

The Uncertain Worshipper:  
Clarifying Seven Major Misunderstandings in Worship

An Honors Project submitted by

Annaley J. Robertson  
139 Lincoln Avenue  
Newport, TN 37821  
(423)623-0737

A BM student in Church Music

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Project advisor: Dr. Clark Measels

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## **Introduction**

In a 1999 research study by Barna Research Group, Ltd., disturbing statistics were discovered regarding the worship experience of regular church attendees in American churches. Results included:

- One third of church attending adults stated they have never experienced God's presence
- Half of regular church attendees asserted they have not experienced God's presence in the last year
- There was a correlation between age and view of God's personal interaction. The younger the believer, the more likely the belief that God was impersonal and distant.

These perceptions of Christian worship are unacceptable. It appears that there is something lacking in the worship experience of believers of the modern day church. It seems likely that these staggering statistics of the faithful church-goers can be tied to the discovery that two thirds of these church attendees cannot give an adequate definition of worship (Barna 45). Similar studies have also found that millions of church regulars define the worship experience as something to attain personal benefit, such as a "good feeling", rather than as something centered on God. Is there a relationship between the worship experience in corporate worship services and an understanding of what worship is intended to be in the life of a Christian?

Barna's research, and my personal observation and study, has led me to believe that the Christian community seems to underestimate the significance of worship in the Christian life. Sharing in my concern for worship in the church is church musician, theologian, and author Marva J. Dawn who writes:

My major concern for the church has to do with worship, because its character forming potential is so subtle and barely noticed, and yet worship creates a great impact on the hearts and minds and lives of a congregation's members. Indeed, how we worship both reveals and forms our identity as persons and communities (4).

Worship is so important and individuals appear to be lacking the experience of God's presence by defining worship as a self-centered act. What does this reveal about the identity of the church community?

I will be studying the importance of developing a philosophy of worship and its possible affects on the worship experience of the individual. It is hoped that this project will become a resource for church leaders and youth, the next generation of church leadership, in their personal Christian pilgrimage. It is intended to show the importance of aiding believers in their understanding of worship and its role in the church. Calvin Johansson argues that all aspects of the church's worship service are designed for Christian maturation, and this project is intended to make this a reality to those who otherwise struggle in the church setting (15).

The purpose of this study is twofold: 1) to explore and pinpoint a working philosophy of worship for current youth and adults of the contemporary church and 2) to

study other misunderstood aspects of congregation worship. This study may point to possible fixes for these misconstrued aspects. Conversations with youth in the community have sparked an interest in the idea that youth from varying denominations are currently experiencing differing worship models yet experience the same lack of interest in the worship of the church.

Further study in the real life setting can be found in the appendix. This research documents the worship experiences of the churches in a particular area through a common survey, and may be useful for other communities to highlight the need for a model for effectively communicating the importance and understanding of worship. I am endeavoring to identify a presentation of worship that is useful for impacting the lives of this generation and generations to come. Furthermore, it is hoped that the research material will offer new insight into personal worship experiences of youth from varying denominations including Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, and Lutheran.

## Methodology

The core of this project revolves around the difficult to define concept of worship. This is mainly due to the fact that worship is a personal experience. However, I will make the argument that defining worship is essential to Christian worship in the corporate church setting. Therefore, a significant amount of time will be spent on defining worship in the Christian life and consequently in the life of the church.

There are seven commonly misunderstood areas of the worship experience covered in this project, which are the focal points and are each discussed in much deeper detail later in the project:

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- **Defining worship as the response rather than a tradition:**

From the perspective of a Christian, worship is life and life is worship. They are synonymous. Worship is a response to the work of God in the heart of an individual.

- **Preparing for corporate worship is the responsibility of the individual:**

Few individuals prepare themselves for the corporate worship experience. There appears to be a silent agreement that individuals are prepared for worship by the worship leaders such as the pastor or the music director. However, preparation for the worship experience is the responsibility of the individual. Furthermore, I believe that all aspects of the service should be a worshipful experience, not a worship preparation.

- **Engaging and participating in the worship experience:**

The corporate church service is intended to be experienced by participation from the individuals engaged in the act of sacrificial worship. Its primary purpose is not intended to be uplifting, though this is a common reaction not to be frowned upon, but rather it is intended to require sacrifice from the individual through participation.

- **Focusing on God in the worship service:**

A major problem in the 21<sup>st</sup> century worship experiences is that individuals expect something from the worship service. The corporate worship service, just like the worship lifestyle of a Christian is not to be focused on personal gain, but on the worship of God.

- **Expectations from a worship service:**

Many individuals struggle with what to expect from the worship services experienced on such a regular basis. The worship experience should be a wonderful experience in which individuals are able to grow in unity as the body of Christ, offer a response of celebration to God's greatness, be led to a place of repentance, and grow in spiritual maturity. Knowing what to expect from a worship experience is important in experiencing worship.

- **Celebrating the greatness of God, but also being led to a place of repentance:**

Being led into worship also leads an individual into the Holy presence of God. Expressions of love for God is prevalent in church services. However, it is

important also to experience a need for repentance and a desire to grow in the personal relationship.

- **Being Changed by the worship experience:**

Congregational worship is intended to change the followers of Christ. This implies the application of Bible based instruction and the living out of commitment to God in daily life.

With these purposes in mind, research began first with discovering misunderstood aspects of worship, clarifying them, and then studying research samples from churches. The idea for this project was a survey designed specifically to discover the current understanding and experiences concerning worship in home churches of two specific age groups: youth (12-21) and adults (22 and older). However, the survey results were never intended to become the focal point of this project. Instead, they were intended to supplement the ideas concerning the need to rethink specific areas of worship understandings for the purposes of the 21<sup>st</sup> century church (see Appendix A).

Surveys were distributed at six different churches in a close radius area. The surveys were distributed at each individual church using random sample and collected together so as to identify the different churches, which will remain anonymous throughout this study. The purpose was to discover any correlation between a person's personal philosophy of worship and that person's current worship experiences in his/her regularly attended church, while also exploring other affects from differing aspects of worship (see Appendix B). It seems possible that those youth and adults who cannot conceptualize worship also are struggling with their worship experiences in their church's

corporate worship. Other aspects of worship were also studied and compared to the worship experience such as expectations from the service, focus on God, active participation, etc. There is no right or wrong definition of worship. Rather, the survey questions are intended to aid in discovering whether an individual has at least some understanding of worship, its place in the Christian life, and to consequently discover if this defined worship is experienced in regularly attended church services. All research material can be found in the appendix on page 52.

The overall purpose of this project is to pinpoint the areas of worship that are essential to the worship of the church and to discuss these areas in a way that would benefit individuals in the development of a philosophy of worship. The next step is to clarify any “hazy areas” created by misunderstandings or twisted meanings of intended worship aspects.

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## Chapter 1

### Defining Worship

It seems likely that one's understanding of worship influences the corporate worship experience in regular church service attendees. Is there a relationship between the worship experience in corporate worship services and an understanding of what worship is intended to be? Is there a correlation between the results of studies that have found that millions of church regulars define the worship experience as something to attain personal benefit, such as a "good feeling", and the results of studies that show a third of Baptist and Methodist youth and nearly half of Catholic youth feel that they cannot relate to the church (Hoge 364). Does the lack of a philosophy of worship negatively affect worship experiences?

One possibility is that the concept of worship has lost its meaning and relevance in the eyes of the modern day church. How could such an integral part of the life of the church lose its position, and what exactly is worship to mean in the life of a Christian? These issues will be addressed in this chapter. Perhaps the best way to examine these questions is to define and discuss the word "worship", its etymology, and, its life as part of the church.

"Worship" or "to worship" can be a difficult concept or action to define. There is a dualism to worship in that it is a personal experience and also a congregational experience. Even so, some understanding of common vocabulary terms relating to worship may be of use. The word "worship" commonly used in the English language is derived from Anglo-Saxon word "weorthscipe," literally translated to mean one worthy

of reverence and honor (Segler 6). Other words associated with worship include the Old Testament word *hishahawāh*, meaning ‘to bow down’ and ‘*abodāh*, meaning ‘service’ (Martin 11). We learn from these two Biblical words the attitude of early worship: reverence and response. The German word for worship is *gottesdienst*, which literally means “God’s service.” Furthermore, Dr. William H. P. Faunces sums up the etymology of the word worship:

The word “worship”...has passed through various meanings. Primarily of course it signified a state of worth. Next, it came to mean an appreciation of worth, a sense of value, the state of emotion arising in one who beholds a worthwhile person. Then it came to mean the outward expression of such appreciation in words of esteem or honor. Then the word came to be set apart for religious uses, and to signify our appreciation of the worth or worthiness of God, as emotional out-go toward him in praise and prayer. Finally, as the hardening and specializing process has continued, the word has grown into a more technical meaning. Today it is applied to certain public acts performed by a religious assembly in consecrated buildings, acts having the order and sequence and symbolism of ritual, and designed to express our collective appreciation of the worthfulness of God. (15)

Even with a literal definition of the concept and an understanding of the broad context of the word, worship remains something in the Christian life that defies definition for it begs to be experienced. Modern worship leader Matt Redman, and one the most respected worship leaders of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, emphasizes the need for order in worship: first there must be revelation to the people and then the response (13). He encourages the

church “in the power of the Holy Spirit, usher people into a fresh revelation of Jesus during our worship times, and the response will take care of itself” (17). Yet, in order to study worship and the worship experience one must have some definition by which to gauge the worship event.

First of all, the answer to why mankind worships seems easier to pinpoint than a concrete definition and may be useful. Mankind worships because he cannot help worshipping (Segler 4). Mankind has a tendency to find an object of worship, whether it be God as the church defines God or some other object or being. The Christian community worships God because God deserves our worship, requires our worship, and enables our worship (Redman 52). Winfred Douglas places this theology in one condensed, basic statement: Worship is the primary and eternal activity of redeemed mankind (3). In other words, God was, is, and will forever be worshipped by his redeemed. The apostle Paul emphasizes this idea that followers of Christ were chosen with the purpose of praising the Father:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms, with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace... (Ephesians 1:3-6).

When it comes to the issue of church worship, the New Testament is ambiguous in providing some clear and concrete description of how Christian corporate worship is to be ordered or experienced. Using early church worship as a model, what we do know about it is its ties with Old Testament Jewish rites and ceremonies that were fulfilled in

the person of Christ (Martin 11). The only model for worship of “Yahweh” that early believers were accustomed to was that used in the Jewish synagogues and temples, and the rituals performed by the practicing Jewish peoples. However, Christ made these rituals unnecessary and became the Christian’s direct access to God. One view contends the temple was no longer necessary to house the Spirit of God. Instead, he now dwells within his people. We, followers of Christ, have become the dwelling place of the Almighty.

With this understanding, it is appropriate to study the New Testament in search of approaches to church worship models, and the best answers lie in the passage Acts 2:41-47:

Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (NIV).

Using this passage, a large variety of worship forms and expectations of what the worship experience of the church should be have developed. This passage makes clear that the worship of the church is the work of the Holy Spirit. Without the working of the Holy

Spirit, Christian worship would simply be a human act like heathen worship then or now (Delling 23). This is to emphasize that the connection between human and God is made possible only because of God's initiative and not by human effort. Congregational worship is not possible by our human efforts alone, but rather by an interaction with the Spirit already at work.

It is important to note that although this is a matter of public worship, the same principles apply. In defining and clarifying worship for the life of the individual Christian, the New Testament is clear on what is expected. The New Testament writings are intended to present the standard for authenticity in the life of a Christian. First century writers addressed issues in the first century church about true worship that are relevant today.

This worship is only made possible by the work of the Spirit in the life of a Christian. Paul references this when he writes about life through the Spirit in his letter to the Roman churches:

Therefore, there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death....Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what the nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires... You, however, are not controlled by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness... Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation – but it is not to the

sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if you live by the Spirit, you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God (Romans 8:1, 5, 9-10, 12-14).

The early Roman church was facing a challenge that 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians must also overcome: bringing glory to God through a life of worship from a heart of sincerity controlled by the Spirit, not a heart bound by tradition. Robert E. Weber writes, “This story of God initiating a relationship and of the people responding in faith is not only the story of salvation and redemption, but comprises the very essence of worship... What lies at the heart of worship is God’s continual movement toward the peoples of the world and the continual response of the people of God in faith and obedience” (19). Christian worship, both on the personal and congregational level, must remain a response to the work of God and not dependent on our human efforts engulfed through traditional acts.

Worship bound by traditions may be a problem for individual worshippers within a church. John Killman writes about these dangers that are stifling worship in the church:

What we believe about God does not lead us to think he would withhold his presence and meaning from our traditionalized rites and ceremonies. But what we know about traditionalized rites and ceremonies, on the other hand, inclines us to suspect that they themselves become less and less congenial to manifestations of spirit and originality, so that finally they divorce themselves from the possibility of divine infusion. They congeal and harden around a memory, and so refuse the present or the future. Their actual origin from the life-styles and situations of the

persons using them, the less capable they are of becoming the receptacles of imparted meaning. (xv)

There should almost undoubtedly be a close relationship between the lifestyle of Christian individuals and the life of the church. Dr. William H. P. Faunce writes, “If men stay away from church today, their absence is not due to innate depravity or to hostility to the Christian faith...It is chiefly because church going seems to the vast majority a pointless custom” (12). Although this statement seems a harsh critique of culture and of the church, perhaps it should be a motivation towards moving away from tradition and focusing on a congregation that responds to the movement of God through meaningful action.

Although the concept of worship is difficult to express, its importance is clear. In a 1997 research article on the relationship between family worship patterns and the children’s behavioral patterns, Jerry W. Lee, Gail T. Rice, and V. Bailey Gillespie discovered fascinating statistics that could have strong implications to the community of Christian believers. This research study revolved around the 1989 Valuegenesis project, which collected data from 7,685 Seventh-day Adventist youth in grades 6 through 12 who had both parents at home. Seventh-day Adventist, sometimes referred to simply as “Adventist”, is an evangelical Christian denomination distinguished mainly by its observance of the Sabbath on the original seventh day of the Judeo-Christian week: Saturday. The 464 question survey contained questions on the family worship behavior of the youth, the youth’s outcome (concerning moral issues), and control variables (374). In discussing the findings of their research experiment, the authors concluded, “The data shows that worship patterns in which worship occurs frequently and in which youth are

actively involved in worship are associated with positive youth outcomes” (378). The authors then conclude these “positive outcomes” as lowered desire for material things, lowered alcohol and drug use, and an active faith. Applying Lee’s, Rice’s, and Gillespie’s findings to the church “family”, it leads one to an emphasis the importance of the worship experience, and to examine how it affects the lives of Christian individuals. This is especially true to those who actively participate in it. If family worship is so fundamental to the development of Christian youth, then it seems likely that church worship experience should also play a similar role to that of family worship.

If worship is such an important part of the church’s life, how did the ideas concerning worship become so skewed? It seems as if the word worship has become overused in the church atmosphere, but its frequent use may alter its meaning and diffuse its potency. Perhaps to examine another word that has “metamorphosized” as much in meaning as worship could be of use. For example, the word love has significantly different connotation than it did two centuries ago. Both words share in radically different cultural meaning in the early church world. In the first century world, home to the Biblical writings containing some of the most powerful and well-known writings about love, the word translated in the English as simply love had three very different levels of meaning. The early Greek words for love are:

*Agape* → charitable love; the love God has for humanity; the love Christians  
aspire to have for others

*Philia* → a brotherly love; a response to something enjoyable

*Eros* → a sexual love (Smith 4)

In stark contrast, an analytical paper on the theoretical importance of love displays a different context surrounding the ideas concerning love in the modern day world. For example the author points out that in the Western world love is typically attached to the mate choice process (Goode 38). The vast majority of literature on love views it as a “sweeping experience” based on a rollercoaster of emotions, and marriage analysts speak of love as the means to a powerful attraction between people at the beginning of marriage (39). Love’s many different meanings are lumped into one word making love difficult to define because of its ambiguous definition. This ambiguous understanding is dangerous when applied to the love of God.

Worship originally relates to the literal “bowing down” and “serving”. Possibly the same misunderstandings or twisted meanings that plague an understanding of love today apply also to the unsure ideas worshippers have concerning worship. If this is the case, then it most likely affects the view of some or even most of the individuals attending “worship services” on a regular basis. The corporate worship experience seems in danger of becoming a tradition without meaning because there is no meaning placed behind it, similar to the way that the word love can mean both something as great as God’s love and something as trivial as a “sweeping experience”. There must be some constant, unwavering foundation for the experience of both personal and congregational worship. Consequently, it becomes important to develop a philosophy of worship beginning with a life of worship and thus flowing into the corporate worship experience. It seems easier to attend the worship service rather than to experience worship in the service, but a philosophy of church worship requires Christians to educate themselves on what is expected of them in the worship experience. An active Christian involved in a

lifestyle of worship seems more likely to become an involved active participant in the corporate worship experience and vice versa.

An in depth study of the word worship reveals the multiple implications of the word all with the same purpose. The word's etymology reveals the need for both revelation of God and response to this revelation, and scripture reveals that we were created for this worship. Franklin Segler, former Professor of Pastoral Ministry at the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, emphasizes the importance of both a philosophy of worship and the application of that philosophy when he writes, "Worship without theology is sentimental and weak, theology without worship is cold and dead" (47). Worship is an active part of the life of a Christian, and this worship becomes part of the worship of the church. The early church leaders used a Latin phrase to communicate the idea of worship and life intertwined: *lex orandi lex credendi*. Robert Webber offers a modern interpretation of this phrase that applies to church throughout all time: worship is faith in motion (Blended 89). This all begins with an understanding of worship in the life of a believer and then an application of this understanding.

## Chapter 2

### Celebration and Repentance

There are many characteristics to the being of God, which are highlighted by the many names of God found throughout scripture, such as Yahweh, Lord, Diety, Lord of Hosts, Mighty One of Israel, King, and Savior just to name a few (Biblical 26). Once an understanding of worship has been established, it is of use to study the God to which our worship is aimed. These names reveal different attributes of the Creator. It is the attribute of love that leads us to a place of celebration of God and His mighty works. The greatest act of love, the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, is the theme of many hymns and songs sung in church today, and furthermore, the focus of much Christian worship. God's grace and mercy are regularly celebrated attributes of the Creator. Names celebrating the loving and gentle side of Christ include "Prince of Peace" and the "Lamb". These glimpses are only a peek at the characteristics of God and are prevalent in most worship services. They can be seen in the congregational music. This is highlighted by the worship music in the form of both hymns and songs used in today's worship. For example, in the topical index of hymns from the 2008 Baptist Hymnal, there is a significant difference between the categories "God, his holiness" and "God, his love, mercy, and grace". Whereas the latter category contains 34 hymns, the previous category contains only 3 hymns.

This idea of a loving friend as our Savior is popular in praise choruses used in the church today. Examples include the well known chorus by Martin Smith entitled "I Could Sing of Your Love Forever," which declares the theme of love through a series of vivid images:

Over the mountains and the seas  
Your river runs with love for me  
And I will open up my heart and let the healer set me free  
I'm happy to be in the truth and I will daily lift my hands  
For I will always sing of when your love came down  
I could sing of Your love forever

This song obviously is a celebration of God, his sacrifice, and the consequent love, mercy, truth, and freedom that can be found by believers. Another glimpse into the attribute of love can be found in yet another example of popular praise music, "Your Love is Amazing" by Brenton Brown and Brian Doerksen:

Your love is amazing, steady and unchanging  
Your love is a mountain firm beneath my feet  
Your love is surprising, I can feel it rising  
When I am surrounded your love carries me  
Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah your love makes me sing

This is an example of worship focused solely on the love of God.

Love and mercy are only a one-sided view of the Almighty. Dr. John MacArthur, in his book The Love of God, addresses the issue of God, love, and the modern day view of this topic. He writes:

Love is the best known but least understood of all God's attributes. Almost everyone who believes in God these days believes that He is a God of love... Because of the influence of modern liberal theology, many suppose that God's love and goodness ultimately nullify His righteousness, justice, and holy

wrath. They envision God as a benign heavenly grandfather—tolerant, affable, lenient, permissive, devoid of any real displeasure over sin, who without consideration of His holiness will benignly pass over sin and accept people as they are. (MacArthur 1)

It is of most importance to not neglect the attribute of holiness, even to the extent of fear. Proverbs 9:10 states, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” References to the fear of the Lord are abundant in the Old Testament writings. Even the viewing of God’s physical presence and his holiness brought death upon a person. Disobedience to his direct commands could result in death, and regular sacrifices of blood were necessary to appease his anger towards sin. Sin cannot be tolerated by a holy God, and the Psalmist declares, “You hate the worker of iniquity” (5:5). It is this holiness that validates God as distinct and set apart from everything else rather than one of many gods. The word “holy” has Semitic roots, and literally means “to cut” (Trevethan 13). Basically this labels God as “cut off” or “separate” from everything else. Ultimately, it is this holiness that creates a need for Jesus Christ. It is this holiness that separated us from our Maker.

Whereas God’s love, mercy, and forgiveness are regularly celebrated in the church today, focus on God’s holiness seems less common. The modern day church suffers from an “imbalanced view” of God (MacArthur 12) The point here is that God’s love and holiness must coexist in the church. Ignoring His love makes it impossible to worship Him and develop a personal relationship. On the other hand, ignoring His holiness denies the need for Christ and demotes God to human standards. It is only when

God is viewed in a balance of perfection and mercy that one can truly worship. This concept must be applied to the worship experience.

Moses is popular for his glimpse of the glory of God's back side, yet had to be shielded from exposure to the fullness of God's glory. God used his hand to cover the cleft where Moses remained as the Almighty passed in front of Him.

And the Lord said, "I will cause all of my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."

(Exodus 33:19-20)

This event is a dramatic example of both the holiness and the love of God. It was His holiness that made viewing His full glory a danger to Moses' life. However, it was his love that shielded Moses with his hand while he passed. The Old Testament in its entirety is a testament to the well-balanced holiness/love of the Creator. It was God's holiness that required him to withdraw his presence and protection from his people, the Israelites, when they became followers of other gods and failed to keep their part of the covenant to serve one God and have no other before him. However, it was his love that moved him to repeatedly send relief to his people when they turned back to him, as seen in the appearance of Judges to save his Chosen people. It was God's holiness that required him to destroy Nineveh because of its sin, but it was his love and mercy that withheld his anger when the people repented of their ways (Jonah 3:10). It was God's holiness that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah; yet, it was his grace that offered protection

from his wrath if only ten good men were found within the city (Genesis 18:32). The entire Old Testament revolves around the multi-dimensional person of God.

This same holy/loving God appears in the New Testament writings beginning with the four gospels and the differing perspectives of the holy/loving Jesus Christ. It was God's holiness that required a need for a perfect sacrifice to repair the broken connection between Creator and his people. It was Christ's perfectionism that attacked at the heart of the Pharisees' hypocrisy. It was his love, grace, and mercy that offered hope to the adulterous Samaritan woman at the well. It was his love, grace, and mercy that healed the lame and raised the dead. Ultimately, it was his love, grace, and mercy that compelled him to willingly face an imminent death by Roman crucifixion and his holiness that made the sacrifice complete. It is the presence of both an awe-inspiring, fearful holiness and an inhuman, incomprehensible love that makes the being of God worthy of pure unadulterated worship.

We are to react to these dueling qualities in the same manner, with humility. The classic hymn "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross", by Isaac Watts, states:

When I survey the wondrous cross  
 On which the Prince of Peace of glory died  
 My richest gain I count but loss  
 And poor contempt on all my pride  
 Were the whole realm of nature mine  
 That were an offering far to small  
 Love so amazing so divine  
 Demands my soul, my life, my all

These verses contain both references to God's holiness and his love. God's holiness is displayed in the need and action of the cross, and his love can be seen in the sacrifice of death and the reference to the "Prince of Peace". Furthermore, the reaction to this act of holiness and love is "poor contempt on all my pride" and a humble offering of soul, life and all. God gives grace to the humble, while he opposes the proud (James 4:6). While it is necessary to celebrate the greatness of God in both his acts and his attributes, it also remains necessary to feel a need for this holiness and love in our own lives. This may ultimately lead an individual to the place of repentance.

Being in the presence of a holy God sheds light on our own inadequacies apart from him, and our need for something beyond our own human strength to overcome our human failures. It is the work of God at work in our lives that changes the lives of believers, for we are commanded to "Be holy just as our heavenly Father is holy" (Matthew 5:48 ). Furthermore, we are called to love as Christ. Ephesians 5:1-2 declares, "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children, and live a life of love....." It is only when holiness and love are experienced in the individual's life that they can be understood in the context of the church and its worship.

## Chapter3

### Preparing for the Worship Experience

If worship preparation is foreign to most, it seems appropriate to offer an illustration at a very basic level. It would seem unacceptable for a professional basketball player to arrive at a game as play begins and warm up as the game progresses. For anyone who has experienced the action of a professional league basketball game, even the warm-ups are intense. Players arrive hours before the game begins and proceed with stretches, warm-up shots to the basket, coach's pep talks, and alone time to focus. Players begin games at their peak in order to offer their best game play throughout the entire game.

In the same way, it seems unacceptable to arrive at church on Sunday mornings unprepared for the corporate worship experience. Should the individual prepare for worship or is someone else responsible for this task? One possibility is that the worship music is preparatory for the worship experience. If this is the case, then it becomes the responsibility of the music director to prepare the congregation for worship, and the worship service itself becomes preparation for worship.

If that is the case, then an understanding of the importance of music in the worship experience is also of utmost importance. In his book *The Recovery of Worship*, George Walter Fiske offers a persuasive outlook on the importance of the musical aspect of worship:

Religion must sing or die, unless she can find some other art as an outlet for her deepest emotion; and no other art can express or satisfy the soul like music. To

check the songs of a church is to smother her faith and gradually stifle her life; so subtle and profound is the relation between religion and music. How closely united are the religious feelings and aesthetic feelings which give voice to music, we never realize until both are refined and become spiritual. (130)

In other words, the musical aspect of a worship service is a vital part of the worship experience. Music frequently makes up a large portion of a Christian church worship regardless of denomination, and it appears that most churches consider music an important part of the worship experience.

One of the most crucial biblical foundations for musical worship is found in Colossians 3:16:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

Aside from this verse, the New Testament makes few references to the proper or best kind of music for Christian worship only that music is typically a part of worship, and the only intended purpose is to show “gratitude in your hearts to God.”

Another possibility is that the pastor is responsible for preparing the hearts of the congregation for worship. In this case, the sermon, or delivery of the Word, becomes the central preparation for worship. The declaration of the Word in the midst of the gathering of the church is almost undoubtedly the part of any worship service with the most emphasis in Protestant churches today. It is evident from Biblical texts that the reading of the Word was part of early church services (Acts 13:15; 2 Corinthians 3:14). The responsibility of the preacher is then to declare the Word and apply this scriptural

revelation to the everyday Christian life (Basden 24). The Puritans considered this element of the worship service by far the most important part of worship. In an essay entitled *The Religious Function of Public Worship* Dr. William H.P. Faunce writes:

The Puritan made the intellectual element in worship supreme...He exalted the sermon at the expense of all other parts of the worship, because clear ideas of truth were essential to the moral life and instruction was the great task of religion. Knowledge of the true God was the chief essential, and to communicate such knowledge was the highest form of worship. (7)

Indeed, the discovery of God through the Word seems of great importance, but focusing solely on the sermon seems to contradict the idea that the worship experience is one of sacrifice. In Protestant worship the deliverance of the Word comes near the end of the worship order, and it would seem that preparation should already have been achieved at this point. There seems to be a need for the response to this revelation of God found through the reading of the Word.

Other possibilities include scripture readers, prayers, greeters, and musicians. In truth, one could place the responsibility of worship preparation on almost anyone. Although the author is in no way belittling the importance of the role of all worship leaders in the community worship services, placing the role of preparer for worship in the hands of others is like asking the coach to warm-up for the basketball player. It makes more sense to place the responsibility of the preparation for worship on the individual.

Of most importance is the idea that preparing for worship before the service by the individuals places the focus of the service solely on the object of worship, God, rather than on the individual attendees. Worship then becomes about our response to the work

of God in our lives as discussed in the previous chapter, and less about what we can take away from the experience.

Thus, Søren Kierkegaard's defines roles for the worship service as follows:

God → audience

Worship Leaders → Prompters to the worship layout

Congregation → Performers (180).

Kierkegaard describes this model metaphorically as theatrical productions with the worshippers as actors. He argues that the secular world views the worship leaders as actors and the congregation as the critical theater goers. However, Kierkegaard's model reverses roles so that God receives the sacrifice of worship from the church, and all responsibility of worship is distributed amongst the church as a whole. The worship leaders, which include the pastor, music minister, choir, and all other individuals participating in leading the worship service, are simply to lead by example and to direct the flow of the service. However, the congregation itself is responsible for actively participating in the worship of the church. This highlights the need for worship preparation. How then does the individual congregant prepare for the worship experience?

The first step in preparing for worship is self examination. For some church traditions, the opportunity for this act is offered on a weekly basis within the structure of the service. Some services begins with a quiet focus time, normally through a quiet, contemplative musical prelude, which allows the individual to focus on the state of the individual self and the need for the presence of God and forgiveness before or as part of immersing worshipping of the Almighty (Wolff 223). Self-examination is actually the

first step in the process of losing the focus on oneself. Before intertwining hearts with the church in worship, individuals must focus on the God (227).

Many church orders of worship exclude the contemplative prelude, and preparing for worship becomes a very personal matter. Some individuals may prepare by prayer, meditation, scripture reading, or some other means. It seems important that the individual enter the service not burdened with the focus of self. He or she is burdened with the uncontrollable desire to respond to God through the work of the Holy Spirit.

## Chapter 4

### Active Participation and Focus

The followers and famous twelve Disciples of Christ during His life would almost undoubtedly argue that Jesus was a man of action. Whether in His miracles, teachings, or constant travel, He was a man of personal involvement and personal action, never asking others to do for Him what He alone could accomplish. Christ's life of worship was one of active service to others, and is the perfect example of a life of worship to be modeled by every believer. In the same way, the worship of the church should be that of active service through involvement and engagement. Just as the Israelites brought sacrifices to the altar of the temple, Christians are called to bring a "continual sacrifice" of praise, through Jesus Christ, unto God (Hebrews 13:15). This erases any misunderstanding that the worship experience is for the purpose of gain rather than giving.

The assembling of a multitude is useless if the individual units are to remain in isolated consciousness—like the clocks in a jeweler's window, each ticking busily and noisily regardless of the rest. A true assembly is rather like the electric clocks installed in a modern business building, each dial regulated constantly by the central clock on the first floor. The great question about any assembly is: Do these various intelligences unite in one great insight? Do these many wills fuse in yielding to any superior will? Do these human souls, full of various jangling desires and wandering impulses, melt into any one great desire, and throb with one great purpose (Faunce 3)?

Faunce creates beautiful imagery concerning the corporate worship experience while making a very valid argument for the gathering of the assembly of Christ, and,

furthermore, the unity of mind and purpose within the congregation. A modern outlook on participation in worship by George Barna, a well respected worship researcher, adds to the importance of active participation:

Highly affective churches agree that ministry is not the domain of spectators; it must be populated by activists. Rather than allow (much less facilitate) people to simply come, watch, and give money at the ministry events... These churches aggressively combat a spectator mentality among the people who attend. (58)

Unity is acquired through active participation of the congregation as a whole. Paul illustrates this need for wholeness in the well-known passage of Romans:

Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts...(12:4-6a)

Each individual, illustrated by the differing body parts, offers a unique addition to the worship experience. Participating in the worship experience, therefore, becomes crucial because participation builds unity in a congregation: We bring bodies together in a building only that we may then fuse minds and hearts in a spiritual unity... Deep in human nature lies... the necessity for congregational worship (Faunce 5).

Participation is an important part of the worship experience because it requires sacrifice on the individual and group level. In research conducted by the Barna Group, individuals responded to questions about the expectations from the worship service. Most notable among the responses is that individuals expect some personal outcome from the experience rather than solely focusing on personal sacrifice (Barna 45). This is a “receiving” and not “giving” attitude toward worship. This most likely can be connected

with a lack of participation in the worship service today, and may also be related to the growing trend of entertainment focused services.

This whole idea of “giving” of oneself flows from an individual focused on God in worship rather than self. Perhaps these selfish motives can be linked to the constant struggle over styles of worship, particularly that of music and its central role in many church conflicts. An understanding of the importance of music that was discussed in Chapter Two is applicable here because music can play the role of either worship enhancer or worship distraction. The musical aspect of a worship service is a vital part of the worship experience, and a brief study of the history of music in the church may reveal some valuable truths about music as either a distraction from focus on God or as a means for channeling worship to God.

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## **A Brief Overview of Music and Its Ever-Changing Role in the Church: 1<sup>st</sup> Century-Now**

*The key point is that the church musician must have a valid base from which to work. If we cannot avoid choices, and they are made as a result of our philosophical position, admitted or not, it is imperative that we give attention to the formulation of credible guiding principles. We cannot afford to be haphazard, careless, or indiscriminant in coming to grips with the issue. It is not a matter of having a philosophy (we all have one) or choosing what best suits our needs and expediency of the moment. It is a matter of wrestling with the substantive alternatives until we are compelled to adopt a position that not only agrees with revealed truth but also enthusiastically promulgates that truth in all fullness (Johansson 1).*

This statement sums up the developmental history of music in the church. As long as Christian music has existed in the church and as long as it exists there will most likely be a struggle with the “substantive alternatives” to find a way to “promulgate truth in all fullness.”

Early Christian church music was limited to congregational singing if it was allowed at all (instruments were considered too secular), and church leaders took great pains to avoid sacred music becoming too “secular” sounding (Rice 12). They emphasized the idea that music that aroused the senses and evoked emotion was dangerous because it could arouse the same thoughts and actions upon which paganistic beliefs were founded (13). As for the early church, Paul instructed in his Ephesians and Colossians letters to the use of “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.” Furthermore, Scribners proclaimed:

The injunction to teach and admonish by means of songs also agrees with other evidences that a prime motive for hymn singing in many of the churches was instruction in the doctrines of the faith. It would appear that among the early Christians, as with the Greeks and other ancient nations, moral precepts and instructions in religious mysteries were often thrown into poetic and musical form, as being by this means more impressive and more easily remembered (43). It seems obvious that the early Christian churches had a very specific role for music in the church. There seems to have been little music for entertainment.

The Reformation and Renaissance eras played a drastic role in the development of the music of the church. Great people like Martin Luther and John Calvin must be mentioned. Luther made great contributions to church music by translating hymns into the common language and by encouraging congregational singing (Rice 21). Luther believed in active participation in the worship service. Calvin was opposed to any kind of music in the church; yet he gave into the demands of the day and allowed unaccompanied singing of scripture as the only permissible music in the worship service (23). Calvin

struggled with the same issue the early church had with music: secularism in church music. It was inevitable that the Reformation brought about a counter-reformation, and with this movement the Catholic Church attempted to purify the church by ridding secular influences that had entered the church services. With the meeting of the Council of Trent (1545-1563), all music not in “good taste” in the house of God was supposedly eliminated in the sacred services (24).

The change brought about by the revolution of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, continued well into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. During these time periods, and even into the present day, history is faced with a divided church and sudden appearances of secularism in the music of the church (Routley 142). American history also alludes to music as a vital part of the lives of the Massachusetts Bay Puritans. The Puritans were drawn to the traditional hymns, and Gilbert Chase describes the singing quite graphically:

...the singing is very slow; many grace notes, passing notes, turns, flourishes and other ornaments are used; pitch and times values are arbitrarily altered; there is a lack of synchronization among voices; everyone sings as best pleases himself (Rice 52).

This unorganized mess of church music led to the use of Precentors, or music directors, and eventually organized choirs, similar to those we know today, comprised of trained musicians from “singing schools” formed to teach unified singing (54).

The dawn of the eighteenth century saw an acceleration of the use and writing of hymns. Tunes such as “Fairest Lord Jesus” (1850) were a visible sign of the ever growing

tendency to rebel against the academic tendency of Lutheranism which had been spreading so vigorously (Scribners 193).

The break between secularism and the music of the church was unveiled once again in the writings of nineteenth century composers. Rice attributes this secularism to harsh opposition by the church for music of “depth and real beauty” (62). Musical confusion ensued from disagreements pertaining to the philosophy, structure, and desired affects of corporate worship for the church (Scribner 204).

Writers seem to be in conflict as to their evaluation of American church music in the twentieth century. Rice argues that the thousands of small congregations that formed across the United States with little or no effective programs led to ineffective worship services with church goers not content (96). However, as the century progressed, church leaders developed church music conferences to highlight the importance of the musical aspects of the worship service (Dickinson 393). Furthermore, the development of hymnals has played an integral part in heightening the standards of musical worship. As for the music of the present day church, there seems to be a dilemma known as “worship wars,” which centers around which style of available music is most suited to minister to today’s congregations. Rice writes:

The present is exciting, and the future is bright. The day should soon come when sacred music will again be at least equal to secular music in quality and quantity. Beauty and holiness will exist in proper perspective and the holiness of beauty will be a reality instead of a dream oftentimes tinged with nightmare horrors (115).

It seems that the sacred music of the church has evolved and will continue to evolve as time reveals new standards of excellence in the pursuit of offering the best in worship to God. Regardless of where these evolutions in music take the worship of the church, one truth must remain: God must be the center of worship and not the self.

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Considering the reality that music makes up a large portion of almost every Christian church's service regardless of denomination, most churches presumably consider music an important part of the worship experience. Music is tied to cultural changes, but the Christian message remains the same. Hence, music should be used to enhance the worship experience.

## Chapter 5

### Changed By the Worship Experience

As Moses returned from Mount Sinai, his face glowed. He had experienced the presence of God. In Exodus 34 it says that as Moses returned from the mountain he covered his face in a veil because it glowed and the people were afraid. This is a well known passage in scripture that teaches a valuable truth to the church today: being in the presence of God changes a person. Although God cannot appear physically to his people on account of his holiness, believers are given the promise today that when two or more are gathered in His name, there will He be also (Matthew 18:20). It seems that the worship in the presence of a Holy God should change believers on a regular basis. As previously discussed in earlier chapters, worship is an individual responsibility based on the supernatural workings of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers; therefore, change in the believer is not the responsibility of a great sermon or a moving musical experience. It is important to understand why change is important in the believer.

The need for change is first evident in the early stages of the Christian life. The apostle Paul writes:

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: the old has gone, the new has come!

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them, And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. (II Corinthians 5:17-19)

This reconciliation was brought about by Christ, whose purpose was to “destroy the devil’s work” and “to take away our sins” (I John 3:8b and 5b). However, this reconciliation would not be complete without the “new creation” that is the byproduct of the salvation experience. The apostle John makes a strong statement when he declares that “whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did” and “we know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands” (I John 2:6) and an even stronger statement when he declares that “whoever continues sinning has neither seen nor knows him [Jesus Christ] (I John 3:6).

Applying this concept of change to the corporate worship experience first and foremost requires congregations to admit the need for change. I John 3:3 states that any person hoping for the return of Christ is constantly purifying himself. The act of purification is a continuous change. Paul writes about this striving on to perfection in his letter to the Philippians (3:12, 14):

I don’t mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me...I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. (NLT)

Just as the believers of the Old Testament offered continual sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins, the church is in need of this same purification for “everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard” (NLT). However, with Christ as the sacrifice, the believers of the New Testament have a differing angle with which to approach God. Christ has conquered the works of Satan (I John 3:8), repentance has led believers to a life “turned” from sin, and direct access to God allows the Almighty to

work within his creation once again. Just as the Law was intended to make perfect God's chosen people, the work of the Spirit is intended to perfect the saints. The desired outcome of the worship experience is purification of the church. This ties in closely with the previously discussed idea of God's holiness and the need for repentance, which by definition literally means "to turn away from sin".

However, the church is in danger of wearing a mask in its attempt to hide any glimpse of human weakness. This mask is labeled by the world as hypocrisy. In his book *UnChristian*, David Kinnaman addresses this issue with the idea that it should be okay to not be okay:

Many young adults view Christians as hypocrites, meaning we say one thing and mean another. The problem is not fundamentally hypocrisy. We're all hypocrites at some level. The problem is the air of moral superiority many of us carry around. We stop acknowledging imperfection in our lives. We forget where we came from and all God has done in our lives. I don't see in Jesus' teaching a call to fake moral superiority... In our faith community we say, "It's okay to not be okay." At the most basic level, we all share the human condition with all of its brokenness. And we have the hope that Jesus really can transform lives and redeem the future. (61)

This failure to acknowledge our imperfections contradicts the biblical idea of confessing our sins to one another so that we may be healed (James 5:16). One purpose of transparency in the church is an assemblage of believers dedicated together to the purification process, and to helping each other stay on track. James also continues reminding believers of the value in rescuing brethren who "wander from the truth" (v.19).

John reiterates the need for repentance reminding us that we struggle to remain in the light, while never forgetting that if we do sin we have Jesus Christ in our defense (I John 2:1). It seems that repentance and the purification process go hand in hand, making the need for change all the more necessary.

There is a danger in becoming stagnant in the life of a Christian. There is a very clear warning against becoming the church that is “lukewarm”, neither hot nor cold in its existence in its worship of the Living God (Revelation 3:16). Perhaps this struggle stems from, as James states it, “faith without deeds.” Similar to the previous chapter concerning God’s holiness and love, the Christian’s faith and deeds are terms dependent on each other. In the same way, the church without interlocking faith and deeds is dead. The term “growth” is used consistently today in connection with the life of a Christian, and in the same sense the worship experience produces “growth” in the church as a whole. The body of Christ is intended to move through the purification process together.

The church’s purification process will not be complete until Christ’s return. This is the ultimate completion of the “change” in the life of the individual Christian and in the body of Christ. The apostle Paul offers a word of encouragement to the Philippians concerning this matter of waiting for perfection:

Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus....But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring

everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. (Philippians 3:13-14, 20-21)

There is a stark contrast between the constant God and his ever-changing people, which highlights the dependent relationship that must exist between human and creator. The goal for which we strive is constant, never changing, and immovable, but never attainable by any human means, but rather by a supernatural working of the Holy Spirit.

You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him... So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. (Romans 8:9-10, 12-14 NLT)

Paul urges believers to allow the Spirit to move in their lives in order to conquer sin. In the same way, believers must allow God to change their lives during the worship experience.

The change wrought by the corporate worship experience is merely an extension of the change wrought by the personal worship experience, but essentially they are one and the same. Personal worship on a daily basis continues the purification of which Paul speaks to believers in hope of Christ's return (I John 3:3), and a major component of community worship is accountability and encouragement to believers pursuing "Christ-likeness". In the same manner as other aspects of the corporate worship experience, this facet of worship is only existent in a worshipper with an active personal worship life. Beginning with the admittance of a need for change, believers must allow the experience

and worship of God to shed light on our weaknesses and repair our brokenness. It would be a shame to leave our weekly worship experiences unchanged.

## Chapter 6

### Expectations for the Worship Experience

It is a common belief that those who expect success are much more likely to be successful than a pessimist who expects defeat. This, too, can be applied to the worship experience. What we expect affects ultimately what we receive from the experience. Relying on the trustworthy promises of God, we can assuredly enter into congregational worship expecting to not leave the same.

We are called in scripture to not only ask for needs but to ask in faith expecting that God will provide (James 1:6). The well known passage in John, which includes the analogy of God as the vine and believers as the branches, calls followers of Christ to remain in him along with his words and to ask whatever one wishes (John 15). It is declared that whatever is asked of God will be given to the followers who strive to bring glory to the Father. This same declaration applies to the worship experience. We are to enter worship expecting God to move in great ways. A lot depends on the attitude of the worshiper as to whether worship is something worthy of the One being worshipped. The “morals benefits of wisdom” passage in Proverbs gives reassurance to expecting because of God’s promises:

My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry out loud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth comes knowledge and understanding. He holds victory in store for the upright, he

is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones (Proverbs 2:1-8)

With the promise that God will give to his followers, one can confidently expect much both inwardly (personal) and outwardly (congregational) from the worship.

### **Personal expectations**

Although worship is not about personal gain, it is to be understood that there are healthy personal expectations from the corporate worship experience. For one to connect with God is to be expected on a regular basis, and is sparked by our own commitment to find him. This is the same experience spoken of earlier that brings about change in the believer's life.

The corporate worship experience is an ideal opportunity to express or communicate feelings to God, which obviously can range with each individual. For example, Christians can join together as a group to express thankfulness and praise through song concerning the death and resurrection of Christ. Additionally, believers can unite to express feelings of pain and suffering through experiences such as war or persecution with the use of the lament Psalm found in chapter 85:

You forgave the iniquity of your people; you covered all their sin. *Selah* You withdrew all your wrath; you turned from your hot anger. Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away your indignation toward us! Will you be angry with us forever? Show us your steadfast love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation (2-7).

It is ideal to offer multiple outlets of emotion to the church keeping in mind the uniqueness of each believer, hence the use of song, silence, dance, prayer, teachings, etc.

Some other examples of benefits of worship are the alienation from the world, a connection with God, and an ultimate peace and serenity to the burdens of the world. To a follower of Christ, life is about sharing in the sufferings of Christ, and peace comes only outside of the world. Of all people groups, the most peaceful should be the body of Christ focused on the Prince of Peace, and when that is not the case, this creates an unnecessary negative image of the church's worship focus.

Worship should be a time of finding not only personal direction and understanding but corporate direction and understanding. Each individual faces the decisions of life, and one should expect to find answers in worship. We are called to seek and we will find (Matthew 7:7), and we are commanded to seek for wisdom from the Lord who gives generously to all without fault (James 1:5).

These moments together in the church are also an opportunity to celebrate the joy of life in Christ and to grow in faith. Faith that is unwavering or can move mountains (Matthew 17:20) obviously is not an easily obtained commodity. One should expect to grow because of the receiving of the Word. This implies taking the word and applying it to the Christian life while avoiding becoming simple "hearers and not doers of the Word" (James 1:22).

### **Community Expectations**

Corporate worship is not only beneficial to the personal spiritual growth but also to the growth of the Christian community as a whole. As the body of Christ we are intended to grow and work together in harmony. Nothing brings believers closer together than being in the presence of God. This comes from a personal attitude of overcoming personal differences in order to worship collectively. One should expect a sense of community and belonging within the church. Interaction among believers is also important to promote encouragement, which is intended to promote accountability (Hebrews 3:13). This encouragement and interaction, in turn, builds a strong body of believers in both faith and application of that faith by growing in the knowledge of our Creator together.

### **Dangerous Expectations**

There are attitudes with which a worshipper may enter the service and be detrimental to the experience. The majority of these attitudes stem from a need to take from the worship experience a good feeling or happiness. Although there is unarguably a joy in worshipping the Creator, there is also a command to share in Christ's sufferings. We are called to rejoice in our sufferings (James 1:3), but that does not always produce a "happy" feeling. Rather, it is more reasonable to expect unrelentless hope that all things work together for those who love the Lord (Romans 8:28). Consequently, the worship experience may not always produce a "feel good" atmosphere, but rather sometimes an

atmosphere of conviction and call to difficult decisions and actions; but there is always hope.

Also, it becomes dangerous to expect to fulfill some kind of duty or obligation by attending and participating in the worship of the church. Worship must never become a duty or obligation, but, as discussed under the section defining worship, rather a natural response to the work of God in a life. Worshipers should avoid becoming the “whitewashed tombs” about which Jesus speaks (Matthew 23:27). This refers to individuals who are active religiously but have a dead personal relationship with the Father.

Achieving God’s forgiveness is also another dangerous expectation from the worship experience. Psalm 24 declares:

Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God his Savior. (3-5)

We are called to enter the presence of the holy one with clean hands and a pure heart, and we must not rely on the worship of the church to cleanse us. This is an area that relies on personal worship and preparation to prepare for the corporate worship. The only real dangers in expectations from the worship experience stem from self-centered attitudes.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, the success or effectiveness of the corporate worship experience is dependent foremost on the personal worship of its participants and then on an understanding of the purposes of congregational worship. In other words, when a believer's personal worship is nonexistent, nothing can be expected in the corporate worship experience. When congregations are confused or uncertain as to the purposes of Christian worship, there are likely to be evident misconstrued or twisted ideas associated with worship aspects. That is why it is so important for all believers to have a concept of worship, prepare for worship, participate in worship, focus on the God, celebrate and fear him, expect movement from the him, and be changed by worship experience on a personal level before applying this to the corporate worship experience.

The original statistics presented in the introduction revealed worshipper's lack of experiencing God's presence, a views of a distant impersonal God, and lack of a definition of worship. Recalling these statistics, hopefully this project has provided a foundation for an emphasis on church worship education. Further study can be found in the appendix on community worship in the lives of churches. The survey research hopefully offers a realistic first step toward grasping some aspects of the current state of congregational worship within the Christian church. This pertains to both a personal level and the congregation level. Any misunderstandings concerning worship must be addressed and dealt with for the sake of individuals and the body of Christ which against not even Hell itself can prevail (Matthew 16:18).

Churches should be encouraged to address the issue of defining worship, both historically and in relation to the contemporary church. Worship must first be emphasized

as a work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer, and then as the same Spirit at work in Christ's church. The importance of reverence and reaction should be an integral part of the worship experience. Any misunderstandings linking worship as "fun" or "just tradition" should be addressed as they appear to detract from the overall worship experience (see appendix C).

The church must emphasize the importance of preparation for worship by the congregation in order to maintain active participation throughout and a focus on God. Furthermore, a well-balanced experience of celebration and reverent fear in the presence of God should be sought. Without the presence of both characteristics God seems to become either "ungodly" or unreachable. All of these aspects must intertwine together to form a meaningful experience that brings about change in believers' lives. Those who leave the worship service changed appear to have experienced meaningful worship that can be applied outside of the church into everyday life (see appendix E).

Overall, when worship becomes God-centered, much can be expected for the benefit of the believers and the church, and this should be emphasized. My research points to the likeliness of a better worship experience when much is expected (see appendix D). This is not related to church growth, or other possible superficial benefits. Rather, these benefits pertain to a body of believers that experience the joy of truly being the 'spotless bride of Christ' cherished in biblical writings, and a group with divine direction and interaction.

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## Appendices (A-F)

### A Glimpse into Community Church Worship

#### A.

#### Survey and Population

A small group of participants were surveyed for the purposes of this project in order to offer a glimpse into the current worship experiences of varying denominations and varying age groups of believers within the church in a specific community. The survey appeared as follows.

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#### Worship Survey

Respond to the following questions with the answer that best reflects your perception of worship. All responses will remain anonymous.

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1.) Gender:

- Male
- Female

2.) Age Group:

- 12-14
- 15-17
- 18-21

3.) Do you attend a Sunday morning church service on a regular basis?

- Yes
- No

4.) How would you describe the musical worship style of your church? Check all that apply.

- Traditional hymns
- Contemporary Praise Choruses
- Gospel/ Bluegrass
- Blended Service
- Other

5.) Which of the following best reflects your situation? I have experienced God's presence in a Sunday morning worship service:

- within the last month
- within the last 12 months
- not within the past year
- never

6.) How often do you feel that you experience worship during a typical church service?

- |               |              |        |       |          |
|---------------|--------------|--------|-------|----------|
| Almost Always | Occasionally | Rarely | Never | Not Sure |
| 1             | 2            | 3      | 4     | 5        |

7.) How often do you perceive your congregation worshipping together?

- |               |              |        |       |          |
|---------------|--------------|--------|-------|----------|
| Almost Always | Occasionally | Rarely | Never | Not Sure |
| 1             | 2            | 3      | 4     | 5        |

8.) How important is worship to your church?

- |      |          |        |            |          |
|------|----------|--------|------------|----------|
| Very | Moderate | Little | Not at all | Not Sure |
| 1    | 2        | 3      | 4          | 5        |

9.) Briefly define worship.

10.) Do you feel you have an adequate understanding of worship?

- Yes
- No

11.) Does worship affect your daily life? How so?

**Answer the following questions in response to your most recently attended church worship service.**

12.) Were you prepared for worship before the service?

- I prepared myself for worship before the service by some means.
- I do not feel as if I am responsible for preparing myself for worship.
- I attended the service without a particular preparation.
- I am not sure how to prepare for the worship service.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

13.) Respond to the following statements by circling the number that best reflects your response:

	Completely	For the most part	Somewhat	Not at all	Not sure
a. I was engaged in the worship service.	1	2	3	4	5
b. I was able to focus on God during the service.	1	2	3	4	5
c. The service lead me to a place of repentance.	1	2	3	4	5
d. The service lead me to a place of the celebration of God's greatness.	1	2	3	4	5
e. This was an effective opportunity for me to worship.	1	2	3	4	5
f. God seemed real to me.	1	2	3	4	5

14.) What were your **expectations** of personal outcome coming into the service? Please rank by circling the following choices on a scale of one to five, with one being a choice you would not expect from a typical service to five being a choice you would expect going into every service.

	Not important at all (I didn't expect this)			Very important (I expected this)	
a. Connection with God	1	2	3	4	5

b. Peace, serenity	1	2	3	4	5
c. Understanding or personal direction	1	2	3	4	5
d. To assure or obtain salvation	1	2	3	4	5
e. Express or communicate feelings to God	1	2	3	4	5
f. Sense of community or belonging	1	2	3	4	5
g. To become a better person or have a better life	1	2	3	4	5
h. Experiencing God's presence, joy, and celebration	1	2	3	4	5
i. Achieving God's forgiveness	1	2	3	4	5
j. Duty or obligation	1	2	3	4	5
k. Reinforce or grow in faith	1	2	3	4	5
l. Feel good or happy	1	2	3	4	5
m. Become stronger, gain encouragement	1	2	3	4	5
n. Interact with other Christians	1	2	3	4	5
o. Gain knowledge about God	1	2	3	4	5
p. Inspiration	1	2	3	4	5

16.) What were the highlights of the worship service?

17.) What were the low points of the worship service?

18.) Were you changed by the worship experience?

- Yes
- No

19.) If so, how were you changed?

---

A total of 75 church attendees participated in the worship survey from a rural area. Fifty-six percent of participants marked gender as female, leaving forty-four percent marking gender as male. Age group ranges included 13-15, 14-16, 17-18, 20-21, and 22 years and older, with participants averaging towards the upper age levels. Other unrelated, purely demographic questions asked included questions about the musical styles of the churches, perceptions of community worship, and the low points and highlights of worship services.

Considering the close proximity geographically of the churches used in the research, it is understandable that in most responses there is no significant deviation between churches. Comparing and contrasting churches was not possible. The most prominent example of the similarities concerns the musical styles of the surveyed churches. A vast majority (59) of those surveyed responded that their church used a traditional style of worship, while a third of participants responded with contemporary (27) or blended worship (25). A smaller group responded with the use of gospel music (12).

An impressively high number of participants responded to perceiving their congregations as worshipping together as a community. With the highest possible response being a 1 (almost always) and the lowest response being a 5(not sure), the mean

score of all churches was a 1.44 placing the response midway between almost always and occasionally. It would seem surveyor participants most likely attend a church where they feel the reality of community worship, which would account for the high score by most individuals, but in light of the age groups sampled, this is not always true in younger church goers who usually attend church together as a family. However, personal observations reveal it is common in these area churches surveyed for youth to attend church without family or parents.

The questions concerning the low points and highlights of the worship service reveal potential helpful insights into the structure of modern day worship. Low points can be defined as moments that broke the worship focus, seemed irrelevant to the service, or were simply not an enjoyable addition to the gathering. Responses to low points in particular services resulted in the following responses:

- Music
- Announcements, flow of the service
- Technical problems
- Sermon
- Entire service, all aspects
- Offering
- Distractions from other obligations in the service
- Lack of participation

This is potentially valuable knowledge to the church community in providing worship that is beneficial to its participants. By observing this list, churches can focus on different elements in the worship to meet the needs of the people of that church. It would be

beneficial to allow the church to voice its concerns about low points in a church's service to promote improvement.

## **B.**

### **Measuring the Worship Experience**

The meat of this research lies in the relationships between the ideal worship experience and factors that could potentially affect that experience. These main factors are defining worship, preparing for worship, participation in the service, focusing on God, both celebrating the greatness of God and fearing his presence, expectations from the service, and being changed by the worship experience. The first step in this study required settling on a set of questions. A total of six questions were included in the section used to determine the worship experience level. For each of the questions, a number scale from one to five was used to find the level of experience of each particular statement. The number scale legend is as follows.

Table 1:1 Worship Response Key

<b>Worship Response</b>	<b>Equivalent</b>
1	Completely
2	For the most part
3	Somewhat
4	Not at all
5	Not Sure

The total number from these responses was added and then divided by the number of statements to provide a number value for the worship experience. The statements measured were as follows:

**I was engaged in the worship service.** As discussed in an earlier chapter, the overall success of the worship experience lies in the participation of the worshippers.

**I was able to focus on God during the service.** This focus on God removes focus on self and is one component of church worship that is a necessity of worship.

**The service led me to a place of repentance.** Being in the presence of a holy God leads to conviction and requires a reaction in the individual members of the body of Christ.

One must choose to admit and repent of this sin.

**The service led me to celebrate God's greatness.** Part of the worship of the church is to remember together the mighty acts of God of past, celebrate those of the present, and give thanks for those to come.

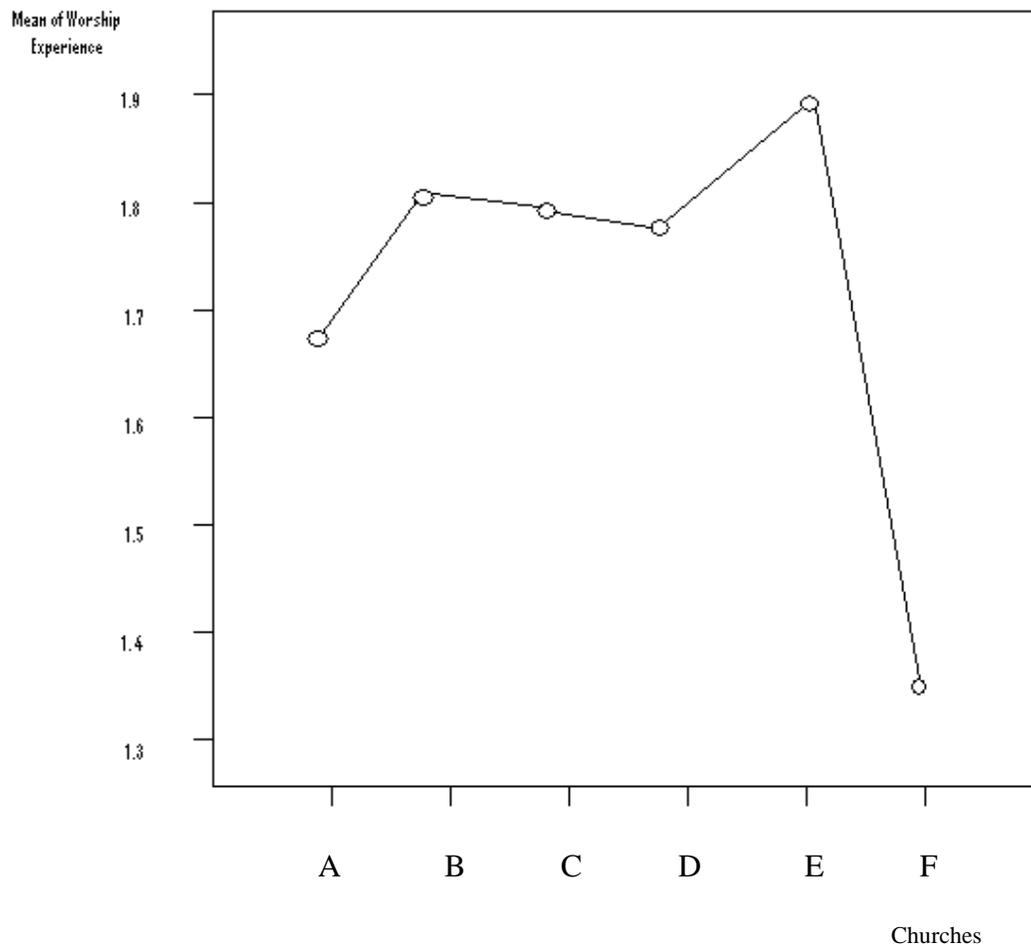
**This was an effective opportunity to worship.** The responses to this question were varied depending on individual perceptions. This question hones in on the personal worship achieved during the corporate experience. However, it was never intended to measure the effectiveness of a church's order or presentation of the worship service.

**God seemed real to me.** This statement, though short, speaks volumes about the worship of a particular church as a whole. It is easy to question the presence of God in the midst of a dead congregation or dead (lukewarm) worship. However, God seems real, alive, and at work in the midst of his worshipping people.

Table 1:1 shows the mean worship experience score as determined by these six questions.

The churches are anonymously labeled as churches A, B, C, D, E, and F and represent input from the majority of the Christian denominations in a particular area.

Table 1:1 Mean Worship Experience by Church



Worship experience levels, as measured for the purposes of this project, are fairly homogeneous among churches in this particular area. This can be expected among churches located in such close proximity to one another.

### **C. Definition of Worship/ Worship Experience**

Results given show an interesting relationship between the worship experience (defined earlier) and an individual's personal definition of worship. Of the 75 participants included in this study, only 64 gave an answer to this part of the survey. The remaining eleven who chose not to provide an answer for this section of the survey, it can be

assumed that these individual either chose not to write a response or were unable to give a definition of worship. As for the responses, table 1:2 gives a summary of responses and the mean score of the worship experience for each grouped response.

Table 1:2 Definitions of Worship

<b>Definition of Worship</b>	<b>Mean Score of Worship Experience</b>
Learning More about God or Jesus	1.50
Praising God, honoring, celebrating	1.70
Connecting, communicating, and focusing on God	1.85
Acknowledging God for who he is	1.79
Response to God with a lifestyle	1.62
Experiencing God, his presence	1.61
Leading the Lost to Salvation	1.17
Fun	3.33
The traditional church experience of song, prayer, word, praise, preaching, service, etc.	2.25
Meaningful Experience	1.83

The only responses that show a significant deviation from the rest include defining worship as fun, which was actually a popular answer among young youth. The resulting worship mean score, which translates to a less meaningful worship experience, is probably due to the fact that congregational worship is not always entertaining and Christian worship as part of life is challenging. Those who define worship as the traditional church experience of song, prayer, word, praise, preaching, service, etc. also appear to be moving away from a satisfactory worship experience within the congregation. The individuals that appear to be taking the most from the worship experience are those who define worship as leading the lost to salvation and learning

more about Jesus. The reason as to why these responses result in a better mean score of worship experience is hard to pinpoint, and would require larger samples and more questions concerning individual spiritual maturity levels.

#### **D. Expectations/ Worship Experience**

Further study also reveals a correlation between the expectations of personal outcome and the worship experience of individuals studied. For the responses to expectations of personal outcome from the worship experience, individuals were given a number scale to rate the importance of particular expected outcomes.

Table 1:3 Expected Outcomes Response Key

<b>Not important at all (I didn't expect this)</b>				<b>Very important (I expected this)</b>
1	2	3	4	5

The possible expectations listed included:

- Connection with God
- Peace, serenity
- Understanding or personal direction
- To assure or obtain salvation
- Express or communicate feelings to God
- Sense of community or belonging
- To become a better person or have a better life
- Experiencing God's presence, joy, celebration
- Achieving God's forgiveness
- Duty or obligation

- Reinforce or grow in faith
- Feel good or happy
- Become stronger or gain encouragement
- Interact with other Christians
- Gain knowledge about God
- Inspiration

The correlation between the expectations and worship experience were measured and are recorded in tables 1:4-1:21. The number on the left of each table indicates the individuals rating of importance as defined by Table 1:3 of a particular expectation, and the number on the right indicates the mean value of the worship experience as defined earlier. Any mean score close to one indicates a better worship experience, as defined by the worship experience score, and a number further away from one indicates a lower worship level score.

Table 1:4

<b>Connection with God</b>	<b>Mean Value of Worship Experience</b>
2	2.42
3	2.33
4	2.16
5	1.59
Total	1.75

Table 1:5

<b>Peace, serenity</b>	<b>Mean Value of Worship Experience</b>
1	3.00
2	1.83
3	2.10
4	1.90
5	1.55
Total	1.75

Table 1:6

<b>Understanding or Personal Direction Response</b>	<b>Mean Value of Worship Experience</b>
3	2.10
4	1.98
5	1.51
Total	1.75

Table 1:7

<b>To assure or obtain salvation response</b>	<b>Mean Value of Worship Experience</b>
1	1.93
2	2.08
3	2.02
4	1.94
5	1.58
Total	1.77

Table 1:8

<b>Express or communicate feelings to God response</b>	<b>Mean Value of Worship Experience</b>
2	2.17
3	2.21
4	1.86
5	1.67
Total	1.75

Table 1:9

<b>Sense of community or belonging response</b>	<b>Mean Value of Worship Experience</b>
2	1.92
3	2.05
4	1.55
5	1.76
Total	1.75

Table 1:10

<b>To become a better person or have a better life response</b>	<b>Mean Value of Worship Experience</b>
2	2.33
3	2.17
4	1.80
5	1.62
Total	1.75

Table 1:11

<b>Experiencing God's presence, joy, celebration response</b>	<b>Mean Value of Worship Experience</b>
1	2.00
2	2.33
3	2.39
4	1.98
5	1.64
Total	1.75

Table 1:12

<b>Achieving God's forgiveness response</b>	<b>Mean Value of Worship Experience</b>
1	1.56
2	2.17
3	2.50
4	2.11
5	1.55
Total	1.75

Table 1:13

<b>Duty or obligation response</b>	<b>Mean Value of Worship Experience</b>
1	1.81
2	1.81
3	1.85
4	1.82
5	1.63
Total	1.75

Table 1:17

<b>Become stronger, gain encouragement response</b>	<b>Mean Value of Worship Experience</b>
2	2.67
3	1.93
4	1.94
5	1.57
Total	1.75

Table 1:15

<b>Reinforce or grow in faith response</b>	<b>Mean Value of Worship Experience</b>
2	2.33
3	2.33
4	2.01
5	1.58
Total	1.75

Table 1:18

<b>Interact with other Christians response</b>	<b>Mean Value of Worship Experience</b>
1	1.92
3	2.23
4	1.84
5	1.67
Total	1.75

Table 1:16

<b>Feel good or happy response</b>	<b>Mean Value or Worship Experience</b>
1	1.33
2	2.14
3	1.90
4	1.85
5	1.55
Total	1.75

Table 1:20

<b>Gain knowledge about God response</b>	<b>Mean Value of Worship Experience</b>
2	2.33
3	1.42
4	2.04
5	1.67
Total	1.75

Table 1:21

<b>Inspiration Response</b>	<b>Mean Value of Worship Experience</b>
2	2.67
3	1.81
4	1.81
5	1.69
Total	1.75

Tables 1:14-1:21 share one common characteristic. In a majority of these responses, the higher the expectations of the worship outcomes result in a higher worship value in worship experience. However, concerning the expected outcomes of assuring or obtaining salvation, there are higher worship experiences means for both ends of the spectrum. It appears that there is no correlation between this expected outcome and the worship experience meaning that it may have no impact on the worshipper. As for those who did not expect to feel good or happy, their mean worship experience was higher than those who marked it as an expectation. It seems that worshippers who do not expect happiness as an outcome leave with a better worship experience.

## **E.**

### **Worship Affects Daily Life/ Worship Experience**

Those surveyed were asked whether the worship experience from a previous Sunday changed their lives. Worshippers then responded with a simple yes or no response. For research analyzation purposes the responses were coded 1 for yes and 2 for no. Of the responses collected, the results were then compared with the individuals total worship experience score. This total worship experience was calculated by adding together the total number value of the responses with six being the lowest possible score (meaning a complete worship experience) and twenty being the lowest score recorded (meaning a sometimes successful worship experience). The results are recorded in the table below.

Table 1:19 : Worship Experience Score in Relation to Change from Experience

<b>Total Worship Experience Score</b>	<b>Mean Score to question: Were you changed by the worship experience?</b>
6	1.17
7	1.13
8	1.29
9	1.22
10	1.25
11	1.80
12	1.40
13	1.17
14	2.00
15	2.00
16	2.00
17	2.00
18	2.00
19	1.00
20	2.00
Total	1.39

Mean scores closer to one signify an individual who was changed by the worship experience. Scores closer to two signify an individual who was not changed by the worship experience. Statistically there is significance to the responses given. There appears to be a strong correlation between the worship experience and whether an individual was changed by the worship experience. Those who felt changed by the worship experience scored a higher worship experience score as opposed to those not changed by the experience.

It is impossible to determine from this data which is the dependent variable. It seems likely that worshippers who experienced a significant change from a particular worship experience would mark positive responses to questions concerning that worship

experience. From this collected data, it would seem that a positive, effective worship opportunity would result in changing the individual worshipper.

## F.

### Preparation/ Worship Experience

Church goers were also asked about their preparation or lack thereof for the worship service. Survey participants who responded with a one were individuals who prepared themselves for worship by some means but did not specify this means. Individuals who responded with a two did not feel as if they were responsible for preparing for worship. Those who marked a three came unprepared to the service. These responses were then studied in relationship to the total worship score. The results were then organized as below for easy reference.

Table 1:20 : Worship Experience Score in Relation to Preparation

<b>Total Worship Score</b>	<b>Mean Score of Preparation Responses</b>
6	1.50
7	1.25
8	1.57
9	1.89
10	1.88
11	1.80
12	1.80
13	3.00
14	2.00
15	1.00
16	2.00
18	3.00
20	1.00
Total:	1.81

Analyzing tests show there is statistically no significant relationship between the two factors. Perhaps there is no relationship between the preparation and worship experience. Further tests with more participants from diverse backgrounds would be essential in assessing this as a more reliable theory.