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MINISTRIES OF THE CHURCH:

Worship

The purpose of worship:

Worship! Every church throughout the world would probably agree with the importance of worship, for the worship of God is of utmost importance. Because this is true, genuine worship should be the response desired from a believer; not worship that is contrived or fabricated. As a believer worships his God, his worship should flow naturally to the One who saved him; to the One who intimately knows and loves him. This is the type of worship that should flow from one's innermost self, being a natural component of who he is as a Christian. His worship is to be directed toward the Great and Awesome God whom he serves and not toward anything else (Deut. 4:24; Exo. 20:4-5; 1 Cor. 10:22; Col. 3:5). Such a response to his God is not only to take place while he is here on earth, but it will be a natural aspect of his life in eternity (cf. Isa. 6:1-4; Rev. 4:8-11; 5:8-14; 7:9-12; 11:15-17; 14:6-7).



When one thinks of worship he may want to consider it from the perspective of Malachi 1:6,8,14:

- 6 “A son honors *his* father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?’ says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests who despise My name. But you say, ‘How have we despised Your name?’
- 8 “But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you present the lame and sick, is it not evil? Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? Or would he receive you kindly?” says the Lord of hosts.
- 14 “But cursed be the swindler who has a male in his flock and vows it, but sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord, for I am a great King,” says the Lord of hosts, “and My name is feared among the nations.”

The priests of Israel were offering to God poor quality sacrifices (blind, lame, sick). This God said was unacceptable because He is “a great King” whose “name is feared among the nations.” God asked them, “Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? Or would he receive you kindly?” If an undesirable

sacrifice is not acceptable to a human ruler, then how much less is it acceptable to God? Therefore we should always offer our best to Him. Hebrews 13:15 tells us:

“Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.”

What is the quality of the worship in many churches? What is the quality of our “sacrifice of praise,” “the fruit of our lips” with which we give thanks? Is it blind, sick and lame; or is it wholly acceptable, from the heart, done in spirit and truth (John 4:22-23)? This is a good question for church leaders to ask themselves in regards to their church’s worship.

Planning worship:

Although worship should flow from the souls of true worshippers of God, often times worship services are anything but worshipful. Why is this the case? One reason may be the lack of thoughtful planning. As was stated previously, worship is not to be contrived or fabricated; yet worship needs to be planned. King David (1 Chron. 15:16-29), King Solomon (2 Chron. 5:11-14) and Nehemiah (Neh. 12:31-43) planned worship. To have creativity in a worship service takes both thought and planning. If a church does the same thing week after week, then the church members may become tired of the endless repetition. This is not how God meant it to be. Worship should not be stale and unchanging. It should be alive, tangible, and authentic; a reflection of a living and growing personal relationship with God. It should be an exciting experience.

The planning of a worship service, in one sense, can be compared to the preparation of a meal. Each meal that a person eats is somewhat different from the previous one, even though many times each meal generally consists of some of the same staple foods. Meals will vary depending upon the ingredients available, the utensils used to make it, and by the skill of the one who prepares it. The same is true of the worship service. Although the majority of what takes place in a worship service will not change from week to week, a worship service, like a meal, can vary depending upon the planning (or lack of it) which precedes the service. Did people take time to plan the service, look at the different ingredients available (people and skills; instruments) and bring them together in such a way that God is exalted and glorified? When a service is planned, the believers present can then participate in the worship of their God. It will be fresh, different, enjoyable and fulfilling -- just like a well-prepared meal -- not old, stale, and something that is all too familiar. Who likes to eat the same things meal after meal? No one! Who wants to sit in a church service week after week that is not alive or fresh? No one! Therefore a church needs to work at creating worship services that have substance and variety.

Having said these things, the worship time in church services should not be designed to create an emotional response from the people. A secular movie or novel can stimulate an emotional response. Worship that is based upon the true knowledge of God and His Word is what believers should respond to (cf. Psa. 139:6; Luke 10:20; Rom. 11:33-36; 1 Cor. 14:6). Therefore when believers respond to an act of God (cf. 2 Chron. 7:3; 20:5-19; e.g., answered prayer), or as an expression of joy (2 Chron. 29:20-30), or because of their hope in Christ (Rom. 12:12), or for having been found worthy to suffer for Christ (Mat. 5:12; Acts 5:40-41; Php. 1:29), or

simply rejoicing in all things (Php. 4:4; 1 Thes. 5:16), they are responding to legitimate reasons to praise and worship God. Any one of these things, or a combination of them, may result in a true emotional response. This is what should be desired. Worship which results from knowledge (may be associated with emotion), and not strictly from emotion (without knowledge), is true worship (cf. John 4:22-23). Simply stirring one's emotions for the sake of stimulating an emotional response is not a legitimate platform for worship. A person's emotions can make him do many things for many reasons, not all of them being God-honoring. This is why the worship of a believer should always be done in an attitude of holiness (cf. Psa. 96:9), with reverence (Psa. 2:10-12; 95:6), and in spirit and truth (John 4:22-23).

Reasons why worship may not be worshipful:

One reason worship services may not result in true worship could be that those who preach and teach are not working hard enough at their task (cf. 1 Tim. 5:17-18). If this is the case, then they also may not be handling accurately the Word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15). As a result, the flock that they are in charge of (Act 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:3) may be poorly fed and spiritually starving. This happens when there is no nutrition in what they are being fed because no one takes the time necessary to prepare a healthy and appetizing message for them. The people continue to hear the same themes time and time again and may become disinterested. As a result, they do not respond in worship because they have not heard anything from the pulpit to respond to. If the messages are not biblically accurate, then they do not have any basis upon which to worship because what they hear is distorted. Such a situation is sad and all too common in our world today.

True worship may also be hindered in a church when each Sunday the message is a platform for evangelism. In other words, the church members hear the same theme of evangelism over and over again and are not being fed from the whole of God's Word, but just one segment of it. As important as evangelism is, church members need to be taught all the things that Jesus taught, not just some of them (Mat. 28:19); as well as the entire Word of God. It is important to remember that believers are to be gathered to be fed, encouraged and refreshed (cf. John 17:17; 1 Tim. 4:6, 13-16; Heb. 10:24-25), and then they are to be scattered to do evangelism (cf. Mat. 28:19). The majority of evangelism should be done outside the church building by the well-equipped church members (Eph. 4:11-16), and not in the walls of the church by its leaders.

Another reason that true worship may be hindered in a person's life is simply that he is not walking closely with the Lord. As a result of this condition, he is not stimulated by God's Word, and he does not respond by worshipping Him. This can occur when sin creeps into a believer's life, negatively affecting his spirituality. Sin can do this because it carries with it a penalty (James 1:14-16; 4:1-10); a penalty which can blind a believer (Psa. 40:12), take away his joy, and make him spiritually ineffective (cf. Psalm 51:10,12-13). When this occurs, the Holy Spirit is grieved (cf. Eph. 4:30) and His work in this person's life is quenched (cf. 1 Thes. 5:19). Therefore this believer's joy is extinguished like a fire that has been doused with water. This is the reason a growing and dynamic walk with Christ is so important to one's worship of the Father; for even then in difficult situations a person with a growing faith can and will worship God (cf. Hab. 3:16-19; Acts 4:18-24; 5:40-41; 16:22-25; Eph. 5:18-21).

Ultimately worship, or the lack of it, is a manifestation of what is in a person's heart. It is what is in a person's heart which defiles (Mat. 15:18-20; Luke 16:15) and condemns him (1 John 3:17-21), or what justifies him (cf. Psa. 24:3-5; 2 Tim 2:22; 1 Pet. 1:22; 3:4; 1 John 3:17-21). Possibly then, the results of a church's worship may very well be an indication to its leaders of the spiritual condition of their church. If the people's hearts are neglected, worship will be lacking. If their hearts are filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit, their worship will reflect this through meaningful and joyous worship. God's children are to give God the glory due Him (Psa. 29:2); and although this does not and will not always happen in this life, one day in the future all created beings will do so (cf. Psa. 66:4; Php. 2:9-11 [Jesus]).

6. List below those things that your church does to encourage worship.

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7. List below those things that your church does to hinder worship.

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8. What things could your church do to encourage more healthier, meaningful worship?

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SPECIFIC QUESTIONS FOR CROSS-CULTURAL MISSIONARIES AND CHURCH PLANTERS:

1. Have you determined what styles of music you will or will not allow in your church? If you have, what guidelines have you used to make this decision? Did you use supracultural principles, cultural or a combination of the two? Summarize your policy below in two or three sentences.

NOTE: If you have not decided what limits your church will allow for music, or you have decided but have not considered scriptural principles about music, then take the time to search the Bible on this topic (see the appendix article titled, "Music"). Remember, if you allow broad parameters when you start your church, it will be difficult to close the gap later if you decide to do so. This is why it is so important to make wise decisions in the beginning.

