

Seed's Philosophy of Corporate Worship

What is worship?

Worship Defined

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for worship meant “to serve”. Contrary to today’s use of the word, worship is not only an action, a time or a place, but also a lifestyle. It means to live one’s life to the glory of God in everything you do (I Cor. 10:31). Worship isn’t as much what we do, but the heart motivation behind it. However, there are specific times where worship is a direct act of praise, thanksgiving, confession, or prayer to our God.

Worship is a Lifestyle *and* an Event

In the context of the local church community, we need to distinguish between a lifestyle of worship every believer is to seek to live, and a planned worship service during the weekly gathering of the local church community. Scripture does speak of worship as being specific times of praise, thanksgiving, confession, repentance, and prayer to God (Psalm 29:2; Rev. 15:4). Corporate worship is a planned event with the intention of creating an environment that fosters true worship among believers and reveals to outsiders the God that we worship. It is saying what is true about God and ourselves and responding to His work in our lives. In the American Christian church, “worship” typically refers to the singing portion of the service. However, this is too narrow in scope. There are many elements in corporate worship such as the preaching of Scriptures, the administration of the elements of the Lord’s Table, corporate prayer, pre-written liturgy, and personal testimonies of others. Another important part of corporate worship is the singing of songs to God and about God. From the oldest examples of corporate worship among God’s people, music has played a vital role in fostering a worshipful environment by communicating truth and emotion into the hearts of people. The music portion of the service is intended to teach the Bible, to praise and worship God, to foster a sense of community in the congregation, and to allow musicians to hone their craft to the glory of God.

Worship: Secular or Sacred?

In the contemporary church there are many battles over worship music styles as well as over who can participate and to what extent in corporate worship. In the New Covenant under Jesus, there is no distinction made between the secular and sacred. For the Christian, all of life is sacred. Christians are not to live one way at “sacred” church and a different way at their “secular” job. In the same way, art (including music) is not secular or sacred. Some songs may be more or less appropriate for a gathering. However, truth is truth whether it is written by a Christian or a non-Christian. So although most songs that are sung at church are written by Christians, there are times in which songs speak truth about God or human nature which are not overtly Christian. Finally, worship of God itself is not strictly relegated to Christians. Although only Christians can truly worship from their heart, all the world is commanded to acknowledge God as Lord and Savior

(Ps. 96:9). One day when Christ comes back, all the world will bow before him as Lord whether they are followers of Christ or of the devil (Rev. 15:4). Although Seed does not allow non-believers to hold a deacon position in worship, we do allow non-Christians to participate in leading songs to God and about God. If musicians are willing to acknowledge truth about God with us, we welcome them in the service with the hopes that their hearts will fully follow one day.

Guidelines for Corporate Worship

Because of the importance of music to the corporate worship experience, the following philosophy is being put in place to support a qualitative standard by which all band leaders and instrumentalists can lead corporate worship. This philosophy is not intended to stifle creativity or musical expression. It is simply a list of guidelines that frees musicians to practice their craft, while bringing basic order to the process. So the following are a list of the general guidelines for all music played at Seed corporate gatherings.

1. Seed music is performed with skill.

God has blessed Seed Church with many skilled musicians over the years. We want to continue to maintain excellence without perfectionism. On one hand the musicians should feel they are in an environment that allows them to experiment and improve their craft without a feeling of continual criticism or unmet expectations. On the other hand the individuals or bands should play and sing to the best of their ability with the time they have to practice because they are doing it for the God. We shouldn't bring God the scraps of our talents and gifts, but the best that we have. A time may come in which there are auditions for various bands in order to maintain the highest quality.

2. Seed music is balanced.

It is very easy for church music to simply form around one persons style or perspective and soon becomes imbalanced toward one extreme or another. It is important to note that balance does not refer to one particular weekly set, but an overarching perspective.

- **Familiar/Unfamiliar.** New songs are great, but too many new songs on a given week can be overwhelming. People like new songs, but they also like to sing songs they already know and feel.
- **Ancient/Contemporary.** Many good Christian songs and lyrics have been written in the past as well as the present. We would like to see a mix of old hymns, modern worship songs, as well as songs written by seed musicians.
- **Imminent/Transcendent.** Imminent songs are about a God that is near and are often more personal and experiential. Often these songs are ones of worship and praise or spoken first person to God. An example of this type of song might be "What a friend we have in Jesus." Transcendent songs are about a God who is distant. He is holy, justice, and even displays wrath. God loves us but it is inaccurate to portray God as our drinking buddy, or boyfriend. Songs need to have both the intimate connection to God, as well as his sacred uniqueness and separation from us. An example of a transcendent song would be "Spectacle".

- **Head/Heart.** Head songs are intended to teach the Bible or theology. They are intended to teach or affirm and focus on the intellect. Heart songs are more about the experience of God, personal life issues, or simple praise and worship.
- **Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.** Seed Church is Trinitarian in its theology and teaching. This simply means we value all persons of the Godhead and believe all are to be sung about or sung to appropriately.
- **Orientation/Disorientation/New Orientation.** The Psalms are the greatest example we have of worship music in Scripture. What we find is a diverse group of songs given to the congregation which cover different life experiences in knowing and understanding God. Psalms of orientation are songs of declaration about God or about truth. Psalms of disorientation are songs about perplexity, confusion, anxiety, fear, or even frustration with God. Psalms of new orientation are songs of thankfulness for God's rescue and a new way of seeing life.
 - Songs of Orientation – Hymns, Wisdom, Liturgy
 - Songs of Disorientation – Lament, Complaint, Imprecation
 - Songs of New Orientation – Thanksgiving, Praise, Confession

3. Seed music is Biblically and theologically accurate.

This means that the words that are being sung are accurate concerning God, how we relate to God, and how we are to live. Some songs aren't explicitly Christian but can convey accurately truth about God or the human condition. For example, songs may speak of human brokenness, the need for a Savior, or any number of themes that could be accurate and good even if not explicitly Christian. On the flip side there are many explicitly Christians songs with lyrics that don't portray God or humans accurately and shouldn't be sung. The main point is that lyrics are important in corporate worship so the musician needs to understand the lyrics they are singing and make sure they are good. There are many songs that have nice tunes which don't convey accurate truth about God or humanity. It is the role of the musician to grow in their own theological understanding in order to best pick out songs that teach and promote proper truth. Also, it may be appropriate at times to sing songs apart from congregational participation to setup a theological concept for a sermon or corporate experience.

4. Seed music is creative.

We want to create an environment among the bands that allows for creativity. Many Seed-exclusive songs have been developed over the years and we should seek to develop more. Not everyone can write songs, and not all songs written are of good enough quality to be sung but there are many other creative ways musicians can approach music or a service that uses their creativity. Experimentation is welcome among the artists who perform.