



# When Style

## Disrupts Worship

By Waldo Malan

There are times when style – in the sense of how to do things – can interfere with our worship of God. In order to better explain this statement I will need to make some basic assumptions and share my understanding of some concepts first.

Firstly, God requires all humans to worship Him – He first makes this public statement when handing down the Commandments to Moses: "I am God, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of a life of slavery. No other gods, only me. No carved gods of any size, shape, or form of anything whatever, whether of things that fly or walk or swim. Don't bow down to them and don't serve them because I am God, your God, and I'm a most jealous God" (Exodus 20:1-6 MSG). Jesus quotes Deuteronomy when replying to Satan,

"Worship the Lord your God, and only him. Serve him with absolute single-heartedness" (Luke 4:10 MSG). Perhaps it would do us well to remind ourselves of why we were created in the first place. Essentially we were created for fellowship, and to have a meaningful relationship with God, our Creator.

We know that God is love (1 John 4:8). This simply means that God cannot be "in" or "out" of love, but that He "is" love. In our limited human understanding of love, even we have to agree that love cannot exist singularly on its own island! By this I mean that for love to be love, it must have at least two parties to participate. Love must always have a giver as well as a recipient. So when God creates man in His own image, He really made humans to "be love," and therefore create recipients for His

love. But love needs to be reciprocal, therefore we can also say God created us to be givers of love as well. And in this beautiful exchange of giving and receiving love we find the purpose of our creation.

I like to think of my creative purpose, this giving and receiving of love, simply as worship. When I hear God say that I must worship only Him, I don't really see that as a commandment but rather as a promise to fulfil my destiny. Throughout the history of mankind we find thousands of expressions of worship, unique to each person that God created. Adam worshipped God by giving new names to the animals, birds and flowers God created. Noah worshipped God by building a boat, Abraham by offering his son as a sacrifice, Gideon by fighting battles, David by writing poetry and



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singing songs, and the list goes on. What is interesting is that all people (and yes, that includes you and me) have unique ways in which we worship God. Unique people have unique worship.

Every human is unique, ranging from physical to spiritual features. We learn that God takes the time to individually weave every human together while in the womb (Psalm 139) – we are completely “hand-made” items, each one uniquely crafted! We have our own unique set of fingerprints, palm print, iris and voice. Let me focus briefly on the human voice. A voice biometric or “voice print,” is as unique to an individual as a palm or fingerprint, which essentially says that no two voices are similar. In fact, many security verification systems now use voice biometrics as standard procedure. What I find amazing is that it means I have a song to sing that only I can sing! So when David encourages me to “sing a new song to the Lord” (Psalm 96:1), that is a song only I can perform! A unique song for a unique God!

All parents will bear me out that when their children were born, they were born the “complete package.” As parents we cannot add or subtract anything from that package, but rather with the help, wisdom and grace of God we can only hone, focus, sharpen and steer those personalities into the people God made them to be.

The reason for this brief preamble is really only to say that our worship defines our relation-

ship with God, or simply that our worship is our relationship. We can then all agree that worship cannot be an event but rather that it is a lifestyle. Therefore we cannot schedule sessions of worship (to be alternated with sessions where we don’t worship) any more than we can schedule sessions of breathing. A short while after we stop to breathe we will also cease to exist... similarly a short while after we stop to worship we cease our relationship with God.

The strange peculiarity of the human race is that we try to organize and rationalize everything around us. Perhaps it is because we are so prone to comfort zones? Just look at the variety of magazines on sale from fashion to homes, recipes to cars, and so on, all “selling” the concept of what is “in” and what is “out”. Unfortunately we have allowed our conformity of general perceptions about what constitutes right/wrong living into our worship. In general the Church has contributed into cementing in place the perception that worship is music, and therefore to be used as an “event.” Let me explain. Most Christian congregations have meetings made up of prayer times, the teaching of the Bible and singing of songs. More often than not the musical portion of the meeting is referred to as ‘worship,’ implying that the two are mutually exclusive. Flowing out from this perception we will then make all wrong kinds of assumption related to style. Some will claim that worship can only be “real” or “right” when a pipe organ is used, others will claim that the use of a drum kit in church is “wrong”,

that only hymns can be used, or that we should be “with the times” and only use music found on the top-sellers on iTunes.

By stylizing our expression of music, and by thinking worship is only expressed through music, we deny ourselves a more meaningful relationship with God. Our worship extends far beyond music, and certainly also far beyond the style. Truth is, we can use any style of music as an expression of worship, and we can use any music as a means of communicating our love to God. However, it cannot, and should not stop there. We worship God by looking after the widows and the poor, we express our love of God in our relationships with all people, and in essence we express our worship simply by giving to others. We give our time, energy and resources to all so that they may be exposed to “God is love.” Often we can be so narrow-minded in our approach to an infinitely creative God that we “disrupt” our own worship. We are uniquely crafted to offer God a unique relationship. It is precisely our uniqueness that defines our worship.

Let us not hinder our relationship by wasting our efforts in admonishing others in the manner they choose to worship, reprimanding them for their choices of music or even how they choose to teach others the Word of God. Let us rather focus on the gifts God placed within us, and practice those as an expression of our worship. God is interested in the big picture of our lives, and will ask only one question the day we arrive at His throne: Did you love?