

INTRODUCTION

The Artist and the Engineer

Dividing all human beings into all-or-nothing binary categories is a crude and unsophisticated way of viewing the world. People are complex, and almost no one is all one thing or another—introvert or extrovert, partier or planner, pessimist or optimist.

Nevertheless, it is sometimes helpful to lump people into categories based on their natural inclinations, giftings, and temperaments. I've found, for example, that when it comes to worship, there are basically two kinds of Christians—the artist and the engineer.

- **The artist** tends to be guided by feeling, intuition, and experience.
- **The engineer** tends to be guided by facts, logic, and reason.

Although very few people are pure artist or engineer, most of us tend to lean one way or another. (If you don't know which way you lean, ask the person who knows you best. They'll have a quick answer for you, I promise.) For better or worse, these leanings permeate every aspect of our lives, including the way we think about worship.

Over the years, I've found that many of the "engineer Christians" would be perfectly content to walk into church right before the sermon after the singing and the praying is over. These engineer Christians love a good logical sermon, laden with propositional truth claims, syllogisms, and cross references galore. Throw in a chart of some kind and the engineers will ascend to the highest heaven!

The artist Christian, on the other hand, is more than happy to sing for most of the service, but would prefer to trim the sermon down to something like a fifteen-minute devotional. The artists want to *feel* more than *think*, to *experience* more than *analyze* and *interpret*.

There's nothing wrong with being an artist or an engineer, as long as you're open to letting God's Word correct your instincts, intuitions, and inclinations where they may be out of line with God's vision for faithful corporate worship ... which is what this book is all about.

THE NEED

I wasn't planning on writing a book about worship, but then I preached through the Song of Moses one

Sunday as part of an expositional series through the book of Exodus. When I did, I found a song that offered encouragement *and* correction to both the artist and the engineer. In Exodus 15, I found a description *of* and prescription *for* corporate worship that has much to say to the modern church. In Exodus 15, we find the *Song of Moses*. But more than that, we find God. Not just any God, but the God of the Bible. And the God of the Bible is a God who reveals Himself through reason and beauty, logic and creativity, prose and poetry, propositional truth claims and musical melodies. In Exodus 15, we encounter a God who leads His people through stories, sermons, and *songs*.

The Song of Moses recounts the incredible saga of God leading His people through the perils of the Red Sea to salvation on the farther shore. But what you really have to understand about the *song* of Exodus 15 is that it comes right after the *narrative* of the same event in chapter 14, and that's on purpose. Why? Well, because narrative is not enough.

As God inspired Moses to write the Exodus story, a mere factual recounting of the salvation story was not sufficient. In recording the events of redemptive history, God didn't just want truth, He also wanted beauty. He didn't just want prose, He also wanted poetry. He didn't just want a story, He also wanted a soundtrack.

We're going to spend the rest of our time in this little book taking a closer look at the Song of Moses, but my aim is not to study the *content* of the song. There are many fantastic books and commentaries that you can consult on the particulars of the crossing of the Red Sea. In this book I'd like us to step back and consider what this song has to teach us about corporate worship more broadly. But before we dive in, allow me to get ahead of a potential objection.

Some of you may be wondering what a song from several thousand years ago, written in the desert, under the Old Covenant, can possibly teach us about modern corporate worship. Well, as it turns out ... quite a lot, actually.

The fundamental pattern of worship has not changed since the days of Moses, because the same God who led Israel to worship Him by the sea is the same God who leads us to worship Him in the church, and the nature and character of our God never changes (James 1:17). The basic pattern of biblical worship is the same from the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelation. Some of the details may change along the way, but the broad contours are the same from the beginning of the story to the end. I think you'll see what I mean by the time you finish reading.

As we work through the Song of Moses together, I want to invite you to consider eleven insights that

should give shape to the way we worship as the body of Christ. Some of these insights may seem obvious to you. Great, you've been discipled well! But even when an insight seems obvious to you, I'd still like you to consider it as carefully as if it were a fresh revelation. After all, we rarely know things as well as we think we do, and we usually need to be reminded as much as we need to be initiated. Or, as the Apostle Paul put it in his letter to the Philippians,

To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. (Phil. 3:1)

Finally, some of these insights may challenge or even frustrate you. Your initial gut-reaction may be to argue or disagree, which you're certainly free to do! But I want to gently challenge you, dear reader, right here at the outset of the book, to try and read with an *open* mind and a *humble* heart. If you're anything like me, I'm sure you wouldn't say that you've got this worship thing figured out. Right? But we're always striving to grow in faithfulness! So, if you can agree, at least in theory, that you don't worship God perfectly (yet!), then allow yourself to be stretched and challenged by some of the more difficult portions of this little book. And always ask yourself, "Does this line up with the Word of God?" If it doesn't, discard it immediately. But if it does, receive it with joy (Acts 17:11).

Redemption Song

Now, with all that in mind, I'm going to ask you to do something that may seem strange at first, even though it shouldn't. Would you take a moment, before reading any further, to pause and pray? To ask God to guard you from error and lead you into truth? Ask God to encourage you where you need to be encouraged, and correct you where you need to be corrected?

* * *

Okay, now let's read the text:

Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the LORD, saying,

"I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously;

the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.

The LORD is my strength and my song,

and he has become my salvation;

this is my God, and I will praise him,

my father's God, and I will exalt him.

The LORD is a man of war;

the LORD is his name.

"Pharaoh's chariots and his host he cast into the sea,
and his chosen officers were sunk in the Red Sea.

The floods covered them;

they went down into the depths like a stone.

Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power,

your right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy.

In the greatness of your majesty you overthrow
your adversaries;

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you send out your fury; it consumes them like stubble.

At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up;
the floods stood up in a heap;
the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea.

The enemy said, 'I will pursue, I will overtake,
I will divide the spoil, my desire shall have its fill
of them.

I will draw my sword; my hand shall destroy
them.'

You blew with your wind; the sea covered them;
they sank like lead in the mighty waters.

"Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods?
Who is like you, majestic in holiness,
awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?
You stretched out your right hand;
the earth swallowed them.

"You have led in your steadfast love the people
whom you have redeemed;
you have guided them by your strength to your
holy abode.

The peoples have heard; they tremble;
pangs have seized the inhabitants of Philistia.

Now are the chiefs of Edom dismayed;
trembling seizes the leaders of Moab;
all the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away.

Terror and dread fall upon them;
because of the greatness of your arm, they are
still as a stone,

till your people, O LORD, pass by,
till the people pass by whom you have purchased.

You will bring them in and plant them on your own
mountain,

the place, O LORD, which you have made for

Redemption Song

your abode,
the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have
established.

The LORD will reign forever and ever.”

For when the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots
and his horsemen went into the sea, the LORD
brought back the waters of the sea upon them, but
the people of Israel walked on dry ground in the
midst of the sea. Then Miriam the prophetess, the
sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand, and
all the women went out after her with tambourines
and dancing. And Miriam sang to them:

“Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously;
the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.”

(Exod. 15:1-21)