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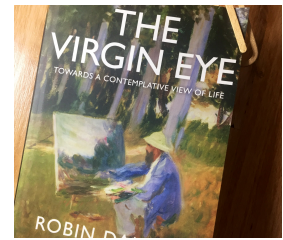
**JAN-FEB REPORT;
RECENT READING;
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**CHRISTMAS SONG
A NEW PIECE OF
MUSIC**



**SINGAPORE JOY
A WEDDING WITH A
DIFFERENCE**



**WWR
WHAT WE'RE READING**

MALCOLM'S MARVELLOUS MONTHLY MAGASINE



Is it really March already?

The end of 2016 and the beginning of 2017 rather flashed by as if fuelled by a somewhat over-zealous double espresso. Hence the lack of magasine editions as of late. Much has been happening....

Penny & I went to the head of the Thames River and spent a refreshing (if damp) day walking around the area. In addition we took a week's holiday on La Palma (one of the Canary Islands), which turned out to be more hiking than walking (volcanic islands don't tend to be particularly flat). The knees complained, but the views, the spectacular flora and the warmer weather more than compensated!

I hope 2016 ended well for you and that 2017 is going well so far. Read on for more updates on what I've been up to recently.

God bless,

Teaching Tips

“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.” Matt 4:23 NIV11

More teaching tips have gone up: topics include, "Vital Visuals", "Meaningful Movement", "When does a speech begin?", "Where do I look?", "How fast should I speak?", "Preaching the Parables", "Speaking the Text", "The Players in Preaching", "How much should I disclose?", "How to Interpret a Passage", "How to Find the Structure", "How to Interpret a Passage: Four Tips", "Connection Crisis". You can also hear the audio versions here, or on my website. If you have topics you'd like me to cover, please let me know.

What We're Reading

More reviews are on their way: "Gluten Attack", "Christian Reflections on the Leadership Challenge"; "Misreading scripture with Western eyes"; "Putting on the Wakeful One"; "Brother Roger of Taize"; "Thoughts in Solitude"; "God First Loved Us"; "A Philosopher's Notes" and "BrainChains".

Devotional Life

A new book has got me hooked - "The Virgin Eye", Robin Daniels; Instant Apostle. It addresses how we develop a healthy threefold attention to God, self-work and others. Daniels asserts that "God is best approached allusively-not as an engineer but as an artist." The question of how we do this is our life journey; guided and inspired by those who have gone before us. We must go to the inner life to heal it and to find God; taking us into him to find how we are to live and then serve others from a place of integrity. It's a refreshing read helping me with my prayer life. I'll post a full review later this year.

Singapore Wedding

I received an unexpected phone call towards the end of 2017. TJ & Sonia asked me to come to Singapore to officiate at their wedding. What an immense privilege this was. The ceremony went well, the bride and groom looked fabulous, and it was a wonderful encouragement to see old friends like the Louis, Salaams and many more.

Watford Christmas events



The Watford church had a fullness of festive fun at Christmas including a carolling evening, where "dancing Santa" made an appearance, and a Christmas Crafts service.

Upcoming events include an "Allotment" service, a "Science Sunday", a Sunday service at Dunstable Downs and a "Bandstand Service" in Cassiobury Park.

Facebook is here: [thewatfordchurch](https://www.facebook.com/thewatfordchurch). If you'd like to keep up with future events & meetings of the Watford Church then follow us on @WatfordChurch. Otherwise drop me a line: mccx@mac.com

Music and Worship

I took a deep breath and wrote my first 'proper' piece of music since leaving university. It was based on Simeon's song and performed as part of the Thames Valley carol service. Oh, and I also wrote a simple two-part congregational song on weakness and strength which we learned and sang at the end of last year.

In 2015 I wrote a series of articles on music and leading corporate worship. In case you missed them, here is the third one.

Corporate Worship Matters: 3. Dealing with Distractions - Worship Leaders

Introduction

The Corinthian church had distractions that compromised its worship, "In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good." (1 Cor 11:17 NIV11) Those distractions were many and various.¹ They affected the body, "That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep" (1 Cor 11:30 NIV11), and they affected the lost, "if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and inquirers or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?" (1 Cor 14:23 NIV11).

Paul wrote several chapters to help a wonderful church get its corporate worship back on track. How do we deal with avoidable distractions? On a Sunday morning there's not much we can do to prevent an earthquake, a epileptic having a fit, or a projector blowing a fuse, but what can we do to prevent needless distractions from taking people's attention away from God?

I believe there are three groups of people who contribute significantly to enhancing our collective worship experience and avoid unnecessary obstacles to wholehearted body worship. Those three groups are the worship leaders, the congregation itself and the leadership of the church. We'll look at each in turn, beginning in this article with the worship team.

1. Preparation

How does the saying go? Something like, "Prior preparation prevents poor performance".

I have tremendous sympathy with worship leaders. I know that almost all have secular jobs, many have children, and not a few also have other responsibilities in congregational life.

However, I'd say that good preparation will actually make life easier. Take this to heart and I guarantee you'll be less tired at the end of the service! Here are a few tips.

- i. Use a template for preparing the service. Don't re-invent the wheel every week.²
- ii. Decide who leads which song well before the day - not 15 minutes before the service starts

¹ Read 1 Cor 10 & 11 for details

² Some of our congregations use tools such as PlanningCenterOnline. Have a look and see what you think.

- iii. Work out in advance how the songs will link to one another and the other elements of the service (prayer, communion etc.). You'll expend less energy if you are not having to think about what comes next at the same time as trying to lead a song, connect with God and stay in tune!
- iv. Delegate the set-up of all sound and A/V equipment. It's tempting to get involved, but it leads to confusion and exhaustion.
- v. Ask the person organising the whole service to send you information about any changes to the normal running order of the service in advance
- vi. A week before the event ask the preacher and person sharing communion which scriptures they are using and what their main points are. If songs can be used to enhance those the song-service will run better and be more effective.
- vii. Pray together before starting the service

2. Presentation

Good presentation is not about being "slick" for the sake of it. We are not trying to imitate the Oscars or MTV awards, but on the other hand we are concerned to minimise distractions caused by an ill-thought-through presentation style. Here are some tips:

- i. Work on smooth transitions between songs & parts of the service (see Kevin's article on Flow)
- ii. Give clear communication regarding the songs where necessary, (e.g. "the next song is...", "the men will sing this verse...", "repeat chorus...", etc.)
- iii. Use body language to reinforce what is happening (e.g. a bigger gesture is helpful when a chorus is to be repeated, or the song is slowing down)
- iv. Provide clear instructions (e.g. "let's stand", "please be seated")
- v. Remember that your face is important! Let it reflect accurately what the song is about.
- vi. Look at the congregation and other worship leaders when the song is about one another and humanity at large.

3. Priorities

The final area for worship leaders to consider is the recognition that what we're doing is significant.

- i. Respect the congregation's time investment. Add up the people present, multiple by the length of the service and the average time taken to get to and from church. If they'd been working they might have earned some significant money. Make it worth their time to attend!
- ii. Respect the visitors' time and emotional investment. They may have had fears about attending a service. Perhaps they are from a different faith, afraid they will be judged, or have had negative church experiences in the past. Slap-dash service preparation will not reassure them, convince them we really believe what we sing and say, or make it likely they will return.
- iii. Respect God's presence and desire to work through corporate worship. Of course He is perfectly capable of doing His work despite our mistakes - in fact, that seems to be when he does some of His most glorious work! However, let's not make it more difficult than it needs to be.

Instead, let's prepare and present to the best of our abilities such that He and we will know we have a clear conscience.

Summary

Some of the ideas above are likely things you are already doing. Others may be new. Still more may be an aspiration depending on the size, context and gifts within your congregation and worship team. No matter, let's prepare well, present effectively and prioritise healthily so that most attendees are able to worship God without distraction most of the time. A well prepared song service will help prevent both distraction from the Divine and worship leader fatigue.

Malcolm Cox

Thames Valley and Deuteronomy

I was lucky to have a chance to teach a number of classes on the book of Deuteronomy. We've been looking at the book on Fridays and Sundays for January and February, and we wrapped up with a sermon on God's promises as revealed in Deuteronomy by Bruce Miller. Recordings can be found on www.tvcoc.org. A large slice of my attention is now focussed on preparations for two teaching series for later this year - one on spiritual disciplines & the other on the kingdom of God.

Speaking Soon

March sees me preaching in Watford twice this month - both times on prayer from Luke 18. I'll also be leading singing at the wedding of David Mobbs and Amanda Steiner. That's going to be a very joyful occasion.

How to Find and Follow

Well, I'm on most social media outlets, but here is the list:

Twitter: @mccx. Facebook: Malcolm Cox. LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/mccox

YouTube: www.youtube.com/mccxmac. Web site: www.malcolmcox.org

Oh yes, and there are those slightly more tradition means of communication:

Email: mccx@mac.com. Phone: 07973 491 021 / 01923 44 66 01

Address: 114 Links Way, Croxley Green, Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire, WD3 3RN

Until Next Time

Thanks for reading this far. That's it for now. Let me know what you'd find interesting to hear about. The next edition will be out in April.

Take care, and God bless, Malcolm