

12 Saddleback convictions about worship (Part One)

by Rick Warren

Jesus' ministry attracted enormous crowds. The Bible tells us that crowds followed him wherever he went. I believe that a Christ-like ministry still attracts crowds today. You don't need gimmicks. You don't need to

compromise your convictions. You don't need to water down your message. If you minister to people the way Jesus did, they'll want to be around your ministry like they did his.

But how do you develop a worship service that'll minister to those crowds each weekend? It's important that you figure out *why* you do what you do before you figure out *what* your worship service will include. At Saddleback, 12 convictions determine how we minister to the crowds on the weekends. Here's why we do what we do in our worship services.

“Whenever you hear people talk about being sensitive to unbelievers, that is not watering down the gospel. It's called love. You're just being nice to them.”

Rick Warren

1. Only believers can truly worship God.

The Bible says, "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24 HCSB). Worship must rest on a true understanding of who God is – and that can only happen when a person has a relationship with God. You can have a worship service full of people, but only believers can really worship.

2. You don't need a building to worship God.

For 15 years we didn't have a building of our own. But I guarantee we did a lot of worshipping during that time. The Bible says, "The God who made the world and all things in it, since he is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands" (Acts 17:24 NAS). God created everything in the world. That includes any place you might consider having a worship service. Worship isn't a place; it's a verb.

3. There is no correct style of worship.

The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 12: "There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men." God gives us only three requirements for worship. It must be authentic and accurate (in spirit and truth, as Jesus tells us in John 4). Paul also tells us in 1 Corinthians 14 that it should be done in an orderly fashion. Beyond that, God gives us freedom.

Debates over worship styles are almost always sociological or personality clashes, couched in theological terms. Everybody thinks that their worship style is the most biblical. But there is no one biblical style. There are no musical notes in the Bible. We don't even have the instruments that they had. The truth is God loves all kinds of worship styles – as long as we worship him in spirit, in truth, and in an orderly fashion.

4. While unbelievers can't worship, they can watch believers worship.

We see this truth lived out in Acts 2. "They worshiped together regularly at the Temple each day, met in small groups in homes for Communion, and shared their meals with great joy and thankfulness, praising God. The whole city was favorable to them, and each day God added to them all who were being saved" (Acts 2: 46-47 TLB).

When the early church worshipped, non-believers came to faith in Christ. Non-Christians can't worship, but they can see the kind of joy worship brings us. They can see how God's Word transforms our heart, comforts us, and interacts with us. God can use our worship services to draw non-believers to himself.

5. Worship is a powerful witness to unbelievers if God's presence is felt and the message is understandable.

Both of those are essential parts of a worship service when witnessing to unbelievers. Again, Acts 2 is a good example of this. God's presence was so evident in the disciple's worship at Pentecost that it attracted the attention of all the unbelievers throughout the city. And then the message was understandable. Remember the miracle of tongues? Every man heard the message in his own language. It had to be understandable! And that's true today as well.

6. God expects us to be sensitive to the fears, hang-ups, and the needs of unbelievers when they are present in our worship services.

The Bible says in Colossians 4:5 (NIV): "Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity." When you have guests over for dinner at your house, do you act a little bit differently? I hope so! A little bit more polite. Maybe you use a different set of china or dishes. The presentation of the meal is a little bit more thoughtful. The table conversation is a little bit more courteous. You may be still eating beans and weenies. It's the same meal, but you are presenting it in a little more polite way.

Is that being hypocritical? No. It's called being polite. Whenever you hear people talk about being sensitive to unbelievers, that is not watering down the gospel. It's called love. You're just being nice to them.

In the next issue, I'll share with you the other six convictions that our worship services are built around at Saddleback.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rick".