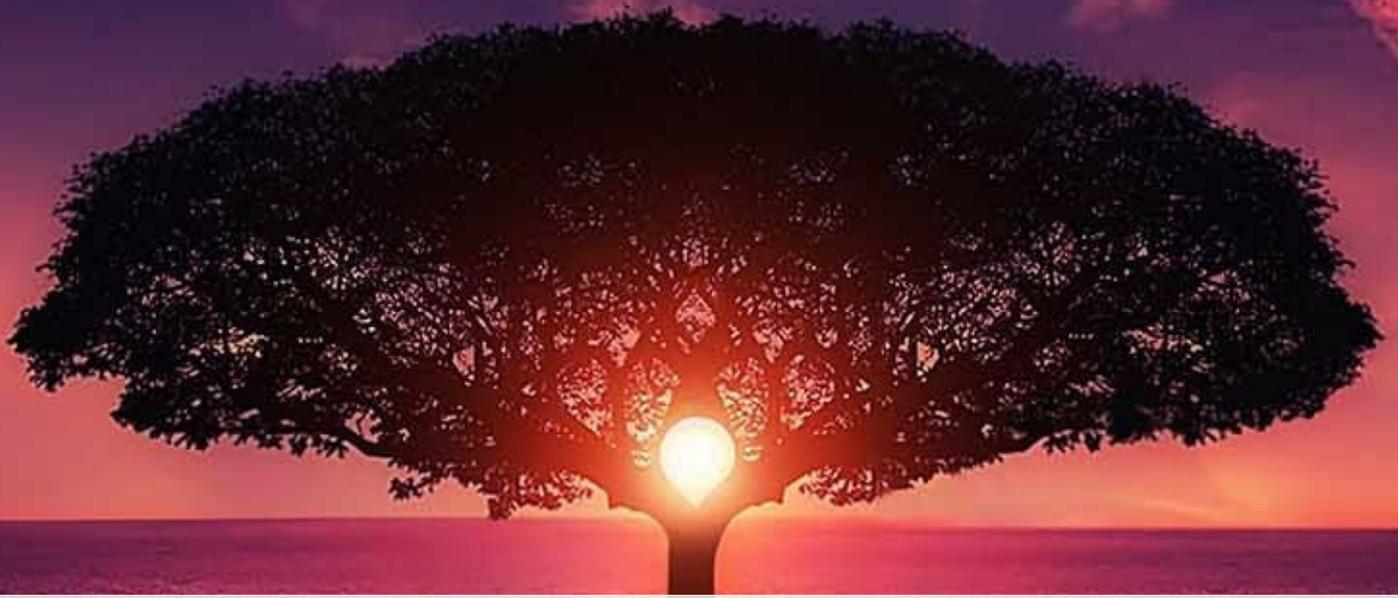




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MISSIONAL FOCUS



Missional Worship

EQUIPPING GOD'S PEOPLE FOR MISSION

PRODUCED BY FORMISSION COLLEGE

MISSIONAL FOCUS

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ForMission College (previously Springdale College) is an interdenominational college offering undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Christian ministry, theology and mission. It has hubs throughout the UK, Central Europe and online. The college seeks to be a learning community of reflective practice, community engagement, leading-edge missional theology, and participation in God's mission. For further information, see www.formission.org.uk.

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Fiona Poulson is an itinerant worship leader, songwriter and speaker. Her album *Stay* was released in 2015. Having studied at both London School of Theology and ForMission College, her life now oscillates between mission and worship, and she is at her happiest when the two collide. Fiona enjoys supporting communities into a freer worship expression, including through song writing, spontaneous and prophetic song. Fiona is available to lead worship, teach on worship and work with music groups and church communities and she can be contacted at fionapoulsonmusic@gmail.com.

DAN PIERCE



Dan Pierce is an Anglican priest, a husband and dad of three boys. Dan wears multiple creative hats – poet, author and singer-songwriter. In January 2024, Dan released his album “Mindful Systems,” under the musical guise of DC Pierce (see www.dcpierce.com). Dan has always worked in the arts and the church but spent some time in the security business. He is a devoted Manchester United and England fan. Dan loves God and neighbour as best he can.

LOU FELLINGHAM



If you've spent any time listening to Christian music, the chances are you've already heard Lou Fellingham sing. Not only as a songwriter and worship leader but as a woman who has been an ever-present in the music industry for the last 28 years. An internationally known worship leader, ten albums into a firmly established ministry, she is known for her prophetic edge, distinctive voice, unwavering energy to see lives changed through the power of music and word. Lou is married to Nathan, with 3 children. They live in Brighton where they enjoy being outdoors, food, hanging with friends and family and movies. Lou would call herself a 'feeder' and together they love to host people in their home and share life with them. They are part of Emmanuel Church in Brighton and are actively involved in leading worship there.

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Dr. Michael Goheen, Professor of Missiology at Calvin Theological Seminary, served as the Geneva Chair of Worldview Studies at Trinity Western University in Langley, British Columbia, and Teaching Fellow in Mission Studies at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia. He has authored several books, including *A Light to the Nations: The Missional Church in the Biblical Story* (Baker, 2010) and *As the Father Has Sent Me, I am Sending You: J.E. Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary Ecclesiology* (Zoetermeer, 2000). He also co-authored the best-selling *Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Baker, 2004), *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Baker, 2008) and *The True Story of the Whole World: Finding Your Place in the Biblical Drama* (Faith Alive, 2009). He has also coedited two volumes on globalization and the gospel, and on the unity of the church.

NOEL ROBINSON



Noel Robinson is an international worship leader, music pastor, songwriter and producer whose mandate is to see the body of Christ rise up in worship, intercession and unity in this generation. Noel has been involved in worship ministry for over 20 years and his ability to cross over the many cultural and diverse expressions of worship has allowed him to stand and lead at many key events and conferences across the world. He has partnered with many ministries from Morris Cerrullo, Rienhard Bonnke, Spring Harvest, Baptist Assembly, AOG, Elim churches, Renewal Worship Encounters plus many more. Noel is the founder of The Kingdom Worship Movement (KWM) and its flagship event, 'The Renewal Worship Encounters.' He continues to work and be influential within the worship leaders fraternity, working with many of his peers.

NATHAN BLANCH



Nathan Blanch is a professional worship musician in the UK, running a YouTube channel to encourage musicians in his church. Although music was always a passion, he was inspired to become a Worship Drummer when he came to faith in a modern worship environment, and is now seeking to help young musicians develop their faith alongside their abilities. He is currently studying for his undergraduate degree in Theology, Mission and Ministry at ForMission College.

CAROL CLARKE



Part of *Missional Focus*' editorial team, Carol is the National Worship Director for The Church of God of Prophecy UK. She is passionate about education and training and is the Director of Malku Training & Education, offering accredited courses in Biblical Worship, Christian Leadership and Theology and Biblical Practices for Ministry. She is the author of *100 Powerful Prayers: In the Presence of God* (2020). Carol is currently studying for her PhD in Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies at the University of Birmingham. Carol simply loves living, breathing and speaking about worship.



Editor's Note

Welcome to the latest issue of *Missional Focus*, following on from our previous issue exploring 'Missional Justice.' On behalf of the editorial team, may I thank all our readers for their continued support and encouragement of ForMission's biannual publication.

The purpose of *Missional Focus* is to resource God's people for engagement in mission. In this issue, we discuss the theological and biblical views of what mission looks like in a 'missional worship' context and address whether there is a need to rethink the functional separation of worship and mission in the imagination of worshippers and church leadership. Worship cannot be understood as merely a Sunday morning phenomenon; it is the heart of both gathered and sent out aspects of the Great Commission (Mark 16:15).

As a way of introducing this issue on 'missional worship', here are some extracts from each article:

- **Missional Worship and Songwriting** – 'Songs have played a significant part in social transformation, as words carry both positive and negative messages. Meeropol's 'Strange Fruit' arguably played a key part in challenging racial inequality.' (Fiona Poulson)
- **Missional Worship and Community Engagement** – 'Missional worship is when our passion for God pours out in unexpected places in our everyday conversations.' (Dan Pierce)
- **Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission Book Review** – 'In this book, Ruth Meyers challenges the separation of worship and mission and the need to rethink the functional separation in the imaginations of churchgoers and church leaders.' (Nathan Blanch)

- **Missional Worship and the Biblical Perspective** – 'Worship can equip us for our mission by continually directing us outward to the unbelieving world as the ultimate horizon of our calling. Like the Psalms of the Old Testament, the songs of Revelation 15:3-4 direct God's people to the nations as the ultimate goal of God's renewing work.' (Michael Goheen)
- **Missional Worship in Practice** – 'I composed the song 'God of mercy', many years ago; it was known as the 'Prayer Song', because we were performing it at an event for Hope HIV and we wanted a song that most people could relate to, even if they were not Christians or did not have a faith.' (Lou Fellingham)
'When we become the witness of the message of the gospel, through showing kindness, love, compassion, and mercy, we bring the Kingdom of God alive in our missional worship.' (Noel Robinson)

Traditionally, worship has primarily focused on spiritual devotion and personal growth, often overlooking the outward mission of making a positive impact on the world. Missional worship seeks to bridge this gap by incorporating elements of community engagement to our understanding of the practice of worship which relates integrally to God's mission.

May these articles inform, challenge and embolden us all as God's missional – and worshipful – people!

Rev Carol Clarke
Co-Editor



The Missional Impact of Worship-Adoration

BY FIONA POULSON

There is a place where worship meets mission and lives are changed for eternity, yet this relationship has not always been easy. Volf has written how ‘Christian worship takes place in a rhythm of adoration and action.’^[1] Not negating the Biblical foundations also for worship-action, my focus here is worship-adoration.

The place of worship is ubiquitous in scripture, but, until recently, barely present in missional literature. It is likely that historically inadequate foundations for mission contributed to this lacuna. Bosch observed in his *magnum opus*, *Transforming Mission*, that the early conversations around mission tended to ‘narrow the reign of God ... to the sum total of saving souls.’^[2] From my research this focus on conversion seems to offer

one explanation as to why worship has been all but absent from such conversations. Worship-adoration is an inherent part of discipleship, holding significant place within the global Church’s worship expression.^[3] As such, I suggest that there is an urgent need for it to be included in the discussion. I propose the relationship between worship-adoration and mission is crucial in this hour and that its impact has been largely unexplored.

Impact of Song

In and of itself, the song has powerful impact physically, socially, emotionally and spiritually.^[4] Physically, airways open and oxygen flows. Sound’s vibration and frequency have been found to impact the physical realm.^[5] Emotionally, music’s mnemonic effect enables a song to powerfully

evoke memories or even stir us to action. In my teens I was struck by a friend’s call to mission, hearing God’s heart for prostitutes in Amsterdam through A-ha’s song ‘Hunting High and Low.’ The often-social nature of singing is tremendously positive for emotional well-being; to sing together is to feel part of something larger than oneself, as experienced from church to football match. We recall the powerful YouTube clips of Italians singing from their locked-in flats during Covid. Songs have also played a significant part in social transformation, as words carry both positive and negative messages. Meeropol’s ‘Strange Fruit’ arguably played a key part in challenging racial inequality.^[6] It has been said, with good reason, ‘Let me write the songs of a nation, and I care not who makes its laws.’^[7] Spiritually, Temple famously described worship



in the following way, and each component is outworked through song:

...the quickening of conscience by His holiness; the nourishment of mind with His truth; the purifying of imagination by His beauty; the opening of the heart to His love; the surrender of the will to His purpose – and all gathered up in adoration...[8]

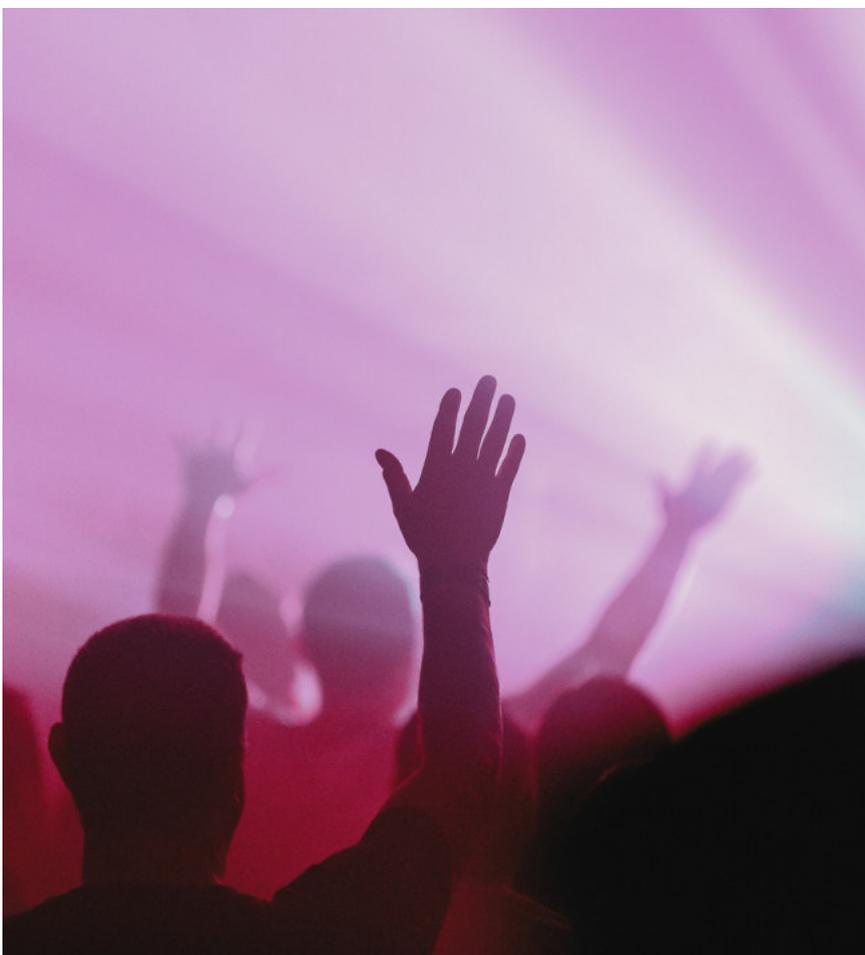
The Song in Worship and Mission

There are many ways to express adoration, yet numerous commands to sing to God and demonstrations of sung praise weave throughout the biblical record, culminating in the glorious *Song of the Lamb* at the end of time.[9] Additionally, Jehoshaphat's instruction to send worshippers ahead of the army led to victory in 2 Chronicles, and Paul and Silas's miraculous prison release in Acts clearly began with their sung praise, and resulted in both their freedom, and salvation for the jailer and his household. [10] Sung declarations of truth from a God-inclined heart posture frequently lead to an experience of God's presence and changed lives. God indeed inhabits his people's praise.[11]

Acknowledging the importance of contextualisation, what follows is not a proposed blueprint for transformation, but rather an invitation to listen, dream and seek God for His way forward for whatever Christian community you find yourself in. I offer three examples of how worship-adoration meeting mission can have substantial impact.

1. Hidden worship – impacting our hearts

There is an order to the rhythm of loving God and others – the call is first to adore and then to act. Volf corroborates, naming adoration 'the well-spring of action.' [12] As we express our love to God, responding to the Psalmist's call to praise and reminding ourselves of His character, we will increasingly encounter His love, leading to an increased love for others. That God is worthy of praise is reason enough to do so. However, the more we worship-adore, the more we will worship-act, including the action of mission. Whilst there are a number of ways of expressing praise, including through art and prayer, there is an emphasis on the call and command to sing in scripture. I propose that we cannot spend time in worship-adoration and not be changed, and that the more we love Him, the more our hearts will desire to share



this love with others. In a world of so many distractions, just as Jesus frequently took himself to a quiet place, as disciples we are invited to do the same. The motive is a deeper relationship with Jesus, but the impact is wider. Our challenge is to both model and encourage this amongst those we lead and worship alongside.

2. Invitation to encounter – impacting others’ hearts

I think back to my university ‘low cringe’ evangelistic events and wonder whether an encounter *with* God may have been considerably more fruitful for those attending than a presentation *about* God? Within an increasingly volatile world, people are seeking both spiritual experiences and authenticity. People often welcome an invitation to a genuine spiritual encounter. Fung, in his insightful book *The Isaiah Vision*, [13] writes of the need to partner with those already positively impacting community, and then invite these partners into the worship space. There is much we can adopt here as we seek to nurture the worship-mission relationship.

The move from attractional to incarnational mission as encouraged by Hirsch,[14] has been widely embraced. I propose the need is twofold – both to invite others into a place of worship encounter, and to take God’s presence to where people are. The need for worship to ‘escape’ the church walls is crucial within our post-Christendom culture. If this is not offered by the people of God, there are myriad other spiritualities vying for attention. As worship-adoration takes place in hospitals and shopping centres, God draws those with a spiritual hunger towards himself.

I recall mission trips where worship has been public – from a North African village, a French Tall Ships festival, a Croatian riverside, people’s homes in a closed Muslim nation, to a tea van in a Calais refugee camp. Each time, people have been impacted by watching believers worship, pouring out love to a God they do not yet know. Conversations and the opportunity to pray invariably follow. When worship-adoration is witnessed beyond the confines of church walls, atmospheres are changed and people outside the church community may encounter something profoundly beautiful and meet their Saviour.

3. Invitation to create – a beautiful antidote

The default for worship-adoration within the Western evangelical church is the dominating global worship model: churches aim for a quality band, playing the most popular songs.[15] There is, of course, much to be celebrated here – if a song reaches global audiences, it is likely because it expresses the heart of many, and able musicianship prevents distraction. However, much is lacking if this is the sole expression. I propose that we need to include other ways where the leitourgia or liturgy is precisely what it means – the work and voice of the people. The invitation to sing a new song is significant in scripture, whether from the spontaneous or prophetic ‘now’ song, or one crafted in the present.[16] Additionally, this spiritually seeking generation also has a considerable radar for the authentic. Rather than ending the

dominant model, we need creative alternatives alongside it to authenticate the value of the worship and songs of the current local context alongside the global.

In 2019, as part of my Masters’ research, I took a group of twelve people from my worshipping community through the experience of writing and incorporating their own song into our weekly worship, over a 7-week period. Whilst welcoming all, I particularly encouraged participation by those who would not necessarily call themselves musical. The project was incredibly enjoyable, illuminating and perhaps pioneering for us all. The group included one non-believer who by the end professed a faith in Jesus.

The findings were striking in relation to the potential scope of impact. It was humbling and exciting to see how empowered the participants felt, having created an authentic expression of heart worship which connected with their lives, concerns and hopes. Communal songwriting proved to be a beautiful antidote to many non-kingdom values such as materialism and individualism. The authentic voice of the people, apparent in words and melody, was indisputable. Kyle relates, ‘When one of your ideas is there and people are singing to it, it really surprises you.’[17] Creating and offering a song-gift to the community was profoundly anti-materialistic. Steve reflected, ‘The dynamic of getting involved with God and being a bit creative, it’s quite powerful. We are of him and we’re just reflecting back.’[18] The project created close community,



countering the individualism and isolation of our times. Kate stated, 'To actually be a part of something, to be actually doing something, it was great.'[19]

This simple process of communal songwriting was a locally contextualised form of worship, demonstrating a community built on kingdom principles. The leadership required for such a task is one which is humble and empowering, as it 'sees, values, empowers and puts to voice the praise of the whole people ...'[20] Its mark is authenticity, a key value for missional leadership.

Summary

Where the personal, public and communal engagement of worship-adoration are embraced, the partnership of worship and mission will begin to thrive. The inclusion of community-written songs demonstrates an authenticity that people increasingly crave in western culture. The first thing needed is that we, the church, fall in love again with He who loved us first and will always love us best. Due to the many impacts of the song, sung worship-adoration is one excellent means through which to open our hearts to God's love.

The task of the church is to creatively and faithfully sing the songs of the Lamb in the midst of a world founded upon the beastly principles of greed, decadence and violence... not an ugly protest, but a beautiful song; not a pragmatic system, but a transcendent symphony.[21]

As we invite others into an encounter with God through our worship, openly demonstrating our affections for our King, they will discover that the lover of our souls is also the lover of theirs.

End Notes

- [1] Volf (1993). p.207.
- [2] Bosch (1991). p.5.
- [3] There are notable exceptions such as the Quaker movement, and secret churches facing persecution.
- [4] A-ha, *Hunting High and Low* © 1985.
- [5] Amongst others, Emoto (2001) and McCollam (2012) have explored the impact of sound vibrations on physical matter. As embodied beings these discoveries are also extremely pertinent to us.
- [6] Meeropol, A. *Strange Fruit*. © (1937)
- [7] Fletcher in Wenham (2013). p. 13.
- [8] Temple (1941). p.30.
- [9] Revelation 15:3-4. The word 'sing' appears more than 400 times in scripture.
- [10] 2 Chronicles 20:21-22 and Acts 16:25-33.
- [11] Psalm 22:3 'But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.' (KJV) The word *inhabit* reflects well the Hebrew work *yasab*, to dwell, remain, sit, abide.
- [12] Volf (1993). p.210.
- [13] Fung (1992).
- [14] Hirsch (2006). p.147.
- [15] This is not dissimilar to the hymnbook model where a set number of songs were sung corporately by all.
- [16] Psalm 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; Isaiah 42:10; Revelation 5:9; 14:3.
- [17] Kyle in Poulson (2020). R8Q3. Kyle (Appendix J).
- [18] Steve in Poulson (2020). R8FQ2, 3. Steve (Appendix J).

- [19] Kate in Poulson (2020). R8Q6. Kate (Appendix J).
- [20] Hunsberger (2015). p.78.
- [21] Zahnd (2012). Prelude.

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Grace for Missional Worship

BY DAN PIERCE

People have often asked me as both priest and singer-songwriter whether my songs are Christian. It's a trickier question than it first appears. My songs are not worship songs. Neither are they obvious couriers of the gospel. They are about fictitious characters and circumstances. They are about addiction, love, philosophy, ambition, failure. They are conflated stories from personal or borrowed experience. My songs are not obviously Christian but I am. When approaching all of these subjects, I approach them bringing every part of myself. So when I perform, I do so as a husband, a father, a brother, a son, a friend and, among many other things, a Christian. Are my songs Christian? No. Well, sort of. Yes and no.

The lights are dim. The venue is full. I am eight or nine songs into my set. It's been an intimate and responsive crowd. I love gigs like this. Even the people getting slowly hammered at the bar are listening attentively. I can see appreciative faces as I introduce the next song, called *Graceless*. Sometimes in between songs there is very little to say. Sometimes I simply begin the next one. Sometimes there's banter. At this point in the evening I have already told stories about lovers and drunkards but now I talk about *Graceless*. Contrary to the title, this song is all about grace. It lights me up. I explain what grace means to me; that no matter how much I have abandoned grace it has never reneged on its commitments. God has never given up. No matter

what alternative beliefs or dependencies vie for my heart, I am welcomed back to grace. The offer of God's unwarranted affection. Despite the theme, the song is not explicitly Christian. The song isn't but I am. When I sing it I carry 45 years of storied grace into every syllable and phrase. It's an outpouring of thanksgiving. It's worship. Missional worship.

You don't have to be a musician to engage in missional worship. It's not about music at all. Missional worship is when our passion for God pours out in unexpected places, in our everyday conversation, in our chance encounters, in our work, in our leisure and hobbies.

Tonally, missional worship sounds like a work colleague enthusiastically analysing the weekend's football, reliving the highlights and dissecting the game. Missional worship is when our love for God naturally bubbles up in out-of-context places. When I say out-of-context places it seems important to note there are few, if any, out-of-context places. What I mean is – out of church. Places we wouldn't normally associate with expressions of Christian devotion. A café, a living room, a shopping mall, a car journey. Just as pride for my sons, my allegiance to Manchester United or my love of film can be easily sparked in conversation, so it is with missional worship. I find myself speaking about my faith because it's integral to who I am. Missional worship is not a mechanical function. It cannot be illustrated and annotated like IKEA flat pack instructions. It is not a sales pitch or

an algorithm. It's not a technique that can be learned or a formula that can be applied. They won't teach you this at Bible school because it can't be taught exactly. Missional worship pours out of deepening relationship with God. That's it. It comes no other way but from understanding oneself as known and loved by God. Missional worship wells up as an involuntary and instinctive response, like when sci-fi fans geek out over rumours of a new intergalactic franchise.

At this point you might be concluding missional worship is an individual sort of affair with little application in the missionary endeavours of a Christian community. It certainly does spring from an individual's grasp of God's love for them but there can be a corporate dimension too. If the gathered people of God can learn the importance of gathering outside of church buildings and services then we move closer to creating conditions where missional worship can flourish. By this I don't mean simply putting on more events. I mean truly being in one another's lives. John 13:35 says, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." If church was more woven into the fabric of day-to-day living we would create greater opportunity for that *love for one another* to be witnessed. If church did BBQ, movie night, litter picks, car washes, game night, house party, open mic night, after school club, trips to the park not so much as outreach projects but out of a genuine affection and time for each other, then we begin to get closer to the kind of situations where

missional worship can begin. This requires us to see church and mission less as a logic exercise to be solved and more like a Petri dish for playful experiment. This is less machine tooled evangelism and more akin to chemistry. This is less about creating events where evangelism *will* happen and more about creating lifestyle where missional worship *can* happen.

The obstacles in a corporate approach to missional worship are significant. There are three in particular that make it near impossible. First among them is time. Modern life is largely segmented - work life, family life and leisure time. Into this we can struggle to integrate church, never mind mission. Church gets reduced to an hour or two on a Sunday and sporadic courses, meetings and events. Church squeezes into the schedule.

The second obstacle is that we can't choose who belongs. We'd love it to be like-minded individuals. The likelihood is, however, that there will be people in our church with whom spending even an hour a week feels too much. People with whom we'd happily not spend five minutes, if we're honest. This is a significant challenge if corporate missional worship means creating more time together.

The third obstacle is that we don't all like the same activity. If I'm going to spend my time in Christian community with those I may or may not like, I at least want to be doing something I enjoy!

These three obstacles are tough to overcome. First, the relentless pressures on our time. Second, the complexity of our relationships. Third, the need for activities that meet our personal preference. These three obstacles can easily be fatal for any endeavours in corporate missional worship. These obstacles feed into each other and inhibit exploration. They produce a cycle of doom to which there is only one antidote. Grace.

Grace says I'll give my time to this even if the outcomes are unclear. Grace says I will love the next person I encounter even if that person irritates me. Grace says I will prioritise the opportunity for connection above my desire for any particular activity. Grace pulls us away from a preoccupation with personal preference and asks us to invest in others. Not because they deserve it but because that's the nature of grace.

As individuals, missional worship will spring naturally when we deepen our understanding of God's

grace at work in our lives. As church, missional worship will spring naturally when we deepen in our corporate understanding of God's grace at work in community. God's grace that calls us to sacrifice time, love the next person and dare to live beyond the comfortable ground of personal preference.

The lights are dim. The venue is full. I am eight or nine songs into my set. It's been an intimate and responsive crowd. I love gigs like this. Even the people getting slowly hammered at the bar are listening attentively. I can see appreciative faces as I introduce the next song, called Graceless. The evening is hosted by my friend Paul, a local vicar. He organises these gigs and all kinds of people come. He does it because he loves live music. He also does it because it creates potential for missional worship. Sometimes it will simply be a sharing of faith in one-to-one conversations. Sometimes the gigs are in churches, living rooms, bars or coffee shops. Sometimes a singer-songwriter comes along who gets hopelessly carried away telling conflated stories from personal and borrowed experience about fictitious characters and circumstances, about addiction, love, philosophy, ambition, failure and... the wondrous grace of God.



MATTHEW

22:37



AND HE SAID TO HIM, "YOU SHALL LOVE
THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR
HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL AND
WITH ALL YOUR MIND"



Interview with Lou Fellingham

LOU FELLINGHAM WAS INTERVIEWED BY MISSIONAL FOCUS CO-EDITOR REV CAROL CLARKE

CC: Please can you introduce yourself and your ministry?

LF: My name is Lou Fellingham, I am married to Nathan and together we have three children: Jesse, Ella and Jude. I have the privilege of being able to do the two things I love: being a mum and also telling people about Jesus through song and word. I have been worship leading, singing, songwriting and in full-time ministry for 30 years. Along with participating in worship at my local church, I also joined the band Phatfish in 1994. We were a band for 20 years.

The band was formed to lead worship in our local setting and also perform sets of songs about the light of Christ in pubs and clubs, that brought light. That was the starting point of why I moved to Brighton. I love mission, worshipping and evangelising to others.

CC: How would you define missional worship and what do you believe sets it apart from traditional worship practices?

LF: I find this question interesting because as a worship leader, I consider worship to be a way of life. It's not just about what we sing on a Sunday. It's about the entire week, our way of living, our thoughts, our finances, our time and what we give our heart to. I believe that the verse, 'Love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind' in Matt. 22:37 serves as a good starting point to define missional worship. We must then love others and our neighbour as ourselves. In my opinion, that is a great summary of missional worship. It's where we keep God at the centre; we worship him, and then show love to others. To me, missional worship consists of those two interconnected aspects. That is where I continue to love him and keep him at the centre. I continue to praise him, magnifying him in my life and that is how I communicate and love other people.

CC: Do you think there are any differences to traditional worship practices when we think of missional worship?

LF: I think when we are in a congregational context and we are worshipping and singing songs in one accord, there is both the personal and corporate dynamic of worship colliding and this is both powerful and missional.

As people bring their personal worship to God, the wonder of salvation, His faithfulness towards them, the cry of 'ABBA Father,' those looking in will discover that God is real and has a deep impact on people's lives. Alongside this, there is also power when people come and unite with one voice the joy of their salvation. Where else do you find a group with such diversity, age range, social status coming together, loving one another and loving something, someone more than themselves?

The church proclaiming the truth of who God is, is a light to the world. Our hearts' desire is that as this happens, those looking in would say, 'surely God is in this place.' When we we proclaim God, people will see Him for who He is, and they will hear the truth and the testimony. We want to declare who God is, His salvation, the truth, His holiness, the wonder of creation, His healing power and His Kingdom.

Whether the expression is traditional or not, we want worship songs that lift people to see God for who He is, songs that lift their hearts to His truth, and then express the love and care that the Father, the Son and the Spirit has for each one of us and His people have for Him.

I do think one thing we could be aware of is our language. Asking the question of whether the words that we're using are necessary to our faith and theology, or just a bit exclusive or cliquy and could be different in order to make a song more missional.

CC: Are there any examples of how missional worship has led to acts of compassion or community engagement in your own context?

LF: Worship Wednesdays are when my husband and I lead worship online. We started this in May 2020, during the lockdown, and we continue to do this on Wednesdays. This has been a context that has led to acts of compassion and where a community has been established. People worship together, care for and pray for one another. They bring their requests for prayer, answers to prayer and their thankfulness. We were not expecting this community to grow, but people have shared Worship Wednesdays with non-Christians. An online Christmas Carol service was one instance where we sang Carols, Christmas songs and traditional hymns, which was our fourth Christmas Carol service. I share about Jesus, have lots of fun, and allow time where we pause, pray and reflect. This is partially due to remembering the Christian tradition of lighting candles that is found in churches and also many outside of the

Christian faith still find comfort and hope in doing so.

Several years ago, a friend of mine lost her brother and she has often attended a church to light a candle. She does not have any sort of a religious background or a known desire for God, but remembering and lighting a candle can be comforting. I try to draw from things that help people feel connected. I bring the message of Jesus Christ and the gospel and was in awe when I received a message from a lady who introduced her friend to my music and Worship Wednesday, although she was not a Christian. She listened repeatedly and has now come to realise how much she needs God and has begun her walk living for Jesus. Another thing that happened was that I composed a song called 'My God Cares For You', for a friend whose brother passed away. It is not a song we are going to sing on a Sunday, but it is still communicating the love of God. It proclaims the testimony of God's care, even in difficult moments. I also composed the song 'God of Mercy', many years ago; it was known as the 'Prayer Song', because we were performing it at an event for Hope HIV and we wanted a song that most people could relate to, even if they did not have a faith; most people pray.

CC: In what ways has missional worship shaped the sense of community and purpose in your congregation and what action has it inspired?

LF: I attend Emmanuel Church, Brighton - a member of the Newfrontiers family, founded by Terry Virgo. I have spent 30 years there. I think what is interesting in this context is that when you have been in a church for many years, you see the different waves that the church goes through and the various focuses the church has for a season, with the full gospel as the foundation but often emphasising different aspects of the gospel at different times. During my early years at Emmanuel Church, worship played a major role. We had a strong international focus. I performed with the Stoneleigh International Bible Week band which drew thousands of people. There were powerful encounters with the Holy Spirit.

It was in the era of the Toronto Blessing and I encountered God in deep ways. The call to worship across all nations felt wide and broad and seems to reach from north to south, east to west.

The church then went through a transformation, with more emphasis on the city and the local community, leading to a more single focused approach. I believe that both are of value but within the context of worship at our local church, I would say our expression of worship over time has slightly changed. Currently, we have a city focused agenda, but we have church plants in other cities around the nations, like Berlin and Krakow.

Within our church context, we want worship that glorifies and magnifies God, that is filled with the Spirit and the Word and uses language that people can relate to; Brightonians need language they can understand. I have spoken to one gentleman at my church, who is not a believer, but he attends the church every Sunday evening because the worship is a place of peace for him whenever he walks in. I believe that is bringing people to God and God to people!

CC: Are there any specific Bible verses that you believe inspire missional worship?

LF: A crucial and foundational scripture in my opinion is, Matt. 22:37 and 39, which speaks about loving the Lord, your God, with all your heart, soul, and mind, as well as loving your neighbour as yourself. And Psalm 145 which exhorts people to praise God to the ends of the earth, comes to mind as well. It continues to say that nations will see Him. 'One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts' (v.4). It describes who God is and then all His works shall give thanks to Him and His people shall bless Him (v.10). Furthermore, even the passages from Col. 3:16 and Eph. 5:19 that talk about speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit are missional, because when we carry out these actions, we are filled with the Spirit; it comes as we speak and declare these truths one to another.

That is, therefore, mission in and of itself because freedom is brought about by the Spirit of God; the Kingdom comes, people are saved, set free, healed, and delivered, and fear has no place anymore. This indicates that God's people have seen God and they do not see fear anymore. I'm not suggesting that everything is eradicated - after all, we're all work in progress - but these verses tell us what to do when we meet. It's not simply that we have a nice sing-along, but God's power is released when we sing spiritual songs together. When many voices come together to proclaim the goodness of God, there is power in one voice joining with others.

CC: Do you think contemporary worship songs include sufficient focus on mission?

LF: I think we have to come back to the heart of what we believe mission is in order to answer this question. To love God and to love others. Over the years, I have sung many contemporary songs that do this. Again, there are different seasons that we have leant towards, for example, the faithfulness of God, the Fatherhood of God, and the Spirit moving. Generally there has been a good mix of songs that lead us to the throne, that feed us and also gives us a place to respond. We are looking for a mix of songs that allow what Matt Redman calls the revelation and response. I think the challenge has been that we have invested in bands and the development of musicians but perhaps not continued to teach the congregation about worship. So for me, the imbalance has come by the contemporary scene leading the congregation to be more passive and, dare I say, even more consumeristic.

As a worship leader, this has never been my intent nor have I heard it from any other worship leaders. Our desire is to have the congregation sing, for us to join and worship together. My job is really just to put in markers as we go and help facilitate the congregation to find their song for the King. The importance of the people of God singing and not just watching is crucial. I guess the temptation for creators and songwriters is to write songs that may be musically satisfying but not so congregation-

friendly. The good news is there are plenty of songs being written at the moment that are both musical and creative and also easy for the congregation to sing. Lyrically there has also been a temptation to write a lot of 'feeling' songs as some put it, but not enough about who God is, His worth and His greatness. I am pleased to say that I think there are plenty of songs to choose from in this day that carry *both* the truth of who God is *and* the testimony of what He has done for us, giving us the opportunity to respond in thanks and praise.

I believe God is moving in a new and fresh way in this upcoming season. There is a fresh outpouring of the Spirit in a tangible way. The songs are reflecting on His holiness, identity, majesty, greatness and worth and the song of heaven and earth is being released in a wonderful way.

Songs such as 'Waymaker' that both allow us to hear truth about who God is and also allow us to respond and bring our personal testimony. Let's not be satisfied though. Let's keep deepening our understanding, knowledge and love for God and let's keep asking for songs that reflect His heart that will unlock the revelation of our triune God.

CC: Some churches are not practising what we are describing as missional worship. What do you believe is preventing them?

LF: I don't know, ask them! I don't want to make big statements about churches that I do not know. What we need, in my opinion, are churches that recognise their need for God and are true to His Word and love the Spirit. The Spirit is not an adjustment, an add-on or bumper sticker. The Spirit is God Himself coming to us. So, we need to know that we need His presence within us, because it brings life to the Word of God. The Spirit brings life to you and it helps us to have revelation of who God is and the truth of Him at work in us. The Spirit is personal and there is so much more than that.

In my opinion, worship needs to be filled with those things and the Word, and as a church we should be focused on Him. This leads to all the other aspects of being a missional church, such as caring for the poor, speaking to injustice, loving your neighbour and serving in the way that God has called you.

Different churches will have different needs but the underlying need of God around the world is the same but how we reach people with the love of God

might be different. I believe the big challenge for churches is to not grow sleepy or weary, and that is hard because of the things that happen in the outside world, in leadership and in our personal life which will inevitably serve up disappointment and pain. Worship is such a crucial gift to us from God.

Worship is of course foremost for Him and no-one else, but He also knows that it does our soul good. It brings us blessing and faith and encouragement as we magnify and centre our lives on Him. It is important to keep the church singing and worshipping. This doesn't mean burying the hard things of life and pretence, it can often be the opposite. As we come in our brokenness and pour out our offering of worship and surrender to God's will, we find God meets us in ways we never thought possible. This can be so missional.

What we want, in my opinion, is for churches and God's people to be able to keep coming back to the heart of worship and place of surrender, trusting God through the good times and the hard times, and we will find that this speaks volumes to both those in and outside the church.

CC: Lou thank you for taking the time and contributing to Missional Focus.



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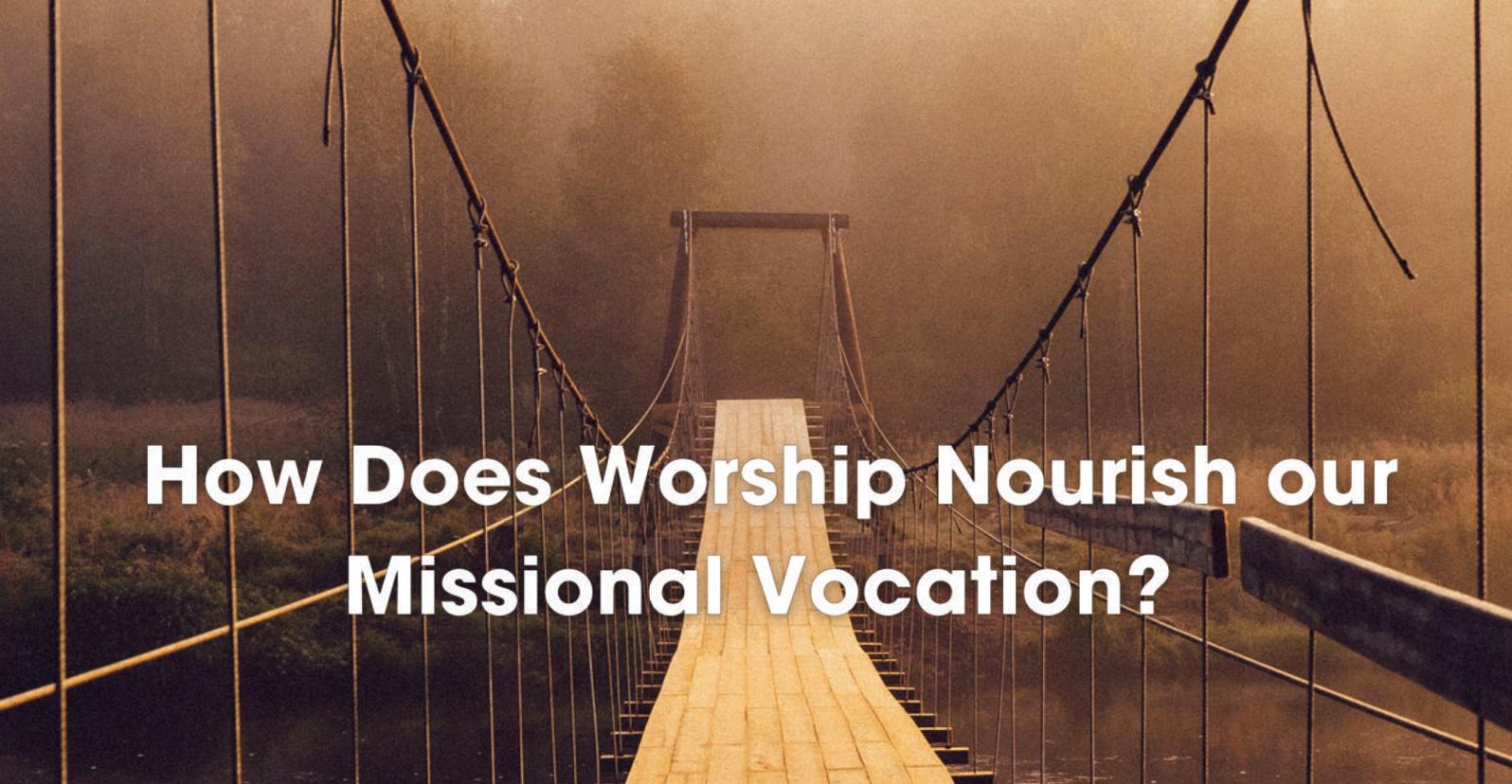
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How Does Worship Nourish our Missional Vocation?

BY MICHAEL GOHEEN

Mission is a contested word. It is not a biblical term but rather theological like Trinity or providence. For years mission referred to a cross-cultural activity that took the gospel from the 'Christian' West to the non-Christian non-West. This understanding has receded with the explosive growth of the non-Western church alongside the decline of the Western church.

During the 20th century, a new framework for mission emerged rooted in the mission of God. While this has become widely embraced the meaning of God's mission varies considerably. This is due partially to the loss of the narrative framework that originally defined that term. God's mission was articulated in terms of the work of the Triune God as narrated in the biblical story to restore his purpose for the whole creation and the entire life of humankind. The church's mission is understood within this broader redemptive-historical context.

The biblical story has a missional trajectory. God's renewing work moves from one family to all the families of the earth, from one nation to all nations, and from one place to the ends of the earth. The vocation of God's people is determined by the role they are called to play within this narrative trajectory.

That role may be summarized as the call to be the new humankind for the sake of the world in every idolatrous culture to the ends of the earth for the glory of God. In the Old Testament the vocation given to Israel was to be the true humanity that Adamic humanity failed to be. They were to display this distinctive life as an attractive alternative before the idolatrous nations of the Ancient Near East. But the Old Testament looked forward to a time when the nations would be incorporated into God's covenant people. That time arrived with the coming of the kingdom of God in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. God's kingdom is here breaking into the middle of history – the power of God to renew all things present by the Spirit. But it awaits the final act of God to complete his healing work. The era in between Jesus' first coming and his return is the time for the gathering in of the nations. Jesus sends his people in a new form – non-geographical, non-ethnic, non-national – to embody the life of the new humanity in every culture of the world amidst peoples who serve other gods. We are to be a preview of the coming kingdom as we have a foretaste of its life. We make known the good news of God's reign in our lives, words and deeds.

How might the worship of God's people contribute to this vocation?

The book of Revelation is concerned with missional faithfulness and full of worship. We can make three observations.

First, the God that is rendered in our worship must be greater than the gods that rule our culture. Our lives in every sector of life are to demonstrate the abundant and flourishing life that comes only in serving the true and living God. Yet the death-dealing gods that rule our culture are a powerful draw. The author of Revelation describes the idolatry of the Roman Empire as delusive (19:20), deceptive (13:14, 20:3, 8, 10), seductive (17:2, 18:3), intoxicating (17:2) and enchanting (18:23). How can we resist their spell? Only as we see the glory of God. The word 'glory' refers to the weightiness of God's character that demands recognition and commands our loyalty. The glory of God stands over against the glory of Rome and its gods (18:7). God's people are called to "Fear God and give him glory... worship him..." (Rev 14:7; cf. 11:13, 15:4, 19:5).

When the god of our worship is 'light,' born of a consumer and therapeutic society, we are not prepared to live in a world where its gods compete for our devotion. Richard Bauckham says it well: 'Revelation is overwhelmingly concerned with the truth of God... The church's witness will be of value only if it knows the truth worth dying for... In the end it is only a purified vision of

the transcendence of God that can effectively resist the human tendency to idolatry which consists in absolutizing aspects of the world.”[1]

Second, worship today needs to enact the true story of the world inviting God’s people to live in the real world it narrates. The ‘Church is a “story-formed community” that is rooted in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus the Christ... In order for the community of faith to endure through time and to withstand the threats of inculturation, the story of what God has accomplished for the Hebrew people and the Christian community must be continually re-told in corporate worship.’[2]

As the church’s worship rehearses the story of God’s mighty acts it challenges all competing stories that falsely narrate the world, ushering us into the *real world*. [3] John’s unfolding vision comes on the Lord’s day, the day of worship (Rev. 1:10). The church in Asia Minor is threatened by the invincible power of Rome and is in deadly danger of being domesticated to the idolatry of the imperial cult. The worship of Revelation audaciously challenges Rome’s narrative. To the small and weak community, John makes bold to say that the true story of the world is revealed in a man crucified by the Roman Empire, a slain lamb who now reigns over all and is guiding universal history to its final goal. John ‘constructs a counter-narrative disputing the imperial one, opening up a different way of seeing the world.’[4] It is this story that is celebrated in the liturgy, songs and prayers of God’s people in Revelation. The worship of the early church in the Roman Empire was a witness to the true story of the world revealed in Jesus Christ which nourished them to live more faithfully in this story and refuse any compromise with the idolatrous structures of death.

Here we catch a glimpse of what worship ought to be. The cultural narrative that threatens us today is surely as dangerous. Today’s church is being co-opted by this story through entertainment and advertising, through television and internet, through sports and shopping malls. Worship today must witness to the real world, the true

story, the living God as revealed in Jesus Christ, and thereby form a people ready for a missionary encounter in their various callings.

Finally, our worship can nourish our new life in Christ for the sake of the world. There are two sides to this: worship nourishes our new life *and* it is for the sake of the world. Often the focus has been on the first supported with language of “means of grace.” But our worship must be a “missional means of grace.” God is present in our reading of Scripture, preaching, singing, confession, sacramental participation as means by which the new life of God’s kingdom flows to us to powerfully form us into the new humanity. But it is always for the sake of the world.

Worship can equip us for our mission by continually directing us outward to the unbelieving world as the ultimate horizon of our calling. Like the Psalms of the Old Testament, the songs of Revelation direct God’s people to the nations as the ultimate goal of God’s renewing work (15:3-4). When the church becomes introverted the various elements of worship function as channels of God’s grace to passive recipients for their own benefit. This puts the church in danger of what Karl Barth calls a ‘sanctified egocentricity’ with ‘praise [that] consists finally only in a many-tongued but monotonous *pro me, pro me...*’[5]

The same elements of liturgy can direct attention either inward on ourselves or outward to the nations. The way the word is preached and sacraments practised should orient us outward for the sake of the world. The way the congregation is gathered, welcomed and called to worship can remind the congregation that they have come from their callings in the world to be nourished for the sake of their neighbours. Confession of sin can be introduced and presented as a time to be cleansed from our capitulation to cultural idolatry, a time to be renewed and empowered for our calling in the world. Confessions of faith can be framed to reinforce a missional cast to our faith.[6] Our prayers should move beyond the needs of the congregation and direct us outward to a world in need. The

charge to the congregation followed by the benediction can encourage the congregation to think in terms of God’s presence empowering them for their mission. Our music is important as it has great power to form us. We need music that directs us to the world and is not co-opted by the narcissism and consumerism of our culture.[7]

The church is blessed *to be a blessing* and has been chosen *for the sake of the world!* Our worship must move us beyond the ‘blessed’ and the ‘chosen’ to the ultimate purpose and goal of God’s story – the blessing of the nations.

END NOTES

[1] Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 160.

[2] Paul H. Jones, ‘We are How We Worship: Corporate Worship as a Matrix for Christian Identity Formation’, *Worship* 69, 4 (July 1995): 353.

[3] See Rodney Clapp’s chapter ‘The Church as Worshiping Community: Welcome to the (Real) World’ in *A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

[4] Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 104.

[5] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV, 3, 2, 567.

[6] An example of this is the contemporary testimony of the Christian Reformed Church entitled *Our World Belongs to God*. The longest section is entitled ‘The Mission of the Church’ (paragraphs 41-54). It is written in beautiful *poetic and doxological language* making it especially suitable for worship. It can be accessed at <https://missionworldview.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ea8a85f0ae5e48aa344cbfb43e88d5d37cb0b7.pdf>

[7] A good resource for such songs can be found in *Complete Mission Praise*, compiled by Peter Horrobin and Greg Leavers (London: Marshall Pickering, 1999).



“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

JOHN 13:35



An Interview with Noel Robinson

**NOEL WAS INTERVIEWED BY
MISSIONAL FOCUS EDITOR
CAROL CLARKE**

CC: Please can you introduce yourself and your ministry?

NR: I am a worship leader, worship pastor, songwriter, producer, trainer and teach around worship. I have been leading worship for approximately 35 years, have written many songs and released 7-8 albums. I have recently recorded a brand new album. I am very much someone who encourages songwriting of generations. I am also into multiculturalism, in how it pertains to church. I have led worship in churches that are high Anglican, right through to Pentecostal and everything in between.

I am a student of worship, including worship expressions, the theology of worship, Old Testament and New Testament. As a musician, I have been playing the guitar from the age of 6, studying classical music at the Royal College of Music. I also studied jazz and jazz improvisation. In between that, there are different genres of music from Latin, gospel, pop and contemporary I am familiar with. In terms of musical styles, I would describe myself as eclectic.

CC: How would you define missional worship and what do you believe sets it apart from the kind of traditional worship practices?

NR: This is quite an interesting title to give, 'missional worship.' When we look at the word missional, it is an adjective. When we look at the word mission, it is an assignment, or something that you must do. It is also something that you must be. Therefore, when you put the two words together, 'missional worship', and when we are dealing with worship, we are talking about the whole expression of humanity, and

our humanity in worship. Matt. 22:37 says, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the Old Testament context of worship. Therefore, everything you did was about the act of worship. So, when we start thinking about missional worship from a 21st century context, it involves the songs you sing, the impact on the lives that are lived, and encourages individuals to do the missional part of our Christianity and faith.

Missional worship in the 21st century would be songs that encourage the believer to walk out their Christian faith in their community and culture, bringing the culture of heaven into the culture of earth. There is also another aspect, that is 'global missional construct' where the church at large, becomes the political voice of heaven. Politics and heaven do not go together, but we become the Kingdom voice in issues concerning humanity, such as local civic issues, national issues, or even international issues. In Rev. 19:10, it says that 'the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus.' This means that Jesus has a testimony about what is going on, not only a testimony about you, but He is speaking about what is happening in the world, where there is poverty and in nations that are far away from God.

Then how do we as believers become the mouthpiece and voice of God? We become the actions of heaven in those spaces whether they are political, civic or moral, and that's why mission is a wide subject. But when applied to our daily praxis, it is being impactful in our world, and communities. The songs then help to endorse, empower and fuel that fusion of doing, hearing, taking steps of faith and seeing Jesus in it all.

In history, one of the greatest denominations to arise in the 19th century, was The Salvation Army, founded by a man called William Booth. But if you listen to some of the songs they sang and follow the work of The Salvation Army and William Booth, you begin to understand that their missional songs birthed our education system. Their missional songs birthed what we call 'Sunday school', which is teaching young children the Word of God. Their missional songs birthed so many things that really helped to deal with what was going on in 19th century England. There were many orphaned children roaming the streets and lacking an education. People in this nation were suffering from poverty and lack in so many areas, such as health. But here comes William Booth, who begins to galvanise the church, to become the answer to many of the problems in the streets and in the community. That became a big missional focus which in the 21st century we can continue.

There is not much difference between that and standing in church, singing songs to God and singing about God because it all involves us worshipping the Lord with our heart, mind, body and soul. It means, we don't just worship God, but we become the voice of God in our communities. I do believe that our worship must not just be vertical, but there's a horizontal context to it, which becomes missional. Also, we must not forget that one of the tenants of our faith is, 'faith without works is dead.' (James 2:17) 'Work' is the missional part of what we do.

CC: Can you give an example of how missional worship has led to acts of compassion or community engagement in your context?

NR: In my context, one of the things about missional worship has been

how we empower the church to become The Great Commission. How does our worship and what we do impact The Great Commission? Jesus said 'go into all the world and preach the gospel; and lo I am with you always' (Mk. 16:15, Matt. 28:20). 'Lo I am with you' doesn't come into effect until we go, and 'going' is also 'being'. There is a sense where we must be what God says and we must be the goers. As believers, our calling is not just to sit at the feet of Jesus and have clubs where we gather and encourage each other, but there is something very powerful about 'doing' and God showing up. It becomes fuel for our worship. When we become the witness of the message of the gospel, through showing kindness, love, compassion, and mercy, we bring the Kingdom of God alive in our missional worship, which is not in a book or in our heads.

CC: In what ways has missional worship shaped the sense of community and purpose in your congregation and what actions has it inspired?

NR: One of the great things about the church I go to (City Gates Elim Church, Ilford), is that we have a pastor that is an evangelist. He is always outward looking for souls and how we can make an impact. We have a nursery attached to our church, which is a practical thing. We also have outreach ministries, that operate on the streets we live in; we are in a community that has a small red-light district. There are ministries that go out to meet women on the streets, sharing love and the message of Christ. We also have a range of clubs, that take care of people who are retired so they are not left behind in the journey of the church. We also have youth clubs to engage young people on the local estates who are going through various issues. We have about 80 ministries flowing out of the church.

Our latest thing is a coffee shop that is open at normal hours, where people can come in, sit down and work. It is like a high-street coffee shop in our church's lobby. We also have a mini supermarket with goods that are sold at a cheaper price to people in our community, who are unable to do a lot of shopping in the bigger supermarkets. We sell everything from tomatoes, onions, rice, potatoes, cornflakes, milk and sugar. The shop is doing well, and we recently won an award from the local council. The missional context here is very apparent here and I think there is something very powerful about churches being the expression of the various things in our community.

CC: Do you think contemporary worship songs include sufficient focus on mission?

NR: Yes, because there is an aspect of mission that must be internalised. We must position ourselves to be missional and we cannot take away the songs that position us. For example, a simple well-known song is, 'everyone needs compassion, the kindness of the Saviour; shine your light and let the whole world see, we're singing for the glory to the risen King; Saviour, he can move the mountains, our God is mighty to save, He is mighty to save.' These are declarations and very missional. I





believe we are in that season where our songs are deliberately personal to empower people to stand in marketplaces and be missional. I don't think the focus on mission in contemporary worship is missing. I think it is there, but we must follow the journey of how an individual believer goes from what I call Psalms 24. 'Who shall go up to the mountains of the Lord? Pure hands, pure hearts.' Then it says 'Lift up your heads, you gates, be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.' This is proclamation and that journey must be seen. Individual and personal worship finds itself in outward expressions and witness. So, I don't think it is missing but we do need songs that are intentionally missional.

The expansion for me would be that we want to get our churches singing songs of mission that open the revelation of who Jesus is, the revelation of what people should be or could be; the possibility that you could be a witness in the earth; the possibility that signs, wonders and miracles can flow through you; the possibility that a kind word from you can change someone's life; the possibility that your actions or acts of kindness, such as giving money to your neighbour or sharing food can make them think about who God and Jesus is – this is missional.

I would also argue there is a disconnect between what we sing and who we are. Oftentimes we like to sing songs like, 'though, I walk

through the valley of the shadow of death. You're with me.' But when we sing those songs and others such as 'send the light, the blessed gospel light, let it shine from shore to shore,' what does from shore to shore mean? In the context of England, it means that our East Coast which is East Anglia, our North Coast which is Scotland, our South Coast which is the Southernmost part of England, and the West Coast, which is Wales, means God wants us to shine our lights in these areas.

It may mean going to those places, or being missional may mean giving money to send people to those places instead. The fact that you cannot go personally, but can give someone £100 for mission or ministry, to take the message of the gospel to other parts of the world, is missional giving and is part of worship. We can all play a part through giving of ourselves, our substance, finances and all the things lent to making the gospel message of the Kingdom and being missional believers in our own world.

CC: Some churches are not practising what we are describing as missional worship. What do you believe is preventing them?

NR: People think about resources and sometimes resources are the most difficult thing to find. But I remember growing up, we didn't

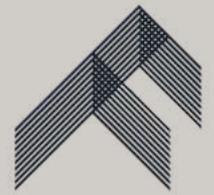
have food banks, but harvest moments where everyone was encouraged to bring something to church on Sunday. This food was gathered in harvest and at the end of service, people would come and take something they didn't have, and we called it 'Harvest Sunday.' This was the original food bank where we set aside time in the week for people to bring food, storing it up for families who were struggling.

Evangelism and being a witness are the easiest because we are around people every day and our lives become the witness of Jesus. So, we don't need resources, we just need boldness to tell the story, and I think we need to start doing that because churches in many communities are declining with members. I think that part of the missional context has died.

When a church is doing something, it is evident that life is flowing. A body is not dead until the blood stops flowing, and I think the lifeblood of churches is missional, and the expression of that is sung worship, and all those things that make up a church service. I believe we are entering a season where, if a church is not missional in what they do, then the question is what is the purpose of the church in that community? Are they fulfilling the purpose for which God has placed them in that community?

CC: Thank you, Noel, for your time and contribution to this Missional Focus.

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Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission: Gathering as God's people, going out in God's name by Ruth A. Meyers (2014) Grand Rapids, Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing

Book Review by Nathan Blanch



Introduction

Ruth Meyers has a Master of Arts and PhD in Liturgical Studies from the University of Notre Dame and is the Hodges-Haynes Professor of Liturgics at Church Divinity School of the Pacific, Berkeley, California. In *Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission* (2014), Meyers uses her experiences in the liturgical field to explore the connection between worship and mission. This review briefly summarises her book, and evaluates its strengths and weaknesses, before concluding and providing a recommendation.

Summary

In many churches I have attended, worship is an activity for Christians to encounter God for their personal faith, bearing little resemblance to mission. Meyers argues that this perception is wrong, suggesting that worship and mission are in fact of the same category (Meyers, 2014, p.1). In chapter 1, she begins with a core definition of missional worship: 'the understanding and practice of worship that engages worshipers in the mission of God, drawing them into God's self-offering of redemptive love through Christ and in the power of the Spirit' (p.12). She proceeds to define the key terms mission, worship, and liturgy (pp.16-29), before presenting her two models for visualising missional worship.

Meyers' first model to illustrate the connection between worship and mission is a 'Möbius strip', a mathematical object that appears to have two sides, but only has one. It can be created by twisting a strip of paper and connecting its ends. If someone were to draw a continuous line starting on one side of the paper Möbius strip, they would find that the line covers both sides and returns to the starting point. Meyers writes worship on one side of the paper and mission on the other, illustrating the connection between them: worship leads to mission, and mission leads to worship (p.35).

The second model is the more common spinning top, in which the axis represents worship, the dimensions of mission surround it, and the whole object represents mission. The energy required to start the spinning top in motion is attributed to God, representing the work of God in enabling mission (p.45). The core of the spinning top represents communal worship, shaping people and preparing them to encounter the world, whilst the edge of the spinning top represents drawing people back towards communal worship to encounter God (p.41). Meyers' two models work hand in hand to define missional worship: worship and mission are part of the same category, and simultaneously flow in and out of each other.



Nathan Blanch,
leading worship

Subsequent chapters explore various components of common church worship practices. First the gathering of people, then proclaiming and responding to the word of God, intercessory prayer, enacting reconciliation, celebrating communion, and going forth in the name of Christ. Meyers explains each of these elements and their connection to mission. She demonstrates how each element points worshippers to God's mission and how they form them to participate in the mission of God. Finally, Meyers provides practical tips for those in the position of planning worship practices, notably to consider how different dimensions can enhance a worship practice. I will return to this in a later section.

To support her claims, Meyers refers to the literature of many theologians, scholars, and researchers. Among these are David Bosch, a South African theologian whose writing informed the core of Meyers' understanding of mission, and J.G. Davies, who inspired the theological perspective that worship and mission are not separate categories (pp.3-5). She also draws from the work of Lutheran worship professors that wrote on the theology of missional church, and Eastern Orthodox theologians that essentially understood worship as a foundation for mission (pp.6-7).

Finally, various scholars inform her understanding of liturgical elements, such as Clayton Schmitt who highlighted the importance of concluding a worship service by turning the assembly towards the world, and Dykstra and Bass who explained Christian practices as active participation in God's work in the world (pp.7-8). Alongside her study of academic work, her own study between 1999 and 2013 involved visiting various congregations including the Iona Community in Scotland and the Taizé Community in France, which formed her understanding of missional worship in different contexts (pp.8-10). *Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission* is a book structured around academic opinions on theology and extensive research on mission and worship.

Strengths

One strength is how well Meyers explains the components of liturgy in each chapter. The chapter on intercessory prayer was especially insightful, explaining in detail the missional significance of prayer as a form of worship. She explains that praying in Christ, with Christ, and through Christ affirms the congregation of God's universal love (p.112). Praying on behalf of others is a reminder that God is working through creation to bring healing and restoration, emphasizing a perspective of participation in God's mission of reconciliation (pp.112-13).

Considering intercessory prayer in this missional perspective is a reminder of the significance of intercession in worship, a fresh perspective in the new culture that so values concert style music in worship.

Another strength of *Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission* is the chapter on preparing missional worship, where Meyers acknowledges that the components of worship are transcultural, making it applicable to readers of any denomination or tradition (p.199). She introduces seven dimensions of worship which enhance the liturgical elements: space, time, objects, actions, texts, music, and silence (pp.200-201).

One excellent example is through her discussion of space, exploring how being missional can be as simple as considering function, beauty, or tradition. She suggests specific spaces to consider, most of which are relevant to every church denomination: gathering, movement, congregation, choir, baptismal, pulpit, and altar table space (pp.208-211). Meyers teaches every reader how to think, not what to think, to be missional in their context. Her writing on altar table space demonstrates the nuanced thinking that can bear profound implications.

Meyers contrasts two churches she visited during her studies. The first church places the altar table centrally, like a typical house placement, however, their use of the table is strictly sacred, like a temple (p.210). The second church also places the table centrally, however, covers it with cloth for sacred use and removes it when serving refreshments, connecting community with communion (p.211). These churches carefully consider how they can draw attention to God in their contexts, and though the distinctions are subtle, Meyers suggests that this can have significant missional implications.

Weaknesses

In discussing mission and worship, Meyers reveals her involvement in creating resources supporting same-sex relationships (p.52). She tells the story of engaging with restaurant staff to highlight the missional importance of loving others. Meyers regards such encounters as 'an act of worshipful mission, giving glory to God by witnessing to God's boundless love' (pp.52-3). Meyers is evidently committed to an inclusive theology, valuing relationship and connecting her beliefs to her everyday interactions. However, one weakness is Meyers' very brief mention of blessing same-sex marriages, for which I felt she could have explained or justified her viewpoint in more detail. Her perspective here, potentially divisive among readers, might have served the purpose of the book better by maintaining the focus on encouraging readers to consider the missional implications of expressing love in such circumstances.

This example was among very few that illustrated 'worshipful mission', contrasting her many practical examples of how worship could be missional. This was another weakness, that although initially against the separation of mission in the world and worship in the church (p.2), Meyers' language continues to confine worship to the church building. Although her intention was to consider 'worship' as an activity which the

assembly engage with at church every Sunday (p.25), there felt like a missed opportunity to encourage readers to think beyond the traditional boundaries. Her models of missional worship imply a unity between mission and worship but are challenged by the limitations placed on worship within church walls. It could be beneficial to explore how worship extends beyond the church building, acknowledging its significance in diverse mission contexts. Perhaps this is a research field that Meyers will explore in the future.

Conclusion

Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission is a valuable resource not only for those preparing worship but those participating too. Ruth Meyers breaks down the various elements of liturgical practice in an elegant structure, explaining each one whilst offering its relevancy to mission. She offers two models for understanding missional worship which are easy to understand and presents her insights in such a way that it is applicable to anyone from any church background. Though there may be theological concerns with her approach to same-sex relationships, an issue which is currently a widespread debate for churches in modern culture, this cannot detract from her knowledge of the liturgical field. Her expertise is evident throughout *Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission*, and it is worth reading for any Christian interested in understanding the missional implications of worship, and any leader of a worship team.

Meyers, R.A. (2014) *Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission: Gathering as God's people, going out in God's name*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans.



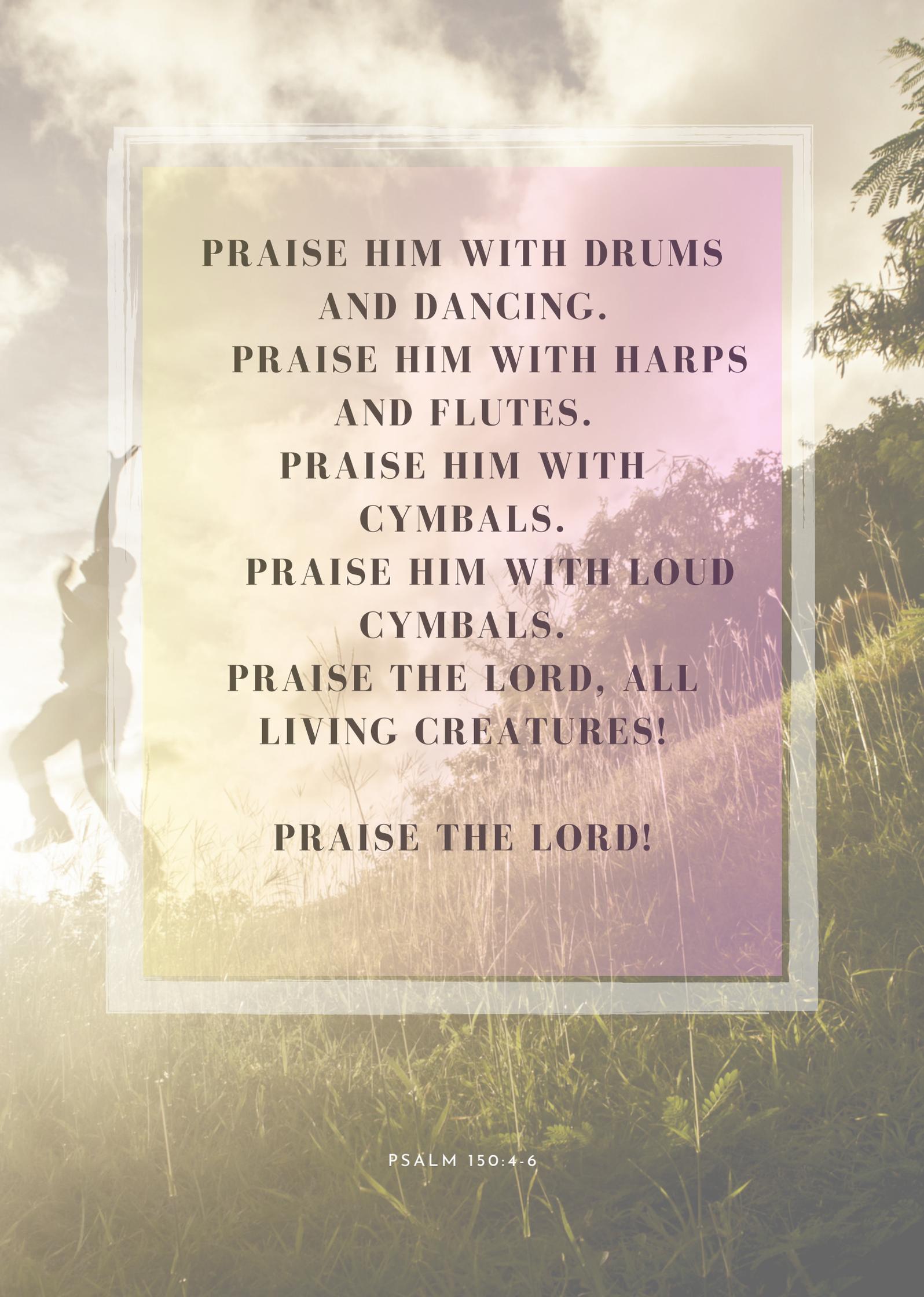


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