

PHILOSOPHY OF MUSIC AND WORSHIP

At Bethel Community Church we believe that worship is:

...the outpouring of our affections for God...

...to be offered individually and corporately in spirit and in truth...

...as the reasonable response for Who God is and what He has done.

...the outpouring of our affections for God...

We have a tendency due to our fallen nature and consumer mentality to make worship more about us than it is about God. When we are more concerned about what worship does for us rather than the object of our worship it is like bringing a birthday gift to a party but keeping it for ourselves. When we are the focus of our worship our offering is presented in an unacceptable way (Lev. 10:1-2, 1 Cor. 11:20-34, Isaiah 1:13,15; 29:13, Jeremiah 7:9-10, Matthew 15:7-9) and renders our worship undesirable by God (Psalm 51:16-17; Isaiah 1:11-17).

*Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring
an offering, and come into his courts!
Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness;
tremble before him, all the earth!
Psalm 96:8-9*

We understand that worship is primarily for God and not for us (Exodus 30:22-30) and that the blessings we receive from worship are a fine by-product of our worship experience but not the focus. In worship we come to do and to give, not to receive. How we feel about worship is not the point. Worship is for God, because creatures owe their creator praise. However, the ability to worship is a gift from God to us *"intended for our blessing and benefit. He (God) doesn't need it; we do"* (Jack Hayford). God requires our worship not for His sake, but for our sake. He is our incomparable Creator and Sustainer and the object of all our soul desires (Psalm 42:1-2). "Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is nothing on earth that I desire beside You. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Psalm 73:25-26). "O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water (Psalm 63:1).

Since God Himself is the satisfier of the soul, we will not worship the gift, but the giver. We will not worship, worship, rather we will worship God. In summation of this point, James Torrance states, *"more important than our experience of Christ is the Christ of our experience."*

...to be offered in spirit and in truth both individually and corporately.

In Spirit - Worship in spirit is worship that engages the heart of a person. True worship flows from the inner dimension of a man and involves the intellect, the emotions, and the will (Psalm 45:1; Psalm 103:1, Romans 1:9). Worship "in spirit" stands in contrast to worship that is mere outward ritual which is

*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*

rejected by God throughout Scripture. Worship “in spirit” is characterized by earnest, authentic, and passionate expressions of love and adoration to God. An act of worship is offered “in vain” when it does not come from the heart (Matthew 15:8). John Piper states, “The engagement of the heart in worship is the coming alive of the feelings and emotions and affections of the heart. Where feelings for God are dead, worship is dead” (79, *Desiring God*).

In Truth – Worship in truth is worship that occurs in response to God’s gracious revelation of Himself in both creation (general revelation) and the Word of God (special revelation - Psalm 19). True worship cannot occur apart from an understanding of who God is (Acts 17:23), and thus every aspect of worship must conform to the truth of God’s Word. Each facet of our corporate worship must be carefully evaluated in the light of scriptural truth in order to protect and enable “worship in truth.” Worship that is saturated in Scripture will be protected from unworthy or errant thoughts about the object of our worship, God Himself. Worship must rest on true perceptions of God. Biblically based worship will retain God and His glory as its central focus thus avoiding man-centeredness. Worship submitted to the authority of God’s word will insure that songs will accurately teach and admonish as commanded in Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19. Hebrew 13:15-16 teaches that “worship in truth” will bring glory to God not only through songs of the worshiper but also through the life of the worshiper.

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. And do not neglect doing good and sharing for with such sacrifices God is pleased.
Heb. 13:5-6

Individually – Worship of God involves every aspect of life (Romans 12:1-2; Heb. 13:5-6). Worship is not only expressed through our singing but also through costly (Gen. 22:2-5; 1 Chron. 21:24) acts of good works such as acts of personal evangelism (Romans 15:16), financial giving (Phil. 4:8) and any faithful act of obedience in the life of a follower of Christ (Psalm 95: 1 Cor. 10:31, Col. 3:17; 3:23).

Corporately – Scripture teaches the importance of offering our worship to God corporately as well as individually. Our meeting together is for the glorification of God through the edification of the Body. When members of the universal Body of Christ (the church/ekklesia – the called out ones) assemble in a specific locale to gather for worship, “I” becomes “we,” and personal experience gives way to communal fellowship. There is real strength when believers bring a corporate offering of praise to God while assembled as the local body (Is. 43:7-11; 1 Chron. 16:28-29; Heb. 10:24-25). We do not go to “church,” rather we gather together as the “called out ones” in a specific location to offer worship to our God and to be taught how to live as followers of Christ while in the world (John 17:11; Phil. 1:27).

...the reasonable response for Who God is and what He has done in the work of Christ.

Scripture teaches that mankind has fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23) but God in all His glory “has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). Those who have trusted in Christ have been saved to see that God’s glory has been most clearly revealed in the person and work of His Son (Heb. 1:1-3). Therefore,

those who have had their sin atoned for by the work of Christ on the cross have been born again into the family of God and now offer the only reasonable act of worship – the surrender of their entire lives (Rom. 12:1-2) for the purpose of magnifying Christ (Rom. 8:28-29; Phil. 1:21). Because of Christ we are completely worthy of experiencing God’s holy presence in worship (Col. 1:13-14; 21-23) and that us cause for celebration (Deuteronomy 14:23-27).

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.
Romans 12:1-2

PHILOSOPHY OF PLANNING CORPORATE WORSHIP GATHERINGS

The gathering of God’s people for worship is an attempt to create an environment in which people can meet with God and be transformed by that experience. It is imperative that we take the worship gathering seriously, prepare for it adequately, and expect the Holy Spirit to work. A worship gathering properly planned and executed will allow participants a time to slow down and experience the presence of God both through the mind and the heart. When that happens, people can be transformed. Transformation in the lives of individuals through worship can and will lead to transformation in the life of the church as a whole.

We don’t set up our worship according to quotas counting each others’ psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with a jealous eye. Music is for praising God, not for dividing the church into clans. In healthy churches we die to our special interests and rise to the interests of brothers and sisters, whether they worship with us across the aisle, across the street, or across the country. We rise to their interests weather they worship somewhere else in the world, or even sometime else in history.
– Cornelius Plantinga Jr.
(Discerning the Spirits (pg. 114)

PLANNING WITH INTENTIONALITY

Elements to be used in the worship gathering will be implemented if they are found to emphasize one or more of the following biblical categories of corporate worship.

- Adoration (recognition of God’s greatness and grace)
- Confession/Baptism (acknowledgement of our sin and need for grace)
- Assurance (affirmation of God’s provision of grace)
- Thanksgiving (expression of praise and thanks for God’s grace)
- Petition and Intercession (expression of dependence on God’s grace)
- Instruction (acquiring the knowledge to grow in grace)
- Communion/Fellowship (celebrating the grace of union with Christ and his people)

The musical element the service seeks to engage *each* participant in true worship and stir the affections of the heart so that the declaration of God's Word is received as a seed in "good soil" which will in turn lead to a proper response.

Worship elements that are participatory for the congregation (such as congregational singing) may be favored over those that are more passive (such as special music).

SPECIAL MUSIC may be defined as any music presentation that does not directly involve congregational participation, including vocal and instrumental solos, duets, trios, quartets, ensembles, choir, etc. Special music will be used when it is deemed to enhance the purpose of the gathering explained above, keeping in mind the subject of the song, appropriate musical style, and quality of the presentation.

It is important that we strive to keep our gatherings fresh, that we do not allow them to become tired or rote. This involves creativity, and occasionally stepping out of the box. It may mean "surprising" the congregation with something unusual from time to time.

To maximize creativity and effectiveness it is essential for staff to be involved as a team in planning, evaluating, and praying for our gatherings.

Works Consulted:

Seven Words of Worship (Mike Harland and Stan Moser), *Worship Matters* (Bob Kauflin), *How Shall We Worship* (Marva Dawn), *Discerning the Spirit's* (Cornelius Plantigna Jr.), *Philosophy of Music and Worship* (Todd Murray), *Christ Centered Worship* (Bryan Chapell), *Worship* (D.A. Carson), *Worship, Community and the Triune God* (James, Torrance), *Desiring God* (John Piper), *Worship His Majesty* (Jack Hayford).