

A FEW OF MY FAVORITE THINGS

I'm one of three girls and a preacher's kid. You know the ones. We're usually getting into all sorts of orneriness, testing boundaries, pushing our parents' buttons.....you know generally being kids BUT while living in the parsonage!

The 3 of us learned early on to "behave" in church, not make a spectacle of ourselves. I do not mean this in a derogatory way toward my parents. Not at all. On the contrary, they instilled in us a respect for the church – the building and it's people – that has remained. For example: You don't attend worship in your grungy workout clothes. Not because of how you look, but rather out of respect for who's house you're in and for what purpose you are there. Similarly, you don't run around the sanctuary like your hair's on fire! And, once you're over a certain age, eating during worship doesn't happen either. (That one's a bummer sometimes!)

However, the other parts of being a PK are kind of neat – Sunday school and VBS, church camps in the summer, youth group as a teen – these were normal parts of our lives. It wasn't "weird" or "strange" to worship, or pray, or sing. And although we moved every few years, which meant a new house, a new school district, and a new group of people, the basic structure of "church" stayed the same place to place. Including my favorite part – the music!

Songs have a way of getting into your brain and just hanging out. We'd come home from a week at church camp and drive Mom & Dad nutty with the choruses that we just couldn't stop singing. Or the VBS theme song would rattle around that week and for several weeks after. Sometimes the youth group would attend a concert and we'd come home with tapes (yep,

tapes, not CDs or electronic tracks!) that would be played until they couldn't be played anymore.

And, in the midst of it, as a kid, you didn't really realize just what was happening.

As an adult you can look back on it and have a better understanding, sometimes.

The songs sung round a campfire under the stars. Or in little chairs as we went from room to room in vacation Bible school. And, in the vans on the late drives back from a concert.

Do you know what those were?

Those were times of praise and worship!

Yep...music isn't simply a place holder in the service. It isn't just what we do until it's "time to worship". Music itself is a form of worship and can be a form of praise.

~~WHAT MAKES UP A "BIBLICAL WORSHIP SERVICE"?~~

We've gleaned from the Bible what was included in a worship service during the first century – the time shortly following Christ's time on earth with us. And from this we have crafted a "typical" worship service as described in the new testament. There's basically 6 parts, each of which we still use, though in differing amounts and frequency: communion, prayers, songs sung to the glory of God, a collection (so that the work of the church could continue), the reading of Scriptures, and the proclaiming of the word of God.

I think you've picked up on the fact that I'm going to talk about music today, yes? And within our worship service, we use 2 types of music....praise songs and songs of worship.

~~DIFFERENCE BTWN WORSHIP AND PRAISE~~

Did you know there's a difference? I think we all know it, but sometimes it can be difficult to articulate the difference between these two acts.

As I was prepping to stand up here today, I stumbled across the following definitions, or descriptions of praise and worship as they are described in the Bible. And they made sense to me. So I thought I'd pass them along to you.

PRAISE is described as "energetic" and "joyful". It's pretty hard to be solemn, or angry, or morose and be able to actively praise our Lord. As kids, these were often the songs that we had movements for, the ones during which we'd all be up and dancing!

WORSHIP can be described as "an expression of adoration and reverence". It "simply requires that you recognize Jesus' place in your life".

~~WHAT ARE MY FAVORITES?~~

This list is by no means exhaustive, nor is it completed. I find new songs every week that resonate in my soul.

As a *child*, some of favorites were the *old choruses* that many of us know. When we were little, we got a very basic understanding of the Gospel from these. Looking at them through the lens of adulthood, there's so much more to them.....

Jesus loves me ~~Jesus loves me. This I know, for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to Him belong. They are weak, but He is strong." It's still one that I sing when I need comfort.

It was one that my grandfather taught us in “pennsylvania dutch”, which I long ago figured out wasn’t the actual language, but more a mix of gibberish and English and dutchy. I sing this song in both English and Pap’s version often!

Deep & wide ~~ “Deep and wide. Deep and wide. There’s a fountain flowing deep and wide.” With the almost universally known gestures...come on do them with me, one time.....deep....and wide. As a kid going through this chorus was a fun way to work off some energy before sitting down for the Sunday school lesson. And if you had a really fun song leader, leave out a word each time you went through it....could you keep up? You tried!

Jesus loves the little children ~~ “Jesus loves the little children. All the children of the world. Red and yellow, black and white. They are precious in His sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world.” A gentle reminder that although my friends & I in those pretty rural churches may have looked very similar, Jesus loves everyone around the world. Didn’t matter what they look like, language they speak.

And what about “*hymns*”. *The traditional songs we sing*? The ones that have become fixed in almost everyone’s minds. We have hymns of praise, of worship, for specific times in the calendar and holidays. We have hymns that are upbeat and peppy. We have hymns that portray the sorrow and anguish we sometimes feel. Some of these are pulled almost directly from scripture with little change in the wording. Some are more artistic, and poetic. Some are patriotic – imploring God’s hand watch over our nation. And, the best part? We singing them as a community. As a church family lift our voices in praise, in thanks, in prayer – in melody!

Amazing grace ~~ “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now I’m found. Was blind but now I see.” Grace that saved us. Despite that fact that we absolutely do not deserve it. God through the death of His son Jesus gives us that grace if we simply believe. What an amazing gift!

Do Lord ~~ “Do Lord, oh do Lord, oh do remember me. Do Lord, oh do Lord, oh do remember me. Do Lord, oh do Lord, oh do remember me. Way beyond the blue.” A plea for our Lord to remember us, to remember His promise of our salvation. A plea to be allowed access to Heaven when our time comes. And as you go through the verses, an invitation to those who may not yet know Him -- “I took Jesus as my savior. You take Him too.” All in a melody that’s easy to take with you!

Victory in Jesus ~~ “Oh victory in Jesus. My savior forever. He sought me and bought me with His redeeming blood; He loved me ere I knew Him, and all my love is due Him; he plunged me to victory beneath the cleansing flood.” The highlights of our salvation in one song – how cool! “I heard”, “I cried”, “some sweet day I’ll sing up there”!

Those “*old songs*” will always hold a place in my heart. They are part of the foundation of our church as we know it now.

We also have *newer songs*. We call them “*contemporary Christian music*”, right? And, I know they aren’t everyone’s cup of tea. There’s drums. There’s guitars. The key sometimes changes mid song. But these are also songs of praise and worship. Just like “the old rugged cross” may resonate with some folks, Phil Wickham’s song “Battle Belongs” will stir others to worship. Just

like you may like jazz and your neighbor prefers classic rock. *We can incorporate different genres* into the service on a Sunday morning.

Let me tell you about a few of *my favorites*...

My Jesus ~~ “He makes a way where there aint no way, rises up from an empty grave. Aint no sinner that He can’t save. Let me tell you ‘bout my Jesus.” Our personal savior. Our Jesus. *Let me tell you about this friend I have.* I defy you to sing this song and stay still. To not stand up. To stay quiet about Jesus to every one around you. It’ll prove pretty difficult to do!

We believe ~~ “In this time of desperation, when all is dark, You help us see. There is only one salvation. We believe.” The *chorus* goes on to remind us what is that we as Christians believe. It’s *close to a recitation of the Apostles’ creed....*”we believe in God the Father. We believe in Jesus Christ. We believe in the Holy Spirit, and He’s given us new life. We believe in the crucifixion. We believe that He conquered death. We believe in the resurrection, and He’s comin’ back again.” Again, similar to some of the old hymns, it’s *the gospel in a nutshell.*

The blessing ~~ “The Lord bless you and keep you. Make His face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you. The Lord turn his face toward you, and give you peace.” Pulled straight from *Numbers 6:24-26*. What better blessing can we hope for? His peace. His grace. His protection. This one takes up a pretty big chunk of my brain, often!

So, are any of these kinds of songs better than another? No. They may appeal more to one group than another. But each serves its purpose. Each type of song helps us as we delve into praise, as we quiet our hearts to worship.

And, each type of music can help bring us into a closer relationship with God. I don't know about you, but there are days when a song goes round and round my head like a prayer. If I'm having a slightly more trying day, it sounds more like a plea for help, strength, or support. When I'm having a better, easier day, it's happy and upbeat and thanking God for everything. And it's not always the same song. It's not always the same genre. It's not even always the same key or tempo – those absolutely change based on my mood! But there's always something musical running through my brain as a prayer.

Friends, my prayer for you and for me today is that the music in your life will help you to worship all day long!

Let us pray.....