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Karaoke Christianity

Written by: James Travis

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Praise and worship is a common phrase in many churches. There are many different kinds of praise and worship, and that is good because there then is a variety that can appeal to everyone. What we are going to look at today is what exactly does praise and worship mean? Is it just going to church and singing as loud as you can and following the words? Or is it something more?

What's in a name?

Praise..... and Worship. The word "Praise" is defined as:

1. the act of expressing approval or admiration; commendation; laudation.
2. the offering of grateful homage in words or song, as an act of worship

"Worship" is likewise defined as:

1. reverent honor and homage paid to God or a sacred personage, or to any object regarded as sacred.

It is important to look at the definitions because many times I have talked with people who thought they knew what the words meant, when in actuality they didn't. They were never taught and so they never understood the real meaning of praise and worship, just as I never really understood until I did the research.

What follows in this article is my personal experience on the issue of praise and worship. It is my hope that by documenting my own experiences in this area that others may be helped, because the issue of praise and worship really isn't spoken of or taught nearly as much as it should be in my opinion.

In the beginning... (the show factor)

The earliest experience of praise and worship that I can remember as a child was of my parents singing at the church we attended when I was no more than five years old. Now obviously at that age I had no real concept of the significance of the act of praise and worship; In-fact, I saw it as simply that, an act... that is to say, a show. All I knew and understood as a child of what was going on is that my parents were on stage, singing at the church, and I thought it was a cool show, nothing more

Ironically, and disappointingly, because the concept of true praise and worship is not taught in most churches anymore, many people carry this same idea of praise and worship just being a “cool show” into adulthood. In-fact, I have visited several churches in where the praise and worship had much more in common with a rock concert than praising or worshipping the Lord.

Now please do not misunderstand me here... I am not saying that there is anything wrong with Christian Rock music. In-fact I listen to it myself!

What I *am* saying is that praise and worship in a church service should be more than a show.

It's about focus

In my travels I have been to and experienced many different church services, with many different kinds of praise and worship... but strangely enough, the people that I encounter are the same wherever I go. They fall into three basic categories – and these are the same stages that I have watched myself go through personally, so I understand them on a very personal level.

First we have the *spectator*. This is the person who still believes that praise and worship is simply a show to be watched. They don't participate in the worship because they don't really understand it, and so they just watch. This was the stage I was in for most of my childhood.

Secondly, we have the *performer*. Somewhat related to our first type, the performer also still sees praise and worship as a show, with the exception that these people feel the need to participate (God moving them ever so slightly perhaps). However because they still don't understand the real purpose of praise and worship, they simply sing, dance or clap to perform for the people around them. This stage was a natural progression for me after stage one, and for a while I remained here without giving it a second thought. It should also be noted that it is very common for the people leading the praise and worship on stage to get stuck in this stage.

Thirdly, we have what I like to call the *dreamer*. Unrelated two the first two stages, the dreamer has no real desire to have anything to do with God. They come to church simply because they feel it's just “what we are supposed to do on Sundays”, or because someone else forces them to come. During praise and worship, the dreamer will find other things to occupy their attention. From looking around, to talking with their partner... they will do anything except praising and worshipping the Lord.

So why did I mention al of this? Because all of these different mindsets of people have something in common: They are all focused on something other than the Lord. This is the main key. To really experience true praise and worship, I had to move beyond all of the other distractions and focus on the Lord. When I finally did this I experienced something else that I would like to share with you...

Have fun with the worship

Many churches today print words in the bulletins or project the words to the songs overhead; and there is nothing wrong with that. For the longest time however, I felt that if I didn't sing every note and every word perfectly, that I wasn't worshipping properly.

When I finally closed my eyes to not be distracted by anyone around me and focused on the Lord, I found that while I might not sing the exact words on the screen, or sing the exact same notes, it still fit the song... and more importantly, God was pleased by my praise, because for the first time, my praise to Him was true, from my heart and not just an empty showing.

Conclusion

It is my hope that through reading my personal experiences that this will help others in their journey of discovering true praise and worship. The focus should be on the Lord. Praise Him using true words from your heart; thank Him for what He has done for you. Make it personal instead of a show for those around you, and you will experience the joy to truly worshiping God.

One final note: The three mindset stages mentioned previously can be true for church as a whole as well as just praise and worship. The spectator can see a sermon as a performance for his personal amusement. The performer can sit back and shout *Amen!* Louder than anyone and not mean it. The dreamer can be thinking of a million different things and be focused on anything other than the Lord during a sermon.

Please understand that I do not mention these things so that we can judge others! I mention these things so that we can judge ourselves! Pay attention to where your mind is and maintain control over it.

I pray that we all may stay strong, stay focused and continue to Rise to the Challenge!

James