



Repetition in Corporate Worship "Toward a deeper understanding"

By Chris R. Hansen

Recently we have experienced some dialogue over the use of repetition in our worship/music during some of our services at Fair Haven. The use of "7-11 songs" or repeated choruses is a concern of some, but it also has been helpful to others. I believe this short article will help those of us who struggle to see the benefit in participating with and engaging our hearts in the repetitions that we sometimes use in worship.

"Repetition within a poem or song can have significant value, not only for reinforcing a point but also for providing a mechanism for formal structure. Repetition can establish a theme, contribute to unity, and serve as the foundation for artistic form."

We also see the use of repetition in the bible. Psalm 136 uses the phrase "For His Lovingkindness is everlasting" in the second half of each of its 26 verses. That's the same five words a total of 26 times. This is much more than a 7-11 chorus. At the same time, it is also biblical to avoid the use of "meaningless repetition" in our worship as explained in Matt 6:7.

"And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words." Matthew 6:7 (New American Standard Bible)

Here the focus is on "meaningless" and for others to hear. If we do not engage our heart and simply repeat words mindlessly we may be in violation of the Matthew 6:7 directive.

Recently we sang repeatedly the phrase "Your grace is enough" which was at the heart of the theme verse for that Sunday.

"But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me." 2 Corinthians 12:9 (New International Version)

It is true that if we were to simply sing from our mind the words "Your grace is enough" the benefit from this wonderful thought would be missed. However if as you sing the phrase "Your grace is enough" you engage your heart in prayer and meditation about what it means to experience God's saving grace or to think of God providing stamina and strength through a difficult time or to even reveal your heart to God and yourself about your own sinful nature and how you do not get what you deserve; Then you would have engaged in real authentic worship with your Lord and Saviour. It would not have been about the music it would have been about your worship with God. You would have

engaged with God and experienced a tender moment with Him.

As we examine Rev. 4:8....

"Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." Revelation 4:8 (New International Version)

....What we see here is repetition being used as meditation, a powerful means by which we can worship God and fill our hearts and minds with the beauty of who He is. So the use of repetition in worship can serve as an opportunity for you to engage with God. Again if you only recite words with your mind it is "meaningless repetition" but if you engage your heart with God it is true authentic worship. The next time you are encouraged to participate in the singing of repetitive phrases I would hope you would use the opportunity to meditate and not just recite some good words about God but to engage your heart allowing the theme to come alive with meaning in your own life.

As you sing; believe more, trust more, become more in awe of God and become more taken with your Savior.

