Worship That Takes Your Breath Away

LaMar Boschman

I remember when I first begin to teach worship and worship leading in the 70's. It was a new concept and met with some resistance but then suddenly gained momentum and acceptance. As one of the first itinerant worship ministries I have seen worship go from song leading to worship leading, from piano and organ to worship team. In the last forty years there have been many changes in worship across all denominational and cultural lines. I am thankful to the Lord for all of it. However we must remind ourselves in the age of the new and the cool, that there are elements of worship that are non-negotiable and fundamental no matter what the musical style or liturgy we enjoy.

Today we think success in worship is guaranteed when we follow certain steps. So we put together a song list like they told us at the latest worship conference. Meticulously rehearse the songs and, on the time appointed to worship, we play down the list prompting the congregation with cues that possibly sound more like a drill sergeant than a shepherd. We think we have worshiped but probably, if we were honest, only sang karaoke. **The latest technique and technology, mechanics and music, can assist worship but are not of themselves worship**.

Worship happens in the realm of the heart and the spiritual. It must have elements of the mystery and wonder of the Only Holy. Have we become victims of definitions, analyses, categories, methods and procedures? The church used to live on the dangerous edge of the miraculous, but now we live in the safe fences of our explanations, definitions and produced worship services and we hesitate to venture out in worship to where the bushes are burning and men lay prostrate before the overwhelming wonder of God.

The word *wonder* is associated with amazement and surprise. When was the last time you had surprise in your church service? What about astonishment, bewilderment, awe and fascination? Wonder is not a casual emotion or shallow excitement. It has substance and takes your breath away. It overwhelms you with a mixture of gratitude and love, adoration and reverence. It might interrupt our plans we had. Tears may flow. Are you open for the spontaneous or a detour when His presence comes?

When we get off the road of the explained and the contained, and get lost in the forest of His greatness, then transcendent worship can begin. Wonder makes you look up and at times overwhelm you. Yet wonder is born in knowledge – knowledge of God. If we want to achieve wondrous worship, we must exhort, teach and lead worship at a higher level. But when we lift up Jesus, the Father or the Holy Spirit and preach the attributes of the nature of God, a worship experience takes place that transcends the average and mundane. Some may even lift their faces and hands to heaven others may bow their heads in holy silence dropping tears on their Bibles.

How do we bring wonder into our worship?

1. **Wonder comes when we preach and sing more of Him**, His attributes, His character, His nature, His greatness and grandeur, His mystery and majesty. Then worshipers will be caught up in the otherness of His holiness. For worship is more than singing a song list, or performing what we practiced. Worship is spiritual, mysterious and "out of this world."

Once your congregation has tapped into the wonder of God, you can't keep them back. They may sing outside of the arrangement and sing lyrics not on the screen. When the prayer ends, they may not because that is what worshippers do who have seen the Lord high and lifted up.

2. **Choose songs that help worshipers to see**, as much as possible, the invisible, to know the unknowable, to comprehend the incomprehensible, and experience the eternal. Moses

saw the glory and power of God on Sinai. Ezekiel saw the glory of the Lord standing upright. Isaiah heard the singing seraphs before the throne. Daniel saw the courts of heaven and the great Ancient of Days seated as Judge. The disciples heard a sound from heaven and saw flames of fire on top of heads of the intercessors gathered in prayer. John saw the throne and angels, elders and alien-creatures, all singing in worship. Our contemporary worship may be excellent and musically engaging, but is it potently spiritual and full of mysterious wonder?

3. **Remember with respect the Christ event!** Jesus is the lamb slain, who died and was buried, who rose again and sits at the right hand of His Majesty on High. He is the center of heaven's worship and so should be the center of ours. Lead people to the awareness and gratitude of what Christ has done. Sing those songs, pray those prayers, and preach those messages on the street and in the sanctuary. Worship will occur, and heaven and earth will kiss in that place. It will invite His power and presence. Then worship as usual–form without force and liturgy without life—will give way to the joy and excitement of the Wondrous.

What does that look like to you? How would you bring the wonder of God into your worship? Hurting people need to encounter Him! Will you take them there?

– LaMar Boschman, keynote speaker, author of numerous books on music and worship including *Pulse*, and *Songs From the Other Side*, worship leader and a pioneer of today's worship.
www.LaMarBoschman.com