

A Synthetic Worship Experience

If we're known for anything, we're known for our historic calling card: no instruments used for worship in any of our churches (mostly). And it's been our tradition to worship God in acapella singing here at Brownsburg. It's a conviction we want to continue to uphold.

Though we realize there isn't exactly a detailed picture provided in New Testament of what a typical church service looked like - and we even understand that classic passages such as Ephesians 5.19, "addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart," and Colossians 3.16, "singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God," aren't speaking of the assembly specifically in the context, but rather the Christian life in general - we still believe that unaided singing is the closest we can get to the New Testament model for worship. Pursuing that model is a goal we have, historically, always been shaped by.

This is why I want to talk about a *synthetic worship experience*. I spoke with a friend recently about his visiting a church that had a typical band set up. And he commented that he understood the draw towards it, because instrumental music has a way of piercing through to the emotions. Music is power. Can you imagine any of your favorite movies without the musical score? It'd be boring. But like a drug that knocks us out of our unfocused stupor and into productivity, the whole stage mentality (that has developed in Christianity in the past 50 years or so) produces a synthetic worship experience that can be tapped anytime there is the whole production. But is it genuine? Is it real?

You don't have to be a spiritual person, necessarily, to come to church, to be in tune with God, feel like the "Holy Spirit is moving," because your raw emotions are being tapped. You don't really have to read your Bible. You don't have to have a rich prayer life. You don't even necessarily have to have the desire to really worship God - if the music is good.

There are a few things of which I think we should be careful.

1. *First, be careful of the common spiritual lingo which implies that true spirituality is chasing a feeling.* Mea culpa, of course - but spirituality is not merely a feeling. Sometimes emotions go bad. Sometimes you're not going to feel like serving God, and nevertheless you should still serve God. Choosing a synthetic worship experience that will fool your feelings into thinking you really are right with God is the easy way out for many people. But if one has a genuine friendship with the Lord, a relationship that exists daily on the outside of these walls - coming to worship him with simple singing on Sunday will be enough. In fact, it will be enjoyable to actually blend your voice with your church family, to actually read the content of the song, affirm what you're saying, and share in teaching and encouraging another member with your voice.
2. *Second, don't think our worship can't become synthetic.* We'll never have a fool proof model that prevents us from creating a synthetic experience rather than a genuine one - because a lot of that lies in your heart. Do we have a stage mentality? For some, we

do. And it's all because we have that stage where the preacher walks. We can definitely maintain a stage mentality depending on how entertaining the preacher can get while he's on the stage. Even intuitively we know it's wrong if we're measuring our worship experience by how entertaining the sermon was to us.

3. *Third, don't let anything become a condition for you to serve God.* I've spoken to many who are on the worship teams in their respective churches, and a common beat I find in their explanation is that they couldn't imagine worshiping God without music. They couldn't worship God unless there was a band, etc. We should never have to *need* something for us to worship God – because then it's not God we're serving, but an idol, an inanimate object through which we tap into God. I personally think that it's a part of God's genius in creating a global religion (and the only true global religion since it's there in the design, in the scriptural DNA, so to speak) that he spoke of mere singing – because *anybody can do this at any place, at any time*. It's not ever restrained. And it's a worship pattern that is always available – whereas the stage, entertainment mentality and approach to Christian worship is all a first-world creation, a product of affluent society, and a thoroughly American convenience.

I know not all will agree with my conclusions, but I'm only trying to open conversation. My question for reflection is simply this: why is singing not enough? Because it should be.