

Simplify Kennedy Space Centre and Worship

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The cry from certain groups within the evangelical understanding of worship is to have seeker-friendly and seeker-sensitive worship services.

The home page of Saddleback Church states: *“At Saddleback Church you’ll hear great music and a relevant, biblical message about the authentic truth for your life.”* And further: *“You’ll enjoy upbeat music and practical messages that help you deal with real life issues. We’ll even give you a helpful outline with the Bible passages.”* (My underlining – this last sentence sounds more or less like an add-on to the real thing, which is music and practical messages.)

The cry for seeker-friendly and seeker-sensitive worship services lies in the perceived problem that those who come to church for the first time, or those who are spiritually immature, need to be helped by reducing the worship to an experience they can understand. The implication is that, if this is not done, people will lose interest and stay away. Therefore, as Saddleback puts it: *“At Saddleback, we feel that it’s OUR responsibility to ‘clear the way’ for you to come to church. We want you to be able to experience the great music, encouraging messages, friendly people and enjoyable atmosphere that are a part of Saddleback.”* (The emphasis here is that of Saddleback).

One will find it hard to find a traditional definition of biblical worship on these pages. I am more under the impression that a church like Saddleback is a religious support group where the emphasis is put on the need of the member, rather than the worship of God through Jesus Christ. With this I don’t imply that the Gospel message of Christ is not heard; I am just left with the idea that need of the worshipper is on the foreground – and this need must be met.

A visit to the Kennedy Space Centre will surely leave me in awe. Just look at all those computers and electronic equipment and scientists! And somehow, by way of intricate calculations and painstaking punctuality they actually manage to send spacecraft into places that most of us cannot fathom. I am sure that I would not understand a single command and a single formula they use to accomplish their tasks. But when the space shuttle lands we know it is “mission accomplished”.

To really understand what is going on I might do one of the following. *First*, I, and those unenlightened fellow visitors-for-the-first-time, could ask the management to tone down their structure to make it more interesting and understandable. They in response can then decide to drop a few naughts and digits, disregard some protocols and also to consider punctuality of lesser importance, as long as we have fun being there.

My fellow unenlightened brothers and I will now begin to understand what is going on and we will enjoy the experience to be on this team.

The problem is just that no craft will make it into space; or if they do, they will miss one destination after the other. Leave one digit out of any calculation and you miss Mars by thousands of kilometres! In the process of making it more accessible to the seekers, NASA will have lost its mission and purpose. It might attract more people who enjoy it more to go there, but no-one will know more about space, because the aim now is people and not the mission.

My *second* option is to, through a process of training and study, get some understanding of the mission and the processes involved to keep the program going. I might ask those who work there to spend some time with me after hours to help me get a grasp of the mission. This way I not only grow in my understanding and comprehension, but I will be able to somewhere along the track get involved in a meaningful way. The main advantage of course is that NASA keeps doing what it is suppose to do without missing other planets or failing to be able to bring the shuttle back to earth.

My *third* option is to just walk away, my argument being that what they do is just too hard to understand, it's boring, it's not fun, and why do they bother going into space anyway. I don't believe in what they do, although I can see evidence of what they do.

If I took this last option, what NASA does seemingly has no effect on my life, but it has no effect on the operation and mission of NASA: what they do will still be awesome and mind-boggling.

Maybe this analogy is not too far-fetched in terms of the cry to simplify worship in order for the seekers to feel welcome.

The mission of the church is not to make seekers feel welcome according to their own understanding of what worship is and who God is. Our mission is to glorify God and worship Him the way He ordained. In the process the Gospel must be presented in such a way that God is not brought down to the level of the seeker; the opposite is rather true: the seeker must be helped to understand more about God and how He wants to be worshipped.

This means that we must spend time to explain the elements of worship and the detail of the Gospel, but all of this cannot be done within worship. Disciple-making implies a one-on-one approach to explain, equip and nurture. This can also happen in small groups. Churches in the Reformed tradition, like their founders, made a of catechism and training. Just read and study the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, as well as the other confessional standards. It was custom in many denominations that the afternoon or evening services were designed in such a way that explanation and instruction of the doctrines contained in these documents could be taught.

(It will help to visit the following website:

<http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html?mainframe=http://www.reformed.org/documents>

If the seekers are not happy with the order and elements of worship, and constantly demand something easier, more entertaining, more down-to-earth stuff, and the church goes down this way, the church will lose its mission. More people might attend, and more songs of joy will be heard, but like with NASA, the focus will be away from the purpose.

If the seekers are not happy after all that was done in terms of discipleship, nurture of equipment, what more can be done? They might walk away in search for something else, and stop believe in the mission of the church. This should not come as a surprise to the church. Our Lord prepared us for this scenario. After all, the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is to some an offence to those who do not believe.

And if they do lose interest in the church, it will have no impact on the mission of the church: it will still focus on the majesty and glory of God, who reigns in splendour and majesty from all eternity to all eternity. It will still be driven to, through mission and evangelism, see that the Lord and Head of the Church be known and worshipped in the darkest corners of this world. It will still be focussed on subduing every thought and made it captive to Jesus Christ.

With such a church God will be pleased; she is and should not be more or less than the pure bride of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.