



ISSUE

22.8

February 23, 2020

# Faithful Sayings

BULLETIN  
OF THE  
OLSEN PARK  
CHURCH OF  
CHRIST

## Services

**Sunday: 9:00 AM**

**10:00 AM**

**11:00 AM**

**Wednesday: 7:00 PM**

## Elders:

**Pat Ledbetter**

**Brady McAlister**

**Jeff Nunn**

## Deacons:

**Steve Dixon**

**Ryan Ferguson**

**Ben Hight**

**Blake McAlister**

**Walker McNear**

**Sam Nunn**

**Lance Purcell**

**Justin Smiley**

**Kevin Wise**

**Trevor Yontz**

## Evangelist:

**Kyle Pope**

## Contemporary Worship

By David Banning

Do you pay attention to church signs? If you do, you may have noticed that many churches are now offering more than one kind of service. They will have a traditional service, followed by a contemporary service. Have you wondered what that's all about?

Contemporary worship is about the music. There will be no congregational singing and certainly no traditional hymns. Instead, there will be a band with professional singers raising the roof with modern songs that sound a lot like soft-rock music. Contemporary worship is about the message. At some point the speaker will address the crowd. His message will be short and devotional with only passing references to Scripture. It won't be negative or controversial because that might drive visitors away. Contemporary worship is about the emotion. The crowd will be on its feet, waving their hands back and forth and cheering or singing along. It looks sort of like a spiritual rock concert. The people seem so genuinely enthusiastic about what they are doing. Contemporary worship is about the impact. It is an approach to worship that really draws a crowd. So, more churches offer a contemporary option on Sunday.

It is easy to be drawn to this kind of service. It seems so alive and full of passion for God. And sometimes our services seem dull and lacking that same passion. I think young people are especially at risk. Tired of worship that seems routine and absent of genuine emotion, they start looking for something with more energy. Sometimes they believe the church up the street with the more contemporary worship has the answer. They may not do everything exactly right, but they are definitely on fire for the Lord.

But if we go with that feeling and begin to imitate this contemporary approach, we will be following a path that does not lead to God-glorifying worship. Let me be clear that this isn't just about personal preference. I don't object to this style because I prefer something a bit more subdued. The problem with the contemporary worship model is that it involves a flawed approach to worship. Let me illustrate with three simple questions.

### **Where did the contemporary model come from?**

I cannot give you a complete historical picture of how the contemporary style began, but I can tell you about one church. The Willow Creek Community Church in the suburbs of Chicago has done more to promote the contemporary model than any other. For more than thirty years,

they have not only drawn thousands each weekend to their contemporary styled services, but they helped other groups all over the country develop this same model. The Willow Creek model has been touted in books and explained through seminars. Countless churches have adopted the model and have experienced similar results.

But where did this idea come from? In the case of Willow Creek, it came from the community. In 1975, members of this church hit the streets of suburban Chicago and started talking to people who did not attend worship services. They were trying to find out why they did not go. They heard things like, "It's boring", "It's not relevant to my life", "The preacher is always begging for money."

Armed with these answers, this group set out to build a new kind of local church, one based on a marketing strategy. To put it simply, they found out what the consumers wanted, and they designed a church that would fit the needs of their target audience (show-biz service, soft-sell sermons, easy parking, childcare). One writer compared the approach to the old Burger King slogan – they let them "have it their way." Their efforts were very successful. Fifteen years later, the account of the Willow Creek story was the subject of an article in *USA Weekend Magazine* (*USA Weekend* April 15, 1990). Their average attendance was more than 14,000 at their Sunday services, with 25,000 expected for their Easter service.

### **Is this really the right approach?**

Some will be so impressed with the size of the crowd that they will miss the fundamental flaw in their approach. Did you catch it? They decided how they should worship God . . . BY TALKING TO PEOPLE WHO DO NOT WORSHIP GOD! Is that really a good strategy?



Olsen Park Church of Christ

Should we decide how to worship based on the opinions of people who don't? Knowing that this is how it all started, we are left with significant doubts about this model. I don't mean to be unkind about this crowd, but I don't think they have the answer.

But I do think there is an answer. If we want to honor God with our worship, then we don't need to be talking to the community or looking at the religious group up the street who has moved to a contemporary worship model. Instead, we need to be looking at God's book (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

### What does God say about worship?

First, worship is God directed (Eph. 5:19). We make many points from this passage about singing. But there is a little thing at the end of the verse—I think the most important thing—that is often passed over. Our singing (in fact all of our worship) is **“to the Lord.”** A lot of very religious people have completely lost sight of this. Worship is not the entertainment hour. It is a time for people filled with gratitude and adoration to express those feelings to God. Worship is what we do toward God, not entertainment that others offer us. If we are ever to get worship right, we have to get this right!

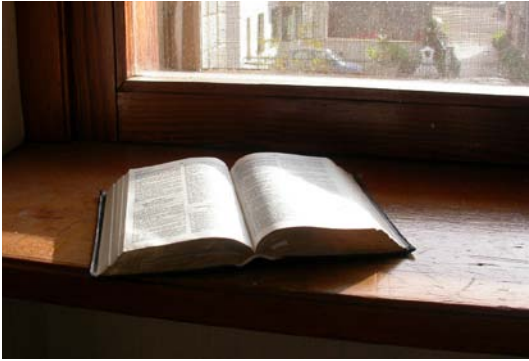
Second, the only way we can know how to honor God is by looking at what He said about worship. When it comes to worship, men have never been left to their own devices. God has always told us HOW to honor Him. When we look to the Old Testament, we find in the Ten Commandments several instructions about worship (no idols, observe the Sabbath Day). When the tabernacle was constructed, God gave detailed instructions about how it was to be made, what was to go in it, and how those who served were to be consecrated. The book of Leviticus contains detailed laws that governed the sacrifices Israel offered (Lev. 1:1-9). There were instructions about Holy Days (when they were to be observed, how they were observed).

The same pattern is continued in the New Testament. Not only are we taught TO worship Jehovah, but there are many instructions about HOW we should do this. In John 4:21-24 Jesus told the Samaritan woman the true worshipers must worship in spirit and truth. In 1 Corinthians 14 the Corinthians

were told to conduct their worship services in a way that was orderly and edifying. In 1 Corinthians 11:23ff they were told how to observe the Lord's Supper. In Acts 4:24 we find the early Christians praying together. In Colossians 3:16 the disciples were to teach each other with songs.

Let me add that these instructions were vital. Many early disciples came from a Jewish background and their understanding of worship was rooted in the laws of the Old Testament. Worship to the Jew meant sacrifices at the temple and observing the holy days. Other early Christians were pagans and their understanding of worship was rooted in pagan idolatry, which could be very corrupt. It was not enough to merely tell these disciples to worship the one true God. They all had to be told HOW to worship Him. If we want to honor God—if our object is to please Him—then we must look at what He says.

Third, worship is to be offered in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24). Worshiping in truth goes back to that point that we just made. It requires that we follow what God says about HOW He is to be worshiped. But it's not just about going through the right routine. Worshiping in



spirit requires that we engage the heart. It must be an expression of what is truly in us.

Keep in mind that the presence of one element does not eliminate the need for the other. Just because people are very passionate does not mean that WHAT they do is unimportant. Israel was enthusiastic about their worship of the calf (Exod. 32:6); but it was certainly wrong. Surely no one believes that, as long as we are excited and enthusiastic, we

can do whatever we want. Again, we must take our cue from Jesus, from what is expressed in His word.

But let's also remember that simply executing the right activities is not enough. Worship must flow from a sincere heart or it is meaningless to God. Sometimes our young people are tempted to look around at other places because they see our worship as an empty ritual (and sometimes they are right). We just go through the motions without engaging our hearts. There ought to be genuine sense of excitement, passion, and enthusiasm about what we do when we come together. We are worshiping an awesome God who has done the greatest things for us. Our worship should reflect that.

The word contemporary means "of the current time, modern." But I think we've discovered that there is nothing contemporary about this "new" model of worship. In fact, it's as old as the golden calf, even Cain and Abel. It's about men doing what they want, rather than what God wants. We will not find the path to pleasing God in some new teaching or method. Instead, we've got to get back to something very old—back to God's book.

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Please come again.