

Foreword

It is an incredible honor to be writing a foreword for this book by Mark Pierson. Way back in the early days of what became known as the “emerging church” (before the term got so confusing with so many different meanings), Mark was a leader I followed and paid attention to. I read everything he wrote, found out as much as I could about his church, and was constantly inspired by his passion for the local church, mission, and worship. So many church leaders here in the U.S. don’t understand that the roots of much of our alternative worship stem from England, Ireland, New Zealand, and Australia. Those church leaders faced many of the same issues of culture and mission and context that we have found here in the United States, but they did so at least a decade earlier. They were true pioneers for the church. Mark Pierson was among the first to consider what it meant to be a missional church in a changing culture.

What I love about Mark—and what you will discover in this book—is that he loves the local church. He’s not interested in big schemes and movements unless they directly relate to the life of a community of faith. Jesus birthed the church as a worshiping community, not simply a group of people who like to do alternative

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worship for the sake of creative expression. That's Mark's passion—helping people of faith worship in the context of a local community of Jesus-followers on mission together.

This truly isn't a book that's trying to make church relevant, hip, or artistic. Mark begins by asking theological questions: "What is church?" "What is worship?" Without a theological framework, it is far too easy for those interested in alternative worship to put more focus on the creativity of worship than the person of Jesus. We can subtly focus more on worship ideas than theological groundwork. Sounds crazy, but it can happen. Mark truly begins at the core of thinking theologically about worship and the church. I cannot overstate how important that is today and this book does not stray from that.

By encouraging us to stay grounded theologically, Mark allows us to discover something beautiful: freedom. Freedom to create. Freedom to breathe. Freedom to create expressions of worship to God from our hearts and souls that might not fit within the usual boxes of worship we have practiced for so long. Mark teaches us to breathe out our worship to God in truth.

A few years ago I went spelunking. I was underground for hours. Finally we came up out of the cave and as we arose the air was so incredibly fresh and wondrous. It was marvelous to breathe it in. The odd part was that we had gotten used to the air in the cave. After a while it just felt like normal air. It wasn't until we got to the surface and breathed in that fresh air that I realized how stagnant the air was in the cave. In the same way, when we breathe prayer and worship in and out in the same ways we've done for decades, we don't even notice when the air becomes stagnant. We are breathing, but the air isn't as fresh and full as it could be. Mark challenges churches to consider the air we breathe in worship. It's time for us to come out of the cave and breathe in fresh ideas that will lead us to breathe out fresh worship

from our hearts, minds, and souls. That doesn't mean straying from truth or chasing after trends or gimmicks or bashing the old or talking about the need for relevance. This book isn't about that. It is about the opening of our hearts and minds to fully breathe our love and passion for God in ways that make sense to our existence as followers of Jesus today.

I imagine there will be many readers who, like me, find themselves consistently in agreement with Mark's vision for worship. They will feel like they have found a kindred heart and aren't alone in how they think of expressing worship. Even though Mark is literally across the globe, I feel as though we have shared hearts and minds around this. When I've wondered if I was crazy for thinking about worship in ways that feel so different from what I've known, I find great encouragement in the ideas Mark writes about here. And it's thrilling to think about how many church leaders will share that feeling and push themselves past their fears and into the possibilities of renewed worship.

I love this book because it is based on the life of the local church. I love this book because it is theology and practice joined together. I love this book because it isn't a "how-to" book as much as it is a sharing of worship-like experiences between friends. I thank Mark for once again guiding us, inspiring us, and leading us in the worship of our Savior and King.

—Dan Kimball, www.dankimball.com