

Worship Team Training - Archives



About the Author: Branon Dempsey is the Clinic Director and founder of [Worship Team Training](http://www.worshipteamtraining.com) – For His Music Clinics: a ministry for local church worship ministries. Branon is a Worship Leader, Clinician and CCLI, BMI Singer/Song Writer in Cypress, TX. He is also a Managing Editor and Contributing writer in the Praise and Worship Arena involving national music and publication companies. Visit Branon and Sign-up for a Newsletter on www.worshipteamtraining.com or email him at branon@worshipteamtraining.com

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Feb ARCHIVED ARTICLES

2.28.08

So Was Your Starbucks Coffee Any Better Today?

So was your coffee any better today? If you missed the blog yesterday, we were discussing about the news of Starbucks and Florida (read yesterday's blog below 2.27.08).

Is change really better? You may agree, sometimes the changes that we make, will either have heavy or little impact. I'm sure in your experience, you have made necessary changes in your Ministry. A range of responses from people can result in excitement and motivation, to conflict, apathy or confusion. In those cases, the latter seems to be the majority. Reason? The word "change" is the most feared word in the Church. Church members are least likely to change or see the need to change because of the old standard philosophy: "if it ain't broke, don't fix it." But what we do when it finally breaks? Most of the time, we spend much energy and resources to get things back the way they were. The funny thing is when we get back to whatever it was before, it's still not the same. It never is. No matter how much WD-40, duct tape and what ever you can throw at the mess, it doesn't change; in the end, all we are left with is a big ball of oily gray tape.

Now, I'm not going to beat the horse on this topic of change – just a few pats. Each one of us has been through enough situations to find the effective or ineffective outcomes. What I have learned over the years, is that change only sticks by a couple of categories: the leadership and your people. Never should the change be about you: what you can see, vision or strategize; it needs to be more about the people you're leading. So, the two categories: leadership and people. In essence, it's the upper leadership, which would be your senior pastor or pastoral staff. If there's no support, your boat it won't float. We can spend an insurmountable amount of energy and time only to find that if the leadership holds little value in our idea, it will be less likely to be supported. What do you do? Follow the senior pastor's vision. That is the voice of the local church that the congregation follows. No matter how great your idea may be, if it is not in line with the senior pastor – it will erode. Battling for support will only cause conflict and division among staff. The same is true with your church members. They too, need to see your perspective inline with the churchwide vision and they must find that vision believable. If

ownership is absent, then you'll notice that your idea will have little gravitational pull. The most beautiful case is when your vision is in line with the senior pastor's and church's vision. In other words, having the senior pastor's stamp of approval will help form a validation and cause for people to follow.

I spoke to a new friend yesterday on the east coast, who is interested in making changes in ministry planning and strategy within his worship ministry. He seemed very excited about what God may have in store for his team. My hope for him is that his zeal sky-rockets as he wins support among the church. It is far too easy to be fired up initially and only to go down in flames later. This young man has a huge potential for his positive energy to spread like wildfire as others in his team catch the vision. If you do not believe in your vision or idea, no one else will either. Rally support by inviting others to buy into the idea. Once people agree with your reason and cause, they are more likely to show support. If they do not agree with your idea, make it a learning opportunity to understand. As you listen to people's input you will have a stronger sense to rectify weaknesses and close the loopholes.

In the end, what your idea/change produces, it will ultimately affirm the vision you set forth. As a byproduct, your people will also be affirmed that it was the right decision. Credibility and trust will be your cornerstone. Even if your idea did not turn out to be the best decision and you were quick to change its course, then you have saved both the sinking ship and any casualties. You may be in a position right now, where you are evaluating the current progress of your recent changes. Does it feel good? Does it hurt? Is it too early to tell? Change does take time. Going back to the story of Starbucks: does the coffee taste any better today than yesterday? Probably not. But is there change? Absolutely. Where? In the process. Some of you may know what happened in the Starbucks meeting, you can read about it here on this blog: [starbucks gossip](#). More than anything, you'll find that the meeting was to draw media and marketing attention. And it worked. The other half, the company did focus on their quality of drinks and customer service care. All in all, it seems that they are more interested in servicing and caring for the customer. Again, when you spend time paying attention to people, they will experience something greater than the change itself: your care and interest for them.

What has been your biggest change this week or month? How has it affect your people? Drop me a line here at the clinic's website, I'd love to hear from you here: branon@forhismusic.com.
– c-ya soon!

2.27.08

Three Hours for Starbucks, 3 Million for Florida.

If you read in the news yesterday Starbucks to close down for three hours to revamp and re-energize training for their employees. Also, you may have heard about the power outage in Florida that affected 3 million people between the cities of Miami and Fort Lauderdale and the keys (maybe this was you). You may be aware of this site, we also

have been down for a while due to upgrading of systems. Inconveniences. Whether if it is a lack of service at a coffee shop, and electrical disconnect or some other feature that you depend on daily. What if churches closed down for three hours on Sunday morning? What if all the power went out during a Sunday service? What if church leaders and pastors do show up for worship? Would things continue? It is not comforting to imagine these interruptions to happen on any day during the week, especially during a worship service. Inevitably, interruptions and disconnects will happen. The question is: who/what is our focus that matters most?

You've seen it too, power has gone in your church, technical problems have risen and or a staff person or pastor was absent on Sunday morning. Or maybe the coffee machine wasn't working that day. I remember having one of those days. Got up early Sunday morning just to find out that my beginnings of coffee, breakfast and daily news was not going my way. Now the story that I'm about to tell you gets more interesting. You may have found yourself in the familiar situation, this is a true story. Because my morning was a working out so well, I decided to leave early to church and get a head start on the day. I arrived at church approximately 6:45 a.m. (this may be too early!). Whatever. I rolled in with my gear, guitars and cases strapped to my back and greeted our maintenance man, who arrived just before me. We both walked into the main worship center, only to find that none of the chairs were set up from yesterday's crew. We were in need of 600 chairs to be ready for two services. As we looked around the large worship center, all we could see was bare floor. The band and the audio crew had not even arrived yet. We were already off to a rocky start, plus we had set-up and sound check looming. By this time, I had already forgotten about the mishap morning that happened at home. What were we to do? The only thing we could do you: roll up your sleeves and get to work.

We were un-stacking chairs, just as fast as the sweat beads were rolling down from our fore heads. By this time it was 7:15 and the band was already rolling in. The bass player and the drummer (sounds like the beginning of a great joke), no joke, they were un-stacking chairs with me as well as the audio crew who showed up a few minutes later. Volunteers of the church finally started arriving and by this point we were 3/4ths finished. Unfortunately, this has severely cut into our set up in sound check time. In other words, we were 30 minutes behind and a music service runthrough was creeping around the corner. Needless to say, the run-through worked out, we performed a very brief sound check and spot checked each tune. All seemed to go okay at this point.

This was around the advent Christmas season. We were doing some Christmas carols. One problem, it was not smelling like Christmas, but rather smelling like the burning of fire (I'm not talking about chestnuts.) The backstage was filled with an electrical odor. Service began – yikes! We could not understand where the smell was coming from and why. We dared not to make an announcement to the congregation in concern of a panic. During the worship, we walked around the entire building only to find nothing. I had to finally get back on stage to lead the final set. During this time, I can still smell the cinge of wires and was expecting a speaker or something else to blow. On another note, I also noticed that the lyric projection was slightly off from the song. Did I mention that some

of the singers were also off as well? For a split second, I had to quickly figure out how to get the singers and the congregation back on the right section. Sure enough, as I waited for the band to complete the next four measures, I was able to get the singers and congregation easily back on track. My mind shifted back to the burning smell on stage. I thought: could this get any worse? Yes, it can always get worse.

After we ended the song, I quickly slipped back behind stage to locate the smell. After 10 minutes of searching with some volunteers, we were still dumbfounded of the problem, and as a last resort we called for the volunteer fire department. They responded in a matter of three minutes only to find the source of the problem: a strand of Christmas lights were buried beneath a pile of cloth and stage decorations. The congregation had no idea of the hap except for those of us on and behind stage. Talk about inconveniences! But that wasn't all. Yes, there was more. Twnty-five minutes later during communion, the entire building's power went out, bringing down all lighting, AV system and instruments. It was a great thing that we had candles burning, which saved the room from going pitch black. Again, what were we to do? The singers briefly stop singing just to take note of what was happening. The band however, continued to play (good musician, good). I heard a whisper for my production leader, calling out to me saying: Branon - keep playing, keep singing. Then the strangest thing occurred.

I was leading from piano, and noticed that the congregation continued to sing without any interruption. All you heard was a very low volume and under rhythm from the hi-hat, a quiet strum from the acoustic guitar and a soft texture being played from the piano. Every voice in the room was singing, it was the sound of an ocean of voices, swelling like waves that were crashing over and over. In that moment, we worshiped. Regardless of the power, regardless of the darkness, regardless of screens and AV, we were captivated by God's presence. After a few minutes, the emergency power source kicked in and we were back up to full power. Ironically, my heart sank when the lights returned. I could sense a similar thought from everyone. This truly was the highest point of the service. Our focus and worship was on God, regardless of the logistics and circumstance, we were like Martha, choosing the only thing that mattered: Jesus.

As I write these words. I think about the passage that says in Matthew 24:35 "heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." The worship of our Lord is constant. In God's omniscience presence, we are never without, as He is always here to provide. As we live in these shakable times of inconvenience, may our worship and faith be the only things that are unshakable. What inconveniences you today that can utterly shape your faith to be in true focus of Jesus? (Listen to the tune: "Be the Center" by Fry.)

2.26.08

We're Back - sorry for the looong wait!

Hello everyone! Thank you for your patience and checking back with us! It seems like ancient years and we are glad to finally be back online! We have made significant upgrades in our service lines and repair work and now we are back – ready for you!

I've missed speaking with you guys for the past few weeks, it seems like an eternity. I'm aware that so many things are happening at your local church and in your worship ministries. Over the previous blogs, I hope that you are able to glean at some of the stories and experiences. As always, I pray that what ever I offer on the site and the services of the clinics, or relevant and tangible to your worship Ministry.

I am very excited in speaking with some of you over the past month of February through the blogs and emails. I have heard stories concerning large worship teams to very small worship teams. Recently, I spoke with a lady in Saskatchewan Canada. This worship leader by the name of Louise, helps lead a 35 member small church in her neighborhood. In fact, she told me how God had recently blessed their church with a brand-new building. It was a former nursery school facility. She explained that the building was donated and fully furnished just for their church, even down to providing canned goods and food in the kitchen's pantry. Before their brand-new building came along, they were leading worship inside the home of the worship leader. It was a simple setup, just piano and about 20 chairs around the living room.

Louise, a mid 50's family home-maker/worship leader, went onto say that her church was ministering to mainly 20 to 30 somethings. She told me how she and her husband why so many 20-year-olds were arriving at their small church. Louise said that most of these 20-year-olds were former atheists and drug abusers. I had asked her why would these 20-year-olds sought refuge at their local church. Louise said they came asking questions about God and the young adults who came were warmly accepted and received. They were not forced to look at the Gospel, didn't need to sign a membership roster, make any prior commitment, or agree to yada, yada, yada screenings. These 20-year-olds were seeking Light and Truth. They simply wanted the Gospel to be demonstrated in love and explained in human terms. Louise said that they've had the opportunity to minister to this group for the past two years and in a larger way they have been mentoring these young adults. Surprisingly, 1 new young adult member starting singing and desires to pursue a career, a young rapper also found his call to ministry in their church (yes, he raps in the worship service from time to time.), also there are beginnings of a small worship band.

I could hear Louise well up with tears, as her voice began to break. She apologized for the emotion, but with joy she could not contain within her heart the excitement and love that she felt for these young adults coming to her small local church. She went on to tell me the best times that they've had in their local church was all of the young adults sitting around a piano singing very old hymns and praise choruses. She also commented several times of her love for Mark Condon and his music through his music ministry site. Louise could not say enough about the great products of instrumental traxs and cd's. She utterly loves all the ministry and music support to their local church (check Mark out at: www.markcondonmusicclub.com)

Originally, Louise contacted me because she wanted to find more tools of facilitating instrumental music rather than just using a single piano. What I have found more appealing was the ways she and her husband had open up their homes and facilitated a loving community of relationships that cultivated authentic worship, while sharing the

Gospel to an untouchable community. The reason why say untouchable, is because those were Louise's words. She shared with me conversations from her young congregation members, who told her that they have tried nearly every church in their community, both medium-sized churches and large churches, where they were not accepted, recognized nor noticed. They even felt like the leaders of the church would not give them the time or day. Her young church members went on to tell her that if it was not for her and her husband, they might have given up on God; but as we know, the Lord always has a plan.

Think about your worship settings and community. Are you a church that's willing to risk being different? Does not the Gospel call us to receive strangers and love to those who would not be recognized as "fitting-in"? More importantly, how do you lead unfamiliar people into true authentic worship? It begins with relationships. Being secure in who you are in Christ, following the heartbeat of the mission in your local church and showing genuine love and acceptance to all people outside and inside your church, you will make a difference in being the bridge to your community. Remember this my friend, music will always be here, but people won't. A great friend/mentor of mine said: Lover of strangers – is the Bible's definition of hospitality.

If you would like to share, drop me a message here at the clinic site. What has been your experience or thoughts in reaching the community around you. I look forward to hearing from you blessings on you this day.

2.12.08

Words of Worship – A Look Into Our Songs

On one hand, do our words of worship songs produce biblical connections in the hearts and minds of the worshippers? On the other hand, do our words in worship stir confusion and/or obscure Christian doctrine? As seen from the Old Testament days of Amos and David, there exists a concern in the usage of our words in song – what is pleasing or displeasing to God.

How do churches regain accurate and sound Biblical theology, teaching and pathos in their worship songs? How are Christians able to recognize and decipher Biblical accuracy in their songs that honor God? From examining today's rapid-changing society, there are several reasons why sound doctrine and theology are inceptive needs for the present day worship life of the Church. In this age of Pantheism, Nihilism and New Age, progressive worldly philosophies have infiltrated Christian society and have affected our biblical view, even when it comes to worship. As a result, many in the Church have watered-down sermons, songs, drama and film for the sake of being "relevant." It is almost as if we are afraid of using biblical words. When I say Biblical, I do not mean churchy, such as "are you washed in the blood?" where only Christians would understand this statement. A Biblical statement that all could understand may be: He was willing and made me clean. One song that comes to mind is Charlie Hall's "Marvelous Light," (verse 2) my deepest stains now clean. This song both musically and lyrically is culturally relevant without dumbing down the words of God.

In most cases, we have both old and new songs that are not inherently Biblical or God centered, such as the old Gospel tune “I’ll Fly Away.” Don’t get me wrong, it’s a real toe tapper, but Biblically, the song is based more on “when I die,” rather than being God/Christ focused. As you may be aware, the plethora of Christian-like philosophies is found in the songs we sing during worship. Due to this dilemma, the Christian is influenced by a “pick and choose song-doctrine buffet” in a Christian-secular society. But what kind of words and messages are we really conveying (in three-fold): to a non-believing world, Church and Holy God?

Through the changes of time and culture, a myriad of Christian authors, writers and promoters have evolved. A blurred gap is created in the theology and multiple philosophies of today’s contemporary worship/Christian song writing. Worshippers/listeners can either be encouraged or discouraged to worship in context of the song’s lyrics. According to the use of Biblical sound doctrine and theology, songwriters have a great potential in fanning the flame in people’s hearts for authentic worship. From the songwriter, the spark is ignited by the level of Biblical understanding and spiritual growth. That flame of understanding is conveyed through the words and messages of the songwriter to the listener or worshipper. The fire produced is found when and where the words and Scripture intersect as they communicate and edify Biblical sense.

The danger occurs when inaccurate, misleading or obscured statements are expressed and form a disconnect with God, the worshipper and the Word. So the question is, do we really pay attention to our use of words in worship? Do we care enough about the message we are sending? Have we lost priority between playing the coolest tune or presenting accurate understandings? Time and time again, I have always heard and maybe you as well: we gotta play this song in worship because church _____ down the street does it – or – I heard this tune off of a Christian radio station and we must play it!!

Ok, so the songs are cool. But what about the words? Do they derive correct acknowledgement of the Triune and Holy God, do they speak of New Testament grace and mercy or foundations of the Old Testament? If they do, then it’s a great song to implement. Ok, the other side may now be saying, yeah, but do songs always have to speak of biblical intellect and God-talk accuracies? My response: yes. Does it mean that we have to find a song that sounds like we’re teaching a theology course during worship? No. What it does mean, is that we are the Church and are not ashamed nor do we deny what we believe. Additionally, we should not refuse Christ words of true love, forgiveness, healing, grace and life everlasting to a dying and isolated generation.

A greater look into our words is needed to safe-guard ourselves from “going through the motions.” A wonderful book by Dawn Marva, addresses these issues that encourages the Church and asks provoking questions that challenge us to stay biblically authentic while remaining culturally relevant. Check out her book here at Amazon. I remember when I was not as cognoscente in lyrical texts when I first began music ministry. As leaders in the church, we have a higher calling to accountability. We have a need to be mindful of our words in worship. This was Amos’ disgust of Israel because the people were not

taking God and his words seriously. They were merely facilitating hollowed offerings of numbed utterances through meaningless motions, offering unacceptable offerings due to self focus and pride. God had blessed their economy, vineyards and households, but man chose to glorify himself and give God the leftovers.

“Take away from Me the noise of your songs,
For I will not hear the melody
of your stringed instruments.”
- A Sermon Woe of Amos; Amos 5:23, KNIV.

Hypocritical religious motions have replaced true worship, creating a false sense of security and a growing callousness to God’s hand. How can this inward focus be appealing to the local communities in which we are ministering to? The woes from God spoken through the prophet Amos addressed God’s displeasure of Israel’s meaningless and unacceptable corporate offerings of worship. How do these lessons of past generations serve as models for today’s worship life? They represent reminders of who God is as being holy, and how man is to rightly respond to his holiness. God deserves all of our praise and our words represent and express what we believe about Him. May our words both honor Almighty God as they intuitively edify people.

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2.11.08

To Drum or Not to Drum...or When to Drum.

Good morning to you out there! How was your Sunday service yesterday? I hope that you are able to gleam at last week's article and introduce a few new fresh thoughts to your worship team and congregation.

Okay, over the past two weeks I have had several questions regarding drummers. Today's blog is to respond to the smaller sized church ministry. In larger churches, there’s always band related needs, but for the smaller church, those same needs are multiplied. In the smaller size church, the drummer is probably one of the most largest challenges for music ministries. Some of those challenges are seen in the limitation of players, skills and availabilities, and maybe all the above. Let's look over a few points in hopes to better assist your ministry as you find what applies to your concerns.

For you drummers out there, please don't take this article personally or seriously. Please save your drumsticks for playing not for causing damage to you, me or those around you! These tips are only clues to help worship leaders and bandleaders as they face the challenge of drums in their ministries. In the near future, I will post an article just for you drummers to ease any of the ripples. Myself, in being a person who knows drums, I know how sensitive these issue can be.

Let's first start with the limitation of players. You may be in the church where there may only be one or two drummers (lucky if you find 2 or 1!), or you may not have a drummer

at all. In all cases, when you were working with a small band, It may be beneficial of not having a drummer. It's better to have either a solid and reliable drummer to enhance the band, or to maintain your 2-3 instrumental group. Here's why: the fewer instruments you have, the drums will only stand out that much more. In other words, if all you have is a piano, a guitar and a drummer, it's going to take more dynamic range for the other two instruments to balance out the drums. Unless you're working with electronic drum kit, balance issues will always be a main challenge. If this is a similar scenario that you are facing, then your sound engineer would be grinning at this point. Anyway, when you're working with a three-member band, keep in mind, at your small church your players may not be pros. This means that you will have reasonable challenges, but you will reap the benefits of great solutions. As for drums, the main purpose of the band is to support the singers, the end result to lead the congregation in worship and in song. I have seen and heard many small church bands that spend way too much time on the drums, when they lack the other instrumental support to the music/singers as a whole. The drummer's job is like the band, to provide a clear sense of timing and pulse. Important drumming concerns can be volume, overplaying issues, uneven tempo control, inefficient drum stick inventory and choices, miking issues or simple drum tuning. Here is a parenthetical thought, for small band and room situations, the drums should never be miked as it will perpetuate all other volume issues. You will also need to consider what kind room you're in. Bad acoustics such as tiled floor, shotgun alley or obtuse wide sanctuaries and hard corners will add more ambience to the room than what you're able to control.

The best situation is to have carpeted floors, a drum shield (if miked), a back sound-absorbent wall and acoustic tiling. Other lesser inexpensive ideas, can be found in using cloth material and foam to make a sound baffle and area floor rugs. I have seen other churches use decorative banners to hang on walls or from the ceiling. These ideas make great inexpensive solutions for controlling room acoustics. When you hear people in the church talk about how they do not like the drums, this is mainly what they were referring to - the noise. The better you can control the noise, the better your congregation will be able to adapt as well as your singers and musicians.

Now let's talk about skill. As said before, it is always better to not have a drummer than to have one who is uncontrollable. No matter how small your band, your sense of timing, dynamic, clarity and cohesiveness always wins in the end. Your singers will always find a space to sing in the music as well as your congregation. When a small band plays well, even without a drummer, the music will sound even, clear and consistent. As a result for recruiting new members, you will attract other musicians who will be more inclined to play. Like anything else, if you find something distracting, you will avoid it; this goes for other musicians who may be interested in joining your band. If you do not have a drummer, the most percussive yet musical instrument you can ever add to the contemporary band would be the acoustic guitar. As long as that player has a good sense of timing and rhythm, you can make up for a lot of what you're missing. Remember what Scripture says, (Forgive the pun!) love covers a multitude of sins. If this situation is you, then make sure that your acoustic guitar player and/or pianist practices constantly with a metronome. Also, if you have a drum machine or keyboard in which you can create a click track, use this device at rehearsals. For the first time, it may seem awkward

and uncomfortable, but you will be amazed in a few weeks; with practice and patience your timing will improve beyond belief. Even using a drum machine in worship sets is not a bad idea. In fact, more drum machines and drum loops are more popular than ever before. Here's a cool plug: go to Praise Charts, they now have drum loops that are musically synced to music charts. You can purchase a sheet of music with a corresponding click track/drum loop (on wav or midi file via laptop) and can play along with the printed sheet of music or chord chart. This link provides a full description, instructions and all the how-to's. Even if you have never heard of this technology before, Praise Charts has the solutions for your needs. Check out the cool here: [ClickTracks at praisecharts.com](http://ClickTracks.at.praisecharts.com)

In working with drum machines/loops/clicks, it will take a responsibility and discipline on your part. You will have to make sure that you can efficiently control the drum machine/loop for starting and stopping on time without interrupting the flow of the songs. Usually, a keyboard player can operate a drum machine without problems. My suggestion, is to try the drum machine/loop/click track at rehearsal rather than on a Sunday. Make sure as you work with a drum machine that you make it conducive as possible with your instrumentalists and singers before you try it out with the congregation. A couple of months would be a good time-window for practice sake. However, if it does not sound good and the problems keep getting worse, scrap this idea and go back to what you're doing originally. Your comfort and pace is more important for your congregation. Remember, you want to help the congregation get where they need to go with as much ease as possible.

Now let's jump to the scenario when drumming skills are the issue. As much as it can depend on the drummer alone, I strongly encourage private lessons, practice time and working with a metronome (click track). Your drummer can work in a vacuum, if they are not working on other skills for growth. I have heard many o' drummer say, "my practice and/or instruction time is at band rehearsal." This is not being real. The rehearsal time with your church band is for your church band (worship team), not for the drummer's "practice time." When you come together for rehearsal, you are rehearsing the whole entire sound of the band and the songs. Rehearsing the overall big picture is much stronger and more important in the preparation for your singers and congregation. Individual practice time is done at home. I have also heard, like you, "I don't have the time to practice at home." I don't mean to sound harsh here, but if you cannot find the time to practice at home, you are not best serving your band and church. All of us are busy. Finding time to practice, even if it's 10 minutes a day, is doing everything in your power to better equip your team. In example, if you are on a volunteer sports team, you're always practicing your skill and position at other times, rather than on the team's practice day. You show up and know your part. God honors our self-discipline, commitment and dedication in our team settings.

It is important for all drummers to learn how to play different volume levels and tempos. It takes a lot of control for any musician to practice soft volumes at slow tempos; this well defines a musician at having superior control over his or her instrument. With this in mind, the drummer needs to use the right tools for the right musical settings. Drum grooves are not always 4 on the floor rock beats. The drummer's job is to maintain pulse

and timing for the rhythm section. This could be as simple as a single high hat groove, a little kick for punch and a bit of snare for accents. Timing is everything. The best bands are the ones who can play clean and in time, every time. Again, the bigger picture is involved where the band supports the singers. Any time in which the band's volume overrides the singer, the congregation will have a more difficult time catching the lyrics. In my past experience, I have worked with outstanding drummers that are professionals, to weekend warriors and to novices who just put a drum stick in their hands for the first time. All in all, you want to have drummers play with their strengths. Let's say your drummer has a strong right-hand, but a very weak left hand, then your answer is to have the drummer play the high hat and kick drum, with limited snare. Another scenario could be that your drummer has both strong right and left hands, but their feet coordination tell a different story. In this case, have the drummer play with both hands and limited foot action on the bass. Another example, let's say both feet and hands work well together, but they're only used to play one tempo...ah here is a struck a nerve. What do you do? Who says you have to have drums play on every song? In my experience of working with inexperienced drummers, I've had them play shaker or some other hand percussion parts just to hold down the time. We would resort to other percussion instruments on similar slow or medium songs. As we would do faster songs, the drummer would switch back to his kit. As they continued to practice at home, the alternation of percussion and drums worked to our advantage for style, color and sound variations. I have found that it's better to look for the positive opportunities in being creative instead of deeming that things can't be done.

Last point, here is the issue of the availability of your drummer. As said before, the band is a team effort. If your drummer has (or any other band member) has commitment issues, this needs to be addressed first outside of rehearsal. The team is for the greater good, not for the silo of one. The drummer's part is essential to the worship band. However, negative attitudes and personalities are not healthy to the team (no one is critical). Okay, we have squashed that issue. If I left out something – let me know. Moving on. Let's say your drummer, being a committed team player, travels often and is not able to play every week. In today's world, and the busyness of people, this is common. As seen before, pick songs where drums are not much of a requirement, use a drum machine or train a singer to play hand percussion like shaker or something similar. You are only able to do what you can accomplish reasonably by manpower. When drums are not an option, there is nothing wrong with completely redoing a worship set to make it more acoustic driven. Be creative and vary up the worship band sound occasionally. Don't get locked in to the idea that you cannot accomplish a full sound without a drummer. There is plenty of enjoyment that music diversity can bring. Be as open-minded as possible and try new things; it will bring refreshment to you as an artist and more importantly, to your congregation. Always remember who the worship is for: our Lord. Our God desires for us to give him our best. In situations when we are without, work the best with what you have.

There are far too many other issues to address regarding drums and the band. Again, I will post other articles and evolving drums and other thoughts. What questions do you have? What did I leave out or spoke little of? I'm sure I've hit a nerve somewhere that

sparked an idea or concern. Tell me what's on your mind. Send me an e-mail, and at your choice, I can post your words anonymously or simply respond to your question. I'd love to hear from you as well as many of those out there who would like to learn from your experience and/or thoughts.

So drop me a line! Enjoy the greatness of this day, see you soon. Email Me

2.8.08

Ashes, Ashes, We All Fall Down – Part II: (continued - if you missed Part I, read below.)

The days and acts of remembrances in worship services today are mainly held by liturgical churches. The contemporary church may mention significant days of the Church Calendar, but most do not hold worship services that center around these celebrations such as Lent. Your church may or may not celebrate the significant days such as Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday (yes this spelling is correct, also means Holy Thursday – The Last Supper & The Garden events) and Good Friday and Holy Saturday. We have a responsibility to learn, define, worship and highlight the essentials of these celebrations because they give us a deeper understanding of our relationship and worship of our Lord and the knowledge of his Word. We derive a greater appreciation and systemic in our understanding of what it means as sinful man being saved by holy God. True, most churches every Sunday, share this importance of a loving God saving sinful man. But during this season of Lent, we have a special opportunity to savor and experience these marked days of history when God miraculously brought man from death to life through Jesus Christ. We also walk with the Messiah, as together, we journey on the road to the cross, to His death and to His resurrection. Lent is a time to remember and mourn of our sin as we seek our need for God. In need of His mercy and grace, we reflect on our own baptism and what it means to live as God's child.

For me, I never truly understood the impact of Lent until I began serving in a Lutheran church back in 2002. No, I'm not Lutheran, not Baptist, not anything other but only a follower of Jesus. The experience in this church is one that I would never trade, as I learned the deeper importance of acts of praise, worship, the Word and his loving relationship with man. At first I thought, this is weird! I'm not Lutheran, not Catholic: why am I here? But as I spent more time in dialogue with the pastor, in discussing the rich theology and history of the church, I began to understand that there is more to worship and more to observe in the Christian faith than what I realized. This propelled me into an everlasting pursuit to understand the true biblical sense of worship and not just "singing" and "listening" through songs and sermons. I learned: the worship service in itself is not for you, to do cool songs and hear snappy messages, experience over-sensory media and the bells and whistles of other AV technologies. All of these tools (and that's what they are not our focus) are great, but how are they used in the context of a worship service in teaching and demonstrating who God is to our lost, broken and fragmented communities? Here's another challenge, how do you highlight the significant days such as Lent in a church that does not follow the Church Calendar or highlights unmentionable celebratory days? How do we use message, media, song and other art forms to convey important Church days and/or significant elements in Christian worship?

Finding words, prayers, songs and videos that relate to Lent, we can speak of its importance in a relative way. In other words, as much as we declare the hope and salvation that Christ brings, we also need to examine why Christ came to save sinful man. This brings us into a greater wonder and discovery of God's deep love and the splendor of his mercy and grace. When you think about it, we are like ashes; without Christ's love and presence, our lives are meaningless, worthless, lonely, separated and disconnected. When we come into relationship with God through Jesus, we experience His kindness, nature and love. We receive his grace, a welcome seat at the Table, an opportunity to share in the heavenly feast of God's Fellowship and to bring with us others that they too, may partake in the life and family of Holy God.

I encourage you during this season, to look into in the study, significance and the meaning of Lent. One book I recommend is by author Robert Webber, entitled "Worship Old & New." As you discover the impacts of the Early Church, important marks of history and significant events, discuss them with your pastor, share your learnings with your worship team, include your own family household and ultimately plant the seeds of truth in your worship services. Many art forms can be used to illustrate and teach the season of Lent and meaning of Christ (i.e. 16th Century Church icons, stained glass and relics). Whether by message, visual art, film and/or music, it is essential to declare biblical texts that denote the time of preparation before Christ's sacrifice.

May this Lenten season be filled with inspiration and wonder as God leads you into a deeper understanding of himself through worship, the Word, prayer, and communion as you respond to his mercy and grace. As together, we later conclude on holy week, as one Body and one voice: Halleluiah, Christ has come, Christ is risen and Christ will come again! Amen!

2.7.08

Ashes, Ashes, We All Fall Down – Part I.

Remember this catchy phrase from childhood games? Yesterday was Ash Wednesday. Did this occur to you yesterday? I know for me, I had to catch myself. As we become adults, we tend to leave behind elements from our past, the same is true of the Christian faith. We may learn of great theology in the church from early Sunday school studies or classes, but later we often forget our learnings as we become distracted or fade into other responsibilities.

The contemporary views in most churches do not focus so much on the Old Testament, but rather the New Testament. The same is true in looking back to the ways of the Early Church. We are slow to recall historical practices of the Church as seen in events, special services, reflections, festivals and celebrations. However, it is in the study of theology and our Church history that brings more meaning and significance to worship. More importantly, we develop a greater understanding in how and why we worship and praise God. Besides Good Friday and Easter, as a child, I've never had a clue of what days like

Ash Wednesday and Palm Sunday really meant. In addition, what was this term Lent anyway (?), aside from something I found in the corner of my pockets. These terms may sound foreign to you as well. My only memory as a kid was on Easter Sunday, unwrapping the fancy wrapped pieces of candy and finding every hiding place that stored its rich chocolate treasures. Today, Lent and Holy week are not highlighted in mainstream contemporary times. Good Friday usually means a day off from work, while Easter Sunday is about a bunny who leaves candy pellets or eggs (watch which ones you pickup). Many people and Christians today, leave out the preceding Holy days of Easter; it is here where we find a time of greater reflection, significance and meaning.

Lent signifies a period of preparation before Easter and is marked by Ash Wednesday, while it concludes with Holy week ending with Easter Sunday. Some suggest that Ash Wednesday began around the second or fifth century. The meaning of ashes originated from the Old Testament, in which the Ancient Church used to symbolize repentance. The significance of using ashes is derived from early church practices of burning palms from the previous Palm Sunday. Usually the pastor takes the ashes on the end of his thumb and makes a sign of the cross on the forehead of worshipers. Yes, this happened way before the Catholic church. We use ashes because we identify ourselves to the dust of creation; we remember that we are dust, and it is God who breathed life into man. Genesis 3:19 says this, “remember man that you are dust and to dust you shall return.” These words remind us of our being and nature, as we recognize the status of man and the Holy status of Almighty God.

Dust signifies a time to dedicate oneself to prayer, repentance, self-examination and renewal. You see this personification every time through out the Bible when individuals have covered themselves in ashes and sackcloth in order to humble themselves (i.e. Mordecai, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Job and Daniel). Through the Lenten season we cover ourselves with humility to reflect and examine of our need for God, while at the end we proclaim on Easter Sunday: Alleluia, Christ has risen! Thus, we have a deeper sense, joy and adoration in celebrating our new lives in Christ: being buried with Him, being raised with Him and to live in faith, until His second coming. What songs, art forms and messages come to mind when you think about these truths?

2.5.08

Super Tuesday and Fat Tuesday:

It is interesting to see these two named days to fall on the same Tuesday of this week. On the one hand we seek to elect an official candidate who best represents our party's views beliefs and ultimately give us what we envision or desire to be the best for this country. On the other hand, on the side of Fat Tuesday, we seek to please ourselves and have a free-for-all in having one big bang of a party before Ash Wednesday. Not every one of us celebrates this Tuesday in this fashion. But there is an important dichotomy that exists. There is a side of us in which we like to make others happy or maybe to please as many as possible. On the other side, we like to do what pleases ourselves. Let's apply this to the understanding of worship leading. Here are a few thoughts that sparked my fire this morning. To some, this maybe preaching to the choir, but I hope that today's word will spur you on in your ministry of music.

Whether if you or a worship leader, a singer, a musician or AV personnel, there is a thought of pleasing others or to please self. Pastors can relate to this one: many people seek for their attention during the week, whether it's through an email, phone call or personal visit, there is someone who wants the Pastor to say or preach or support A, B, or C. They may even offer great ideas and great topics, but it may not be the very word that is spoken from God. The same happens to worship leaders and musicians and singers. You see where I am going? There is always somebody in your church or in your Ministry who desires to have something done to make them "happy." I know, I may be preaching to the choir here. The same is true with AV personnel. They too have the same persons that come by and say, "hey, can you turn the sound down a little?" or "do we have to have that PowerPoint screen above the altar?"

Here are some thoughts about pleasing self: Let's say you have a (sorry guitarist – it's just an example) guitar player in the worship team. He wants to play a solo when he wants, regardless of what the worship leader, band or song is doing. A famous excuse is: "well, I feel led by the Lord to play this guitar solo – it's my gift to the church." The reality is, guitar solos, as great as they are still have their own appropriate time and place in relation to the worship service. Same is true for singers, there may be certain solos or harmonies going on that have nothing to do with the context of the song. And about the worship leader? They may want to choose songs based on how "cool" they sound, but either they may have nothing to do with the actual message for that day or the tune may not be easy to sing for the congregation. Hey, wait a minute, why is the congregation important? (rhetorical – it actually is about the congregation's participation.) My idea is not to poke fun, but to raise an important point because what was just described actually happens. Maybe these instances do not happen in your local church, but they do in others. Now don't get me wrong, guitar solos, singing extra solos and/or harmonies, choosing cool songs, all these are all well and good. But my question is, what is the basis of which leads us to choose what we do? In other words, who are we trying to please? And the choices that we make, do they fall in line with the right place and the right time in the service context? Now stay with me, I am making a stretch to create this point. Going back to Super Tuesday, again we try to elect an official that best represents our views and gives us our desires. Is that any different from a church or Ministry? The answer is no. There are always going to be people who are going to ask and seek the support of their wishes. All of us have preference points, all of us have an outlook of how things could be done differently for the good of the cause. Where the boundary lies is when is it a person who is wanted to make something happen for themselves or is it actually God speaking?

In everything that we do, whether you are a worship leader, musician, singer, AV tech personnel or pastor, our number one job is to seek what God desires. It is very easy to allow the pressure of others; but even more so, when we miss out on truly following what God is called us to do. With that said, it is hard to bear fruit in doing the work as we listen and follow the voices of many. No matter what your role is in a worship team or in church Ministry, even as a simple follower of Jesus, our number one calling is to hear God's voice and follow him. The Bible says in Colossians 1 verse 10, Paul writes, "and we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in

every way bearing fruit in every good work; growing in the knowledge of God,” verse 11-12 goes on to say, “being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share the inheritance of the saints and the Kingdom of light,” (NIV). The Bible tells us here that as we seek God to please him, we will bear fruit in every good work. We will grow in his knowledge We will be strengthened and empowered in His might; and from this, we will have greater endurance and patience. We will be joyful as we give thanks to the Father because he is the one who's qualified us to share our gifting and service in the ministry of the local church.

I understand this as well, sometimes reality is a different thing. It's easier just to read these words and think “great concept, great philosophy, but...” and then when reality hits, we either forget about it or ignore. It may not be even practical; but this is a growing aspect in our hearts as followers of Jesus as leaders of worship. God has called us to listen, discern and seek the truth even in those challenging instances. This is where we test the words to see if they are of God. Following God's call is what defines us as leaders; as we seek to please him and pursue his good and perfect will.

I hope that there are words of encouragement to you to be reminded that you are not alone. We all share in God's work together in building the Kingdom. Let this Tuesday be another day, that you listen and discern God's call, pleasing him for his good perfect will. I pray the best for you in your worship teams and look forward in meeting with you again.

2.4.08

Superbowl! Superbowl! Superbowl!

What an amazing Sunday night! To everyone's amazement, the most rated Superbowl underdog of 2008, the New York Giants came from behind with 35 seconds left in the game. New York's quarterback Eli Manning passed an amazing 13 yard touchdown pass to running-back Plaxico. This phenomenal play by the New York Giants surpassed everyone's expectations both on the field and at home. I hope you did not lose lots on your bets!

Truly, the game last night signified the victory of a true Super Bowl underdog team. The New York Giants played with consistent determination, drive, heart and professional will. Even at earlier times in the game, when the teams seemed that they were hanging on by a thread, they pulled throughout in the last. This truly was the best Super Bowl win I have seen in years. What does this Super Bowl win show as an example to our worship teams? No, we do not compete in the same way as football players perform. But we do function in a similar way in the relation of teamwork.

Our competition is not the sound engineer, video technician, congregation, pastor or fellow team member. Our competition is what Paul says in Ephesians 6: 12, "for our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but rather the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (NIV). The competition and struggles we face as a worship team are

revealed in the form of sound distractions, technical errors, stage hindrances, missed cues and etc. Other forms of complications we may encounter can range from communication, attitude, lack of preparation. Other instances can be a singer or musician not learning their music, missed chords or notes and the like. The reality is the need for a game plan for every rehearsal and worship service. As you've heard it said with technology, things will go wrong. Having a game plan and especially a backup plan will help, when any distractions or challenges occur.

If you watch the Super Bowl from last night, you can imagine what the New York Giants must have experience emotionally and mentally through the first 4 1/2 (felt like!) quarters of the game. There is no doubt that the team players experienced some degree of an anticipated defeat. We did not have the advantage of seeing their game plan. All we could see was an effort to stay calm cool and collected. Eli Manning kept his nerves and team under control while they experienced pressure, because of this; he was able to maneuver a win through an unexpected move. How does this relate to you and your worship team? When the technical errors, distractions and disconnects occur, our ability to remain calm and in control is our plan B. Our touchdown and goal is to help our congregation worship without distractions, this is our plan A. Our task is to navigate our teams both technically and musically. With organized, determined yet fun practices, we can develop good habits. Unfortunately, we can never rule out any technical errors, but we can learn how to have a better handle in responding to the distractions when they occur. What was your game plan in yesterday's worship? I know my plans always need refinement and improvement. The good news is that we learn and grow as we go. When we do not take advantage of learning from our experiences, we are less capable of navigating through the next set of challenges and complications. What were some of the most challenging experiences you faced in leading worship or playing/singing with the band? I remember one time the power going out! What about you?

Here's a last recap thought: Those of you who watched the post game show of the Super Bowl, you may remember the report of the New York Giants Sunday morning practice. Early yesterday morning, both Manning and Plaxico were practicing completed pass runs in the in-zone. Interestingly, the very touchdown pass that was rehearsed was almost identical to the play that won the Super Bowl. The sports reporter showed identical video footage from the practice to the game and they were a mirror-form play. The great victory was this, even under pressure, the team was cool and remembered the plan and followed-through. I pray for the best plan for you in your team this week.