

ENCOURAGING SPONTANEITY IN YOUR CHURCH

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I. Introduction

- A. Classical music is music that's written out in advance. Minor variations that have to do with tempo, dynamics, and phrasing. We pretty much know what's coming, but it can still be exciting to listen to.
- B. Jazz is freedom within a form. You can vary just about anything, staying just enough within boundaries so that people recognize the song.
- C. Both are valid musical genres, different expressions with similar effects – the enjoyment of those listening.
- D. Planning and spontaneity are different expressions with similar effects as well – the edification of the church.

II. Misunderstandings About Spontaneity

- A. Not pitting spontaneity against planning.

Planning can actually prepare us for spontaneity. Studying in private can make me more responsive in public. Praying over lyrics in advance and make more sensitive to what they're saying as I lead.

- B. Not encouraging laziness.

Don't pursue spontaneity because you don't want to prepare. God-honoring spontaneity can actually require more of us than planning alone.

- C. Not saying spontaneity is more "spiritual."

We don't need to be spontaneous to experience the Holy Spirit's activity in our hearts.

God has promised to be present with us as we engage in different activities with faith. He is present with us in our fellowship, when we sing his praise, share the Lord's supper, and preach his word.

We tend to become overly familiar with God's presence.

III. The reasons for spontaneity

- A. We gather to meet with a living God and a risen Savior, not simply to carry out our plan. (Heb. 12:22-24)

Are we focused on meeting with God or making sure that everything goes right?

- B. God's Spirit is actively present among us when we gather to magnify Christ and his word.

We're told in 1 Corinthians that the Spirit gives manifestations of his presence for "the common good" of the church (1 Corinthians 12:7). Those can be as normal as administration and leadership, or as abnormal as prophecy and tongues with interpretation. There is a wide range of spontaneous manifestations in between.

The goal of the Holy Spirit's work among us is always the same – to bear witness about Christ (John 15:26) and to bring to our remembrance all the word of Christ (John 14:26; Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:18-19), for the purpose of building up the church.

- C. Spontaneity gives us freedom to respond to present needs and promptings.
- D. God wants to care for his people.

Pursuing spontaneity isn't simply about breaking our routine or being creative. We want the Spirit to manifest his power through us in as many ways as possible so people's hearts and lives can be affected. Spontaneity can be a means to that end.

The natural effect of Spirit-led spontaneity is being more aware of God's presence and his care.

As we see and hear evidences of the Spirit's activity in our meetings, 1 Cor. 14:3 says the church is build up, encouraged, and consoled.

IV. How Can We Pursue Spontaneity?

A. *Dependence* resulting in prayer.

Expressing need and desire for the Spirit to do what only he can do, to be actively present, working in people's hearts.

B. *Expectation* resulting in planning wisely.

If you pack your meeting, there won't be any room for spontaneity.

C. *Response* resulting in action and follow-up.

Many churches are committed to Spirit-led spontaneity in name only. We have to act on what the Spirit is doing.

Can include song changes, prayer for people, Scripture reading, verbal transition or explanation.

Being spontaneous always involves an element of risk and a temptation to fear of man. If it turns out that the Holy Spirit really was leading us, the church is built up and Jesus is glorified. If we blow it, we'll be humbled, which is good, because God gives grace to the humble (James 4:6). Stepping out is a win-win situation.

D. Have a clear understanding of who is ultimately responsible for leading the meeting.

1. Spontaneous leadings are always open to evaluation.
2. The more your pastor trust you, the more freedom you'll have to lead out. But trust must be earned.

V. The practice of spontaneity

A. Practice alone.

1. Develop a conviction. Study 1 Cor. 12-14, book of Acts.
2. View prayer as a dialogue, not simply a monologue.
3. Practice spontaneous singing.
 - Sing your prayers, using a familiar melody or one you make up.
 - Sing Scripture. These Psalms are a good place to start: 23, 63, 84, 95, 100, 117, 121, and 145.
 - Sing a line from Scripture, then respond to it in song. This develops your ability to interact with God's Word.
 - Sing your own words and melody over a simple chord pattern.
 - Make up a new melody to a familiar or a not-so-familiar hymn.

4. If you play an instrument, learn how to improvise at the end of a song rather than just ending it. That opens up opportunities for people to sing freely or to reflect on the truths they just sang.
5. Interact with Scripture as you read it.

B. Practice with your team.

1. Sing and play responsively and spontaneously.
2. Do unanticipated things in rehearsals. Use any necessary signals. Verbal cues work well.
3. Make sure everyone can see you.
4. Spontaneous transitions are usually best led by one person.

C. As you grow in spontaneity, let your church know what's going on.

1. Be clear and brief in explanations.
2. May need to start with minor and brief changes before major and long changes.

Repeating a line. Singing between lines. Mixing up the order.

3. Be open to emphasizing certain lines in a song that the Lord wants to use to minister to a specific group. Are people being affected by the words? Do we need to sing a line, a verse, or a chorus again? Do we need to move on or wait?
4. Set up a microphone that's overseen by a pastor. In smaller churches, a mic may not be necessary.
5. Lead humbly but confidently. Always be listening, trusting that the Spirit will lead you in ways that exalt the glory of Christ's work and his Word in hearts and minds.

VI. Evaluating Spontaneity

- A. Important to ask questions. Was what we did helpful? Did it exalt Christ? Did it deepen our love for his word?
- B. Don't exalt impressions over pastoral leadership.
- C. Don't become over dependent on spontaneous impressions.
- D. Don't over analyze. God is sovereign. He will lead us if we're listening for his voice, but remain rooted in his word and the gospel.
- E. Thank God for what he has done and will do in the future to reveal his active presence in our meetings.

VII. Final Thoughts

A genuine recapturing of Paul's perspective will not isolate the Spirit in such a way that Spiritual gifts and Spirit phenomena take pride of place in the church, resulting in churches that are either charismatic or otherwise. Rather, a genuine recapturing of Paul's perspective will cause the church to be more vitally Trinitarian, not only in its theology but in its life and spirituality as well. This will mean not the exaltation of the Spirit but the exaltation of God; and it will mean focus not on the Spirit as such but on **the Son, crucified and risen, Savior and Lord of all.** (Gordon Fee, Paul, The Spirit, and the People of God, p. 188)

- A. What are we missing by failing to recognize our desperate dependence, not looking forward to gatherings with eager expectation, and not humbly responding as the Spirit distributes His gifts individually as he wills? Opportunities to exalt the Savior by serving and being served by those around us.
- B. When people visit with us what will they see – a group of people who worship a God they only read about, that never interacts with or speaks to them? Or will it be like 1 Cor. 14 –

But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.

May we be that kind of church for the Savior's glory.