

Motel 6 Worship

By [**Mike Glodo**](#)

Christianity Today online recently compiled the response of several worship leaders to the question “should churches dim the lights for worship?”¹ What disappointed me was that none of the pro-light-show responses made any references to pop culture, either past or present. If worship lighting people aren’t making hip pop culture references, then who can we count on? The two which occur most readily to me come from Mickey Gilley and Jerry Seinfeld.

Gilley’s 1976 “Don’t the Girls All Get Prettier at Closing Time?” is his self-proclaimed “national anthem for all the honky tonks in the world.” It’s a ballad to the effects (and often regrets) of low lighting on the patrons. And then there’s Jerry’s “two-face” girlfriend – the one who looks gorgeous one day drinking coffee at Monk’s Diner but hideous the next evening at a fine restaurant. Jerry laments, “I don’t know who’s going to show up – the good, the bad or the ugly!” It seems that lighting is everything.

The pro-light-show respondents gave several reasons why we should “turn the lights down low when we get behind closed doors” (thanks, Charlie Rich) including:

- * Song tempos vary, why shouldn’t lighting levels vary?
- * “Lighting needs to reflect what’s happening from the stage.”
- * “If people like it darker, make it darker.”

The argument to reflect “what’s happening from the stage” should reflect upon using the word “stage” in a worship context.

The reasoning to give people what they want may want to consider the golden calf option.

No one addressed how irrelevant this issue is in general except to the churches able (or at least willing) to devote an enormous amount of resources to lighting (and smoke machines).

¹ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2015/may/under-discussion-should-churches-dim-lights-for-worship.html> accessed 05/28/2015.

A musician friend of mine once told me that he didn't think Sam Ash and Guitar Center could even think about staying in business without churches. What's that lighting cost? Two and a half children's ministry workers?

More important, none of the arguments reflected upon the unintended consequences of theater-dark lighting motifs.

Scripture generally favors the light over the darkness. This is not just a metaphor. Or rather, it is the expansive kind of metaphor that is to shape our lives. Light keeps perception from trumping reality. Light keeps us in the phenomenal world of wood, metal, stone and flesh rather than in the noumenal world of LEDs, LCDs and image.

Light favors the Word over the image. It reminds us that that man up there talking is (supposed to be) talking from a book. I'm acquainted with a church which declares "the Bible to be the only infallible rule of faith and practice," but makes it impossible to read one's Bible during the sermon.

I recall excitedly taking my family into the chapel of Covenant College on Lookout Mountain, Georgia. The view out the chapel windows is breathtaking. Except this was the summer and the chapel had been rented out to a youth camp which has completely sealed over all of the windows in order to make it dark enough for the video and light shows. I can see the camp brochure: "Send your children to the top of scenic Lookout Mountain so they can sit in the dark and watch videos." I wondered if they were going to project a slide with Psalm 19:1 on it.

Light gives us real real, not "real." All those generational claims about the high premium on authenticity and transparency should welcome the light – not of the projection screen but of the sun.

Darkness invokes the theater motif, which invokes the performance dynamic in worship.

But without a doubt the most important and explicit reason for keeping the lights on is our mutual obligation toward one another in worship. In worship we are not to "sing together alone," to borrow a phrase from Robert Putnam (author of *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*).

We are to "address one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart... submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ." (Eph 5:19-21)

While our principle duty in singing is Godward, the close second – just as with the greatest and second greatest commandments – is man-ward. We are to sing to God *and* to one another. My singing in worship isn't just about me, it's not even just about me and God. It's about me and God and *you*. When we come

into the assembly we sing songs to one another in order to encourage, strengthen and testify to one another. Hearing the assembly sing bolsters my confidence that all of this is true. Seeing it sing evidences the beauty of the gospel.

I don't just want a thousand tongues to sing my Great Redeemer's praise, I need a thousand faces singing to me. Or at least a few dozen. We need to both look around and listen around us in worship, not for people-watching but for people-hearing. For bearing witness to one another. To see the glory of God not just in the face of Christ, but reflected in his redeemed.

Thanks, Bob Kauflin of Sovereign Grace Music, for giving the only thoughtful answer in the above-named article. I'm glad that he, like Tom Bodette, "will leave the light on for us."

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