

Across the four decades of my life so far in the church the worship wars have raged and much has changed. I remember wearing a hat to church because all females kept their heads covered in worship – or perhaps it was the late 1960's in a conservative country town, and that's what respectable women wore on formal occasions. I can't really say whether it was for me, as a two year old, a theological or a cultural construct, but I can say that I always had a matching bag because my accessories were hand made by my mum from her fabric off cuts.

I remember being in the very first 'band' (a saxophone and a violin) to play with the organ and piano on the platform at the Easter Convention at Belgrave Heights, Victoria. Cutting edge we were!

The piano at home was piled high with Alexander's and Sankey's song books, along with the different denominational hymn books, the Billy Graham Crusade song books, the Elim choruses of Scripture Union. The 70's brought Sing and Celebrate, the new hymnals of Sing Alleluia and the Scripture in Song series. The Resource Praise and Worship books and Vineyard collections of the 80's brought a charismatic tinge to even the most mainstream congregations where spiritual warfare was never on the preaching plan, but weekly we sang "demons will have to flee". By the 90's Amy Grant and the whole Contemporary Christian music solo artist genre and their choral album spin-offs had us in matching floral dress and pale pastel shirt choirs singing in gorgeous americanese. Then suddenly there was something called Hillsong, then Soul Survivor, Planetshakers, and on it goes, each with their new sound, their new theology and their new 'heart of worship'.

Music is a powerful and demanding beast; it not only creates prima donnas, it is itself a prima donna. It takes hours and hours of preparation for a brief and fleeting performance. The equipment is big and space-hungry and attention grabbing (whether it's a pipe organ or a drum kit) and expensive. Both the equipment and the style goes out of date faster than you can keep up. It rides the emotional rollercoaster at full speed, and when it crashes there is always collateral damage. Music is one of the most powerful dynamics in our churches. We give it this power.

What power do we allow the Bible?

"We thought we just wanted to update our music, but we changed how we read the Bible..."

An
autobiographical
Reflection
on the shaping
of our worship
and culture of
engagement
with the Living
Word.

Music is not the centre of the life of a discipleship community. Throughout the worship-culture wars I have never heard an argument about whether or not we should read the Bible in our gatherings. No one disputes this. It's a complete non-issue. We are Christians; of course we read the Bible, we study the Bible, we take the Bible seriously, we give half (well maybe a third these days) of our service time to the preacher. There is no contention over the value of reading the Bible.

But have you noticed that we seem to be simply doing less and less and less reading the Bible together in worship? Keep a clock on the minutes actually spent hearing the words of the Bible given airplay next time you're in church.

As a musician I lament the power music has in shaping a service. I know that it is only one expression out of many that can stir us on to faith and good works.

As the scope of music has grown in our experience of gathering, I have begun to become more and more thirsty for the Bible as the Living Word to be the Primary Structural Determinant of our life together as followers of Jesus.

But how? How shall we open the Bible in such a way that it might shape us, transform us, be our inquisitor and our instructor, our challenger and our champion?

How can we submit ourselves to the Living Word, to its dynamic life among us?

I have begun to think that if we are followers of the ways of Jesus, the ways in which we open and access the stories and teachings of Jesus should bear a correlation to the ways of Jesus himself.

We do not just open the Bible to find out what the ways of Jesus are, but to find ourselves in the ways of Jesus. We are disciples after all. Learners of the way, with big L plates stuck on our windscreens.

But what are the ways of Jesus?

If Jesus was the Living Word made flesh, how did he go about the business of doing that?

How did Jesus do things?

Whatever the ways of Jesus are – these are the ways a disciple would want to go.

OPENING THE BIBLE IN THE WAYS OF JESUS

Jesus' way is to
do things with

GRACE

LOVE

JUSTICE

COMPASSION

HONESTY

JOY

together in

COMMUNITY

in openness to the

SPIRIT.

Jesus' way is
often the way of
questioning,

the way of the

'other',

or the 'least',

the way of

humility.

Perhaps you have
other ideas?

Hope &
Mission?