



LISA STANCZAK

Does corporate worship train us for our tines of personal prayer? Do we believe that God will “turn it around” if we could just sing loudly and fervently enough, regardless of how much we’ve offended His holiness? Does our white-knuckled clutch on personal wish lists have an inverse relationship to kneeling in adoration and fear before our King and Master of the universe?

Could we draw a connection between a lack of fear and reverence for God during “worship” and the recent downfall of prominent leaders from our faith communities?

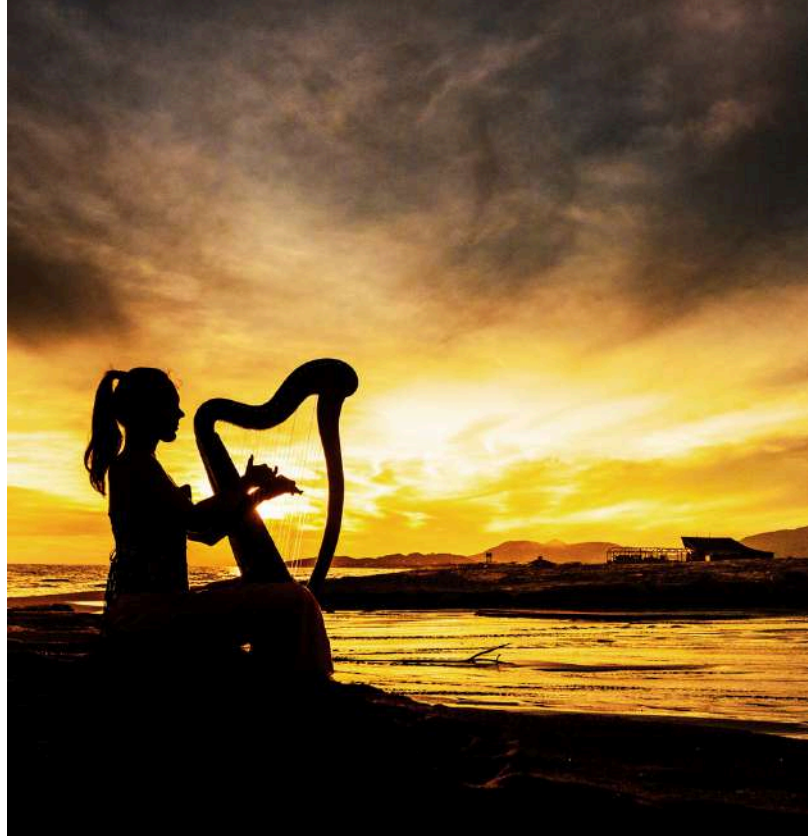
Worship teams in the body of Messiah have tendered many types of songs as forms of worship. In this article I will classify some of these songs according to their relational nature. In a follow-up article, I will discuss how worship equips the body of Messiah for Kingdom work.

Prayer is one type of song labeled as worship. For this discussion, prayer is engaging with God while hoping or expecting to receive something we want. The relational dynamic of prayer is like a boomerang – we ask, God gives, and we receive. Often what we pray for is a change in our circumstances. Asking God to save us or rescue us from our plights is not wrong or even unbiblical. He is, in fact, our deliverer and redeemer. Philippians 4:6 instructs us to make our requests known to God about everything. But when we call the boomerang activity “worship,” we walk a fine line. Invoking the power of God to revamp our uncomfortable situations borders on witchcraft, a practice that summons supernatural power to manipulate or change circumstances. Prayer songs aim for God to understand our will and our desires, and not our trying to understand God’s thoughts and His heart. The promise of Philippians 4:6-7 is not a change in circumstances, but shalom that we can’t understand.



Storytelling (or testimony) is another type of song. We sing testimonies about God in the third person to recount the wonders that He has done in our and others' lives. Testimony brings encouragement and lines up with Ephesians 5:19 which instructs us to "[speak] to one another in Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs." Sharing what we have witnessed is a way of remembering (zachor) – and not forgetting – the awesome power of the God of Israel. The relational dynamic of storytelling is "person to person," but it can also be self-edifying, meaning that we can sing songs of testimony to encourage ourselves. It is important to note that this type of song does not work to build our relationship with God any more than my telling you about my favorite movie star builds my relationship with that movie star, except that, if I eventually meet the movie star, I will already know a lot about that celebrity. An example of storytelling is Miqedem's song, "Betzet Yisrael."

Songs of declaration are like storytelling and can also serve to encourage, but they differ from storytelling because they affirm our God's identity by faith rather than by fact. Relationally, we can make declarations to others, to ourselves, or to God. Being conscious of our focus helps us to understand the relational nature of our pursuits. *Songs of declaration about God*, one subcategory, align with Psalm 105:1-2 which instructs us to make known among the nations what Adonai has done. An example of a declaration about God is Sue Samuel's and Baht Rivka's "Rise Up."



Songs of declaration about ourselves, another subcategory, align with Galatians 2:20 which instructs us to form our identity in Messiah. An example is Mattias Jelski of SOLU's "Ani Chofshi" ("I am Free").

Thanksgiving, or gratitude, is like testimony but coming from a different heart bent. As in storytelling, we stand in awe of God's works. But in thanksgiving, we also express an indebtedness and personal gratitude for what God has done. Thanksgiving pivots the relational dynamic from "person to person" to "person to God" which is a critical shift toward worship. An example of a thanksgiving song is the SOLU team's "Rak Bizkhutkha" ("Only Thanks To You").

Teshuvah, or repentance, is a deeply personal type of song which we offer to Adonai. Relationally, songs of teshuvah (returning) are "person to God"

and also help define the relationship between imperfect humanity and that of holy divinity. Since songs about repentance require an internal change that many people resist, songs in this category are not wildly popular or available. Still, teshuvah must precede worship. Pleading with God for mercy and forgiveness for the ways that we have been unholy and offended Him aligns us with God's will and informs our proper perspective. If we don't come before Him with fear and trembling, with a willingness to change our behavior to please Him and with a desire for Him to change our hearts, we may miss His voice. An example of a song of teshuvah is Yaron Cherniak's "Ashuv Eleicha" ("Coming Back to You").

Worship is the last type of song

I will call out and has two subcategories. For this discussion, worship is two-way communication between the worshiper and the one who is worshiped. The relational aspect is person to God and back again. When worship goes out, Adonai's heart and power come in. *Fear-based adoration* is one subcategory of worship. An example, within the Siddur's "Atah Gibor" (You Are Mighty) liturgical prayers are set to music by Alexander Kuzovkin. *Love-based adoration* is another subcategory. Examples are Shilo Ben Hod's "Dai Li" (Enough for Me) and as seen with Miqedem's "Dodi Li" ("My Beloved").

Songs not grouped as "worship" above can prepare us for worship. But if we never get to worship, we will never know God's heart. Often songwriters



say, "These lyrics come straight from the Bible." But not all biblical passages are worship. If we recognize the differences, we can choose how we engage with God and then start to notice the outcomes. If congregational leaders and worship team leaders are able to explain the relational nature of the songs we express communally, they can help ordinary attendees in their own lifestyle of worship - as they model their personal prayer times on corporate worship services, and in becoming more aware of the nature of their personal interactions with Adonai.





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