Deeper is a fresh section of www.vineyardmusic.com, where select theologians and Christian thinkers are asked essential theological questions related to the modern worship community. In this issue of Inside Worship, Deeper asked Dr. Peter Davids, writer, theologian and biblical scholar, to address the supreme importance of a worship leader steadily growing in their biblical knowledge. Here is Davids' challenging answer, and recommended reading list.

The Importance Of Scripture Study For

AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. PETER DAVIDS



What is the importance of a having a growing knowledge of the scriptures to the modern worship leader? Biblical knowledge is absolutely indispensable to worship.

First, even knowing what worship is depends upon biblical knowledge. The terms for worship are first and foremost biblical terms, and thus knowing what worship is starts with studying the terms in their biblical context. The context for these terms is not just individual texts, but a historical context in which the various institutions that the texts describe developed. For instance, the reason why Hebrews (in chapter 13) defines worship in terms of sharing one's goods with others and praising God is dependent upon its view of Jesus as the completion of the Old Testament sacrificial system. Thus, for the author of Hebrews, there is a need to redefine sacrificial worship because of this change.

Second, worship is at root submission to God. Without a thorough biblical knowledge how will we know who this God is and what type of submission pleases Him? We might assume that it will come to us through preaching or our general theological knowledge, but this is a problematic assumption. Theological knowledge is itself dependent upon the scriptures. We need to be able to evaluate the various theological voices in the Christian world. Because of this dependence upon the Bible, the evaluation requires a thorough grasp of the biblical text.

Furthermore, not all worship leaders have a thorough biblical background. Some of them are indeed like me, a person who grew up with the Bible being read daily in my home so that it became part of the fabric of my life. Others do not have this advantage and so will not have sufficient biblical depth for their job without intensive and continued study. This cannot come through hearing sermons, for one usually hears only one or two sermons per week. Preachers themselves require evaluation, and the preaching of any given church may not be entirely balanced (perhaps because of a legitimate need or focus of that congregation). The only way to be assured that we are really worshiping the right God in a way that pleases Him is to study the text of scripture ourselves.

Third, worship is itself full of scripture, and if we do not have a thorough grasp of the scriptures we will often not understand the images and themes of the worship texts that we are using. This could lead to strange juxtapositions, ignorant interpretations or the ignoring of relevant materials. Associated with this issue is that fact that many worship leaders are themselves songwriters. How can one write songs without being soaked in the scriptures so that its truths ooze out in one's song? Furthermore, after writing the song one needs to critique it biblically and theologically. A lovely poetic image might be misleading, or even imply heresy. While one can often ask someone else to do this critique for him or her, the first line of critique should be the songwriter himself or herself.

Finally, fourth, the worship leader must cultivate an on-going relationship with the God whom he or she is leading others to worship. It is a well-known fact that this God is often (and perhaps most easily and best) encountered in the scriptures. That is, if one sets out to study the scripture with a heart intention of knowing God better, one often ends up encountering God in a way that goes beyond rational study. One

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can say, "Well, then, I will just open the Bible and wait for God to speak. Why should I put the effort into study if it is the personal encounter that I am wanting?" The answer is that just as Jesus did with those apprentices of his on the road to Emmaus, God often wants to explain the scriptures to us more deeply rather than simply speak without scripture. He wrote it. He preserved it. He has a vital interest in relating to us through it. After all, in scripture we have 2000 years or so of God's acts; how can we have any experience with him today that will be worth more than 2000 years of experience? Our experiences today are based on and rooted in the acts of God in scripture.

One Step Farther But we can take this one step farther. Our call as worship leaders and as a worshiping people is to be apprentices of Jesus (I prefer "apprentice" to its religious synonym "disciple"). As we look at Jesus' own speech and the writings of his early apprentices, such as Peter, James or Paul, we see people steeped in scripture. If the root of living with God is following Jesus and his early apprentices, then it is clear that it is impossible for us to follow without pursuing a knowledge of scripture similar to their knowledge. Thus in the end a worship leader needs to study the scripture thoroughly because his or her leader did – and we want to be like our leader.

Recommended reading on this topic (titles and authors): Note: I am recommending three types of books: the first an introduction to Bible study (there are many more advanced books I could recommend, but this is a start), the second an example of a companion book to help us understand (a companion to our Bible, in two independent translations, and our concordance), and the third a biblical theology that is absolutely foundational for the Vineyard movement, as well as for many other evangelicals.

1. Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth*
2. Craig Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary – New Testament*
3. George Eldon Ladd, *New Testament Theology*

Books by Dr. Peter Davids

- With Walter Kaiser, F. F. Bruce, Manfred Brauch, *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (InterVarsity, 1996).
- *The Epistle of 1 Peter* (NICNT) (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990).
- *James* (New International Biblical Commentary) (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1989).
- *The Epistle of James* (NIGTC) (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1982).

Affiliated Schools and Programs

- Vineyard Bible Institute *(http://www.vineyardbi.org)*
- Vineyard Leadership Institute *(http://www.vli.org/main.htl)*
- Tyndale Theological Seminary *(Tyndale@compuserve.com)*
- Sugarland Vineyard *(http://www.thevineyardchurch.cc)*



DR. PETER DAVIDS

Peter Davids is a respected theologian, scholar and writer in the Vineyard movement. He has theologically trained leaders across denominations, including the Vineyards in Canada and Germany, and is now involved with the Vineyards of the United States. Peter has authored or co-authored five books and written numerous articles (see above). He presently resides with his wife Judith in Stafford, Texas.

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enjoy the beauty
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be intrigued
passionate vocals
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