

# Simple Worship Is All We Really Need

*A Word to Worship Leaders*

by Andy Park

Here in our apartment in Sha Tin, Hong Kong, we are surrounded by the sounds of worship. Everyday, twice a day, 'the brothers', mostly ex-drug addicts who have come to Christ, join together to lift their voices in songs of thanks and adoration. Every morning and evening, the simple sounds of praise echo throughout this cluster of small apartment buildings.

There aren't many educated folks or trained singers in the bunch, so it's not like you're listening to a men's choir. In fact, some of the notes I hear make my hair stand on end. But I'm sure it's all beautiful to God. He's not nearly as picky as I am.

Being immersed in the songs of the "dai heng" is a great reminder about the essence of worship. Worship is about a cry of the heart, not a slick production. Worship is about me coming to God and pouring out my guts, it's not about having the latest sound or a hot new song. Worship is about receiving forgiveness and healing when I confess my sin and weakness. Worship isn't about sophistication, it's about honesty—taking off our spiritual disguises and letting God get under our layers of self-protection. I find that the Holy Spirit doesn't respond to the polished outer presentation, but the hungry heart.

I can't help but think that the culture of worship here among the dai heng is similar is to the first century church. A bunch of people come together, stand in a circle, share the Lord's supper and sing hymns to God. That's about as complicated as it got in the earliest days of Christian worship. I believe it was Tertullian, an early church father who wrote in about 200 A.D., who encouraged Christians to gather in a circle and sing hymns. He said that anyone who had anything to share could step into the middle and sing a song. That pattern is still being used today. Any small group in the world can gather in a circle to sing, pray and share communion. Worship doesn't have to be any more complicated than that.

Contrast this picture to the contemporary Christian worship culture in the western world. We're so into the musical side of things. We're so into the latest sounds, writers, songs and recordings. But are we so impressed by the packaging that we lose sight of the gift of worship? Are we willing to settle for professional production and graphics or do we really hunger for God himself?

In this day of explosive technological advancements, it's easy for us from the first world countries to get caught up in the glory of drum loops, MP3's, digital recording and flash video presentations. If you're not enough of a "techie" to get into that stuff, maybe you get bogged down with getting the right musicians to play the right sounds on the right instruments.

We're always looking for something fresh to jolt our people out of their spiritual doldrums. It's a constant challenge. Production skills and tools can be powerful in getting people to wake up and take another look at God. But if we depend on techno tricks, we won't be able to dazzle people for very long before it gets old. Besides, do we want to create a church culture of spectators who come to be entertained? Or do we want to invite people into a simple adoration of their Creator and Redeemer?

If you are employing new styles of worship and it's working, that's wonderful. It's all good, as long as the form of worship doesn't become the focal point of worship. If people are more enamored with your cool arrangements, worship is on the decline.

There are no easy solutions to this tension for modern worship leaders. I personally really like high quality music, dance and visual presentations. God has given us the arts, and there are so many ways of employing the arts in worship. I think it's great to pursue some of those options, even if they are 'trendy', as long as it doesn't suck the life out of our worship. God uses the vernacular of the day as a mouthpiece for his Word and a vehicle for his presence. But the coolest musical and artsy trends can't replace life in the Spirit, and a heart of worship.

Maybe you get discouraged because your band can't do it like they do on the CD. Or maybe you're among the thousands who would give anything to gather a band, but you can't find the players. That's a tough one, but it sure points you back to the essence of worship. When we're depressed because we can't have the sound we really want, maybe God is telling us to shift our focus a bit.

When you're surrounded by recovering drug addicts who need more of God's love, power and healing, you don't think so much about how good the P.A. sounds, what kinds of musical arrangements you're using. The priorities are shifted to the stuff of the heart, the things of the Spirit of God. There are time when I feel annoyed by the lack of musicality around me here in the new boy houses, but the lovely presence of the Holy Spirit more than compensates for the unlovely musical notes.

Worship is all about loving God and making melody in our hearts to Him. It's about giving a love-language to a group of people so they can worship God with us. Let's not forget the simple essentials.

*God, give us a heart of worship. Renew in us a simple love for you, a thirst and hunger to know you and to walk in holiness and righteousness. We want to see you and touch you. Come and change our hearts again.*

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