Multi-Relevant Wo



A few years ago, I left the corporate world to serve as the worship pastor of a Vineyard church in the southern United States. My family had lived our entire lives in Minnesota, so moving meant leaving all that was familiar to us. Shortly after arriving, I found myself leading worship for our church's Fourth of July celebration – a very important holiday in the US. Wanting to do things right, I included music that I thought would be *relevant* for the day. Everything was going great until the final song, "The Battle Hymn Of The Republic." The congregation just did not seem to engage in the song. I was baffled.

After the service, a few folks kindly clued me in. According to US history, the Union army used that tune as a theme song when they marched through the South at the end of the Civil War. Oops. Apparently the memory still had some lingering effects. For some, I had succeeded in facilitating a very relevant worship experience that day – relevant in a very negative way!

A Multi-Relevant World

We live in a multi-relevant, inter-related world, filled with an astounding variety of people from all walks of life. What powerfully ministers to some may not impact others in the same way. Ultimately, it's the Lord who meets each person where they are. As worship leaders, our job is to simply let the reality of God touch the lives of those we're called to reach. In Matthew 22:37-39, Jesus reminds us to not only "love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and mind," but to "love our neighbors as ourselves." Not only is God blessed when we give our all to Him in worship - but also when our worship reaches those around us and among us.

So how do we do all of this? I've found it helpful to ask an ongoing question: *Are our multiple expressions of worship, over any given period of time, congregationally, culturally and eternally relevant?*

I'm learning that we reach a broader spectrum of people when we're able to answer yes to that question in these three areas:

1) Congregationally Relevant: Are we reaching where our people where they are?

For some, churches are like favorite radio stations. They keep tuning in if they like the music and the talk. By definition, what happens in our churches determines why people come and stay. For many, it is the place where they have experienced significant encounters with God. More than likely, whatever is happening in worship during these times continues to affect us individually and corporately far into the future.

Remember when you were in high school, or during your formative years? You are probably still affected by the sights and sounds you experienced during that significant time in life. It's the same for our spiritual lives. As we grow, we continue to identify with certain expressions of worship that at one time or another have struck particular chords in our hearts. Collectively, these expressions form the basis for congregationally relevant worship.

Song selection and style play a big role in determining what's congregationally relevant. Therefore, it is important to look at both of these areas as tools to connect with our congregations. Whether it's "Amazing Grace" sung with a choir, "Shout To The Lord" with a contemporary praise team, or "Hungry" with a modern worship band, God gives us strategies to reach where our people where they are. If it touched someone once, it will probably touch them again. As a worship leader, it's okay to scratch where your church itches when the Holy Spirit is leading you to do so.

I'm learning that the use of specific songs and styles often gives us unspoken permission from the congregation to lead them in new expressions of worship that will reach new groups of people. I call it "weaving common thread" throughout the multi-colored fabric of worship ministry. Here are a few suggestions:

- Create bridges from one week to the next. This could be the same worship leader or a few of the same musicians leading two different style bands. Including a familiar face or two will communicate to the congregation that it's possible for a group of people to worship using more than one style.
- When using different worship teams and multiple expressions of worship, be sure to weave some of the same songs into each team's repertoire. It will give both visitors and congregation members alike common points of identity amidst the variety.
- Use three congregational favorites for every new song introduced. You'll be given the grace to include that new song that's been burning in your heart all week - the one God wants you to use to lead your congregation to another level of worship.

2) Culturally Relevant: Are we reaching our communities where they are?

Maintaining congregational relevance helps our churches willingly embrace other culturally relevant expressions of worship. Wouldn't it be nice if congregational and cultural relevance were the same thing? Life would be much simpler for worship leaders - we wouldn't have to struggle to balance the subcultures that develop in our churches with what may be happening outside of



ourselves. If we are to really love God, we must effectively learn to love our neighbors as we experience God's love ourselves. Worship must be both upward and outward, as we are continually renewed inward.

Today, many churches are taking a look around them and realizing that the basic model of a contemporary praise team with rock band instrumentation is not resonating with everyone we're hoping to reach. The models of worship developed by baby boomers, or any other group for that matter, will always be relevant to their own subcultures. Yet in today's world we must give place to a growing number of worship expressions.

I oversee worship in a church that recently added a multi-cultural worship choir to the mix. The inclusion of gospel music and traditional hymns in a boomer dominated world has opened the church up to new groups in our community and the generations that surround us. It's cool to see the cutting edge effect that hymns have on a younger generation discovering them for the first time.

Every generation seeks to develop its own expressions in music and culture. Simultaneously, they often want to discover what they missed two or more generations ago. For example, our Club Worship team is bringing back the electronic dance beats of the '80s and incorporating them into a post-modern setting. Personally, I remember getting into the Beatles in the '80s because I was too young to know they even existed in the '60s! I experienced part of the 20-year recycling of culture that every generation goes through.

Churches must be careful to avoid falling into a sub-cultural "no man's land," operating 10 – 20 years behind current culture. It's important to be sensitive to those who came into our churches during those years, but if we are to have an outward focus and continue to grow, our worship must resonate close to current culture. I believe the optimum target is to be about five years behind. If it's zero years, we run the risk of congregational alienation. We need some semblance of familiarity. Also, re-discovering culture 20 years old or more helps keep things fresh for rising generations.

Eternally Relevant: Are we touching God where He is?

Are lives being changed for the kingdom, are people coming to a knowing relationship in Jesus, and ultimately, is God getting all the glory? We need to be able to say yes to each of these things to be eternally relevant.

I served in a church where one of the elders once told me there had been "a lack of anointing" in worship. I began to ask God to help me discern the situation. This man was in a place where prophetically-oriented worship experiences carried a high priority for him. I had been leading worship with simple songs of love and adoration to God. The Lord then reminded me of all the restored lives and salvation encounters that had been taking place every week in our church, often in the midst of our worship times. God then led me to Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 13. When God's manifest presence is among us, we only know in part, and are able to "see but a poor reflection" of His glory in us - as but a reflection in a mirror. We are being transformed into His likeness. Until perfection comes, we are imperfect. Our perception of His anointing on a worship time is affected by our human condition.

Only God can accurately assess anointing. Again, what powerfully ministers to some may not impact others in the same way. God showed me I was on track with what He wanted to accomplish in those worship services. The evidence of God was all around us. I was able to answer yes to the question - is the reality of God's presence in our midst such that it turns hearts toward Him, blesses His heart and brings Him eternal glory?

Ultimately, this is the reason we give place to multiple expressions of worship. May the relevance of God be released into our multi-relevant world of worship!



MARK MILLER

Mark Miller is the producer of *If You Say Go* for Vineyard Music, and the author of Vineyard songs such as "I Delight In You" and recent contributions "Sovereign Lord" and "A Living Hope." Mark has served as a Vineyard worship pastor in North Carolina and Colorado, and currently oversees worship in a church of 2000 in Minneapolis, MN. He is also helping to develop worship in the Vineyard there. Mark and his wife Tammie have four children: Jeremy, Josh, Jordan and Jenna