Sunday morning you want to be hospitable to those who enter our worship experiences, but don’t yet share our faith. Right? But you have strong (and correct) feelings that you ought not to sacrifice “Truth” in the process. What to do? Here are three suggestions to start the conversation:

1. SIMPLIFY YOUR RHETORIC.

In an homage to Bob Webber soon after he died, Joan Huyser-Honig celebrated Webber’s focus on the “embodiment of God’s narrative,” the kind of “hospitality that inspires worship committees to look at beloved liturgical elements and ask whether they’re too complicated for people to connect with.” Practically speaking, “Do whatever you can do to simplify liturgy so you make ancient things accessible in our cultural context,” suggests Darrell Harris, chaplain at Webber’s Institute for Worship Studies.

For example, for years now worship leaders have been told not to assume we can toss out words like sanctification and propitiation and expect everyone in attendance to follow us. Good start. But how often do we suppose that those who don’t know the Lord regularly use words like holiness or salvation? And even if they have a general sense of the denotative—or “dictionary”—definitions of those words, can we really assume they understand their connotative meanings—all the specific, sociological associations that come with the words—in our American evangelical context? Most of us spend plenty of time, rightly so, honing our praise bands’ sounds. Spending a bit more time thinking seriously about transitional commentary could make a big difference where hospitality to unbelievers is concerned. For further reading: Worship Words (Rienstra and Rienstra).

2. CHOOSE SONGS THAT ARE EASY TO SING.

If you’re serious about creating a welcoming environment for those unfamiliar with our Christian culture, you have to make it easy for them to sing along with us during the congregational-singing component of our corporate worship. Most of our contemporary worship songwriters have covered point one sufficiently, but even when they do, do our interpretations of their songs help our cause? For instance, when Chris Tomlin, with his lovely lyric tenor, records every other song in B major, do we feel compelled to sing those songs in the same key, or do we modulate down—sometimes a couple of whole steps—to make his wonderful songs relatively easy for the vast majority of folks to sing? Do we pay attention to things like syncopation in the rhythm, the use of metrical feet in the lyrics, and musical ornamentations that often work a whole lot better on a solo recording than they do in the context of corporate worship? Doing so could help those who don’t listen to K-LOVE stand a decent chance of participating in worship, at least at a basic level. For further reading: The Art of Worship (Scheer).

3. LET SCRIPTURE DO THE WORK OF SCRIPTURE.

A few years back, frequent Worship Leader contributor Constance Cherry did an intriguing study on the percentage of time the reading of Scripture occupied in worship services across America (“My House Shall Be a House of ... Announcements”). Sadly, she found that Scripture reading in contemporary worship services (across a host of different denominations) accounted on average for a mere two percent of the service. Speaking through the prophet Isaiah (55:11), our Lord said, “I send [my word] out, and it always produces fruit. It will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it” (NLT). If worship evangelism is our goal, let’s elevate Scripture to a place of prominence above all of our well-intended songs and statements. “He must increase, but I must decrease,” indeed. For further reading: Worship in the Shape of Scripture (Mitzman).

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