

Take the Test: Are You Fully Abandoned in Worship?

I was raised in a traditional church where people worshipped God reverently while holding identical blue hymnals. The only instruments in our church were a piano and an organ, and nobody got too excited except for the one old man on the front row who sometimes belted out an uncomfortable “amen” during the preacher’s sermon.

Then, at age 18, I had a life-changing experience with the Holy Spirit—and I ended up visiting an African-American church on the other side of town. These people worshipped Jesus with no inhibitions. They flailed their arms, shouted “Hallelujah!” and swayed to the beat of drums. I was so energized by their passionate praise it that I couldn’t wait for the next meeting.

I soon learned from studying Scripture that my African-American brothers and sisters were worshipping the biblical way, even though it was foreign to me. God never intended His people to hide their enthusiasm. The more exuberant I became in my worship, the more personal freedom I experienced. I began to leave the shallow waters of religious tradition. I ventured into the deep ocean of total abandonment.

I learned what it means to worship God with my whole heart—with no fear of people’s opinions.

Many churches today have adopted a free style of worship, and some of the best praise music ever recorded is available to our generation. Yet I find that many Christians have still not learned the secret of uninhibited praise. Many of us are content to listen to a music team on stage when God never intended a worship service to be a concert. He invites all of us to be fully and radically engaged in extravagant worship.

Have you shed your inhibitions in worship? I often challenge people to compare their worship experience with the book of Psalms, which should be the standard for every church regardless of nationality, culture or denomination. Psalms calls us to joyful, energetic, unreserved, high-voltage praise.

Have you found the freedom to express your worship in these ways?

1. Declaring praise. The psalmist says: “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.” (Ps. 107:2). Praise is simply honoring God for His character and attributes. But it is not enough to just think nice thoughts about Him—you must verbalize how much you are thankful for His mercy, forgiveness and goodness.

2. Raising hands. King David said: “I will lift up my hands in Your name” (Ps. 63:4). I’ll never forget the first time I saw a room full of Christians praising God with their hands in the air. It looked like a bank robbery! God asks us to raise our hands because our physical posture affects our hearts. Lifting your hands will help you surrender totally to Him.

3. Singing. Can you imagine a world without music? It lifts our hearts, releases joy and breaks the power of anxiety. The psalmist said: “I will sing of lovingkindness and justice, to You O Lord I will sing praises” (Ps. 101:1). Don’t just listen to songs in church or mouth the words halfheartedly. Turn up your volume and belt it out—and don’t worry if you are in tune. All God wants from you is a joyful noise.

4. Shouting. We don’t think anything about screaming at the top of our lungs for our favorite sports team. But are you comfortable cheering for Jesus? The psalmist wrote: “My lips will shout for joy when I sing praises to You” (Ps. 71:23). The shouts of God’s people caused the walls of Jericho to fall. Some types of spiritual resistance will not come down until you raise your voice.

5. Clapping. The psalms have several references to clapping (Ps. 47:1), but it is not just a way to make noise. Clapping in worship has an invisible spiritual impact. Psalm 149:6-8 says that when we engage in the “high praises of God,” we bind spiritual principalities with chains. High-decibel praise is a form of spiritual warfare that has profound impact on demonic powers. No wonder the devil has convinced some churches to stay quiet!

6. Dancing. One of the most powerful moments I ever experienced in worship was when I danced in a church for more than an hour with a group of Christians in Nigeria. I was absolutely soaked with sweat by the end of the service, and my calves were sore the next morning, but my spirit was free. Many Christians are too self-conscious to express their worship in dance, even if it’s just a simple sway or a side-to-side shuffle. But the Bible is still clear: “Let them praise His name with dancing” (Ps. 149:3). If you want God to move in your life, you may need to move when you worship!

7. Kneeling. Catholics and liturgical Protestants have practiced kneeling during worship for centuries, but many of us Pentecostals and charismatics have forgotten this vital biblical practice. Muslims bow in prayer five times a day, yet it has become a strange practice in the evangelical church. David wrote: “Come let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker” (Ps. 95:6). Kneeling inspires humility, and reminds us that we are not God. You may find the most profound experience with Jesus occurs when you are on your knees.

When King David brought the ark into Jerusalem, he was so overjoyed that true worship was restored that he danced before God with abandon. Yet his wife Michal was so embarrassed by his radical display of devotion that she criticized him—and became barren as a result (see 1 Sam. 6:12-23).

Who would you rather be in that story—the wholehearted

worshipper or the stick-in-the-mud religious critic? Don't let tradition, spiritual pride or personal hang-ups stop you from experiencing all God has for you. Break out of your box and turn up your volume.

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