Singing The Song Of The King

BY GARY BEST



It was a cool January evening in 1985 when just a few of us gathered to prepare for what would be the first public meeting of our new church plant (the Langley Vineyard) the next morning. It was becoming clear to us why the rent for the old, small building we had obtained was so cheap; it had taken some time simply to sweep up the dead flies that mysteriously kept falling from the ceiling (that building is still referred to, lovingly, in our history as "the fly church.")

We were filled with anxiety (would anyone come?) as well as anticipation (God had encouraged us with Luke 12:32: "So don't be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom"). At the end of our cleanup, before we left for the evening, our young worship leader, Andy Park, pulled out his guitar and led us in simply expressing to God our fears and longings for His presence and Kingdom. Though worship in the midst of piles of flies was hardly the ideal set up for a "magic moment," the Spirit of God surprisingly brought tears as He softened and called our hearts to the "song" of His Kingdom. This became a repeated experience as often as we gathered over the ensuing months and years: as we turned our hearts and voices to God, He would faithfully come near us in loving and intimate ways. It was increasingly during this time that He gave to Andy, as well as a young man in our family named Brian Doerksen (and eventually to many others), songs that gave our souls language for these encounters.

Of course, at that time, we had no idea of the extent to which God would sovereignly breathe on these songs and use them to invite others around the world into an intimate encounter with Himself. The songs were simply an outgrowth of our desire as a people to be fully captured by His heart of mercy and to tangibly walk it out – they gave us language and melodies with which to express the joy and the terror of that pursuit!

As I look back on that time, I realize that there was a simplicity and wonderful naiveté that can realistically never be re-lived. Yet as I observe these same worship leaders and songwriters almost 20 years later, I am thrilled to see even greater vibrancy, relevance and authority in their songs and in their lives today. And I believe there is a simple reason for this: they have not lost the heart to do what their worship language describes, causing their lives to sing as loudly as their voices.



Lead others in singing the song of God's greatness and love

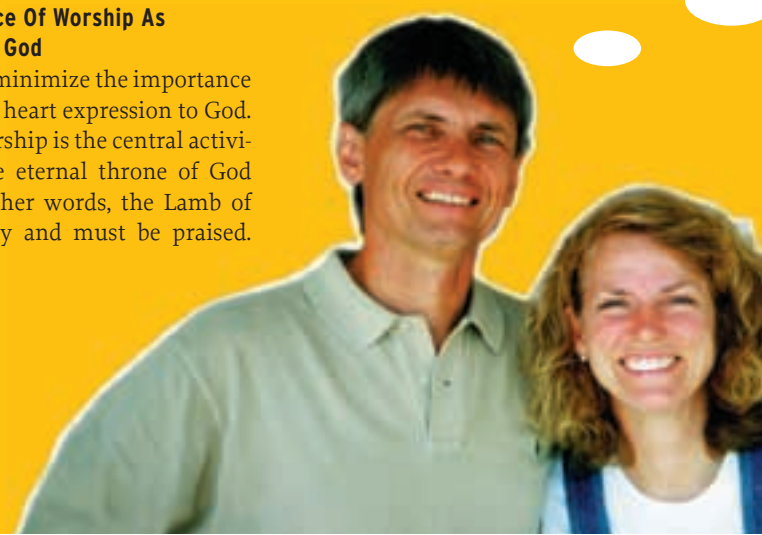
The Importance Of Worship As Expression To God

This is not to minimize the importance of our honest, heart expression to God. Corporate worship is the central activity around the eternal throne of God (Rev. 4). In other words, the Lamb of God is worthy and must be praised. Aligning our hearts and voices with that reality powerfully invites the presence of God's Holy Spirit to continually transform us; and it proclaims to the spiritual world our allegiance to Christ, causing rejoicing among God's angels and trembling among Satan and his demonic forces.

It also powerfully nurtures and deepens our relationship with God. Against all reasonable expectation, He has in His mercy invited us into a loving relationship with Himself. Therefore worship for us does not need to be grudging acknowledgement (Phil. 2:9, 10; James 2:19); it can be a celebration of intimacy. This intimacy is to be marked by rich communication – worship is the love language that nurtures and deepens our communion with God and invites His presence to grow in us.

The Importance Of Lives In Tune With Our Words

It is supremely important to most worship leaders (certainly my co-workers have been no exception) that this expression to God is artistically aesthetic. They hate having instruments



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and/or voices out of tune or out of sync. Yet I believe there is a far greater danger: that the priorities of our practical, daily lives become out of tune with the words of our songs! It seems clear from scripture that this is of great concern to God.

God has made it clear that all worship expression must be heart-felt to be pleasing to Him – mindless recitation does less for God than it does for us (Is. 29:13)! That is to say, "heart-felt" in a biblical sense, not in our modern sense of being emotional. The Bible speaks of the heart as the center of our being which includes the mind, the emotions and the will. It is important to God that our words come out of, and be in harmony with, our whole lives. In fact, He describes the songs coming out of Israel's worship festivals during the time of Amos the prophet as "noise to [His] ears." Though God Himself describes the songs as "lovely" (and no doubt they were delivered with great emotion), He will not, and cannot listen to them – they are so out of tune with His principles of justice and honesty that to His ears they are like a discordant symphony; a cacophony (Amos 5:21-24).

Worship leaders sing the song of the Kingdom in other, more secret arenas

The kind of worship expression that God is looking for comes out of a unity of life and voice. As the apostle Paul puts it in Romans 12:1, when we have truly seen and experienced the great mercy of God, we can have no other response than to trust Him so completely as to practically surrender all that we are to Him – our thoughts, our words, our actions. True worship is a holistic response of our entire selves to God; it can be nothing less. As the author of Hebrews encourages us, both words and deeds are important:

With Jesus' help, let us continually offer our sacrifice of praise to God by proclaiming the glory of His name. Don't forget to do good and to share what you have with those in need, for such sacrifices are very pleasing to God (Heb. 13:15, 16).

This counsel is especially important in our present "instantaneous" culture, which is so emotionally attuned it often lacks perseverance and discipline. Once we have talked about something, we almost feel like we have actually done it. In a fragmented society, it is quite easy to accept a fragmenting of our own lives into separated compartments. And so, despite the warning of James 3:10, it seems that "...blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth." Or, seemingly less serious, but actually not so, we earnestly sing, "Your Kingdom come," yet fail to ask how we should live in the light of our song.

In worship songs, this has often resulted in emotionally stirring melodies and lyrics that, on a spiritual level, are quite shallow and have little authority to challenge and call people to deeper submission and integrity. They stir the soul but fail to move the life.

An Example To Follow

It is for this reason that I have been so blessed by watching our teams over the years. Not that they (in the words of Paul), "have already reached perfection" (Phil. 3:12), but each in their own way has, with integrity, continued to reach toward what it means to truly be worship leaders. They have tried to grow in their ability to lead others in singing the song of God's greatness and love. They have grown as they have applied themselves diligently to the craft of songwriting, striving to most effectively provide music and lyrics to give wings to the souls of us all in our expression to God. And they have kept reaching for a genuine unity between the songs of their mouths and the songs of their hands.

I've personally been blessed by the songs sung from the stage as I've been lifted beyond my own discouragement or fear and led to a living encounter with God. Even more, I've been deeply satisfied and challenged by watching our worship leaders sing the song of the Kingdom in other, more secret arenas: generously sharing with the poor, touching the fatherless in real ways, being a faithful friend to those with AIDS, visiting those in prison – being good news as well as singing good news.

Generously sharing with the poor... touching the fatherless

Perhaps that's why their songs still move and inspire me to truly worship in word and deed – to sing a song that's music to God's ears first of all, and most of all.

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