Do We "Bring" God's Presence When We Worship?

A Theological Course Correction For Worship Leaders And Pastors

By Dan Wilt

The following is, I submit, a theological course correction necessary for Worship Leaders and Pastors who lead in settings that intentionally welcome the Holy Spirit to be "manifest" as we engage in worship. It is for those who love when the presence of the Holy Spirit is experienced, at all levels, by a community who has gathered to worship.

First of all, let me affirm this: I love the Holy Spirit. I also love when the Holy Spirit is manifest in a room in a palpable way, and people are responding (aided by expressions of worship) to the invisible, yet overwhelming, presence of the living, loving, ever-present God.

But as pastors and worship leaders, we have a responsibility to *think about the way we talk about that experience* to our congregations. We may mean one thing theologically, but when we're not careful with our words, we communicate another. Theological ideas can be helpful or unhelpful to the discipleship of Christians – what we believe about God and how He works – and the following addresses what I believe to be a theologically faulty way of talking about God's presence in any given worship environment.

Do We Bring The Presence Of God When We Lead Worship?

Here is my answer: *We don't "bring" the Presence of God by our music, worship, messages, or prayers.*
I believe such language is theologically faulty, and confuses Christians when we use it. It suggests that we ourselves are the primary actors in the worship story, and that our actions precipitate whether or not the omnipresent God is "there" or not.

God is already present. God is the primary Actor in worship. Ours is to respond (1 John 4:19).
We turn our hearts to perceive Him, welcome Him, and to request His Presence be ever more manifest among us (ex. Solomon and the dedication of the Temple in 2 Chron. 5:13-14, and the disciples in the Upper Room in Acts 2). God doesn't "show up" in this sense; He reveals Himself and we perceive Him – as we are open to a revelation of Him.

"The air has always been there; the breeze lets you know a current is moving." - Dan Wilt

If We Don't 'Bring' The Presence Of God, Can We 'Welcome' The Holy Spirit?

Welcoming the Holy Spirit is an act of invitation, yes, but *not an invitation for the Holy Spirit to come into the room as if the Spirit has been absent.*

Welcoming the Holy Spirit is an invitation to the already-present God to more fully overtake our hearts and to make His presence more evident, to more of us, in revelatory and transforming ways.

Worship leaders and pastors then create environments that help a community to become *aware* of His presence (well-curated worship environments can beautifully facilitate this), and to engage with Him as the already-active God who is near and can be perceived.

Our liturgies do not make God do anything…that would be magic (performing certain actions in order to get a divine being to do our will).

Rather, our liturgies (including rockin' worship sets) invite Him to more fully do what He is *already doing* in and among us, even as they open our hearts to respond to the Spirit's active, manifest presence.

God may choose, in some instances, to make His presence more evidently *manifest* in various environments. In this we can think of the examples of the Spirit filling Solomon's Temple (2 Chron. 5:13-14), or the rushing wind empowering the disciples in Acts 2:1-4.

But *we* should not take the credit for *His* choice, even as we create environments where we as people are able to be more perceptive of what is actually happening in the room.

"Welcoming the Holy Spirit is an invitation to the already-present God to more fully overtake our hearts…." Dan Wilt

God "brings" Himself if you well, and is present, before we ever begin the music. I.e. Omnipresence is the theological presupposition to which we must orient before language for what is happening in the room falls from our lips.

Our worship work (liturgy) is to create environments where we can more fully perceive – and engage with – the reality of God's Presence.

Can We Pray Or Say, "Come, Holy Spirit?"

Absolutely, in my view. We can invite the Holy Spirit to "come" in our midst.

It is what we mean by that when we pray it, as it has been prayed for millennia, that is so important.
In the Vineyard movement we pray "Come, Holy Spirit," and in so doing we are inviting God's presence to be manifest in powerful ways both in us and in the room.
What I am challenging is that I have heard many pastors and worship leaders over the last decades *ask Him to visit us as though He isn't there, and then when we ask Him to be there, He decides whether He will be or not.*

- ***God's omnipresence*** suggests He is already there (Ps. 139:8).
- ***God's indwelling presence*** tells us He is in us (Col. 1:27).
- ***Gods manifest presence***, where He's moving in a special way and we are perceiving Him increasingly, is what I believe can change from gathering to gathering (Acts 2, 2 Chron. 5:13-14, Acts 11:15).

In Acts 11:15, Paul says "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning." The Holy Spirit, in this sense, comes. In John 3:8, Jesus alludes to the "wind" blowing wherever it pleases. There is something about a sudden wind that lets you know the air is there, as it has been all along, but it is moving in a fresh current.

To intimate that God is absent completely and then becomes present because we pray is quite different than believing God is present and then manifests His presence in a specific and transforming way.

Why Do You Pray "Come, Holy Spirit"?

I personally and pastorally invite the Holy Spirit to “come,” but what I mean by that is that I am requesting Him to “come” in a specific and profound way to my broken heart and the broken hearts in the room.

I am inviting the Father to reveal Himself in signs and wonders, and to take over the space in which we meet in a way that sweetly convinces us all that He is present, and He is love.

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What Are Some Examples Of Invitation Prayers In Church History?

The prayer, “Come Holy Spirit” has many roots in history, and is a beautiful, orthodox prayer inviting God to manifest His presence, fill the hearts of the faithful, and reveal Himself in fresh and redefining ways.

A favorite of mine is below, written by St. Symeon, approximately 1000 years ago.

INVOCATION PRAYER FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT
From the book by Bishop Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1979).

Excerpts from *An Invocation To The Holy Spirit* by St. Symeon (949-1022 A.D.)

Come, true light.
Come, life eternal.
Come, hidden mystery.
Come, treasure without name.

Come, reality beyond all words.
Come, person beyond all understanding.
Come, rejoicing without end.
Come, light that knows no evening.

Come, unfailing expectation of the saved.
Come, raising of the fallen.
Come, resurrection of the dead.
Come, all-powerful, for unceasingly you create, refashion and change all things by your will alone.

Come, for your name fills our hearts with longing, and is ever on our lips.
Come, for you are yourself the desire that is within me.
Come, my breath and my life.
Come, the consolation of my humble soul.

Come, my joy, my glory, my endless delight.

[Here is the prayer in its entirety,]

Question: Have you heard the language of us "bringing" God's presence in worship or in church, and if so, how do you feel about the above?

Bio: Dan Wilt, M.Min. is an author, communicator, and innovative voice in the fields of Worship and the Arts. He is the creator of the Essentials In Worship Video Training Course for worship leaders and teams, and is the Founder of the 35K member WorshipTraining.com. Dan serves as the Director of Communications & Resources for Vineyard USA, and his ancient-future worship leadership blog offers weekly tools and team encouragements at DanWilt.com.

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