On Diversity in Worship



Diversity is a buzz-word in our current cultural climate. The word can invoke intense feelings on all sides – of all kinds – of issues. Referencing the challenges that diversity creates, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. commented, "11:00 on Sunday morning is the most segregated hour of the week." This observation, made almost 50 years ago, still rings true today.

The reasons for the state we currently find ourselves in are myriad, and I am not going to attempt to delve into the underlying causes for these issues in this letter. Instead, I want to address things on a more universal, and fundamental level.

DIVERSITY AND THE ROLE OF THE WORSHIP TEAM

While it is true that the role of the worship team is first to be true worshipers, there is always an important additional role – that of leading worship. The use of the word "leading" assumes that there is someone trying to follow.

While I do believe that it is key for the worship leader to be engaged on a personal level, expressing oneself to the Lord with honesty, integrity and creativity, there is also an element of restraint that we employ in our worship leadership in order to serve our congregations well. This value might best be labeled "accessibility," and communicates that we are considerate of those who we are leading and their specific needs.

This value can express itself in technical or musical ways. We choose songs that are compelling, yet are also easy to connect with and to sing. In a more spiritual sense, we listen for the voice of God by asking questions such as these:

What does this gathered group of people long to say to God?
What does God desire to hear from us as we gather?
What new challenge is God calling us toward as a people?

CULTURAL ACCESSIBILITY

I would challenge us to add yet another emphasis to our accessibility endeavors – that of cultural accessibility. Cultural accessibility can be approached from numerous directions, such as ethnicity, church tradition, national origin or even age, just to name a few.

As we strive to be faithful to God's call on our lives as worship leaders, let's embrace the value of cultural diversity whole-heartedly, wrestling through its sometimes tough issues in order serve God's people in more effective and culturally relevant ways.

In His Grip,

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