

Prayer and Worship: The Church We Crave but May Never See

As the years come and go, I wonder if I'll ever see the church my spirit is yearning for.

"Yet the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. For the Father seeks such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth" (John 4:23-24).

"And He taught them, and said, 'Is it not written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations"? But you have made it a "den of thieves"'" (Mark 11:17).

Greeting. Worship. Announcements. Teaching. Dismissal. Repeat seven days later.

Sound familiar? Yeah, it sounds too familiar.

For at least eight years specifically, and 23 years generally I've been teaching, writing articles, writing books, recording podcasts and posting videos about this very subject—extreme reformation in the church. Yet, the church service in nearly every Christian church looks the same (or worse) than it did decades ago.

I'm just about done. Finished. I can't stand the thought of additional years of church experiences modeled after a wine skin that's been outdated for years—yet, I acknowledge that it's all I may have to choose from while I'm still on the earth. Reformation seems to be far off.

The goal is not to hope for a more anointed old wine skin, but rather for such a radical reformation that it looks nothing

like what we see today.

Simply, what's coming will look more like an extreme prayer meeting with people laid out all over the place with fire and tears in their eyes than the casual, tired and predictable worship and teaching services we see today.

Yes, the Sunday service will finally be the Upper Room experience that the burning, desperate remnant has been yearning for. Raging prayer, fervent prayer, passionate prayer will return to first place in the church.

The Trap of Worship: Where's the Prayer?

Did you notice that the very biblical identity of the church was not even listed in the church service model I shared above? Greeting, worship, announcements, teaching ... *but no prayer*. Sure, people say prayers, but that's not what I'm talking about. I mean a culture of never ending night-and-day prayer where every single person is invested with wild passion in ministry to God.

This is the one issue in today's church that is absolutely maddening to me. I have made this point countless times over the years, yet the prophetic call to action is rejected soundly.

How can we even presume to be a legitimate Christian church if prayer isn't primary? According to Scripture, the church is a house of what? Worship? No. Teaching? No. Fellowship? No. The church is a house of prayer—except in America. Except in the Western world.

Regarding worship I'll qualify this one time as I dive deeper into this point—I am zealous about worship and affirm it is critical and biblical, without question. I have worship music playing hour after hour as I go through my day. Misty Edwards is leading worship on the screen as I write this, and I love it!

That being said, I am troubled at the attention musical worship receives in the church today. It has become an idol for many and is all too often devoid of a spirit of prayer.

I've said before that worship music in its current state can be used as a lazy man's intercession. It's entertaining. It feels good. It feels spiritual. Yet, it by no means defaults in spiritual maturity or true worship.

"And the incense that you shall make according to its composition, you shall not make for yourselves. It shall be for you holy to the LORD. Whoever makes any like it to use as perfume shall be cut off from his people" (Ex. 30:37-38).

That Scripture is for today. Today's pop worship culture better take notice. The incense, the worship, is holy. It's for God. It's not to enhance our personal experience! It's not perfume for us; it's incense for God!

I've become increasingly grieved at how popular worship events can draw thousands while prayer meetings draw few. The call to prayer is rejected.

Even more disturbing is how easy it is for people to blend in, raise their hands, dance at the altar and enjoy even truly anointed musical worship—while not legitimately worshipping at all and not being grieved over their immaturity, sin and lack of radical commitment to the cross of Christ. They celebrate some presumed freedom while not being locked in as prayer-driven people, broken and fervent warriors. No sacrifice. No surrender. Just a pursuit of a personal supernatural experience. I'm becoming more convinced than ever that many of these supernatural experiences are certainly supernatural, but not holy.

I've witnessed people who are involved deeply in the New Age, engaging in homosexual activity, gossip, watching impure movies or television and a variety of other issues that, at times, would even disqualify them as true Christians,

worshipping and dancing with abandon. However, I've never seen people who are given to these compromises stay engaged in an Upper Room style, Holy Spirit driven prayer meeting. A culture of burning prayer draws the remnant. A culture of prayer repels the casual. Prayer is that powerful.

This is why I have counseled leaders and others—if you want to know who's on fire, surrendered and truly following Jesus, throw a prayer meeting. In fact, I've actually modified that advice. Now I instruct them to develop a prayer culture. Remove any activity that would allow them to hide or blend in—and call them to the furnace of intercession. I have dramatic stories of how this strategy has rocked our own ministry. Here's a few.

Demons Can Hide

An amazing young man was on our worship team in a previous church. He was skilled and committed. I was growing concerned about our worship team at that church due to a slight independent spirit that was manifesting. It wasn't major, but it was growing and I had to deal with it. So, I started mandating that the worship team join us for an hour of prayer prior to the service. I knew that a call to fiery, Spirit-driven prayer would bring issues to the surface.

The young man was immediately resistant. He would suddenly show up late and then attempt to hide in a corner. I noticed this immediately, and decided to gather everybody together to pray so nobody could shrink back from the fire. He stood there as stiff as a board with a blank look on his face. His agitation was increasing as the prayer grew in fervor.

Isn't it interesting how demons may be able to hide in the midst of worship, and even on a worship team, but can't stand people praying in tongues in a prayer meeting!

The type of deliverance that comes from musical worship only comes from a lifestyle of ministry to God—of prayer.

Prayerless Worship Teams

We were between worship teams once, so we decided to invite guest worship teams to lead in the interim. What I witnessed saddened me deeply.

We required these visiting worship teams to join us for pre-service prayer, and most of them looked lost, confused and eager to get out. Some would actually leave and hang out in the foyer. Just one, from a House of Prayer in the area, was on their face crying out in prayer with us.

I couldn't imagine how those teams, who were mostly quite skilled, could even begin to lead a church in worship without a spirit of prayer on them. Prayer was actually foreign to them! Even worse, for many, prayer was troubling to them!

After several weeks of the nightmare, God spoke to me clearly: *"Don't seek out another worship team until I say."*

He wanted us to worship—from a place of Spirit-filled prayer. *Worship doesn't require music. It requires a surrendered heart of continual, burning prayer.*

The question was clear: Would people still gather together if the musical entertainment was removed in favor of prayer? Most did not, and we were left with the remnant God was after. No longer could people shrink back and hide in the music. Now everybody was unified together in passionate prayer.

That was one of the best decisions I ever made as a leader. We had people who may have been using incense as their personal perfume, and when it was removed, they left too. You see, worship requires sacrifice, and today's worship culture doesn't highlight that.

"Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the

perfume" (John 12:3).

God instructed us to discover true worship without the assistance of a live worship team over a year ago, and to this date we don't have one—and I'm not looking for one. Now, prayer drives our services, and while we do use video worship from the International House of Prayer, it will always be supplemental. We could proceed with it or without it. So, thus far God hasn't revealed that it's necessary for us to have someone leading live musical worship. Simply, we can worship now from a place of intercession, and that is what we are doing. In fact, I can see churches of many thousand people praying throughout their service with video worship playing over them and not even have an in house worship team! I personally think it would be a powerful move.

What's become to be known as Harp and Bowl Worship is truly a powerful way to intermix prayer and music. However, very interestingly we see in the above passage that it's the creatures and elders who are singing—and it's the saints who are praying!

It's the intercession of the saints that results in new songs! This is why the primary focus must be on prayer, not music. Prayer plus worship (surrender, adoration) can result in new songs. But don't confuse musical worship with biblical worship. They are separate though sometimes overlapping realities.

"Also the sons of the foreigner who join themselves to the Lord to serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord, and to be His servants, to everyone who keeps from polluting the Sabbath and takes hold of My covenant, even them I will bring to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted on My altar; for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all people" (Is. 56:6-7).

The above passage is the perfect example of a biblical church service—in prayer with offerings and sacrifices. Music not required.

Of course, as I've tried to make evident, music is biblical and an important supporting element in the right context, but first we must recalibrate the church. Music has been a crutch for too long and has resulted in a lot of lazy Christians.

The singers will sing with a powerful anointing when the church is in right governmental order.

"Both the children of Israel and the Levites should bring the contribution of the grain, new wine, and the fresh oil to the chambers because the vessels of the sanctuary and the ministering priests, the gatekeepers, and the singers are there. We resolve not to forsake the house of our God" (Neh. 10:39).

Prayer-Fueled Worship

"Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!" (Ps. 95:6).

"Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness" (Ps. 29:2).

If you need musical worship to feel close to God, it's an indicator that your prayer life is lacking.

Again, it's troubling to me that people can enter into worship while, at the same time, resisting a culture of prayer. That should be a litmus test for us. If they can't pray with endurance and fervency, just who are they worshipping when the music starts?

Worship isn't about us feeling good. It's about God being glorified! We lay everything down and bring offerings and sacrifices and worship! No music required!

“Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come before him! Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness” (1 Chr. 16:29).

Our team at Revival Church has prayed in fiery tongues in over 70 Detroit region churches, and our ministry in Manitou Springs was in over 100 Colorado Springs churches. The two hour prayer meeting was intense as we prayed in the Spirit together, non-stop.

Often the pastor would ask if I wanted their worship team to play, or if I wanted a worship CD to play in the background. Most of the time I'd say no. I didn't want us leaning on the familiar. It was time to go into the uncharted territory of passionate, continual prayer. I knew that when we found a company of people that could enter in and pray on fire in any environment, that reformation in the church would draw nearer.

You see, when we pray in tongues, when we pray in the Spirit, then we can see worship in the Spirit come. Instead of English lyrics, I see waves of spiritual tongues rising up as incense becoming dominant. This is the spirit and truth worship of the hour.

“But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:23-24).

At Revival Church, I'm on the hunt for what I call Pavement People. These are the 2 Chronicles 7 people who couldn't even enter the building due to the glory of God filling it—so they hit the pavement and worshipped. No comfortable chairs, no music, nothing but them, the pavement and God.

“And when Solomon finished praying, fire came down from the heavens and consumed the burnt offering and sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. And the priests were

not able to enter into the house of the Lord, for the glory of the Lord filled the Lord's house. And all the sons of Israel saw when the fire came down and the glory of the Lord came on the temple, and they bowed their faces low to the ground on the pavement, and they worshipped confessing, 'The Lord is good, and His mercy endures forever'" (2 Chr. 7:1-3).

"When Ezra blessed the Lord as the great God, all the people responded 'Amen, Amen!' By lifting up their hands as they bowed their heads, they worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground" (Neh. 8:6).

But today, if there's isn't a powerful musical worship experience in the building, you'll find not only an empty building, but an empty parking lot.

The coming musical worship movement will come from a place of extreme prayer. Maybe it would make sense to sit the musicians down and call everybody to hit the pavement and pray in tongues for two hours every Sunday—and then again on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday. We will come to the House of Prayer in the fear of the Lord to revere him.

"But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house. I will bow down toward your holy temple in the fear of you" (Psalm 5:7).

Maybe after a year or two of Upper Room style prayer, with no musical assistance whatsoever, we'd see a new wine, culture shifting musical worship movement emerge.

"Neither do men put new wine into old wineskins. Or else the wineskins burst, the wine runs out, and the wineskins perish. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved" (Matt. 9:17).

We will be so undone and overwhelmed by the "groans that can't be uttered" from a life of intercession that the musical

worship that emerges will be nothing like we have today.

Everybody will be on their face groaning and crying out, repenting and worshipping with deep groans of intercession as the instruments play over them. From that place new songs will explode out of us!

“Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weaknesses, for we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God” (Rom. 8:26-27).

“My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my body cry out for the living God” (Ps. 84:2).

“Blessed are those who dwell in Your house; they continually praise You. Selah” (Ps. 84:4).

A Reformed Church Service

So, just what does a reformed church service look like?

It looks like a prayer meeting—because it is a prayer meeting. When people arrive on a Sunday morning, they will see people plastered all over the floor groaning and interceding. In prayer. The kids will be on the floor with them as biological families come together with their spiritual family for hours of passionate prayer. That’s the new, reformed church model! Apostolic leaders will break in briefly with instruction and prophetic decrees that take everybody back into focused intercession.

The church will finally become the House of Prayer that it was born to be.

Maybe there will be music, maybe there won’t be—but, without question, there will be prayer. Raging, continual prayer. And,

that culture of Holy Spirit baptized intercession will result in clarity as to who's with you and who is not.

Sin won't be able to survive in the camp. Resistance will become immediately evident. Gossip will cease. Pride will die. Personal comfort zones will be threatened. God will be exalted.

From that place of prayer, other secondary events will take place such as teaching services, but they will remain supplemental. Prayer will be primary because, it's clear, the church is a house of prayer for all nations.

We will be in the church, physically with other Believers, most every day of the week in intercession and new wine ministry!

"Then they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen" (Luke 24:52-53).

So, here's the model:

Greeting. Fervent prayer. Groans of intercession. Apostolic instruction. Zealous decrees. More groans. Declaration of Scripture. Fear. Trembling. New songs. Brokenness. Repentance. Prayer. Joy. Dancing. Freedom. Repeat again tomorrow.

"Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness; tremble before Him, all the earth" (Ps. 96:9).

"Then I looked. And there was a great multitude which no one could count, from all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out with a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!' All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures and fell on their faces before the throne and

worshipped God, saying: 'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen" (Rev. 7:9-12).

Prayer. That is the call of the church. It's time for a prayer reformation. A prayer revolution.

John Burton has been developing and leading ministries for over 20 years and is a sought out teacher, prophetic messenger and revivalist. John has authored nine books, has appeared on Christian television and radio and directed one of the primary internships at the International House of Prayer (IHOP) in Kansas City. Additionally, he planted two churches, has initiated two city prayer movements and is currently directing a prayer and revival focused ministry school in Detroit called theLab University. John's mandate is to call the church in the nations to repentance from casual Christianity and to burn in a manner worthy of the King of Kings. He is equipping people to confront the enemies of God (established religion, Jezebel, etc.) that hinder an extreme, sold out level of true worship.

For the original article, visit .