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WORSHIP WHITE NOISE



(Tuning in the 7 Worship Culture Shapers in the Chaos of the Contemporary Worship Experience)

DAN WILT

Worship White Noise

Tuning In The Seven Worship Culture Shapers
In The Chaos Of The Contemporary Worship Experience

By Dan Wilt, M.Min.

Book Mandate

Could a renewed vision of worship enable the Church to produce the next Walt Disney, Coldplay, or Nelson Mandela carrying the world view of Jesus – in addition to the next N.T. Wright, Chris Tomlin, or Mother Theresa?

It's time to cut through the extraneous noise – the chaos – of the modern worship experience. We must recover worship's world-altering melody once again. That melody is infinitely bigger than music, infinitely bigger than church services and experiences – and is the melody the cosmos has been waiting for us to sing.



Written by Dan Wilt, M.Min.

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to every:

Pastor & Denominational leader,

Worship Leader & Music Minister,

Songwriter & Artist Of Faith,

Worship Music, Author, and Industry Professional,

Christian Radio Industry Professional,

Christian College & University Professor or Administrator, and

Worshipper.

We have something profound to embody and teach related to worship in our generation.

I honor you for your courage as you call the world to a fresh vision of worship –
one that begins and ends in Christ.

I also want to thank the Vineyard family of churches around the world. Thank you for living this vision of worship in front of my eyes for the past decades. It is a privilege to call you my immediate family in the Body of Christ.

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PRE-READING NOTES FROM THE AUTHOR

How To Read This Short Ebook

1) Read it through in one morning, afternoon, or evening – front to back.

2) Forget #1. If the Preface bores you, skip it and continue.

3) Forget #2. Jump around and read the sections that shout at you.

4) Forget #3. Just pass it on to someone who is one of the 7 worship culture shapers.

5) Forget #4. Realize that you are one of the 7 worship culture shapers. Therefore, #1 is the best choice because this ebook is for everyone who worships, leader or not. (But you can still skip around if that feels best.)

6) If you don't read Part II at the very least, my work will have been in vain.

7) There is a Book Summary at the very back. If you must, just read that.

Some Pre-Reading Assumptions That Helped Keep This Book Short

- I will assume that you have spent some time reflecting on the topic of worship.

- I will assume that you know the Bible and don't need me to pack this piece with verses.

- I will assume that you are intrigued enough to follow my extended argument, over the short amount of pages here, and will allow my solutions and applications to be made as best as I can in a spirit of suggestion and experimentation (i.e. You will read with grace).

- I assume my day-to-day friends will bear with my more "academic" moments, and my academic friends will tolerate my lack of expanding on all topics in that this is a short, "popularly-written" book.

- I trust you will see this little book as a compelling conversation-starter, rather than as a solidified solution.

Thanks for downloading this book. Let's dive in.

PREFACE: MY LIFE AS AN ACOLYTE

I remember the moments in the back stairway, behind the sanctuary, like they were yesterday.

Clothed in a black robe and with a shimmering white collar, I knew I was in my element the moment I first walked out as a young acolyte through that creaking wooden door in our small United Methodist Church in Middletown, PA.

As the fire of a lighter crackled into life on that back stairwell, the wick was lit on the end of my staff. Deep shadows slammed against the wall as the symbolic light flared on the end of that golden rod, and I was about to "bring an emblem of the light of the Spirit" into our service. After silently and reverently walking out in front of the congregation, I would ascend the steps at the front of the sanctuary and light the three altar candles in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The flame would represent Christ coming among us as the light of our world, and the altar candles would be lit to serve as a reminder throughout our gathering that Jesus is present with his church. At the end of the service, I would extinguish those same candles and walk out into the narthex – signaling that Christ moves with us into the world we know.

That's heady stuff for a kid.

I was leading – in my own young way – worship.

Worship – *gathered worship* – had begun and ended with someone leading the way. I was that young leader then, and I still see my calling as that of a humble acolyte – one privileged to lead people into experiencing God's presence through the fresh, contemporary songs and liturgies that light our way to Christ-likeness today.

Somehow, as a small boy, I recognized that creating sacred spaces for humans to be encountered by God was important, vital, and immeasurably *essential*. For me, it would be my life's calling.

As I lit the altar candles in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to welcome people to engage in gathered worship, little did I know much of my life would be spent doing the same thing in a hundred different ways. As I extinguished those same candles at the close of every gathered worship service, I instinctively felt I was providing a starting line, not a finish line, for a more expansive act of worship to come.

I couldn't see then, through my young eyes, that a primary calling in my life would be to amplify and articulate the meaning behind the precious word *worship*. Through leading, writing, websites, and teaching, I would give my life to furthering the call to worship I saw pounding in every verse of the Scriptures.

From those early years lighting candles and singing the *Gloria Patri* in my small United Methodist Church, I went on to become a devoted Christian, then an artist, pastor, worship leader, denominational leader, industry content producer, author, songwriter and musician, radio communicator, university professor, and communications entrepreneur.

With feet planted deeply in both non-Christian and Christian worlds, my vision of worship began to slowly shift to what has emerged today. I began to see worship everywhere – at Disney World, at the Super Bowl, at the Grammy Awards, in homes, in mosques, and on Sunday mornings in my local church.

Who Cares About The State Of Worship Today?

Like you, I care about many things. For my part, I have realized that for over 25 years of my life one of the things I care about most is worship. I cry when I talk about it. I get shivers up and down my spine when I think about what it could really mean. I am moved by it when it happens with purity of heart, and I am compelled to action in that same place.

I love worship's cosmic mystery, and its everyday practicality.

You may care that much, or you may care differently, or a bit less than that. Either way, we care.

You are, most probably, a Christian. You might also be a mom, a pastor, a filmmaker, a college student, an industry professional, a radio DJ or a professor. You might be a worship leader, an author or an artist. You might be a twenty or thirty something, single or married, a grandparent or a teenager. You might be Methodist, Independent, Charismatic, Baptist, Anabaptist, Anglican, Catholic, Orthodox or part of another denomination.

Have We Reached The Saturation Point On Contemporary Worship?

No matter your role, or your sphere of influence, we share a common bond that will make this shared writing/reading experience work – *we both care about worship*.

Because we care – and because we care (my guess is) so deeply – this kind of book has to be written, and we have to talk.

I believe that we have reached the saturation point on the contemporary worship experience.

Deep down, I think many of us already know it.

What I *do not* mean is that we don't need it anymore. It is a vital expression of the worship of our generation, in its music and forms. Every generation will continue to need new songs and powerful experiences with the Presence of God to keep going. This generation is desperate for a living encounter with God – and worship music in all its forms and expressions is one of the key gateways to creating those spaces of encounter.

When I say "saturation point," I mean that our fixation on worship music and church services being the be-all and end-all of what it means to worship has had its day, its season, its half-century. It plays a part, but it is not the whole. I will also contend that church services and liturgies play a part in our worship vision, but they are also not the whole of worship.

If worship doesn't get bigger, in our minds, very quickly – we will lose the cultural war. I don't mean that the gates of hell will defeat the Body of Christ. I mean that the church of our generation will be remembered by human history for the Mother Theresa's – and very few others.

For me, it's a worship paradigm issue, and this book is meant to blow the current one we are embracing to loving smithereens.

So, I will champion contemporary worship, and historic liturgical practice, with every word in this little book. But then, I will seek to subvert the way you and I think about the part they play in worship.

I don't think I have all the answers, but I am quite sure of the few burning questions that keep me, and you if you are like me, awake at night.

Ready To Swallow The Big Pill?

Let's just say it clearly, and swallow the pill as we begin.

The contemporary worship movements of the 20th and 21st century, powerful and renewing as they continue to be to us all, have effectively reduced our vision of worship to the size of our music, experiences, and services.

Most of us would never say that, mind you, but our ways of talking about worship betray what we really believe. While we pay homage to more expansive ideas by talking about the "living sacrifice" of Romans 12:1-2, or "lifestyle worship," the contemporary worship music scene and its momentum is largely instructing young disciples what worship *truly* is all about – the music. In other worlds I travel in, the other instruction is that it is largely about our formational practices.

I will contend that both ideas have merit, but left to themselves and coupled with some theological brokenness in the system (see Sacred, Creational, and Secular later in this book), they become toxic to the expansive worship for which we were designed.

Some of my dearest friends and colleagues are reeling at this point, because I am suggesting that reducing worship to our formative actions in liturgy is equally as problematic as our fixation on music. Please stay with me as I later explain why I must dismantle our worship-activity fixation, not only with music, but also with the liturgies that have so deeply formed us over thousands of years. You'll see that I believe deeply in our activities, but they do not provide, in and of themselves, an adequate vision of a human at worship.

Why An Insider Challenges Our Fixation With Contemporary Worship Music

I admit at the outset of this book, that I am one of those who is both immersed and enamored with the riches of faith displayed in and through contemporary worship music. I lead it. I write it. I embrace it. I train others to lead it. I champion it as a sacred elixir that can bring society to embrace God's presence, felt and near. It's powerful stuff.

I have served/acted as a:

Pastor & Denominational leader (*I've taught worship*),

Worship Leader & Music Minister (*I've led worship*),

Songwriter & Artist Of Faith (*I write worship*),

Worship Music and Author Industry person (*I've served worship*),

Christian Radio Industry Voice (*I've sought to inspire worship*),

Christian College & University Professor (*I've sought to empower worship*), and

Worshipper (*I've sought to live out worship on a daily basis*).

I am, by all accounts of the word, an *insider*. I care about the music of worship, the liturgies that form us, and the expressions that move us.

Yet I also believe that when a powerful expression like contemporary worship music has so much sway in a time of history, we must work hard to do to keep each disciple's faith moving toward Christ – and not the expression. If not, we veer off to camp around that fresh revelation God has brought through the expression.

This is the case related to contemporary worship music. We've camped around it, and my industry has helped us to do it. In doing so, we've taken our eye off the ball. Actually, Christians have done that for a long time before the contemporary worship scene had its day.

Some are also camping around liturgy needing to dominate over contemporary worship music once again. Even our best academic voices today extol the virtues of liturgy, and rightly so, for

the formation of our desires and interior habits. Once again, I join this chorus over and over in my own teaching work, and will until I'm asked to speak no more.

But the voices who compel our worship language to include the streets, the airwaves, the cinemas, the businesses, the neighborhoods, the politics, the parliaments, the technologies, the industries, the innovations, and the artistries of our age – are marginalized by the common, deafening roar.

Can Our Current Vision Of Worship Alter The World?

We'll deal with the corporate roar in Part 1. Suffice it to say, for now, we have the *sacred*, and we have the *secular* – and our limited language locks us into ways of talking about worship that not only cordon it into the four invisible walls of a church, but also minimize the best worship efforts of the Romans 12:1, living sacrifice innovators, educators, scientists, producers, artisans, and business saints of our day.

Our widest vision of worship must begin in the first verses of Genesis, not the Psalms, nor even the Gospel of Matthew. Worship is as big as God is, and that is where He begins to tell the majestic story of Worship.

We were made for a response to God that ultimately alters humanity.

The Wake Up Call And Solutions Suggested By This Book

Here's the wake-up call. We're doing good work in the world. The "Seven Worship Culture Shapers" I will address in specific in Part 3 are doing good work. But it's not always *great* work, and it's not always their fault.

Invisible chains of misappropriated values and misaligned theology are literally choking the worship, for which we were so strikingly designed, right out of us. We think we're doing it in our services, events, programs, and conferences. To some degree we are, but it is, in my humble opinion, a truncated vision of what worship is. Worship must make sense, and matter, *everywhere*.

Our compelling Christian vision of worship had better make some sense to an ancient Olmec and a contemporary Buddhist – and passionate song singing in church services is not a compelling enough vision to matter. Neither is our liturgy. Every religion has sacred actions.

The difference is in the *content* and *paradigm* of worship and its meaning – and if we don't get that foundation right, the whole building is misaligned.

Stay with me. We're going somewhere very important together and the time taken here to set the stage is vital to real change occurring.

The Task Of *Worship White Noise*

Here is the task I have taken upon myself to accomplish in *Worship White Noise*.

Part 1: Expose the problem – "What Is Worship White Noise?"

Part 2: Suggest the solution – "How Do We Make Music From The Noise?" and

Part 3: Provide real applications steps – "Who Can Transform Our Vision Of Worship?"

To ennoble worship as a life in intimate play with Jesus in all spheres of human activity, we must decisively *change our language*, and the meanings we put behind our favorite worship words.

To put it in a series of metaphors, we must diminish the white noise, and maximize the music; we must slay the chaos and revive the dove; we must still the waters of contemporary cliché and stir the waters of vocation and calling – all in the name of worship.

Until we amend the vantage points from which we see worship, from the outside in as well as the inside out, books like this will be necessary.

Our Affection For The Explicit, And Resistance To The Implicit

Here is a philosophical idea that needs to be put up front.

To put it as a pastor-from-within might, as Contemporary Christians we adore the explicit, and resist the implicit. In other words, we adorn the church and its services with fact statements and mission statements, and ill-equip its temple of unique living stones to live in a world of nuance, mystery, and unknowns.[i] We prize the praise, and marginalize the more mysterious mandate to go into all the world living, eating, sleeping, and breathing the Gospel in a thousand ways.

This is not an either/or, but rather a both/and treatise. However, sometimes either/or language can help us make good decisions. As it pertains to worship, either we celebrate the lifeblood of worship that pulses both inside and outside of a local church footprint, or we sacrifice the culture on the altar of our worship insularity.

We must sing, we must break the bread, and we must take the cup. My other books, teaching, and vocational expressions, will affirm these in every way (as will this one). But, we also must make the social designs that begin and end in the imagination of God, create the television

shows that artfully remind human beings of their origins and their endings, and infuse the business world with ethical leaders who do more than invite the populace to church gatherings.

We must become worshippers at their widest and finest, and aggressively cultivate those who are attempting to do so, to be so, after church is over.

The Psychological Noise Has Clouded The True Music

So, after 25 years of global worship conversations and leadership, I have come to believe that the contemporary Church has effectively (and inadvertently) made the resonant melody of worship pulsing through the Story of God virtually indistinguishable.

Amid the clatter and clutter of our modern industries, definitions, and experience of worship – we've almost missed the point altogether.

In common Christian thinking, we have made worship primarily about 1) our music, and 2) the services in which we gather. While both music and services are an integral part of forming our worship desires[ii], it is this book's contention that our elevation of these has both corrupted and sabotaged the common Christian's understanding of the full expanse of the Church's worship mission in the world.

The psychological noise generated by the contemporary Church about worship in the past 50 years has come to mask the effervescent beauty of one of the most important ideas in human experience – what it means to be a human at worship.

Music is beautiful. Services are vital. But they do not hold, within themselves, a complete picture of a human at worship. And while including both of these ideas, a concept of worship limited to them is as criminal as seeing the world as the size of our own small town. We both know many Christians who live this way. We may even be one of them.

In fact, it's so normal to think of worship as primarily being about music and liturgy that to challenge the idea seems inconsequential, and diminishing to our best thinking and best feeling on these topics.

But what if that view is actually corrupting our vision of the Church's mission from within?

If that were true, would it be worth talking about then?

A Rebirth Of Our Worship Vision

Like a caterpillar instinctively building its own cocoon of rebirth – sensing it could be either a tomb or a womb, or both – we have worked our worship-selves into a sacred frenzy and monetized our worship-selves into a holy corner.

While I believe the Spirit is leading us to this season of metamorphosis, we have literally demanded *of ourselves* that we change – and our systems, industries, church programs, and 21st century culture have shouted the same.

The chrysalis we have built is ready for silent, reverent entry.

We must die to an old way of being, to rise again to a new way.

We must die to an old way of thinking about worship, to rise to a new way.

Our worship patterns and industries must follow suit.

Our worship mission in the world depends on it.

As a lover of Jesus, a lover of the Church, a lover of worship, and a lover of the diverse 21st century human experience in which we find ourselves, I have found myself compelled to write the book that is in your hands or on your screen. My prayer is that you feel similarly compelled to read it, and to respond.

Startled And Stunned By A Fresh Vision Of Worship

I often say in conferences in which I'm asked to address the vast topic of worship, that the more I learn about what it must mean to engage in this cosmic invitation to shared life with God, to respond in worship to God, the less I feel as though I have to say.

The very idea of worship should stun us, startle us, alter us, and set our lives spinning. To quantify an idea that will be as meaningful to an alien (should we ever discover life beyond earth) as it is to us – is a remarkable, complex, and wonderful task.

To simply package the term worship into the convenient categories that mark the last few thousand years may even do violence to a vision of worship that is literally vivifying the atomic structures around you and I as you read.

In her elegant book *Walking On Water*, patron saint of the wrestling artist of faith, Madeline L'Engel, suggests that the world around us is a living portal to the revelation of what it must mean to belong to God – to be of His ilk, and of His heart.

To put worship in such a small box is like trying to sum up a lifetime of marriage with a photograph – something gets lost in the translation.

The Page Is Turning On Our Vision of Worship

The page is aggressively turning on the contemporary Church's vision of worship – and it couldn't be a more welcome renewal. It is exciting to be a part of what is growing in the soil of our last 50 years of worship experience (1970 will soon be a half-century ago, friends).

As an engaged participant, leader, listener, pastor, communicator, and cultivator of the contemporary worship experience, I welcome you to read the following pages in light of our next chapter.

You will hear no cranky prophet, no enamored fan – just a leader in process who is finding the jewel of worship to be more shimmering than I have ever believed to date. Each day that passes, each song that passes, worship becomes more of an invitation to glory than an act of faith.

Shaped by my 25 years of experience in the contemporary worship project, and formed by current biblical insights and voices such as N.T. Wright, Jeremy Begbie, Steve Guthrie, and a gifted host of friends, I've become more settled in my position on worship. The post-postmodern world, with its riches in story, science, diversity, and community, have also informed these pages. So have Apple products. *Darn it*.

In many ways, though I've written and spoken what must now be a few million words on the topic of worship in courses, articles, books, and events – this is my first lean into a manifesto on worship.

To help you both read it quickly, and to manage your expectations, it is written in a short (and hopefully sweet) form. It should only take you one Sunday afternoon to digest it, in written or audio form. It is a short prequel to my next book on worship – the one that can't be heard unless this one has sounded a chord in you.

That vision of worship includes, but does not center, on music or church services – it resounds within them and because of them.

Now, let's get to it.

This Book Is For You

If you are a:

Pastor or Denominational leader (*you teach worship*),

Worship Leader or Music Minister (*you lead worship*),

Songwriter or Artist Of Faith (*you write worship*),

Industry Worker in Worship Music or Publishing (*you serve worship*),

Worker in the Christian Radio Industry (*you inspire worship*),

Professor at a College or University founded on Christian principles (*you empower worship*), or a

Worshipper (*you live worship*),

then I have written this for you. I only ask that you:

- Read it, and if it resonates with you,
- Recommend it to the seven worship culture shapers you know, and
- Share your thoughts with others in process at www.DanWilt.com.

We can conquer the worship white noise together, and recover the essential melody – the living music – of worship.

Dan Wilt, M.Min.
Franklin, Tennessee, USA
September 1, 2013

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PART 1: WHAT IS WORSHIP WHITE NOISE?

What Is White Noise?

You've probably heard the unmistakable hiss at some point in your life. White noise is a wall of sound produced when all frequencies of the audio spectrum, emitting from any particular device, are simultaneously amplified to the same volume. The result? A generic, non-descript *hiss* – or *white noise*.

Just as frequencies of light combine together to form *white light*, so too frequencies of sound combine together to form *white noise*. White noise has its uses, but for the purpose of our metaphor here, it could be called the antithesis to what we recognize as *music*.

Music is different than white noise. Music occurs when frequencies are individually selected, colored with a unique personality, and then shaped by pitch, rhythm, tempo, meter, timbre, texture, dynamics, volume, and instrumentation.

Both noise and music draw on the same frequencies – the difference is *order and intentionality*. As my good friend, a music educator, puts it: "Noise may be defined as energy unhinged from any reference to rhythm or regularity," or to look at it another way, as "energy lacking structure" or "chaos applied to force."[iii]

Music brings the energy naturally occurring and orders it, like the Spirit of God hovering over the surface of the disordered (chaotic) waters of Genesis. Creative work brings order to chaos.

In music, select frequencies from amidst all the possible noise are lifted to the foreground to act as one, connected voice – we call this voice the *melody*. Other frequencies recede, step back, and take their place as harmony, groove, and texture. They color and lift our perception of the melody – we call them *accompaniment*.

You've experienced the power of music before as I have. When a melody and its accompaniment are in their proper places, the resulting music literally becomes a surreal "place" to which we go. Music creates an imaginative, magical space that is unique to the song and the listener. Music takes us places in our hearts and minds without physically moving us from one spot to another.

Music can create a sonic sanctuary, remind us of an important story, or heal us emotionally. Music can inform, reform, and transform the listener.

Music Makes Sense Of Noise

For this reason, humans have made music, and music has made humans, since the beginning of time. Music takes us somewhere that random noise never will. Music tells a story that transcends words; it reaches around the back door of our soul, bypasses the critical faculties of our mind, and transports us.

Listen to a piece of your favorite music later today. Ask yourself, "Where is this music taking me?" If you need a suggestion, listen to the Vitamin String Quartet's version of U2's *New Year's Day*. If you're not stirred in your longing for a world that glistens like Eden, by some form of music that you love, you may need to get your pulse checked.

Like the old, black man with Alzheimer's who would significantly regain his mental capacities after just one hour of therapy listening to his favorite Jazz artists – music centers us.

That's it – noise distracts us; music *centers* us.

What Then Is "Worship White Noise?"

What does all this talk of white noise and music have to do with the modern worship experience? Let's say, for a moment, that words are like frequencies. We can make noise with words – chatter with them, overuse them, misunderstand them, post them with profundity on Facebook, and even make weapons with them. Words are powerful. Words matter. Words are dense with meaning and shape how you and I understand and interpret life.

If we can make "noise" with words, we can also make "music" with words. Words can express important ideas, inspire us, shape national sentiments, and even alter the course of history. Perhaps this is why Jesus is revealed to us, in the opening chapter of the Gospel of John, as "The Word, made flesh" (John 1:14). The Word, and the right words, can give us context and meaning that wrap us right up into the middle of the Story of God.

When carefully and intentionally fused together, words – adjectives, verbs and nouns – can create melodies and harmonies that move us. But, if we're not careful with precious words, words like "worship," their meaning can be both diluted and even altered over time. To use our music metaphor, the melody of a word's meaning can be sloppily trumped by other words that were designed to be harmony and accompaniment.

Here is the dangerous thought.

Words like worship can lose their meaning; worse yet, they can begin to mean something different, something less and limited – something even destructive to their original meaning.

Worship white noise – amplifying all our popular ideas about worship to the same volume – has eroded worship's most profound meaning for all of us.

We must find the melody, the music, again.

If Worship Is A Melody, What Are The Harmonies?

In my opening paragraph, I suggest that a renewed vision of worship could empower the Church to naturally, and frequently, produce the kinds of remarkable human beings that indelibly impact our world. I'm clearly not talking about worship as a musical set, as sacramental actions, or as a gathered worship service.

I may not even be talking about our next level up of worship understanding, "worship as a lifestyle." Something bigger, more grand, more breathtaking is begging to be brought to the surface.

I am convinced that a proper lifting of a word like worship, of a melody like worship, will empower the Church for mission in a way that baptizes every Christian's vocation (calling), every innovative, philanthropic, relational, or economic initiative, as a fitting act of worship.

The opposite, by extension, is also true. A slight, or significant misunderstanding of what it means to "worship" will *damage* us. In fact, it already has. The Church has been sabotaged from being a womb for the kinds of people who embody faith elegantly in the sacred spaces of science, family, media, education, business, the arts and more.

In many cases, our problematic visions of worship have often made the Church a tomb, rather than a womb, for grand dreams and human greatness. As Dallas Willard says, "We have pushed God up into His heavens…" and disjointed our worship from its most appropriate forum of activity – the world.

What Does A Narrow Vision Of Worship Do To Us?

A *narrow* understanding of worship, locked up inside sacred spaces, leaves Christians both disoriented and dysfunctional – believing our limited vision is packed with grandeur when it is actually becoming as small as our church services. We are moved by it, and that always matters – but we are rarely, enthusiastically, and deeply propelled *out* by it.

Now, I am not saying the Church is dysfunctional. I tire of the whining that things God's idea of creating an incarnational community was a bad one – because human beings blow it so often. I love the Church – it is built for speed. I am also one of the greatest advocates of worship leadership and the service forms that galvanize us and form us that you may ever meet.

But, I do contend that a significant portion of the 21st century Church's disconnection from one another, affection for religious replacements for faith, abhorrence by intellectual society, disaffection for human participation in divine mission, inability to model greatness in cultural arenas, and relative impotence in permeating the world with the way of Love as embodied in Jesus, can be traced back to a starved and unhelpful view of *worship*.

Our worship vision is isolating us, and keeping us busy in insular worship activities that are not breathing hot with cultural subversion. Yes, we are subverting the culture's values when we worship. Indeed, that is the profundity of what happens every Sunday in a local church.

But still, deeply damaging ideas and language about worship remain.

Can Worship Live Outside Of A Conference Or Service?

Worship is too big, too compelling, too timeless of an idea to allow it to remain veiled by the commercial and industrial noise in the world of contemporary Christianity. We have overused, and often carelessly applied, what is perhaps one of the most important words to ever grace human lips.

To reclaim a grand vision of worship's scope and breadth, a vision that actually lives and breathes outside of the four walls of a worship conference, will demand a herculean psychological shift in the contemporary Christian mind. Entire movements, denominations, and industries will have to re-tool, and re-orient. We'll have to stop talking about worship services, and start talking about worship living.

We have made the accompaniment of worship as loud as the melody of worship. Like a child banging on a piano, the result may be endearing, but to declare it to be akin to Bach masterpiece, or to make it the plumb line for all other music, would do violence to our best musical endeavors.

Similarly, we have declared our worship white noise to be musical, and have defined the melody of worship according to our beautiful, but limited, contemporary experience.

We have a problem, and *it's time for change.*

The Problem: We Have Equated Worship With Music And Services

Now we're going in. Let's clearly identify the problem.

We have equated worship with music and services.

In the last 50 years or so, the contemporary Church has had a powerful revelation, a gift from God, that is contemporary worship music. In the 1960s, the hymn-oriented faith world was confronted with a way of singing to God that opened the door to myriad encounters with the Spirit's manifest presence. People all over the world began to see songs as a "place we go" to meet with God – not just as pleasant words and melodies affirming truth.

I love this part.

My history, your history, church history, and even world history will never be the same because of the new song (Psalm 40:3) God fanned into flame in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. That new song, expressed in thousands of worship anthems, came pouring out of the Body of Christ and precipitated a great renewal of devotion in the Church, entire industries perpetuating the Gospel through music in the world, and the social engagement of the Church we are seeing blossom afresh in society today.

This outpouring became a vehicle through which Christ began renewing the emotional life of a generation jammed-up by Modernism. Fires of faith, sparked in younger generations, were spread by winds of worship music that touched us all too deeply for words. An industry grew up around these irresistible experiences enrobed in music. Thousands of new songs were added to the rich, historic body of worship work in just a few decades.

We have all been deeply, profoundly, moved by the music of worship. We are all the better for it, and will be for generations; we must never go back.

We have received a *gift* in the contemporary worship experience.

What Is The Problem With Equating Worship And Music?

I have friends who know my love for a wide range of music, and specifically, the music of worship. They are on all sides of the worship "noise" of our day, asking me the above question for their own unique reasons.

> *Keeners* want me to affirm that there is no problem – and their smart phones are full of Christian music. I often get blank stares when I start talking about the white noise.
>
> *Rebels* want me to affirm that there is *only* a problem – their smart phones are full of non-Christian music. I often get only my first few sentences heard when I start talking about the white noise.
>
> *Freezers* want to stand still and simply not ask questions about that with which they are both familiar and content. I often get silence – a deer-in-the-headlights silence, a knowing-but-uncaring silence, or a powerless silence from this group.

Still others, however, intuitively *know* there is a problem equating worship with music, and yet are committed to being a part of a solution that doesn't throw the baby out with the bathwater. They want to see a vision of worship rise in the Body of Christ that includes, but transcends, the music that feeds it. They understand that different kinds of music have different roles to play, both within the church proper and outside of it.

Their smart phones are typically filled with a blend of both music from Christians and music from non-Christians. They don't buy that the big idea of worship is solely contained in a

worship song or service, nor do they affirm those who have eschewed all traditional worship forms to live a willy-nilly, unfocused, untethered-to-community "individualized worship life."

I like to call these folks *Strong Hearts* in the revitalization of our worship vision.

> *Strong Hearts* recognize that there is always a gift, a problem, and a solution when it comes to things that are precious to God. They want to mutually *affirm* the cosmic nature of worship, *secure* the vitality of worship's widest meaning, *celebrate* the powerful encounters connected with contemporary worship music, *reclaim* the importance of formational historic worship expressions, and *contribute* to the contemporary Church being reoriented to a worship vision that powers on both inside and outside of church walls.

Like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, these wild-eyed visionaries are running *to* the problem – not away. They are worship leaders, pastors, and artists, but also media designers, business innovators, movie animators, educators, justice advocates, philanthropists, first grade teachers, chefs, mothers, internet game creators, television producers, IT professionals, mechanics, floral designers, writers, receptionists, politicians and more – and they view worship as an infinitely bigger story than most of us were ever told.

Here is their challenge, my challenge, and your challenge as the 21st century Church:

We have equated worship with music, and to a greater extent, with the gatherings that contain sacred expressions like music.

It's not right – and it's not a worship idea that is true to the whole expanse of Scripture.

That is the problem – but we will minimize it unless we recognize the horrific ramifications this primary view of worship has had on the Church's mission in the world being realized.

172,000,000 Frequencies Later

Let's do one more thing that may help to not only convince us that the white noise is really out there, but that we desperately need course correction in the way 21st century Christians think and talk about worship.

Do a Google search on the term "worship," and you will get 172,000,000 results at the time of this writing. Some of these will be related to Christian worship, but *many* will not. Worship is a word the whole world uses. Search "worship music," and you'll get approximately 63,900,000 results – considerably less than the first term.

In the contemporary worship revelation related to music, the term "worship" as a noun, verb, and adjective has been applied to virtually every concept imaginable – elevating every conference, band, album, artist, service, and song to the same volume.

Does that sound familiar? Just as taking a picture with a celebrity and sharing it online makes one feel important, so too bolting the term "worship" to everything that matters to us elevates the importance of the term to which its connected. At least, it used to before the white noise level got oo high.

I'll simply list a few of the phrases found on the internet using the precious word "worship" as an *adjective*:

> *Worship music. Worship service. Worship experience. Worship time. Worship event. Worship seminar. Worship conference. Worship retreat. Worship workshop. Worship ministry. Worship education. Worship program. Worship training. Worship school. Worship setting. Worship team. Worship band. Worship rehearsal. Worship choir. Worship planning. Worship overseer. Worship artist. Worship label. Worship recording. Worship album. Worship CD. Worship song. Worship collection. Worship leader. Worship set. Worship and praise. Worship musician. Worship technician. Worship coordinator. Worship professor. Worship degree. Worship diploma. Worship certificate. Worship history. Worship values. Worship leadership. Worship devotional. Worship mentoring. Worship community. Worship developer. Worship department. Worship pastor. Worship book. Worship magazine. Worship radio. Worship station. Worship festival. Worship artist. Worship lifestyle. Worship white noise.*

Now, let's hear its Internet use as a *noun*:

> *That was a great time of worship. Who is leading worship? What time does worship begin? That leader is so gifted at leading worship. Worship is my favorite part of the service. I wish our worship would be better. The worship at our church is more liturgical than yours. Worship in Islam begins with acknowledging that Allah is God. Let's start our meeting with worship. Did you plan worship for this Sunday? We need someone to do worship for this women's retreat. The new agers in town are having some crystal worship event. She worships money and fashion. Worship is the reason we are having this seminar. Worship was fun today. I like their style of worship better than that one. My workshop today is about worship. Would Jesus approve of our worship? Worship is what I want to do with the rest of my life. Worship needs a tune-up in our church. Worship white noise.*

Finally, let's see the word used as a verb:

> *Let's Worship. We worship together at the same church. Worship God. I worship Jesus. Worship with all your heart. Let's teach our youth to worship. Boy, that band can really worship. That leader worships when they lead. My brother really knows how to worship. When you worship do you raise your hands? They totally worship Lady Gaga. When Buddhists worship they are seeking enlightenment. How in the world does someone worship in a persecuting country? I remember the last time I worshipped at that church. Let's gather*

to worship. I am so excited to see her lead worship! Early medicine men worshipped in caves high on peyote. Our congregation doesn't really know how to worship. Worship white noise.

When Everything Is Highlighted, Nothing Is Highlighted

I use these above terms on a regular basis in my work as a worship educator, and I will continue to use them with nuance in my language and clear meanings in my mind. However, when everything is highlighted on a page, *nothing* is highlighted.

Our over-use of the word "worship" has begun to blend even these important ideas above into an indistinct buzz of noise. We subconsciously begin to lose our belief that any of these words deeply matter, including worship, and something insidious begins to happen.

Under-Reacting To The Noise

Let's pause for a moment. Perhaps you think I'm over-reacting, and I would understand your concern if you did. I clearly care about worship, just as you do, and I'm writing a book about it because I can't live with my own tension. Fair.

However, over 25 years, I have realized that I am not alone in my perception. In fact, I am *far* from alone. Let me note, briefly and for the sake of the conversation, my investment in the modern worship experience as

a pastor and denominational leader,

a worship leader,

a songwriter and artist,

a Christian radio host,

a worship industry worship resource developer,

a Christian university professor, and as

a worshipper.

In each of these roles, I have watched narrow understandings of worship play themselves out again and again in real world situations. I have stood by Christians who are worshipping Jesus in incredibly authentic ways through their daily devotion to excellence, innovation, creativity, and leadership, and watched them be told by other Christians,

"That's not worship. That's a secular job.
That's less important than what happens in a church job."

Worship has just been cut off at the knees and another Christian has been spiritually damaged.

Is everyone around here getting nauseated, or is it just me? Ever notice how passionate young Christian men and women don't typically receive suggestions from church leaders that they should become astrophysicists, third-grade teachers, or mayors? Ever notice how many of them are pushed to become youth pastors, pastors, church planters, and worship leaders?

These are key roles, but I'm convinced that our theology has damaged us in this inability to call Christians to the depths of their role in God's world.

Thousands of worship conversations later, I have come to believe that we have *under-reacted* for far too long. Our lingo, phrases, conferences, magazines, and sermons betray what we've really come to believe about worship – that it is mainly about the music and what happens when we gather.

True as it sounds, few things could be more incorrect.

It's Time For Action

So, here we find ourselves. We need some new ways of talking about worship before we take another step forward as the contemporary Church. The buzz, the noise, is unavoidable. But we can extract the music from the noise with some fresh language, pointed challenges, and immediate action.

The information highway of the Internet has exacerbated the worship white noise all around us, and our lack of multiple, nuanced words for worship has heightened the confusion. The over-amplification of the accompaniment has made the melody blend in with all the other frequencies.

Allowing the worship white noise to continue can make pastors and worship leaders feel good about their jobs, and even attract people to our church services as we make them the be-all and end-all of Christian experience. In doing so, we betray the Church into creating a subculture that effectively removes itself from the playing fields of the rest of humankind – all in the name of the worship that should put them smack in the middle of it in the first place!

We are all in recovery, and we are all in some way culpable for the confusion. That page is slowly turning, thanks to many of my peers in local church, industry, educational, and creative settings, but *it's not turning fast enough*.

The idea that worship is primarily about music and gathered settings is chaining the Church, and disillusioning thousands of my closest, most culturally involved, Christ-pursuing friends.

Action is demanded.

We need 3 things to move forward:

> *We need fresh language* with which to talk about the melody and accompaniment of worship, and
>
> *We need some pointed challenges* to our *Seven Worship Culture Shapers* that will help us to apply our reclaimed vision of worship immediately,
>
> *We need to die to old ways of talking about worship, and rise to a new way* of talking about what is arguably one of the most important words to ever grace human lips.

PART 2 – HOW DO WE MAKE MUSIC FROM THE NOISE?

Let's Whip Up Some Fresh Terms

As a child, I would make up words for fun. It got me into trouble at school, but the habit seemed to make life more interesting for me – especially as I awakened to the reality that the most mundane objects in life were shot through with the miraculous and in demand of new names.

So, on summer nights while other young boys were either becoming professional baseball players or making themselves useful with a lawnmower, I would lie on my back on a hill near our home in our small town and attempt to come up with fresh terms with which to describe the world around me.

Renaming a weeping willow tree a "somber-limb," a large boulder a "sleeping-slab," or a nighttime sky a "star-blanket," I would attempt to create a fresh meaning for a familiar concept using an adjective coupled with a noun.

In this same childlike, adventurous, etymologically playful spirit, let's bite off more than we can chew related to the grand word "worship."

Let's attempt to come up with some fresh language around the "big idea" of worship. Let's look for language that expands our vision of worship rather than limits it, that works all of the time in everyday conversations, and can serve as the headwaters from which more specific ideas about worship can easily stream and be understood.

The Ingredients We'll Need For A Fresh Definition Of Worship

To begin with, let's get our ingredients together for a compelling definition of worship. Here are the hearty meat and potatoes that will make our definition both substantial and lasting.

1. We Need A Biblically-Based Definition

Let's draw on themes from familiar, biblical "worship definition" passages such as

- Romans 12:1-2 (self-offering and loyalty in all aspects of every day life),

- John 4:21-23 (the heart of who we are, flowing in spirit and truth, in an engaged relationship),

- John 12:3 (devotional intimacy, such as the moment when Mary is pouring out perfume on Jesus' feet),

- 1 Chronicles 29:3 (material gifts, such as the moment when David gives his personal belongings in sacrifice to enhance a space designated for worship),

- The Book of Psalms (a body of creative work that includes individual and gathered expressions of worship including praise, thanksgiving, prayer, lament, intercession, sacramental rituals, and remembrance), and

- Revelation 4-5 (John's vision of the centrality of the resurrected Christ in the ordering, and consummation, of all things – culminating in the New Creation that is breaking in the now and will be established in the age to come).

We want the spirit of our definition to embrace the whole counsel of the Scriptures related to worship, from ancient ideas of animal sacrifice, to Jesus' teaching and modeling of living worship, to the visions of heaven's worship expressed in John's revelation.

2. We Need A Historically-Affirmed Definition

We also want to draw on the Church's ongoing historical interpretations of the meaning of worship (particularly gathered worship), including

- The worship languages of time and space (events, gatherings, places),

- The worship languages of public Scripture reading and prayer,

- The worship languages of sacred actions (Eucharist, baptism), and

- The worship languages of art, architecture, and music.

In other words, we want our definition to find meaning in the fact that human beings were designed to respond to God, and to express meaning about life, in some very precious and sacramental ways.

These pathways both nurture us in the Christocentric (Christ-centered) life, and keep faith's truths bustling in hearts and minds over generations.

3. We Need A Humanity-Inclusive Definition

Further to this, we want a definition of worship that isn't only accessible to Christians, but rather applies to *everyone*. If the Christian Story is actually the human story, and not *just* a story for Christians, then our ways of talking about worship should connect on some level with all human beings – rather than just the spiritual in-crowd.

- We want an atheist to be able to understand and apply our definition of worship to the orientation of their own life,

- We want a Jew, a Muslim, a Buddhist, a New Ager, or an agnostic to not be completely befuddled when we apply our definition of worship to a conversation with them about our life following Jesus (i.e. we don't want our definition to only work in a Christian subculture),

- We want a scientist, a stenographer, a skiing instructor, or a senator, an astrophysicist, an engineer, or a mother of 3 to be able to understand and apply our definition of worship to the orientation of their own life, and

- We want to a Christian to be able to reasonably and comfortably talk about the worshipping life in any setting, with any person with whom they are conversing – and to find common ground in that discussion.

3. We Need A Missionally-Charged Definition

We want a definition of worship that will arm the Church with fresh, clear, nuanced ways of talking about worship. This is important to stem the tide of the noise that is already going on in our heads and in our intra-Church conversations.

- We want a definition of worship that will stir our theology, practices, and faith to blossom in a way that thrusts us into the very heart of the world around us – not away.

- We want a definition of worship that will replace more insular musical and sacramental language about worship that disconnects us from the culture around us,[iv]

- We want a definition of worship that enables us to apply the Christian worldview to what it means to be human, and to what it means to follow Jesus in every generation, and

- We want a definition of worship that affirms the widest scope of a life at worship while simultaneously affirming what happens in a church service.

4. We Need An Experientially-Holistic Definition

Here is a tough one, but we must say it and swallow this pill if we want to have any impact in the world that is *becoming* all around us. We want a definition of worship that leaves room for

- 20K-30K denominations to uniquely express worship in the forms, patterns and unique styles that create a space of encounter for their community,

- Co-existence of liturgical, traditional, contemporary, emerging, and future expressions of the Body of Christ in peaceful and mutually beneficial harmony,

- International and multi-ethnic expressions of worship to expand to their full potential in reclaiming faith and engaging unique communities over generations, and

- The spiritual, intellectual, emotional, physiological, and creative facets of the human person to be engaged in the gathered worship experience, as well as in the whole expression of a life lived *coram Deo* (in the presence of God).

The Seasoning We'll Need For Our Definition Of Worship

We have something spicy to add to these ideas, something sweet – perhaps an understanding about worship that has come from extended and important thinking about the topic in academic and spiritual formation worlds.

Evelyn Underhill, in her seminal book *Worship* written in the early 1900s, said

"Worship, in all its grades and kinds,
is the response *of the creature to the Eternal."*[v]

Here is a very helpful idea that should shape our definition. According to Underhill, a human being at worship (not just a Christian human being) is a human being *responding* to the Eternal. To *respond* is our act of worship – whether that response is appropriate or adequate, in quality or form.

Note that there is no mention of music related to worship here, just as there is no mention of the study of microbiology or gardening.

According to Underhill, and affirmed by others in the study of worship,

Worship is the response of a human being to God.

With this current set of ingredients in place, and stirring in our spirit, let's attempt a definition of worship that can provide the launch pad we need to speak clearly about worship once again.

A New, Working Definition Of Worship For Christians

Our ingredients mingle together to form a broad definition that is applicable to all human beings, and then to provide for the specific understandings of worship that we have as Christians.

As you read it, listen for the whispers of Romans 12:1-2, 1 John 4:19, the Psalms, Genesis, the Epistles, Revelation, church history, and what you have come to experience in your relationship with God through all the mechanisms and forms of worship.

A Working Definition Of Worship

"Worship is a response of [loving] allegiance (the reason)
To a person, place or thing (the object)
By focusing all activities of the human spectrum (the action)
On that objects' ultimate honor (the result)."

We have, in this new definition:

1) A reason for worship,

2) An object of worship,

3) An action of worship, and

4) A result of worship.

For the Christian, we are responding with loving allegiance to God the Father, by expressing our allegiance to the Son, Jesus Christ. We express this by focusing our daily, and corporate activities, on elevating God and making Him famous.

A Working Definition Of Christian Worship:

"Worship is a response of loving allegiance (the reason)
To God (our Loving Father and Creator of Life),
The Lord Jesus Christ (the Resurrected Son of God and Returning Savior),
and the Holy Spirit (the Indwelling Comforter and Advocate)
By focusing all activities of the human spectrum (the action)
On His ultimate honor (the result)."

> Here, worship is a *response* to God's approach of love to us in Christ Jesus. For the Christian, the worship relationship is initiated by the Father, through the work of the Son, and Christ Himself acts toward us in love through the Holy Spirit (Webber).

God Is The Subject Of The Worship Sentence

In other words, God is the Subject of the worship sentence, and we acted upon by God as the Objects of His devoted love. To worship, is to respond to that all surpassing love. "We love Him, because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). This is why we worship.

If we get this backwards, that we are the Subject of the worship sentence, and God is the One acted upon by us via our religious gymnastics – all manner of toxic worship forms will begin to arise. No, we are the *pursued*, and the Love that holds the Universe on course is our *Pursuer*.

Life is worth living again – Jesus is the Initiator of worship. Ours is to respond.

Four Fresh Ways Of Talking About Worship

Armed with this wider, more expansive definition, four fresh terms will now help us distinguish between the various expressions through which we have the privilege of responding to God's initiative of love.

These clarifications, I hope, will allow us to keep the melody of worship the melody, and the accompaniment of worship in its rightful place. These terms are not all "new," but they are clarified and categorized in this list of terms to help us find fresh and meaningful language with which to speak about worship.

Those terms are:

1) Life Worship (the melody),

2) Gathered Worship (the accompaniment),

3) Family Worship (the accompaniment), and

4) Personal Worship (the accompaniment).

Let's begin with the most important, and all encompassing, of the fresh terminology – Life Worship.

1. Life Worship (the melody)

Life Worship is the *melody*. Life Worship is what happens when your life and mine are responding in loving allegiance and surrender to the God who first loved us (1 John 4:19).

This is the melody of worship, a life directed Godward, giving thanks through "*all activities of the human spectrum*." This is the essence of the worship the Father is seeking in and from us, that is in "spirit and in truth" (John 4:21-23).

It is a life lived *coram Deo*, "in the presence of God."

Life Worship is "capital W" worship – it is what God is after in the woman at the well, and in us. He is not after our songs – He is after our lives.

Life Worship weaves itself throughout human history as the all-encompassing response that God is inviting from every man, woman, and child on planet earth.

Life Worship Includes All Other Expressions

All expressions of worship are included within Life Worship, but *they only find their meaning* when Life Worship is in place.

Expressions of worship can inspire us to Life Worship, but they must never be confused with the goal itself. God is after you and me. Our music, our services, our liturgies, our sacraments, and our social action are all caught up in this supreme posture of Life Worship.

To offer every aspect of our lives, from the way we spend our money to the way we speak to our co-workers, is our only fitting response to the loving pursuit of God in Christ Jesus.

Let's unpack this important idea, as much white noise stems from our misunderstanding of Life Worship's melodic center.

All Of Life Is A Sacred Space

If we generally agree on the above, there are halting repercussions that will alter our theology of worship and mission – and what it means to act with God in the world as our living act of worship.

An accurate rendering of the concept of Life Worship acknowledges that all of life is sacred, and all of your activities and mine can become acts of living worship – responses to the pursuing love of God – no matter our occupations, hobbies, talents, relationships, ethnicities, or locations.

Doing justice, loving mercy, creating animations, designing clothes, loving neighbors, acting generously at work, cleaning homes, honoring spouses, stewarding money, running businesses, changing diapers, architecting software, running gardening clubs, studying math, actively cherishing our children, spouses, and parents – *all* can become acts of Life Worship.

It All Comes Back To A Choice

Millions of Christians have been let off the hook of Life Worship because someone told them that church services and Gathered Worship (see below) would do the trick. As Dallas Willard once said, one of the greatest problems in the church of the 20th-21st century is that most people singing the songs and filling the seats have *never actually decided* to follow Jesus. I agree.

There is no liturgy so beautiful, no song so stunning, no Eucharist prose so profound, that it can actually *make* the life participating actively worship. No, the life of the person is what brings the meaning to the liturgy, be it expressed in songs or sacraments, and uses them to worship.

Our actions can inspire and move the heart toward worship,
but the choice remains in the will of the worshipper.

Gathered Worship, like a good accompaniment, creates a space for the elevation of the melody of Life Worship. Apparently, according to Romans 12:1-2, Life Worship is the *only* fitting response to the all-surpassing love of God (Catherine of Sienna) – all else is a stream feeding this river.

Now, here is where the distinction between Life Worship as the melody, and other ideas about worship as the accompaniment, becomes so very important.

Let's say the above, "all of life is a sacred space," in another – more provocative – way.

Killing The Holy Cow: Sacred And Secular

Now, let's buckle up as contemporary Christians. While the following is not "new" – in the sense that many respected scholars have been saying this for many years now – it is still alarming to many parts of the Body of Christ when it's put into straight terms.

An accurate rendering of the concept of Life Worship defies the existence of a "Secular" world as a real, metaphysical "space in which things happen." It demands that all of life be seen as a sacred space for worship to happen within.

This is worth some time. Why? This faulty idea, that a Secular world exists (consisting of Secular music, Secular jobs and more) as a separate category from God's Sacred creation is the

single most confusing idea confronting empowered Life Worship today. If this is not addressed, no Walt Disney, no Steve Jobs, no great artist innovatively carrying a Kingdom mindset with a vibrant culture-shaping skill-set will grace the halls of our generation.

Our view of Life Worship demands that we take a few moments to deal with our confusions about the words Sacred and Secular – and that we introduce a third, fresh category, called "Creational." More on that later.

The Earth Is The Lords… Or It Isn't

For now, let's affirm that, biblically, the "earth is the Lord's" (Psalm 24:1).

Full stop. So is the cosmos. Full stop. We can talk about a metaphysically distinct sphere of material reality called the "Secular world" till we're blue in the face, but it won't make God's sacred world less His. Genesis 1-2 precludes such a notion – God started it all, despite Satan's fall from Grace. (Satan may operate as the "prince of the powers of the air," which Ephesians suggest is a spirit at work in *people*; and people may defer to more Sacred or more Secular visions of the world – however.)

To package all of that nuance up (of human beings and their place on the continuum of engagement with the world's "empire") into 2 easy, distinct categories of Sacred and Secular is just plain dangerous. All of us are nuanced in our ultimate allegiances, and so is much of the church.

To help us, let's ask this question – "Does God believe in a Secular world that is utterly apart from His influence and domain, in which all occupations and music that aren't directly church-related fall into?" My answer and hopefully yours, informed by the Scriptures, would be "No, it's more nuanced than that."

Now, there may be no metaphysical Secular world that exists outside of God's cosmos, per se, but there are secularizing elements at work within the world, driven by unseen forces and disordering God's good creation in a variety of ways. They encroach on us all the time, and when led and driven by highly Secularized people, they harm and corrupt.

But they are not everywhere that an official church is not. The world is more nuanced than this, and we'll see this when we address our connection with the music that is so important to this discussion.

How do we talk about this, and still retain our fresh vision of Life Worship?

First, let's affirm that the blanket assumption certain normal occupations (see the abnormal ones below) and music pieces (music that doesn't explicitly nurture faith) are inherently "Secular" has no place in a rich, flourishing, Kingdom-of-God vision of a human at worship.

When You Assume, You…

The fact is, our time and place can determine our assumptions. For the early church, being a soldier, or being a farmer (Augustine), had nothing to do with Christ and were therefore "Secular" occupations. In essence, God wanted nothing to do with them. The funny part is, so was prostitution. Hmmm. Being a farmer or being a prostitute falls into the same category?

For the extremist Muslims in Mali, who have burned instruments and forbade any music but the singing of Koranic verses, all music other than that based on its holy scripture is "Secular."

Today, we may see all of this differently than the early church or this stance of Muslim extremists. We might say that being involved in sex trafficking, or running a drug ring, are truly "Secular" occupations. In other words, they directly and intentionally disorder the creation as God designed it and pull people away from a Christocentric (Christ-centered) set of desires and longings.

However, currently, the same category of occupation (Secular) that houses sex traffickers, if you listen to the average Christian speak, also houses graphic designers, psychologists, teachers, and lawn care workers.

If they're not working directly with the church, they are all "Secular" jobs – right?

We have a big problem. Sacred and Secular are not working well as categories for Life Worship. Too many are "in," and too many are "out."

If every breath, sacred as the space in which it is drawn, matters to God, then Life Worship can be expressed in most of these apparently Secular occupations – rendering them Sacred. We no longer need to pray for all passionate young people to become youth pastors or work in a Christian-baptized industry. They don't all need to be oversees missionaries.

We want them to become Kingdom people. Sacred, incarnational activists who live and breathe and work and laugh in order to know Christ, be known by Christ, and make Christ known.

One basic idea changes, and the whole tower of cards falls at the feet of Jesus.

The ground that you are on is holy under your feet; see it as a Sacred opportunity for Life Worship. Secular has to do with the meanings we place on things – not an intrinsic quality that is easily defined. Your work, your home, and the space in which you move is Sacred space. Use it to the glory of God.

"Creational" Is The New Category That Could Heal Us

We have a new category that could begin to heal our non-nuanced, confusing thinking. It is the category of "Creational." Without this category, our working definitions, in popular conversation, reveal an either/or worldview – and both our categories and our truncated worship vision are insufficient to carry us forward as worshippers of God in a sacred, yet fallen, world.

Let's review. In popular Christian conversation:

Sacred defines any person, occupation, artistic expression, action, or system that is explicitly and literally Christian in wording, self-awareness, or Christian church | ministry | business organizational alignment.

Secular defines everything else. The bucket is big, so everything else can be thrown in. In other words,

Being an airline pilot or a tyrannical despot,

Being a public school teacher or a cut-throat business executive,

Being a pub musician or a licentious rock star,

are all Secular occupations.

Egad. We can't really believe that, can we?

I propose that these two lone categories of "Sacred and Secular" are completely inadequate for encompassing the broad scope of human activity and the intentions and motivations at work in human hearts – which are then embodied in the systems, art, and worlds we create.

In other words,

"Sacred and Secular" simply do not provide the language we need to describe human activity.

I propose a new, third category that must be inserted for the human experience, and Life Worship, to begin to make sense.

Creational is the new category that could heal us.

Creational is the big category for our human activity as God's image-bearers, and Sacred and Secular are ways our expressions can be directed.

According to the narrative on the creation of human beings in Genesis, human beings are created in the image of God – the *imago Dei*. Some suggest this is simply a vocational statement (we are God's vice-regents on the earth), and others suggest this is a nature statement (we are like God in the areas of our capacity to love, exert will, benevolently order creation, etc.).

As every person is "created" in the image of God, we all operate out from a "Creational" foundation. The music of the symphony, the beats of the producers, the skills of the master gardener – regardless of their faith perspectives – shimmer and shine with the glory of God.

They can run but they can't hide. God's magnificence and ingenuity is shining through their expressions.

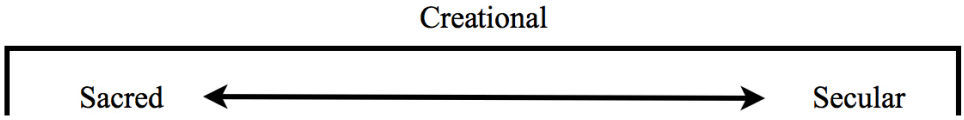
So, the insertion of the new third category alters the definitions of Sacred and Secular and gives us a fresh context in which to see our lives flourish.

(Let me note here that the term "Creational" has academic uses that may confuse this discussion for some. I am not oblivious to these, but I am focusing currently on using the term Creational to speak of all expressions that come from people created in the image of God.)

The following is just a working diagram, and is only intended to relate to our view of occupations and music (and other expressions that flow from human beings) specifically.

We are all created in the image of God (Creational), and therefore we create. Much of what believers we create has a God-centric focus (Sacred), but not all of it (Creational).

Others, who don't know Christ, create out of their Creational selves, and some produce very Sacred moments (I love when this happens, and a musician or filmmaker realizes they touched something way beyond them) by also very Secularized ones.



The New Definitions Of Creational, Sacred, and Secular

So, do we have a working way of talking about a world that is more nuanced than two buckets will hold? Let's introduce the term "Creational," and try it out in every day life.

> *Creational* is the larger category that ideas like sacred and secular find themselves within. Creational defines any person, occupation, artistic expression, action, or system that flows from the reality that human beings are created in the image of God, and explores, enhances, or amplifies the human experience in the created order. Creational actions may be come from an explicitly Sacred perspective, an explicitly Secular

perspective, or *anywhere in between*. These actions remain Creational. Human love, creativity, friendship, art, worship music – everything – all lives here.

Sacred defines any person, occupation, artistic expression, action, or system that is explicitly (for Christians) focused on nurturing Christian worship, discipleship, and a Christ-centered desire-set/worldview.

Secular defines any person, occupation, artistic expression, action, or system that explicitly (and aggressively) points human beings away from a sacred or creational vision of reality. Secular in this new vision, is clearly, distinctly, *anti-faith (in God specifically)*. Truth is, many people and occupations we've lumped into a Secular category before are operating from a Creational perspective rather than an explicitly Secular one. The "empire" of this world, and human systems, may surround and flow unknowingly through them, but that doesn't mean that everything coming from them lacks value.

The addition of the category of *Creational* has just made room for diverse expressions of vocation, art, political action and more to be at the center of the worshipping life rather than on the periphery.

While we could begin to unpack the idea of living a Creational existence, that is Sacred in every aspect, we'll wait for our next section – focused on music and liturgy – to flesh it out a bit more.

Suffice it to say for now, that with the integration of the category Creational into our language of Life Worship, we have just redefined the nature of life itself.

Life is roomy. Life is spacious. Life is Sacred – inside of a cathedral, inside of an office, inside of a school, or inside of a war zone. We can Secularize anything, and that would be bad whether it happens in the halls of government or in a church's corporate systems.

Life Worship is now possible *everywhere*, from *anyone*.

Life Worship: Nourish To Flourish

We must now nourish and nurture this fresh approach to Life Worship. Armed with our fresh language above, we are saying that there is no place in which true worship cannot blossom, no ground that cannot be holy under our feet (unless it is a world we are participating in that is actively Secularizing at every turn) – from the sound stage of a movie set to the next planet we visit.

It's all sacred space, and God plays there. We'll talk more about this topic under our next category of Gathered Worship.

In review, Life Worship recognizes that the terrains on which living worship occurs, on which loving responses to God occur, are *everywhere*. A big cosmos demands a big melody of worship. In a universe where, a few years ago, a star exploded and spawned off 200 solar systems *our size*, we need a big definition of Life Worship.

With Christ at the center of our worship, empowering us by the Spirit to respond to the Father, and inviting us into a Christ-centered view of our moments, months, lifetimes and corporate history, we act out our Life Worship on a daily basis.

Life Worship is the *melody* – but for the melody to last it needs constant harmonic support. Enter "Gathered Worship."

2. Gathered Worship (the accompaniment)

Gathered Worship is the *accompaniment to the melody of Life Worship*. Gathered Worship is the fragrance of lives expressing Life Worship throughout the week, now coming together and expressing and enhancing our devotion through various "languages" of Gathered Worship.

Music, sacramental actions (the Eucharist, Baptism, the passing of the Peace), the public reading of the Scriptures, corporate prayer, the creation of art and architecture, the planning of celebrations following the Worship Year calendar, weekly services, weddings, funerals, symbols, art installations, visual media presentations and other acts of Gathered Worship *shape us as Christians*.

God initiates the invitation to Life Worship, and we use our tools, our liturgies, our languages of Gathered Worship, to *respond*. Gathered Worship is the *harmony* to Life Worship, and is an essential component of the symphony of a life offered to God.

Please buckle your seatbelt; we are going to spend some extra time here because we are so entrenched in so many ideas related to Gathered Worship and the music that is often associated with it in contemporary Christian thought.

Applying Our Ideas To Creational Music, Sacred Music, And Secular Music

Let's focus in on the musical expression of Gathered Worship. There are many expressions of Gathered Worship, but we must address this one, as it is the primary contributing factor to the worship white noise of our generation.

An accurate rendering of the concept of Gathered Worship, in light of our understanding of Life Worship, holds that certain kinds of music are optimal for Gathered Worship (typically hosting a wide range of ages and demographics) and others are not as optimal.

But if a piece of music is not optimized, or even intended, for gathered worship use (to sing it or listen to it) – what are we to do?

We only had two categories for music before, "Sacred" and "Secular." One was generally considered to be positive, and the other is usually considered to be quite negative. But in our Life Worship section, we just questioned "Secular" as a useful category for most music or occupations.

Where do we put music that is not for Gathered Worship use? In fact, we're not just dealing with music written by Christians now – we need a category for music written by *everybody*.

As I said in the Life Worship section, the word I propose, after extended dialogues with theological and biblical studies friends, is "Creational."

"Creational" is a positive word, and a positive category for music. It suggests that all human beings are made in the image of God, and therefore they, like the One in whose image they are made, *create*.

From the stuff of life, we make art. When a Christian makes it, it is Creational. When a non-Christian makes it, it is *still* Creational.

That is, unless the song is utterly and aggressively seeking to disorder our vision of the New Creation. Then, and from my perspective, *only* then, could something begin to be called truly Secular or Secularizing.

Now, instead of having simple, either/or buckets in which to throw our music, we must actually speak with nuance, *discerning* different kinds of music from one another.

Honestly, discerning is harder than knee-jerk categorizing. It takes more time, and demands "wisdom" rather than simple "judgment." But discerning can unveil the beautiful in what seems ugly; judgment (in a heart) often does not take the time to unpack the world.

I'm not sure if the following will work, but I'm going to give it a swing. If it crumbles, I own it. If not, let's see if there is some merit in this exercise.

An Exercise In Labeling: Carrie Underwood, Vince Gill, and "How Great Thou Art"

On April 22, 2011, Carrie Underwood and Vince Gill (both professing Christians as I understand at the time of this writing) performed the song *How Great Thou Art* in front of their country music artist peers at the "Girls Night Out" Superstar Women Of Country Special.[vi] Find it on YouTube – it is both a compelling and moving performance.

Personally, I was in tears by the time it was done, and I'm not a full-on fan of all country music. No matter what you think of country music, if you don't get chills up and down your spine from the sheer performance and faith pounding in the music, you might need that pulse check again.

The crowd, full of non-Christians and Christians I'm sure (though arguably there may be more professing Christians in the country music genre than in most others) launch into a standing ovation in the final chorus. One could guess that there was no one in the audience that night, live or at home, that was not moved.

Now, let's analyze this by applying our old categories, then our new categories. I am making assumptions that both Underwood's and Gill's faith are vibrant and authentic, and that faith brings heat to the song they are leading.

According to the average, contemporary Christian music listener today, with few exceptions, the unspoken "labeling" of what happened in those few minutes on stage might look like the following (at least at the time of this writing).

Average Contemporary Christian's Response to Carrie Underwood's Performance Using Only A Sacred/Secular Lens

Carrie Underwood: *Christian Faith*

Carrie Underwood: *Secular Artist*

Carrie's Record Label: *Secular*

The Song, *How Great Thou Art*: *Sacred*

Should Christians Listen To It: *Yes*

Should non-Christians Listen To It: *Yes*

If The Song Is Carried On A Secular Label, Is It Secular? *No, it's a Sacred song on a Secular recording. The fact that the singer is a professing Christian, makes it all the more Sacred. But she's a Secular artist, right? So that makes this hard to answer.*

If The Singer Is A Christian, Is Her Job Secular: *Unsure. Probably yes, her job is a Secular job as a Country artist – she's not an explicitly Christian singer. For her to be a Sacred singer, she would need to do most of what she does in churches, conferences, or explicitly Christian concerts.*

If The Band Is Made Of Non-Christians, Is The Performance Secular? *No, the song is Sacred. So it's a Sacred song (especially because it's a hymn for gathered worship) performed by Secular musicians. That means that the music they make is Secular (if they are in the Country Music world, but the song is Sacred. So the song makes their music Sacred, not Secular). Again, that was tough to use our buckets, but there we are.*

Is The Arena A Sacred Space, Or A Secular Space? *Holy cow. I don't know. In that moment, that big arena became like a church – even if people weren't there for that. It houses mainly Secular artists, and probably some Christian acts, but I would guess it's more a Secular space than it is a Sacred space.*

Is Carrie A Christian Artist or A Secular Artist When She Sings This Song? *Unsure. If she's not with a Christian Record Label, I suppose she's a Secular artist singing a Christian song. She's a Christian, but in a Secular occupation.*

What Makes Something Sacred Or Secular? *If it's in the church, has to do with the church, or the artist is on a Christian label, then it's Sacred. If it's not in the church, has to do with the church (this song), or the artist is not on a Secular label, then it's Secular. The artist is Sacred, or Christian, if they are on a Christian label. Carrie is a Christian, singing Secular*

music – much of the time. Therefore, I'm unsure exactly how to label her or that performance.

Is What We Just Did Confusing? *Yes*.

Now, let's apply a more Creational approach to Life Worship to this same idea, and then relate it back to Gathered Worship. This may or may not help us, but if it even begins to open up a way for our worship to play out everywhere, then it will have been a helpful exercise.

Average Contemporary Christian's New Response to Carrie Underwood's Performance Using A Creational Lens

Carrie Underwood: *Christian Faith*

Carrie Underwood: *Creational artist who embraces a rich Christian faith. Sometimes creates specifically sacred art. May, at times and from some peoples' perspectives, create or perform Secularizing art. Others might say she is just representing true feelings, through art. Many options are in front of us here.*

Carrie's Record Label:

> *There is no category that perfectly fits. If the world's system of accumulating wealth (the empire) is behind the system, it probably has many secularizing elements to it as a business. However, some Kingdom elements could be at play in some corners.*
>
> *Labels host many kinds of artists, and art. They probably have artists who are Christians making music, and others making music, who are contributing nuanced Creational ideas and commentary on beauty and brokenness into the world.*
>
> *They may also have some artists contributing explicitly Christian music that is for the primary purpose of Gathered Worship. They may also have artists contributing to the disordering of the world, drawing people explicitly away from God. Those artists might be Creational in perspective, or in some cases, they could be deeply Secularized people.*
>
> *Maybe it is not the label or the songs that are primarily Sacred or Secular (again, according to the world's values driving their creation) – it is an idea in the heart of those playing the songs. (Wait a minute. Could some "Sacred" music be created from a heart motivated by deeply Secular, or world-values-based, attitudes?)*
>
> *We could call the label "non-Christian," if it's not founded on Christian principles. But, again, some of what they create might be very Christian in its focus, and embodied in artists who are seeking to follow Christ. But calling them "non-*

explicitly-Christian" can work. Creational might be a confusing term, except among people who understand what that means.

As far as Christians are concerned, we simply may need to not label the label. If we must, we could use Creational or "non-explicitly-Christian" language, rather than just knee-jerk react and call it Secular. That would lack discernment, and discernment takes time and energy. In fact, exercising and applying discernment is one of the most "un-lazy" things a Christian can do.

In fact, I know Christian labels who may act in some very Secular, disordering, ways toward money, artists, etc.. I also "Secular" labels who promote some very Sacred songs and artistry, and certainly promote non-Secularizing, Creational artistry.

It's a mixed bag – and we're being spiritually lazy if we don't keep our language about it all nuanced and thoughtful.

Should Christians Listen To It: *Yes.*

Should non-Christians Listen To It: *Yes.*

If The Song Is Carried On A Secular Label, Is It Secular?

First, we won't call the label Secular, but for our purposes, let's suggest the label is Creational in its output and the entire spectrum is represented.

The label leaders may be Secularized on many levels, and the "empire" behind their systems may drive its values. But the category is too broad and leaves no room for good, creative, energized life to flow from the label expressed by non-Christian and Christian artists who are working Creationally. It's about the people, and people are a mixed bag.

Back to the song. The direct answer is No – it's a Sacred song on a Creational recording (flowing from the heart of Carrie's artistry as a Christian). If there are Secularizing (disordering God's creation) songs on the recording, then it is a mixed bag.

The fact that the singer is a professing Christian drives the heart behind it. Other artists involved, from producers to musicians to engineers to designers, may be Christians or not – but they are all acting Creationally.

I.e. They have applied their gifts to the creative task. Some of them might be deeply Secularized in their hearts, but they are still offering a Creational gift flowing from being made in the image of God, whether or not they are aware of it. In fact, their Creational creativity could be a shining gateway to their eventual encounter with the God of their creativity.

If The Singer Is A Christian, Is Her Job Secular:

> *No. Her occupation is Creational, to all of us, and probably very Sacred to her. The ground beneath her feet is holy, and she will have to discern what she chooses to sing and create like anyone who follows Jesus into cultural venues.*

If The Band Is Made Of Non-Christians, Is The Performance Secular?

> *No, it is Creational, and possibly Sacred in its usage for Gathered Worship. If band members are deeply Secular in their disordered world according to Jesus, their work is no less Creational when it is applied in this performance. To make explicitly Secular music may be a part of some of their worlds, but to categorize it all in one category would be a severe wrong.*

Is The Arena A Sacred Space, Or A Creational Space, Or A Secular Space?

> *In that moment, with all the Creational artistry going on there, and the atmosphere of worship created by that song, the arena became a church – a most sacred of spaces. Labeling the venue as Secular, or Creational, or Christian seems foolish.*
>
> *If the main work going on in a place determines what we label it, then I would probably label the arena (if it houses hockey, concerts, and circuses) more of a Creational venue than a Secular or Sacred one. Because spaces don't get baptized – people do – I would suggest that the building could be labeled "none of the above." Of course, the architects, designers, and construction workers building it and maintaining it are acting Creationally – some may even see their life's work as a Sacred act of worship.*

Is Carrie A Christian Artist or A Secular Artist When She Sings This Song?

> *She is a Christian, who happens to be an artist. She is Creational in much of her work, and Sacred in some of it (as this song might represent). My guess is there isn't a conscious Secular bone in her body. Her heart beats with a love for God as she works out her vocation with fear and trembling in the day-to-day – the way the rest of us do. Discernment must lead us.*

What Makes Something Sacred Or Secular?

> *The heart of the performer skews what comes out in their creativity. They may be Sacred in posture, i.e. their work has a primary purpose in being used for Gathered Worship or providing an uplifting, explicitly Christian experience. They may be Creational in their posture, which is no less a Sacred activity putting them right in the middle of their gifting. They may also be very Secular in their hearts, but people are a mixed bag, and we often show signs even in our "disordered" lives of Sacred/Creational realities.*

Is What We Just Did Confusing?

> *No, it's not confusing. It just took time, and discernment, to use different language. In our generation (unlike clear Old Testament connections of the term 'sacred' with objects), Sacred, Creational, and Secular are in the hearts of people and that to which they attach meaning. As genres of music or occupations, terms like Secular are too broad, and leave too many people and what they do out in the cold.*
>
> *The term Creational takes work to apply, but it makes sense of a world that is not always black and white, cut and dry. I would continue to use the word Sacred to refer to some Creational art that is God-focused due to the heart of the artist, and to Gathered Worship expressions or creative expressions designed to lead us to faith.*
>
> *I will no longer use Secular as a blanket term for anything not coming from a Christian, or not coming from a Christian church, record label, bookstore, radio station, university, or stage. I'll let the idea of Creational simmer within me, and go from there.*

Thus ends our bumbling experiment. You may have insights not offered here. Please share them at www.DanWilt.com with all of us.

We could apply these same questions, to any artist, singing any song, and we would usually come up with Sacred, Creational, and even on occasion, Secular terminology.

But leaving out the term Creational? We do violence to many peoples' Life Worship callings. I have friends who are TV producers, designers, children's teachers, software developers, Moms, and more… and calling their work Creational enables them to make it a Sacred offering of Life Worship to God.

In fact, we must all agree on what we have found to be true in our experience (Wesley suggested that was one of the ways we must evaluate our biblical ideas) – that what is Sacred for one, is not Sacred for another; what is Creational to one is Sacred to another; what is Secular to one may be Creational – even Sacred – to another. It's just true. A great work of art reveal the dark side of slave trafficking may be a Secular piece to one, and a very Sacred one to someone whose eyes have been opened by that piece.

Many of these ideas exist in the heart of the person, and we bring those perspectives to the art or occupation we engage in as a collaborator-in-creating-meaning through them.

We Intuitively Know That "Creational" Is The Category We've Been Missing

We really haven't said anything new – we've just experimented with a new category.

Creational music, as a category, is one that my tribe (and you are probably a part of that) has intuitively recognized for years. We know there is much beautiful music in the world, and we've voted with our smart phones in declaring it to be true. We'll get to that in a moment.

We can therefore have "Sacred" expressions, such as corporate worship music and liturgy, but we can also have "Creational" expressions that are Sacred at heart according to the musician, and yet creatively explore all facets of life in unique, self-expressive ways.

Sacred expressions, for our usage here in Gathered Worship, are often very accessible to everyone, such as what we commonly call contemporary Christian worship music. Sacred expressions intentionally point us to the Father, to Jesus, to the Spirit with explicit lyrics. Sacred music is vital to our formation as Christians.

Creational expressions may not always be explicit or accessible in style, form, lyrics, ideas, or imagery. Sometimes, however, their lyrics are explicit and accessible (ex. U2), but they are still not built for corporate, multi-generational, gathered use. In other cases, ideas are implicit, robed in poetry, provocative in imagery, and even devoid of words that we might term explicitly Christian.

In my life, often, I am with Christians who are singer-songwriters. They often perform a wide range of songs, from Christian worship anthems, to the best-of hits of the last 50 years.

In those moments, the community is filled with joy, laughter, and even sings along.
Community is built. Fellowship is strengthened. Joy is felt.

Then, a worship song deeply binds us together.
All of it is beautiful.

Creational songs may not be as "useful" in a Gathered Worship context – but they are *no less important* to the flourishing of our Life Worship. Sacred songs, if we need a genre with which to label things, I will suggest have a primary use in Gathered Worship settings.

What Music Moves You?

Let's keep pushing our little musical wagon. I should note here that, in my experience connecting with churches all over the world, communities have very different needs and demographics that find different forms of music more accessible, and others less. In other words, music that is useful in Gathered Worship *changes from congregation to congregation*.

We are now beginning to see a great need for a variety of ways that we can express Gathered Worship. O joy, o bliss – many artists who are Christians are attending to the need – and some of us are embracing church gatherings to a whole new level because of it.

Jon Foreman (of *Switchfoot*) is one of those artists for me. There was a time when I, as one of the most dedicated worship training voices in the contemporary church, was ready to completely drop out of listening to Christian music.

I even write it, and I was ready to drop out. (I should note that I am a part of the Vineyard family of churches, and the ethos, values, connection of worship with the poor, authentic music, pursuit of God's healing in worship, creativity, and humility of our worship leaders and songwriters has also kept me in the worship music world for the past 20 years. I love the Vineyard, no mistake about it.)

When Jon came out with his acoustic recordings, entitled simply *Winter*, *Spring*, *Summer*, and *Fall*, I was saved back into the contemporary worship experience. Imogen Heap had saved me back into listening to music again; so did Death Cab For Cutie (*Transatlanticism* helped me to creatively breathe again).

Jon Foreman bridged great art with Sacred and Creational lyricism, and made me want to say "I'm in" as a worship leader all over again.

Name the artists whose Sacred and Creational art have moved you.

We can see how much we need *both*.

"Creational Music" Is The New "Secular Music"

Creational music – expressing ideas about life, love, interpersonal relationships, justice, hate, ethnicity, politics, moods, adolescence, economics, creation-care, and more – is absolutely vital to Christians coming alive to Christ's mission in the world. Life Worship demands we make music and art about it all, and process life on every level.

With Creational music made by non-Christians – non-Christian bands, orchestras, singer-songwriters, and producers, we must use *discernment*. Discernment is hard work; categories and easy judgments are so much easier.

But discernment (through the lens of Philippians 4:8 – the "whatever is good" passage) is the *only* thing that will keep us from creating categories that marginalize some of the best Christians – and best music – I know.

My Christian Music Confession

I love music, made by Christians. It often draws me to Christ. But I have a problem, and here is my confession.

I have a strong aversion to literal, explicit, easy to understand, no-questions-asked lyrics. Strangely still, I love much modern worship music! However, at a foundational level, I am moved more by ambient instrumentals that transcend words than I am by popular songs telling me exactly what they mean.

You may wonder why I'm a contemporary worship leader. It's because it all matters to me. And, the times are changing.

Bon Iver, Chris Tomlin, And The Boxes We Make

I come alive through the music of Brian Eno, Bon Iver, Imogen Heap, Sting, The Civil Wars, The Vitamin String Quartet, Death Cab For Cutie and myriad other bands.

I am also deeply moved by songs written by Jon Foreman, Phil Wickham, The Brilliance, Gungor, Chris Tomlin, Matt Redman, and Kathryn Scott.

I lead Gathered Worship with the latter of these songs, but am fueled in my Life Worship by a wide range of Creational music. It's not all "helpful" to my set building in the same way, and I discern constantly how much I feed myself on the variety of attitudes that come with the music to which I listen.

I don't need it all to fit in a box; neither do you. Use discernment, and know that you may desperately need both kinds of music in your life listening.

You have your own artists that deeply move you. Our concept of Creational music can help us to understand why we are each uniquely moved by diverse music. We don't all have the same connection points. We don't need them to be in unity.

To speak without nuance about music, and to simply throw any music that does not mention one part of the Trinity in its title or lyrics, into a "Secular" trashcan, is *criminal* – and it's damaging to the Church. The category of "Creational" can fix this.

God is interested in *everything* that interests and moves us – it has usually come from Him at its root. From the taste of good food, to our discovery of the Higgs-Boson particle, to our barista job at the local Starbucks, to the quality of our Life Worship, God cares about what we care about. Now, a statement I must make to those who "dis" all Christian music.

Why I Love Christian Music

Having spoken of my love for Creational music, let me note my love for music that is made by, and for, Christians.

Many years ago I heard my son, walking out the door once again to face broken relationships and bullying attitudes at his school, singing a CCM song reminding him that "the Voice of Truth tells me a different story…" (*Casting Crowns*). I fell in love again with music that is explicitly biblically-based, encouraging, and Christ-centered. It can give us hope and put the Word of God deep in our heart.

When I see a homeless woman's face, beaming with joy in the midst of a contemporary worship song, finding her way to God and healing despite years of sexual abuse, I fall back in love with music that is explicitly designed for corporate worship.

I have worked with university students for years. Most of them are Christians, and some of them have gone so Creational in their music tastes they have dismissed all Christ-centered music – because it's too literal, or doesn't meet their aesthetic tastes.

I simply ask them to create some Christ-centered music that is not literal and does meet their tastes. I even ask them to create music for Gathered Worship. They will need it at some point for their own health, for their family's health, and to offer we who will be moved by their music.

The music of faith, born of faith, written to nurture faith is absolutely vital to the well-being of all human beings. We need worship music, and more of it.

Maybe not more of the *same*, but more of it.

There Is More To It Than Music, Of Course

I have spent much time here on music, as it may be the primary contributor to the worship white noise of the contemporary church in our generation. To some large degree, I have neglected to discuss the *form* of worship (such as the four-fold service), the Eucharist, other sacraments and more. James K.A. Smith's work, along with N.T. Wright, Jeremy Begbie, and many others, address the formational role that all worship and life habits play in forming followers of Jesus.

Yet, I have focused on music in this short book because of our contemporary fixation on music as the primary outlet for our worship expressions. My opinions on liturgy and the formation that worship provides are captured primarily in my Essentials In Worship Video Course work. I have addressed the place of these other ideas in Gathered Worship more fully in other writings, and I will continue to do so in live contexts.

Gathered Worship includes anything, and everything, that draws us together, galvanizes us in our faith, and helps us to reclaim God's Story and our calling to be like Jesus – generation after generation after generation.

We repeat Gathered Worship – again and again and again each week – as we must be formed by that worship as we transfer the call to be like Jesus to our children and those who will come

after us. Every Christian *must find ways to participate* in forms of Gathered Worship that enhance and empower their Life Worship activities day in and day out.

When you can match a loving community with the kinds of music and sound that move you, and then match that with the kinds of liturgy that are historically healthy for building us as the Body of Christ together over time, and then match that with a community that calls you to Life Worship rather than just to their church services – you have truly been given a great gift.

My prayer is that in 20 years, fueled by more books like this by many others from many traditions, these kinds of Gathered Worship opportunities will be accessible to us all. We will have more forums to come together to worship, and we will simultaneously have more forums to embrace our unique appreciations in worship.

3. Family Worship (the accompaniment)

Family Worship is Gathered Worship, only now expressed in the home rather than in a church sanctuary. The sacred space is often the family meal table, or events that celebrate a rite of passage (birthdays, weddings, receptions, parties, holiday gatherings).

This pattern of worship has been all but lost in most contemporary Christian homes, if not relegated to occasional family meal prayers. In my experience, many families simply expected the Gathered Worship services of their local church to provide what we are responsible to initiate in our homes.

We must recover family rhythms of remembering and reclaiming the Gospel if the Church is to flourish in our lifetime.

An accurate rendering of the concept of Family Worship suggests that Christians who are in family settings should do some of the "work" of Gathered Worship themselves. In other words, Gathered Worship settings, whether they are expressed in youth group nights or Sunday services, can only provide so many opportunities to express our loving response to God.

Nothing can replace the vital gathering of individual families, nurturing and reclaiming their faith, and responding to God *together*.

Some Practical Ideas For Family Worship

In our family, we use an app called *Lectionary* to guide us through our daily Psalm, Gospel, Old Testament and New Testament readings each evening at dinner. I begin our meals with the common greeting "The Lord be with you," and my family answers, "And also with you." We pray, and sometimes sing the *Doxology* in rich harmony (that's taken years to hone, and the song will get quieter during the teenage years).

During Worship Year holidays, we have daily Advent readings and weekly Carol singing, Christmas Eve re-enactments (with an olive wood nativity set), Christmas morning storytelling, Epiphany prayers, Lenten devotionals, Easter meal prayers, and Day of Pentecost communion.

All of this occurs in our home, and each worship expression can take anywhere from 1 – 20 minutes. Family Worship must occur if each generation is to interact over faith (grandparents, parents, children, and close family friends), and if younger ones are to get the Bible hidden deep in their hearts.

I would conclude with this – even if your children are wandering in, or rejecting, their faith, don't stop having a regimen of Family Worship. One minute reading Jesus' words at dinner (even if eyes are rolling) can find its way into a life returning to God. Family worship can keep

all the doors to faith open, for everyone at any stage of the journey – even when church doors seem to be closed. Don't stop. Change the forms, maybe, but *don't stop*.

4. Personal Worship (the accompaniment)

Personal Worship is Gathered Worship, only in a "solo" form. Former terms like "quiet time," or "personal devotions" sought to reflect this important idea. Personal Worship is our private expression of worship, expressed when we are alone with God. It may include Scripture reading, prayer, singing, sacramental actions (candle lighting, personal rituals) and more.

An accurate rendering of Personal Worship acknowledges that each one of us has our own private life of devotion before God that invigorates our Life Worship. The Psalms emphasize our corporate Gathered Worship environments, but call us again and again to personal responses and actions of the heart between us and God.

While our age, and our music, has pushed us to elevate the idea of personal intimacy with Christ too far at times, Personal Worship is vital to a life propelled by Grace into a world rife with suffering.

Some Practical Ideas For Personal Worship

In my own life, acts of private devotion include daily Scripture reading, the lighting of candles as I pray for my family members and the world around me, silent meal prayers enabling me to give thanks at every given opportunity, the keeping of the Daily Hours of Prayer and doing my Daily Examen as an ongoing rhythm drawing me to remember Christ throughout the day, and ongoing acts of generosity.[vii]

As a musician and worship leader, I often spend time at my keyboard, hammered dulcimer, or guitar, singing my thanks and prayers spontaneously to Jesus. Ambient instrumental music moves me, and I work with a fellow composer to create the kind of music that helps us to engage with God.

Personal Worship must occur if we are to give our lives back to Jesus again and again, working out our salvation daily, in the midst of the wind and waves that mark the path.

Extracting The Music From The Noise

Drawing from the chaotic frequencies flying everywhere in the contemporary worship experience, let's recover the music of worship.

Life Worship is the melody of Worship;
it is the primary aim of a Life lived in the presence of God.

If Life Worship is the melody, then

Gathered Worship, Family Worship, and Personal Worship
are the fitting accompaniments to that melody, energizing Life Worship over a lifetime.

When all is said and done, each of these terms will eventually flow together into a seamless expression of Life Worship, growing in momentum, grace, and strength until the moment we draw our final breath.

Worship is more than music, but it is renewed by music, and liturgy.

Worship is your life response to God.

Make everything an act of reciprocated Love.

PART 3 — WHO WILL CHANGE THE WAY WE VIEW WORSHIP?

Tuning In The Seven Worship Culture Shapers

If everything we are and do is now on the table as an opportunity for our Life Worship to flourish, then there is aggressive and provocative work to be done immediately in the Body of Christ. The language of worship is *chaotic* out there, and our confusion will take some time to tease apart. We must get started, and using our fresh worship terminology, get on the same page.

How do we get this clarified vision of Worship into the hearts and minds of the average Christian? How do we alter our path, in partnership with God, so we lose our insularity and are gained by the mission of God in the postmodern world He so loves?

A Review Of The Big Changes I'm Suggesting

Let's take a moment to review the broad changes I've proposed so far:

> 1) We are now using Life Worship, Gathered Worship, Family Worship, and Personal Worship as our new vocabulary until we get familiar with the ideas. Life Worship is the point; the other expressions fold into it, form it, and inform it. We cannot mistake Life Worship for Gathered Worship's activities.
>
> The heart is the goal of worship; not the forms that shape it. When Life Worship is understood to be the melody, all the others fall into their proper place as a part of its grandeur and growth.
>
> 2) The category of Creational is now the larger category for all human activity as those made in the image of God, and the terms Sacred and Secular are nuances within the broader Creational category. All of life is now sacred when it is seen through the lens of faith, but many expressions, and people, point to a secular vision of the world.
>
> 3) We are actively making worship about more than the music and the services we experience. We are making worship about every vocation, every occupation, every act of creativity that is centered in healthy, normal human experience.

There are seven epicenters of worship conversation and activity in the Church at present. These "Seven Worship Culture Shapers" have the greatest responsibility, and resources, to infuse this fresh worship language into the contemporary Church.

As I am a part of each one of these entities, I can boldly say that the Seven Worship Culture Shapers are culpable for where we are, for how long we will stay here, and for how we will become gatekeepers to the important changes ahead.

The Seven Worship Culture Shapers are:

1) Pastors & Denominations (*teach worship*),

2) Worship Leaders & Music Ministers (*lead worship*),

3) Songwriters & Artists Of Faith (*write worship*),

4) The Worship Music, Publishing & Bookstore Industries (*serve worship*),

5) The Christian Radio Industry (*inspire worship*),

6) Christian Colleges & Universities (*empower worship*), and

7) Worshippers (*live worship*).

The sooner our language changes, the sooner our theology will begin to shift and our programs will begin to reflect a more holistic vision of Worship.

The sooner the big idea of worship becomes less of an insular, in-house experience, the sooner the Church will be unleashed to penetrate every sphere of society.

My Challenge To Us As The Seven Worship Culture Shapers

I'm asking my peers, in each of these worlds of influence, to join me in accepting this 3-part challenge to:

1) Change our personal language about worship *to embrace the ideas of Life Worship, Gathered Worship, Family Worship, and Personal Worship. Let these terms, and/or the ideas behind them, nuance everything we say about the meaning of the Christian life.*

2) Encourage others to change their worship terminology *when they speak about worship or use it in a title. Add experimental words like "Creational" to our vocabulary. Lovingly, but pointedly, challenge spiritual leaders, artists, authors, teachers, radio personalities and colleagues whenever and wherever we hear language that locks worship into the four walls of a church.*

3) Advocate Christians "showing up" in cultural arenas (and in church arenas) as their act of Life Worship*, and expressing greatness in every aspect of society. Help them to connect their occupations and daily life with a vibrant, missional spirituality – and with the term Life Worship. Be a part of the solution, helping people contextualize their non-church based occupations and passions in the grand Story of Worship.*

Applications For The Seven Worship Culture Shapers

Here are just a few examples of possible ways each of the Seven Worship Culture Shapers could apply themselves to the above challenge, and change our future.

Pastors & Denominations (*Teach Worship*)
Using our new language about worship in sermons and announcements, at events and services, we will:

Clarify to every day Christians that all of life is sacred, and that it is our Life Worship that Jesus is after – not primarily our songs or service experiences. This will take *courage*.

Force ourselves to eschew "worship white noise" banter to get people to see our local church events as the be-all-and-end-all of their Christian experience (or to get them to read our books and attend our conferences).

Articulate a vision of Life Worship that propels our congregations into the heart of their neighborhoods, their occupational centers, their nation, and their world, at the same time that it calls them to Gathered Worship that is meaningful, participatory, and empowering.

Intentionally teach about the new category called Creational when we speak about music, occupations, and more. Allow this term to eventually dominate and clarify the ideas of Sacred and Secular – helping average Christians wake up to embrace God's widest mission once again.

Worship Leaders & Music Ministers (*Lead Worship*)
Using fresh language about worship when we are leading in front of our congregations we will:

Clarify to our community that the music we love is only one part (a beautiful part) of what serves the Life Worship of individuals in our faith community.

Educate the Christians connected to our pastoral care that Gathered Worship is an accompaniment to the Life Worship into which Christ has invited us all. We will use carefully worded prayers and statements about worship to accomplish this.

Aggressively work to cease sloppy ways of talking about worship behind microphones, at church events, and when our guard is down and old verbal habits try to take over.

Frequently remind our communities that the same Jesus who invites them to Life Worship, is the same Lord who empowers us to offer our Gathered Worship "in spirit and truth."

Songwriters & Artists Of Faith (*Write Worship*)
Using fresh language about worship, and applying our best artisanship and craftsmanship to the task of creativity, we will:

Be free to write songs that enhance the Life Worship of the Body of Christ without always feeling the need to be literal, highly accessible, musically consumable, or melodically and lyrically straightforward. Complexity will be welcomed back again into the creative Christian equation.

Write rich music for Gathered Worship use, and Creational music to artfully move us forward in our faith journey – according to our unique giftings. We won't defer to a record label or publisher to tell us whether or not our work is valuable based on whether or not it is widely *consumable*.

Study theology, spiritual formation, and worship history, while simultaneously studying cultural trends and artistic innovations.

Fight to create both Life Worship and Gathered Worship bodies of work that serve unique target groups and amplify that "all truth is God's truth."

Note: Christian authors and artists in other genres will employ this fresh language about worship as well, influencing their constituencies with a clearer vision of a life at worship.

For Christian music artists, our Sacred music will be written to serve our local community, not primarily our career. Our Creational music will find its way into both the Church and the culture, and like some of the more visible artists today who are fighting to express Christian idea in cultural packages and spaces through art, some of us may find our new calling.

The Worship Music & Publishing Industry (*Serve Worship*)
With great resource, comes great responsibility. The church has been wanting to see worship fanned into flame for their personal and communal use. Christians throw money into this pot, buying music downloads, CDs, books and more to fuel their journey.

The commitment of the Industry must never be, ultimately, to the bottom line. A missional commitment, rooted in an alternate Kingdom than this world serves (the empire), must lead the way.

What the customer wants is not always what the customer needs. Good Kingdom business serves both/and. Christians are often given what we want (I must be honest – I am occasionally, but rarely, given what I want in music, art, and books from the Industry), and not always what we need.

Using fresh language about worship, and leveraging our current equity, reach, and influence, we will:

Begin to take risks again, and push the envelope in Christian artistry by embracing the Creational category, and by forsaking solely Sacred/Secular categories for the music we release.

Aim our resources at equipping the local church for Gathered Worship and mission. In doing so, we may invest more of our resources in less accessible, unique artists who are coming to the table to serve niche target groups in Gathered Worship. All of this will involve risk – but in a day when entrenching is riskier than change (Seth Godin), what have we got to lose?

Be motivated in our industry by a compelling vision of Life Worship, helping to missionally launch the next cultural influencers through both corporate worship music and Creational artistry. We will use our resources to be a breeding ground for the next Sufjan Stevens, as well as the next Chris Tomlin.

In other words, we will place missional interests in the front seat with business interests, and may even choose to reboot our corporate structures to dis-entrench ourselves from the non-Christian business models on which many businesses in our

industry were built. (Again, I recommend a reading of James K.A. Smith's, *Desiring The Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, And Cultural Formation*.)

Provide spiritual formation, theological, and innovation education to our artists and content creators, and embrace our responsibility to the artists we promote to ensure that they are missional in mindset, careful in stewardship, connected in family relationship, and proactive in personal discipleship.

We will not simply put artistic Christians in front of the masses. We won't tour them till it unduly strains their family life. We will require them to have a growing, substantive life in God. In other words, we will ally ourselves with local churches, and other people and agencies, that exist to effectively infuse a missional, Life Worship desire-set/worldview into our artists.

The Christian Radio Industry (*Inspire Worship*)
Using fresh language about worship, and recognizing our significant influence over the thinking, music, and language used by the contemporary Christian church, we will:

Start to dignify, along with our current radio shows, the kinds of music, art, talk shows and more that may not always be safe for every age and member of a family – but do a great service in enhancing the Life Worship expression of the Church in a today's world.

Affirm stations called to remain "family-centric" and Sacred music-focused in programming, while equally affirming other stations (and personalities) making the choice to address real-time issues in culture, playing Creational music (from many camps), displacing declarative sermons with storytelling, and entering cultural conversations from the overflow of a vibrant Life Worship climate among our staff.

Affirm new stations, run by Christians, that are called to be a bridge to the non-Christian world, using Creational music and provocative programming to gain entrance to the hearts of their listeners without pressuring them to explicitly proclaim the Gospel. Their Life Worship will gain them entrance into hearts and settings where they will embody the life and teaching of Christ.

Encourage donors to fund fresh Christian Radio emphases that don't fit in what they might see as a "Christian ghetto." We need the current programming, but also need new programming that will profoundly equip Christians with the conversations, ideas, language, and insights we need to enable us to speak incisively into the rapidly (and strangely) changing world around us – rather than further isolating us in a Christian bubble.

Christian Colleges & Universities (*Empower Worship*)
Using fresh language about worship, and embracing our astounding influence over the thinking and intellectual discipleship of millions of Christian young people every year, we will:

Begin to immediately implement entirely new majors and programs that not only spiritually, intellectually, and professionally form organists, choir directors, and contemporary worship bands for Gathered Worship, but also develop the next musical versions of Mumford & Sons, U2, Sigur Ros, or The Civil Wars for cultural impact.

Though currently driven in our funding needs by business and engineering programs, we will take the risk to create programs that provide Spiritual Formation and Direction for creative leaders called to serve both the Church in Gathered Worship, and the world in Creational artistic expression. We will value both kinds of leaders. (We may even put some of them on our Boards so our bottom line does not drive all of our curricular decisions.)

Our teaching will combine the energies of the ancient-future Church, addressing the four-fold worship progression of Gathering, Word, Table, and Sending from historic worship practice, how to lead an effective set of musical worship songs, how to direct a choir, and how arrange a band that would be considered sonically current in the 21st century by anyone's standards.

Referencing James K.A. Smith's vision of "ecclesial colleges," we will revisit the importance of contemporary worship and contemporary Creational music in the missional task of the Body of Christ.

Gathered Worship leaders will be seen as significant in our development as cultural music artists, and vice-versa.

Educate our students, board members, and donors as to why we are making aggressive, immediate shifts in our curriculum for the sake of the world. Moving from Sacred/Secular language to more nuanced Creational language, we will take the risk to re-shape our approaches to educating young Christians to send them out after 4 years with a Life Worship mandate that will exponentially expand their sense of call to their co-mission with Christ.

Technologically move into the 21st century, keeping aware of current cultural trends and innovations, rather than digging our heels back into the past or cloistering in Christian safe houses. (With all due respect to my colleagues, I

just needed to say it that way.)

Rather than often lagging 20-30 years behind in our technology (or church/culture perspectives), we will invest in upgrades as quickly as we do new buildings.

This will attract gifted young people of faith into specialized arts programs where they will be discipled in Christ-likeness even as they are prepared to write scripts for the film industry, become advocates through photo-journalism, or create the next architectural design vision that rivals anything created by Frank Gehry or Michelangelo.

Our purpose for going online with our current and new programming will be driven by our desire to infuse a Life Worship mission into a new generation, rather than a sole desire to generate income to sustain our bottom line. This will take financial courage, and some sharp minds designing and marketing the programs.

Value the power of a vital, vibrant worship community among our students, teaching that mission is the natural overflow of the Gathered Worship encounter. Cultivate a variety of Gathered Worship environments, allow students to choose the environments most suited to them, while creating pathways for them to touch Gathered Worship environments with which they have been previously unfamiliar (liturgical and otherwise).

Invest in student spiritual formation, and prepare these faith-powered leaders for occupations in which their Life Worship can be expressed passionately, innovatively – and dangerously. (Enter the next Walt Disney.)

Worshippers (*Live Worship*)
Using fresh language about worship, we will recognize that we have the most vital part of all to play in seeing our own Life Worship as the target of God's pursuing loving. In response to being loved, completely and sacrificially by Jesus, we will:

Begin to see our every thought, choice, and action, be it in a sanctuary, business cubicle, or recording studio, as an opportunity to respond to God in Life Worship. We will understand Life Worship to be a simultaneous call into the heart of God and into the heart of the world.

Be thankful for the riches we access in Gathered Worship together, cultivating both Family Worship and Personal Worship in our homes.

Change our language about worship to the terms Life Worship, Gathered Worship, Family Worship, and Personal Worship, and nuance all of our discussion about life and faith with the ideas behind these terms.

See all of life as a sacred space in which God encounters us, and we encounter God. We will respond to the call to acclaim God in all places, at all times, to make His Love famous and His Name renowned.

All of the above, and more, is critical to us moving out of the worship white noise, and into the kind of worship the Father seeks.

The Seven Worship Culture Shapers must accept the 3 part challenge, and change – or we will we remain isolated from culture and lost in our worship white noise.

Your own ideas may take us further than mine; but we must fight to reclaim a Life Worship vision that encompasses the entire terrain of human experience – and looks into the past and future for its inspiration.

CONCLUSION

When The Results Are In – Worship White Noise Will Be Out

A renewed vision of worship will free the Church to its co-mission with Christ once again. To stay where we are, perpetuating our part in the worship white noise of our generation, is not an option.

If you agree with me, then let's risk everything, to embrace what we might begin to perceive as God's stunning vision of a human life at worship. (If you don't agree with me, that is fine as well.)

Let's establish the Church, in the name of Jesus and in the spirit of Worship, as the incubator-community of the most innovative, prosperous, and loving movements ever dreamed up by human society.

Let's quiet the noise, and make the music of living worship with Jesus – together.

Please, join the conversation at www.DanWilt.com. We need you.

Book Summary: Worship White Noise

Tuning In The
Seven Worship Culture Shapers
In The Chaos Of The Contemporary Worship Experience

Dan Wilt, M.Min.

Introduction: I Care About Worship

Ever since I was young, serving as a cherub-faced acolyte in my small, United Methodist Church in Middletown, Pennsylvania, I have cared – very deeply – about worship. Watching the contemporary worship experience emerge, then flourish, I excitedly gave my life to the furthering of a deep, wide, and rich embrace of the encounter that is worship in the international, contemporary church.

The dawn of the Internet, the recovery of emotion in worship, and even the rush to create income from this precious jewel (Tozer) has now convoluted our understanding of what it means to biblically worship in the most expansive definition of the term. Inward, experiential, and even liturgical visions of worship must take their place behind a vision of worship that propels us *into* the world as innovators and image-bearers, rather than solely dragging us away from the world to perform our acts of worship.

Part 1: What Is Worship White Noise? (the problem)

We begin this section asking a fundamental question: *Could a renewed vision of worship enable the Church to produce the next Walt Disney, Coldplay, or Nelson Mandela carrying the world view of Jesus – in addition to the next N.T. Wright, Chris Tomlin, or Mother Theresa?*

Then, with reflection on the metaphor of white noise, we cut through the extraneous noise – the chaos – of the modern worship experience. We lay the foundation to recover worship's world-altering melody amidst the din once again. That melody is infinitely bigger than music, infinitely bigger than church services – and is the melody the cosmos has been waiting for us to sing.

Part 2: How Do We Extract The Music From The Noise? (the solution)

This section will open with us biting off more than we can chew. We attempt to create a *fresh, guiding definition* of Worship, that draws deeply from the Scriptures, and applies to all people, of all times – Christian and non-Christian.

Empowered by this new definition, we unearth 4 distinct phrases that could re-shape the common Christian vision of what it means to worship as a human being:

- Life Worship (the melody),

- Gathered Worship (the accompaniment),

- Family Worship (the accompaniment), and

- Personal Worship (the accompaniment)

Viewing all of life as sacred, and armed with fresh terminology, we reclaim the "Secular" world with the nuanced category of "Creational," inviting God into these spaces so that living worship can happen – calling the follower of Jesus into a Life Worship expression that lives and breathes in every sphere of society. From movie production to motherhood, and from business leadership to baking, we validate the multifaceted venues in which worship occurs for today's Christian.

We then reclaim the meaning of Gathered Worship (in all its forms) by gently taking it off its current throne, and rightfully positioning it as the accompaniment and support to the true and lasting melody of Life Worship. We affirm the contemporary worship experience, but place it in its accompanying role.

Part 3: Who Will Change The Way We View Worship?

With our fresh definitions in place, we apply our renewed vocabulary to the current practices of the Seven Worship Culture Shapers:

1) Pastors & Denominations (*teach worship*),

2) Worship Leaders & Music Ministers (*lead worship*),

3) Songwriters & Artists Of Faith (*write worship*),

4) The Worship Music, Publishing & Bookstore Industries (*serve worship*),

5) The Christian Radio Industry (*inspire worship*),

6) Christian Colleges & Universities (*empower worship*), and

7) Worshippers (*live worship*).

With a three-fold challenge, I pointedly ask my peers and fellow influencers to join me in the following choices:

> ***1) Change our language*** *about worship to embrace the ideas of Life Worship, Gathered Worship, Family Worship, and Personal Worship. Let these terms, and/or the ideas behind them, nuance everything we say about the meaning of the Christian life.*
>
> ***2) Encourage others to clarify what they mean*** *when they speak about worship or use it in a title. Add words like "Creational" to our vocabulary, as we displace non-reflective meanings behind words like "Secular." Lovingly, but pointedly, confront spiritual leaders, artists, authors, teachers, radio personalities, and colleagues wherever we hear language that locks worship into the four walls of a church.*
>
> ***3) Advocate Christians "showing up" in cultural arenas as an act of Life Worship****, and expressing greatness in every aspect of society. Help them to connect their occupations and daily life with a vibrant, missional spirituality – and with the term Life Worship. Be a part of the solution, helping people contextualize their non-church based occupations and passions in the grand Story of Worship.*

Please join the conversation at www.DanWilt.com.

A FINAL WORD FROM THE AUTHOR

Thank you for reading Worship White Noise. If this book has impacted you in any way, it would be my privilege to host you in an ongoing conversation over at www.DanWilt.com. Many others will join us there who also are fighting for something beyond us related to worship.

Bless you as you faithfully participate in, encourage, facilitate, and demonstrate the heart of worship in our generation.

Finally, if you would do me the kindness of leaving a review on the Amazon or iTunes page where you downloaded this, it would be so helpful. Others can then connect with your response, and find their way to the worship conversation.

Grace and Peace to you,

Dan Wilt
Author, *Worship White Noise*

For more books by Dan, visit:

www.DanWiltBooks.com

For Dan's blog and the conversation, join us at:

www.DanWilt.com

and leave a comment or three.



Written by Dan Wilt, M.Min.

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[i] Our creeds, our songs, and our statements of belief are fundamental to us having the strength to walk into our worlds bearing the Gospel; but they are not the only kind of spiritual development we need to meet the daily challenges of deciding what television show to watch, or what business endeavor to fund, on a daily basis.

[ii] See *Desiring The Kingdom, Cultural Liturgies*, *Vol. 1* by James K.A. Smith for a full and vital exploration of this idea. This book may be the single most impacting work I have read on worship in the last 20 years; I am grateful for Smith's wisdom.

[iii] Conversation with Mark Eshenbaugh.

[iv] We are, indeed, a peculiar people and God's new humanity – but our peculiarity must come from a missional engagement with the world rather than simply from our strange practices. This is what made the early Church make sense to the empire. This is what will make today's Church make sense to the Empire – our compelling love expressed in courageous acts that re-humanize dehumanized society.

[v] Evelyn Underhill, *Worship* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002 – orig. pub. 1937), 43-44.

[vi] Here is Underwood's and Gill's performance on YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DIoESxTOKy4

[vii] The small booklet, *How Is Your Soul? A Personal Study For Spiritual Renewal*, written in partnership with Vineyard USA, is a useful tool for daily spiritual habits. It includes a Daily and Yearly Examen for ongoing personal spiritual development.