

Spirit Filled Worship
Can We Worship as David Did and Still Reach the Unreached?
 by Bob MacGregor

Like many pastors, it has been my heart's cry that our church would be a church of influence. Sometimes our prayers and desires begin to be fulfilled in the most unique ways.

It was a Sunday morning worship service and visiting our church was a U.S. Congressman and his wife with whom I had had the opportunity to pray when a team from our church visited the National Prayer Center in Washington D.C. What made our particular situation even more sensitive was the fact that most likely no one in our church voted for him and that the Republican candidate running against him was a member of our church.

The people in our church were wondering what I was doing by inviting him, especially with his opponent being a part of our church family. Obviously, I was feeling vulnerable, but beyond that I asked myself "How are we to behave?"

In Washington D.C. Pastor Ken Wilde, founder and leader of the National Prayer Center, had instructed us to be very "non- Pentecostal" when we were given opportunity to pray for Congressmen and Senators in their offices on Capitol Hill. However, this wasn't his office and we weren't on Capitol Hill.

This was the church of Jesus Christ and I was the delegated authority over this community of believers. We are a church that believes in Psalmic worship, priestly sacrifices, the charismatic manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit and the power of God's presence in our midst. Would I compromise this because an educated, liberal thinker who was a member of Congress was in our service?

My decision as a pastor was to honor God over man. Our Sunday celebration services are not designed for man, but they are a festive occasion to gather in the name of Jesus Christ and worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4: 24).

I assigned a couple from our church to greet the Congressman and his wife at the door and escort them to their seat. In addition, we gave them a written description of what they would experience in worship during our service. The Congressman read the description and said, "Psalmic worship. That is a term I've never heard before."

The worship took off like a rocket. The people were shouting, clapping, and singing with great intensity. It seemed that every hand was lifted in the packed sanctuary. While worshipping, I peeked out of the corner of my eye at the Congressman and his wife. They were holding hands and staring without expression at the words of the songs on the screen. When it was time for him to greet our congregation, he said, "Boy, you people know how to have fun on Sunday morning."

Our elders laid hands on him and prayed for him according to I Timothy 2: 1-2, and my wife escorted them out of the service. With tears in the Congressman's wife's eyes, she thanked my wife for the service and the kindness expressed to them by our church.

David said in Psalm 40:3, "He has put a new song in my mouth—praise to our God; many will see it and fear, and will trust in the Lord." That day God had put a song of praise in the mouths of the people of our church and a U.S. Congressman and his wife were touched by God's presence.

We find a tension in the church today between presenting a relevant gospel message to a modern culture and at the same time fulfilling the obsession of our hearts to worship God in a biblical manner in order to experience His presence in our lives and our gatherings.

As believers, we have difficulty maintaining balance in our practices and tend to move from one extreme to another. We either become eccentric in our worship and say like David did to Michal, "I will play music before the Lord. And I will be even more undignified than this" (II Sam. 6: 20-21), or we become so sensitive to the unchurched and seekers that we forget for Whom we are gathering in our Corporate worship services (Ps. 29: 1-2; Matt.4: 10; Rev. 4: 11).

God is a jealous God and is to be worshipped and feared before we do anything else in His name (Deut. 5: 9; 6: 13). As Kevin Connor often says, "Worship always precedes service." It is my fear that we are losing sight of this in our sensitivity to the unchurched.

Can we achieve both? Can we biblically worship God and educate the seeker at the same time, allowing them to be drawn into worship and experience the presence of God? We may be forgetting what the unchurched are really looking for—a real encounter with the living God!

There is a biblical place for form and order in New Testament worship. God is not the author of confusion, and the gatherings of God's people are to be conducted with order so that the believer and seeker can be edified (I Cor. 14: 33, 40). However, many times a seeker-sensitive approach can lead to a focus on perfectionism and an over concentration on details and performance.

In a quest to touch the heart of the seeker, we may have missed the opportunity to touch the heart of the Father (John 4: 24). In doing this, we've been guilty of not trusting in what God can do in the heart of a seeker or unchurched person through the power of His presence—a presence that comes to His church through the praises of His people (Ps. 22: 3).

It would be prudent for all 21st Century pastors to re-examine their motives behind their concerns about image and relatability and rediscover how God often chooses foolish things to confound the wise. He even chooses the foolishness of the childlike, emotional expressions of Psalmic worship where spontaneous singing, shouts of triumph, jubilant clapping, celebrative dancing, and the lifting of hands expressing hungry hearts. This type of worship moves the very heart of God to respond to the joyful expressions of

His people. These things will always confound the sophisticated and wise (I Cor. 1: 18-20, 27, 29, 31).

When the religious leaders of Jesus' day urged him to stop the children in the temple from crying out "Hosanna to the Son of David!" Jesus said to them, "Have you never read, 'Out the mouths of babes in nursing infants you have perfected praise?'" (Matt. 21: 15-16). Those children were caught up in Jesus. Matthew 18: 3 commands us to become just like those children if we want to be an integral part of His kingdom.

Jesus was quoting Psalm 8: 2 when He described the children's praise. It is interesting to note that when you read this Psalm in the Old Testament it does not use the actual word "praise" but it uses the word "strength" when describing what comes out of the mouths of babes and nursing infants.

The Psalmist is saying that God establishes strength through the mouth of babes. The word "strength" is translated from the Hebrew word "oz" and has various applications, such as "force, security, majesty, and praise." It comes from the root word "azaz", which means, "to be stout."

It is interesting that Jesus tied strength to praise. By robbing the church of biblical worship and praise in our attempt to be sophisticated and reach the seekers, I wonder if we have not lost the power of God's strengthening presence in the lives of His people and those who are seeking Him as well?

I am personally persuaded that no one had a greater heart to reach the lost than the Apostle Paul did (Rom. 1: 14-15; 9: 1-3; 15: 20-21). Yet, when Paul lived before unbelievers, he had no difficulty theologically or philosophically worshipping God in their presence and allowing charismatic expressions of the gifts of the Holy Spirit to operate through his life.

When jailed and beaten, Silas and Paul sang hymns and prayed while their fellow prisoners sat and listened (Acts 16: 25). How were they singing and praying? Paul described his style of worship before the Roman governor Felix saying to him, "so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets"(Acts 24: 14). Paul said that he believed all the prophets, including the prophet David who laid the foundation of worship for Israel, the church, and all of the nations in his hymnal of worship, the Psalms.

That night, as Paul and Silas sang in the jail, unsaved prisoners bound by natural and spiritual chains witnessed two apostles worshipping God in Psalmic fashion without reservation or hyper-sensitivity to the unchurched prisoners who may have been watching. The outcome of that worship service was that the power of God's presence shook the place, broke the chains off the prisoners and eventually led to a harvest, the salvation of the jailer and his household (Acts 16: 25-31).

As we develop strategies in an attempt to reach the harvest in our day, let's not forget that worship precedes all ministry and that God has promised us that as we worship and glorify Him, He will demonstrate His salvation and bring many into the Kingdom of God (Ps.50: 23).