

Are We Headed For A Crash? Reflections On The Current State of Evangelical Worship

Posted on [May 19, 2014](#) by [Jamie Brown](#)

Last week I spent a couple of days attending the [National Worship Leader Conference](#), hosted by [Worship Leader Magazine](#), featuring many well-known speakers and worship leaders. The conference was held about 15 minutes down the road from me, so it was an opportunity I couldn't pass up. I'm glad I went.

I met some new people, heard some thought-provoking teaching, enjoyed some good meals and conversations with worship leader friends, and experienced in-person some of the modern worship trends that are becoming the norm in evangelicalism. **It was eye-opening in many ways.**

Over the last few days I've been processing some of what I saw and heard.

Worship Leader Magazine does a fantastic job of putting on a worship conference that will expose the attendees to a **wide variety** of resources, techniques, workshops, songs, new artists, approaches, teachings, and perspectives. I thought of Mark Twain's famous quote "If you don't like the weather in New England, just wait 5 minutes". The same could be said of this conference. It's an intentionally eclectic mix of different speakers, teachers, worship leaders, and performers from different traditions, theological convictions, and worship leading philosophies. You'll hear and see some stuff you like and agree with, and then 5 minutes later you'll hear and see some stuff you don't agree with at all.

It's good for worship leaders to experience this kind of wide-exposure from time to time, and the National Worship Leader Conference certainly provides it.

Yet throughout the conference, at different sessions, with different worship leaders, from different circles, using different approaches, and leading with different bands, I picked up on a **common theme**. It's been growing over the last few decades. And to be honest, it's a **troubling theme**. And if this current generation of worship leaders doesn't change this theme, then corporate worship in evangelicalism really is headed for a major crash.

It's the theme of **performancism**. The worship leader as the performer. The congregation as the audience. The sanctuary as the concert hall.

It really is a problem. It really is a thing. And we really can't allow it to become the norm. **Worship leaders, we must identify and kill performancism while we can.**

It's not rocket science.

Sing songs people know (or can learn easily). Sing them in congregational keys. Sing and celebrate the power, glory, and salvation of God. Serve your congregation. Saturate them with the word of God. Get your face off the big screen ([here's why](#)). Use your original songs in extreme moderation ([heres's why](#)). Err on the side of including as many people as possible in what's going on. Keep the lights up. Stop talking so much. Don't let loops/lights/visuals become your outlet for creativity at the expense of the centrality of the gospel. Point to Jesus. Don't draw attention to yourself. Don't sing songs with bad lyrics or weak theology. Tailor your worship leading, and the songs you pick, to include the largest cross-section of your congregation that you can. Lead pastorally.

I am a worship music nerd. I listen to a lot of it. I follow the recent developments. I know who's out there (sort of). I try to keep up (it's not easy). Even I didn't know most of the songs that we were supposed to be singing along to at the conference. **I tuned out.** I sat down. I Tweeted. I texted my wife. I gave up.

You're not reading the ramblings of a curmudgeony guy complaining about all the new-fangled things the kids are doing these days, with their drums and tom-toms and electric geetars. You're reading the heart-cry of a normal guy who's **worried about what worship leaders are doing to themselves and their congregations.** People are tuning out and giving up and just watching.

This is not a criticism of the National Worship Leader Conference, though I do think they could make some changes to more intentionally model an approach to worship leading that isn't so weighted on the performance side. As I said, the conference exposes us to what's out there in the (primarily) evangelical worship world.

It's what's out there that's increasingly a problem.

Worship leaders: step back. Take a deep breath. Think about it. Do we really want to go down this road? It will result in a crash. Back-up. Recalibrate. Serve your congregations, point them to Jesus, help them sing along and sing with confidence. **Get out the way, for God's sake.**