. In our world, if it can’t be felt, it isn’t real.

I see it in youth ministry all the time. Last summer, a high school student came up to me during an altar service at youth camp. He said, “I can so easily feel God here at camp, but when I get home I don’t feel Him as much. What’s wrong with me?”

I think this beautiful and courageous kid expresses the hidden thoughts of many believers today. I looked into his face and said, “It’s not about feeling; it’s about believing.” I told him that our emotions are certainly God-designed but can’t be relied upon to determine our spiritual aptitude.

We have to believe that He is with us. Faith must kick in where feelings end so we can remind ourselves of what is eternally true, no matter what our mood or circumstance. No wonder the Lord said, *“Be still, and know that I am God”* (Psalm 46:10).

Whenever I enter into a congregational worship experience, there’s a checklist I run through to get my mind in the right direction. Maybe it will help you.

1. I remember that worship is about Him, not me. Too often, we allow our personal spiritual performance to determine the level at which we will sing or engage the Lord. But God never changes, and if my heart’s desire is to love Him, my own failures and successes shouldn’t affect that. I shouldn’t cower in self-pity and withhold praise because I sinned; neither should I become self-righteous

and arrogantly boisterous when I follow all the rules. He's the object of worship, not me.

2. I remember that I can run to Him with my sin. Much like the prophet Isaiah ("I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips" – Isaiah 6:5), when we're in God's presence, we will inevitably be confronted with how un-God-like we are. That's healthy. It is the whole point of worship—to remind us that there is a God, and I am not Him. However, when the realization hits, I must run to Him, not away from Him. True worship brings relational restoration between us and our Savior.
3. I remember that I'm a worshipper, not a consumer. Such much of our world is built around pleasing customers and "satisfaction guaranteed," but I have to shed that when I walk into the house of God. Worship is not what I get out of it; it's what I eternally invest in my adoration and service to Christ. With that in mind, I can get past misspelled words on the screen, a loud bass amp, or inadequate room temperature. It's all for His satisfaction
4. I remember that He's more anxious to be with me than I with Him. How I wish I could say the opposite, but it would run counter to His character. He is so anxious to have that time with me, not just on Sunday, but daily, even hourly. When I realize how faithful He is and how He is pleased by my mere existence, I can lay aside everything and picture His face in my mind.

Don't get me wrong. Our sinful nature won't allow us to do it without a fight. Just keep trying. Believe me, He is worth the effort.

Matt Anderson serves as youth director for the Ohio District of the Assemblies of God.