



Passion Praise - Ten tips on worship in open places

1 – Make sure you've prayed it through

This is spiritual warfare, make no mistake, you need to be ready. In Old-Testament times the priests went before the armies of Israel praising God (read 2 Chronicles 20). Let God fight your battles for you. Prayer walk the area you intend to worship in before you start, claim it, take control in spiritual realms over those spiritual authorities that will oppose you (for more information [click here](#)). You need to be deadly serious about the spiritual foundations, the spadework, or whatever you build will fall.

2 – Make sure you've come to worship and not just to entertain

I was recently listening to a CD by Terry MacAlmon and I thought to myself, this isn't good listening, don't care for it. I'd just been listening to Darlene Czech's "All things are possible" which is a polished and entertaining album. Then it struck me, Terry's CD, though not my style and not particularly entertaining was nothing less than concentrated worship. I imagine it would have been a completely different experience if I'd actually been present at Terry's live worship recording. There's nothing wrong with entertaining, well-performed music. I make no complaint. It's just that it's not going to work in extending Jesus' kingdom. That's because God doesn't listen to the performance, He looks straight into our hearts during worship and says to himself, "can I accept this, can I use it?". Actually this is a great relief because few of us are going to give a 'good' performance, we're just not talented enough. We don't need to be, we just need to be in a place where God can use us to extend His kingdom. Heart-right worship does the work, brings in the lost, wins the battles. Think "do I get into the zone when I'm worshipping?", because if not you're not going to cut it out on the battlefield. So get your life right and get your worship right first!

3 – Keep it small and unplugged

There are laws in the UK (and I guess elsewhere in the world) that require a license in order to put on a performance event in a public place. Nothing wrong with putting on a big worship event either, except that you can't do it every week. In the UK, and probably this is true elsewhere, there's no law against a few friends gathering round a guitar and singing a few songs. The key thing then is to keep it unobtrusive. We're not trying to grab the attention of the whole park, we want the disinterested to walk on by. We're after filtering out those who God's Holy Spirit is already working on. Another simple reason for unplugging is that there isn't anywhere to plug in. I use a small Yamaha keyboard with internal D-cell batteries. Totally portable, not too loud.

4 – Be aware and respectful

Don't give your enemy an excuse to accuse you, although He'll accuse you anyway. The people in the park aren't your enemy or 'ministry fodder', treat them as friends. God loves them just like He loves you. Some years ago I went to the Sidmouth Folk Festival in Devon, England. What I like about the festival is that many of the performers busk with other street artists in the town centre and along the sea-front. It's a colourful and exciting spectacle. A group of local Christians had decided that they would also join in and did so disastrously. They were musically dreadful, which as I said earlier isn't of itself a big problem, but the venue they had chosen was a bad choice for their level of talent. Then when these Christians saw that people were passing rather too quickly by they decided to berate them, telling them that they were all going to Hell. Now I believe in preaching hellfire more than most Christians but this hapless band just made themselves look like idiots, which is just how they were behaving. We're not called to make Jesus look like a moron or a despot. That's Satan's job, not ours.

My advice is - don't set out to offend other people or spoil their enjoyment of the park or open space. Respect everybody even those who don't want you there. Give plenty of space for folk to walk on by, don't play too loud, engage everyone who speaks to you, don't ignore anyone. We met a man with a hangover sitting on the bench we usually used one Sunday afternoon. His head was tender so he didn't really want us

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to start playing anything, however quietly. Therefore we delayed five minutes and spent time just talking to him. When we did start he left (probably went to lie down somewhere), but we had at least spent time sharing Jesus with him and we parted on friendly terms. I can't emphasise enough how important it is that we be as gentle as doves.

5 – Make space for conversation

Although we're here to worship Jesus and I love to do that, we're doing it in the park because we want to be used by the Lord to extend His kingdom. That isn't going to happen if we don't stop from time to time to talk to the people who have lingered. We also stop if only to acknowledge them, say hi, say bye if they then start walking off. No pressure, when Jesus said "compel them to come in" (LUKE 14:23), what He meant was "make a compelling case as to why they should come in" and not literally accost them and force them in to the kingdom – that'll never work. We need to have a reason to speak of the hope that is within us (1 Peter 3:15), gently and with respect. Our group is not afraid to play requests as long as we know the songs and they're at least vaguely worshipful. On one occasion we played along with a group of Kurdish refugees as they sang in their language a lament about the unrequited love of a boy for a girl. It reminded them of their homeland and they became almost tearful, sure broke the ice though.

6 – Don't cause an obstruction

In the UK it's against the law to block the queen's highway and that includes footpaths. You will be instructed by the police to move on and that won't leave you feeling good at all.

7 – Don't collect money

If you're collecting money, however worthy the cause, then you're not worshipping at all, you're busking. In the UK you can be moved on by the police for this. On the other hand very occasionally money has been pushed into our hands despite our protestations. We then gracefully accept it.

8 – Tie up with local churches

Surprisingly, and to my annoyance (also God's annoyance I'm sure) this has been the hardest part of the whole job. One church leader even cursed us for going out into Pearson Park when we asked for His Church's support. In England our churches are most often insular and disengaged institutions. This is no-doubt why Jesus' kingdom here is in decline (it seems), and not advancing. The church is Christ's bride however ugly she makes herself appear; the precious and beautiful bride He gave His life for. You need to make connections with local churches as these are the places where the new converts you meet will go for fellowship and growth. At the very last resort, and only if the Lord so instructs, should you consider planting your own church. Remember St Paul's example: when entering a new town he always went first to the Jewish synagogue and only if this failed (and it usually did), did he then plant a new church amongst the gentiles.

9 – Give it a chance

Rome, they say, wasn't built in a day. Many of the days we spent worshipping in Pearson Park though 2006 and 2007 didn't result in a single conversation. Most days however did result in great conversations. The point is that we enjoyed ourselves worshipping God whatever happened and that made it all worthwhile.

10 – RELAX!

Ok, so on your first day out there you'll be nervous and probably it'll show. Practice relaxing though. Have you ever been in a worship experience where people aren't relaxed? Other people pick up on tension, but don't worry in a very short time you'll relax and enjoy yourself. If you're not enjoying it and it's all a struggle you'll not be encouraged to come back week after week.

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