

# Helping Seventh-day Adventists Worship

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# Editorial

## Liberty

It is only a few months since Iraq was 'liberated', but for all the promises of 'freedom', the Iraqis have been asking about electricity, water, jobs, oil, petrol, and a million other things that we take for granted. This month two countries celebrate over two hundred years of 'independence' – France and the USA.

The French Revolution was a bloody, brutal change to 'democracy'. It took a few years for it to settle down. It has been a checkered history ever since. Napoleon took 'democracy' across Europe till he was conquered. There have been numerous troubles since, two world wars fought in France, and then trying to find its identity in the new post-colonial, post European dominance world. They have had 6 constitutions in that time.

The United States rebelled against what it thought was imperial mismanagement by Britain, and separated from it. It formed what it claimed was 'democracy'. After that it remained distant from world affairs, before dominating world affairs. It believes its role is to 'free' oppressed countries.

As Christians we also talk about liberty and freedom, but what do we mean by these terms? We often don't let people express their own opinions about God, religion and faith. By the same token, we say that people can be free of sin now.

A while back I learnt something interesting about the Amish<sup>1</sup>. For all their 'backward' practices, there was one that stood out in my mind. At the age of 16 they let their children go out into the world to do whatever they want. At the end of that time, these children, now adults, choose whether to make the Amish faith their own, or to remain where they are.

So often we talk about human freedom, but so often we try to limit it within God's authority. Rev 3 talks about God preferring us to not choose Him rather than to sit on the fence, not really going to either side. Perhaps we all need to follow what the Amish did to explore our options to make an informed position.

In Grace Notes this month we'll explore the negative impact of human freedom on other people.

Till next month  
Nigel Bruce

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.npr.org/programs/morning/features/2002/may/amish/> refers to a documentary I heard about on a different show. It explores the lives of some teens that actually have their freedom to choose between the world and the Amish faith. [http://www.oprah.com/tows/pastshows/tows\\_2002/tows\\_past\\_20021121\\_c.jhtml](http://www.oprah.com/tows/pastshows/tows_2002/tows_past_20021121_c.jhtml) also talks about the documentary.

# Devotional

## Let them eat cake

Many of us are fond of a good cake (occasionally of course!). I'm not going to discuss the nutritional value of cakes (each cake varies, as well as the nutritional needs of each of us), but as much as we can say that cakes are bad for us, we still love to eat them.

I believe cakes illustrate what the Christian life is like. To start with we turn on the oven. We warm to the gospel message slowly but surely. We also grease the baking tin so we finally leave the confines of the world. If you are stuck in the tin, even as a crumb, you'll be thrown in the rubbish. At least Jesus has greased the tin.

We then sift some flour into a bowl, getting rid of lumps. Often we use plain flour of works expecting great results, when the self-raising flour of grace can provide results beyond expectation. But if it is lumpy the cake ends up like a saggy old mattress, which is no good to anyone. We shouldn't adopt ideas wholly without putting them through a sieve to remove any bits that may not blend with the final product. We also need some flour, sugar, and other dry ingredients.

If it weren't for the wet ingredients the dry ones would never hold together. The eggs are the best binders, and in some cakes they are beaten separately while others go straight in. Still, you have to remove the shell to release the liquid, otherwise you have inedible bits throughout the cake. Many cakes also have milk and/or water added to them. We might need milk as babies, but we continue to need to use it to grow spiritually through life.

If that is all you put into a cake it would be very bland, but it is the different flavorings we add to it that makes the cake enjoyable. It is the personal touches that make life enjoyable. And for some a cake needs icing. For some, it is a sifting of sugar on top. For others it is a rich sauce. This is the people that go the extra mile for you without a second thought.

We often talk about being the refiner's fire, but it is never comfortable in a 180°C + oven. But when we get out of that oven we will be in paradise, and can finally enjoy fully the pure taste of the cake God has cooked. Thankfully, we can still lick the bowls in anticipation of that day.

In the purported words of Marie Antoinette, "LET THEM EAT CAKE!"

# Bible Study

## Isaiah 6

When God called Isaiah to ministry, He used a very powerful worship event that only Isaiah partook of. Ever since, Christians have referred to his experience when they consider what it means to be called to worship God.

Have you ever noticed that it wasn't the first thing that happened to Isaiah? For some reason Isaiah has included this event in chapter 6, not in the first chapter. In fact, he doesn't introduce himself till then. So often we expect the important call from God to be the beginning of our ministry (can it work any other way?). Yet God gives Isaiah a vision first, then gives the specific call for Isaiah to go.

Have you ever tried to visualise what the Seraph look like (v2)? It seems that everything on this earth has a relatively sameness to it, with most creatures having only two wings. No wonder that Isaiah looked a little dazed, as he saw creatures unknown to earth giving praise to God.

In many of our worship services we emphasis silence and orderliness. This event doesn't seem to fit into our mould, with the voices of the seraphs causing the whole building to shake and even God's residence filled with smoke. No wonder that Isaiah felt so unworthy. But wouldn't we feel the same way if we felt that we were going to die?

Then the seraph does something interesting. He takes a coal and puts it on Isaiah's mouth. It is not to sanctify his mouth, or even give him the right words to say. Notice what the seraph says. "your guilt is taken away and your sin is atoned for."(v7) What does touching a man's mouth have to do with salvation?

There was no sacrifice. There was no offering. There was no priest. Isaiah hadn't even confessed specific sins, except that he and his people had unclean lips. Nothing about the rest of the body, especially when we remember the many abominations the Jews practised during this time.

Yet God offered no condemnation, instead offering full pardon for those sins. And instead of simply stating it to Isaiah, He used a visual aid to help Isaiah experience the forgiveness. It is then that God speaks for the first time, and it is the well known question "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"(v8)

Would you be able to answer that question the same way Isaiah did? Are you ready to share the message of Jesus Christ to the world? Perhaps we need to have the same worship experience.

# Grace Notes

Can you do whatever you want?

It has been called the scandal of grace. A person can commit a hideous crime and it can be forgiven by God. It seems so unfair, yet we still want a God who is graceful to us, and still is a just God. Does grace simply let us do whatever we want, with the knowledge that God will forgive us?

We all know that Paul's answer to that is DEFINITELY NOT. Living in grace means that we have the means to live a better life than we did before. The Ten Commandments are not the means to salvation but to the conditions for living life.

We can accept all of that but still have trouble with the idea that people will still abuse this grace, causing more pain for people than they can handle. The doctrine of the judgment has also caused its fair share of problems through the centuries, instilling fear into believers. In the twenty-first century we still have problems with this doctrine. We may sound orthodox in our explanation of it, and still recognise it as a Biblical doctrine, but it is in the murky area of practice that it comes under great scrutiny.

Part of the problem lies in Adventist understanding of judgment. We claim that this is the work of Jesus in the Heavenly Sanctuary at present, but it has led to us becoming judgmental of people now. Thus, instead of leaving it for God we become judge and jury, condemning all sinners immediately. We almost feel that God will be too lenient (or graceful to these people that have hurt innocent lives) and take it upon ourselves to show God's justice, hopefully stopping some sins being committed.

The dilemma still remains as to preventing innocent victims while allowing individuals the free choice to do what they want. It is never an easy choice, but God has chosen our free will over His feelings, continuing to let people make their own choices. At the same time He has intervened to prevent some individuals from affecting innocent people being victims to those decisions.

For a number of years there has been great discussion over the way Christian churches have handled sexual abuse. Innocent victims continued to be abused even while authorities knew about it. The leaders believed that they should cover up these stories, in the belief that God's grace covered the offenders. It does, but it didn't protect the victims. True grace would have confronted the 'alleged' offender (in the proper context, giving them privacy), and taken action later if the offender was not going to get treatment for his problem.

So instead of the problem being dealt with originally, there are cases over 40 years old just emerging now. Grace takes the hard road, and of necessity takes time. Ask God. He has waited millennia with us.

# Developing a Theology of Worship

## Secondary Sources

Last month we looked at the Primary source – the Bible. This month we look at the other sources that often interpret the Bible. For many Adventists, a second close to the Bible is the writings of Ellen White. There are many other more contemporary works that we can read, but we will use EGW as an example in this article.

They never take the place of the Bible. We constantly need reminding of this first point. Ellen White constantly said her work was to guide people to the greater light. So often we use other works because we understand them more easily than the Bible, but we need to read them in reference to the Bible.

No one source is definitive. In marketing hype it may even legitimately claim to be definitive, but it rarely is definitive for eternity. Before Ellen White met Joseph Bates she was sceptical of the seventh-day Sabbath, but later accepted it. And it wasn't until 1855 that they understood that the Sabbath began at Sunset, not sunrise or 6pm. Initially Adventists held to a 'close-door' view, believing that no-one else could be saved. It slowly changed so that now we have a strong emphasis on mission right around the world. We don't even need to talk about their belief in the Second Coming in 1844. Does that mean Ellen White, and other early leaders, were wrong? Obviously, in hindsight they were, but at the time no one else had better answers to challenge them. The problem is not her writings, but trying to interpret them a century on with different perspectives. We should see all interpretations as just that, words written on a page at a particular moment in time, which may stimulate light on the subject, but may be superseded over time.

This leads to the third point. It is useful to read works with the author's context in mind. But just like the Bible, it is possible to get so caught up in all the extra material that we lose sight of the text itself. Knowing the author's perspective will help us understand their position. There are many factors to consider: geographical location, time period, ideology, theology, their career, and family. These factors also impact the initial readers of the documents. In addition, one needs to recognise the literary nature of the work. We all know that Ellen White lived in the late-nineteenth century America, as a prophetess who helped found the Adventist church. Her initial readers were new Adventists, as well as senior church leaders. She has many letters with specific details for the reader, and numerous books that were for broader readership.

Finally, a good book should not only provide some answers, but raise many questions in the reader's mind, as well as perhaps suggesting different ways of seeing the subject. To form a theology of worship it is essential that we continue to look at things from different perspectives. This is the value of reading a wide-variety of books.

# Being a Worshipper of God

## Gender

There's an old joke that says there are three types of people in the world – those that can count and those that can't.

At our very being, there are only two types of people in the world – male and female. Over the last few decades these terms have been redefined, in the hope of achieving equality. In God's eyes we are all equal, but we still experience, practice, and understand things differently. Even as Christians men and women see God differently, and this affects how they worship. If you'll allow me, I'm going to use some very broad generalisations about both groups (even though my understanding of women may be limited).

If there is one thing that women want in life, and in their worship, it is nurturing. It is the opportunity to interact with others, to be loved, and to feel God in a new way. They like the personal nature of worship, often preferring small group interaction, personal testimonies, and the experiential nature of worship. Men prefer to avoid expressing their emotions, enjoying being lost in the crowd, and the logical, philosophical nature within an orderly format. The sermon is the highlight of their worship experience.

We could talk about how both genders see the world differently, the different stereo-types, and the many different facets that define our gender roles. But I would like to talk about a subject that often isn't raised – sex. As young kids we couldn't stand 'boy or girl-germs', but then one morning we woke up and found that we only wanted to be with them. It is our sexual function that makes us different. The women are the ones that bear the children, and then raise them up, while the male has a 'fatherhood' role that is not as involved as that of the women.

We may find Freud's understanding of humanity too simplistic, but not only did he make us aware of 'hidden' natures within us, but that we are sexual beings, with sexual needs, roles, and desires. At a simplistic scientific level that is all that we are, but God created this within us, and though sin can (and has) ruined it, is something we cannot deny. In fact, true worship recognises that sex is not merely a procreation necessity, but a gift of beauty and enjoyment when it is used in the right way. God set it apart as something that happened between two lovers as an expression of each other, and a way of worshipping God by recognising the special gift He has given us.

# Being a Worship Leader

## The key to being a good worship leader

Whatever role one takes in life, we all want to be successful at it. Being a worship leader is no exception. While I recognise that no one thing makes you successful I believe that without this key you won't have a successful worship ministry. In fact, it is the key to successful Christian ministry, and life.

If you look at all the leaders God chose in the Bible, it wasn't their impressive resume that got them the job. They often didn't inspire people with confidence, their oratorical skills were negligible, and they didn't have the 'right' connections. But they did have the only connection that mattered. And that is the key – good connection with God. Or, in other words, a regular worship time with God.

So often we get caught up in doing all the things that we forget to worship ourselves. I recognise that we often don't have the time to do everything that we would like to do, but being a leader means getting our priorities right. It is not our show that we present to God. Remember that we are only the 'cue' cards, which we need to follow as well. To worship as well as do our job, we need to prepare well before hand, but this often leads us to neglect our own personal devotion.

By being worshippers ourselves we then find ourselves with the rare quality of integrity. We all have heard of people who promised different things, even did good deeds, but then some dark secret came out that destroyed whatever good work they did. Integrity limits these kinds of problems, but being sinners will not remove these kinds of scandals.

People often think that being a leader gives you many nice perks, but true leadership, especially Christian leadership, is not about being the central figure of the show. Jesus showed us that the highest form of leadership was in fact servanthood. The gap between leaders and followers isn't as great as we try to make it out to be. In fact, being a leader means you find yourself learning from your followers just as much as they learn from you.

# Nuts and Bolts

## Running Sheets

Running sheets are not new. Many churches have used a standard format, by simply filling in the gaps. Unfortunately, for many churches, this has resulted in a cold, staid worship format that one can predict with ease. What is new is many churches developing a new format every week. Some are very simply, while others have all the information you need. Here is a good way to go about doing a running sheet, whichever type you have.

List the items that will occur in that service, e.g., offerings, sermon etc.

Next to each list the person who is in charge of that area

Find out the time needs of each item. For example, if the Scripture reading is a longer passage give it more time than say for one verse. It is useful if it is timed exactly. When it comes to prayer try to be specific. Many people assume that it goes for 5 minutes (occasionally it does), but most only go for 2-3 minutes.

Do you need specific PA or computer requirements? Ensure that the people doing this are informed, know what is expected, and have a running sheet themselves.

Now is the time to work out the order of the program. There are many factors to consider when doing this. These can fall into 2 categories. Firstly, the purpose of the program. For example, if a call is going to be made at the end, you want to eliminate any other 'calls' that morning, so that the call is given the necessary emphasis. All other aspects of the program will then build up to that point. Secondly, the practical details. It is no use having a drama with lots of people straight after the song service unless the actors can come from a different entrance.

Now, no running sheet is immune from unexpected changes. But if something does arise, ask the following questions.

What time changes need to be made? If adding something, know what sort of time you do have to work with? If it is a reduction, what can fill that space?

Who is doing this unexpected change? If it is someone with an announcement, be sure who is doing it so they are aware of when they have the floor. If someone is unable to come, can anyone else fill in?

Finally, make sure that everyone involved in the program has access to the running sheet. I've known times when a running sheet was created. Others changed it, and no-one knew what was going on. When changes are made, make sure that the person in charge of doing that sheet is informed, so that they can liaise with everyone else.