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**Korean Preachers & Worship Leaders**

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**Korean Preachers &  
Worship Leaders**

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## Ben Tabbal

Sam Pack

### Abstract

Pastor Ben Tabbal has been is the English Ministry Pastor at Living Water Mission Church (LWMC) in Cerritos, California for the past four years. His mixed heritage of being Korean, Japanese and Filipino has given Pastor Ben a very unique sense of worship that he has brought to LWMC. He defines worship as a sense of reverence of knowing not only knowing what God has done, but also knowing who God is in our lives. He embraces the idea that true worship can and will lead to physical manifestation of the spirit. For example, such manifestations can be seen as acts of service, an excitement for praise, spiritual gifts and prayer<sup>1</sup>, all of which are beginning to take place within the LWMC EM congregation today. From expressing their worship in a physical way (lifting up of hands, singing out, jumping up and down, etc...) during the musical worship portion of Sunday morning service to manifestations of the supernatural (receiving the gift of tongues, prophecy, healings, etc...) during weekly prayer meetings, people are being changed as their understanding and love of worshipping God increases.

### Pastor Ben Tabbal and His Ministry

Being Hawaiian born, half Korean, quarter Japanese and quarter Filipino, Pastor Ben Tabbal brings a very unique sense of worship to Living Water Mission Church (LWMC), a predominately Korean church in Cerritos, California, where he has served as the English Ministry (EM) pastor since 2005. From the moment he began serving to the present day, Pastor Ben Tabbal, who is more commonly known as simply “Pastor Ben”, would say that serving the LWMC EM has been the hardest ministry he’s ever pastored, but also one of the most fulfilling and rewarding.<sup>2</sup> Coming from a background of serving substantially larger churches like Grace Community Church and New Hope Chapel, Pastor Ben had to undergo a shift of doing ministry in a larger context to a more concentrated group of people. This was something he struggled in for the first few years, as he was trying to understand the culture and history the EM, as well as implementing a ministry plan that would appeal to the members of a group who felt jaded by their

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<sup>1</sup>Tabbal, Ben, interview by Sam Pack. *Interview w/Pastor Ben* (September 24, 2009).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



previous pastor's departure. These past four years Pastor Ben Tabbal has been relentlessly serving at LWMC, and has recently been able to break through many of the barriers that were set up when he first arrived in the hearts and attitudes of the members. Today, the Living Water Missions Church English Ministry is thriving in its worship and is gaining members on a consistent basis. A large part of that is due to the continual service and care Pastor Ben has put into the people who attend LWMC EM.

### **Pastor Ben and His Worship**

When asked about his definition of worship, Pastor Ben expressed that worship is a sense of reverence of knowing the fact of who God is, and not only what He has done.<sup>3</sup> In other words, he feels that worship begins with humility. As believers and followers of Christ, we must understand the greatness and power of a Holy God who is the maker of heaven and earth. When it comes to understanding the concept of worship, we must understand the concept of God being bigger and greater than all of us. That the lives we live are but a small portion of a greater story, which is the story of God and His divine power over the universe. Paul Huh, professor of worship at Columbia Theological Seminary, writes in an article in *Theological Forum*:

*There are millions of stories in human experience, and many of them help us to interpret the Bible, God's story. However, our stories do not tell us who we really are, but the story of God shapes our identity. God's story does not deny our stories of faith, but rather it invites us to embrace our stories as they are, imperfect and sinful.*<sup>4</sup>

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While Huh writes this regarding to narrative preaching, it can also be argued that it is saying that we must understand that as we embrace these imperfect and sinful stories, we must do so with humility as a people who have been saved by His grace.

Pastor Ben would argue that the better we understand this idea of worshipping a Most Holy God, the more physical manifestations of worship will begin to surface. Some examples of such manifestations are acts of service, an excitement for praise, spiritual

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<sup>3</sup> (Tabbal 2009)

<sup>4</sup> Huh, Paul. "Korean Narrative and Preaching." *Theological Forum*, Seoul: Yonsei University, 2003: 11.

gifts and prayer,<sup>5</sup> all of which are beginning to take place within the LWMC EM congregation today. After years of teaching and living out this concept of worship in Pastor Ben's life and preaching, members are now starting to adopt the same concept and are engaging in their own forms of worship. From expressing their worship in a physical way (lifting up of hands, singing out, jumping up and down, etc...) during the musical worship portion of Sunday morning service to manifestations of the supernatural (receiving the gift of tongues, prophecy, healings, etc...) during weekly prayer meetings, people are being changed as their understanding and love of worshipping God increases.

### **Pastor Ben and His Preaching**

In his preaching, Pastor Ben's conceptual understanding of worship can clearly be seen. His main theological components when he preaches are based on God centeredness, the depravity of man, and what the Bible has to say about it. According to Pastor Ben, people tend to allow their own self-centeredness to take over. In other words, all sin is a product of God not being the center of our lives.<sup>6</sup> The complacency, back biting, and complaining could all be avoided if people would only go back to God. Pastor Ben argues that we must continually remind ourselves that Bible states that *the true worshippers will worship in spirit and in truth* (John 4:23). Meaning that God demands a certain kind of worship that is based on how HE wants us to worship Him.<sup>7</sup> He's saying that there must be a sense of heart for God that allows us to put our desires and demands aside so that we can be obedient to God's desire in our lives.

Jumping from both topical and expository preaching, depending on how easy it is to get the point across, Pastor Ben does seem to preach to those who are already believers in Christ or have been attending church for some time. Rarely is there a seeker sensitive sermon where he preaches to those who are not believers and/or are coming for the first time. His reasoning for this is that he tends to preach based on what's going on in the world today and what the Bible has to say about it, and so his sermons can be relevant to anyone at any point in their lives.

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<sup>5</sup> (Tabbal 2009)

<sup>6</sup> (Tabal 2009)

<sup>7</sup> (Tabal 2009)



## LWMC and Worship

While the preaching is an important aspect of the worship service at Living Water, it is seen as just one part of the worship that goes on at LWMC. When interviewed, Sergio Gomes, LWMC College Ministry leader, expressed that service starts from the very beginning where we set up the chairs. That there needs to be some breathing room for the people to simply sit in the presence of God before the opening praise begins.<sup>8</sup> The main point is to make sure that every aspect of their Sunday service is worshipful. Whether it's something as profound as a sermon on Christ's goodness in our lives or a routine task like making the announcements, LWMC does try to always have a sense of worship during their services.

With that said, however, there is a lot of emphasis on the music aspect of worship during their service. According to Josiah Lee, one of LWMC EM's praise leaders, the reason behind this is because it ushers in God's presence. That the music is an announcement of God's presence, and gives the congregation an opportunity to receive the word before the sermon and to apply the word to their hearts after it. The music brings in an atmosphere of acknowledging God and helps ready their hearts.<sup>9</sup> Mainly playing contemporary Christian worship songs, Josiah and the rest of the LWMC EM praise team work hard in helping to create a place that is inviting to all those who desire to bring glory and honor to God through worship and praise.

Another important aspect of worship at LWMC EM is how their confirmation and baptisms look like. Pastor Ben makes it a point that all people who wish to be baptized must go through a confirmation and baptism class so that people can learn the theology behind baptism and to help them see where they're at and where they need to grow. They need to understand that this is not the final point of their faith, but an acknowledgment of the fact that spiritual growth is still needed in their lives.<sup>10</sup> Twice a year, LWMC EM will meet with the rest of the LWMC Korean Ministry (KM) at Doheany Beach, California to perform full immersion baptisms for all those who wish to announce their faith publically within the church. Not being baptized, however, does not hinder those

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<sup>8</sup> Gomes, Sergio, interview by Sam Pack. *Interview with Sergio Gomes* (September 23, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Lee, Josiah, interview by Sam Pack. *Interview with Josiah Lee* (September 23, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> (Tabal 2009)

who wish to partake in communion at LWMC. It is simply a public statement of faith and commitment to God.

When asked about how the sacraments are used, Pastor Ben expressed that LWMC sees communion as an opportunity to continually check ourselves to see where we're at. To make sure that we are centered on Christ and that Christ is there in our lives.<sup>11</sup> For this to be effective, communion is held at least once a month and a half as opposed to the frequency of communion in Korea which is usually either set as four times a year as Geneva practiced, or twice a year.<sup>12</sup> Using unleavened matzo bread and grape juice, the sacraments are normally passed around to the congregation, but there have been times where people are asked to come up to receive the sacraments. This is done as a way for people to step forward and declare their faith to the rest of the church and to acknowledge that they are part of the body of Christ.

Finally, a normal Sunday service begins with setting up chairs by some of the lay ministers, which leads to a time where people can sit and respond to God's presence. Afterwards, Josiah comes up with the praise team to lead the congregation in worship through music and ends with a time of prayer. Then the announcements are given by Sergio and then followed by a time where people can greet each other. Offering is next and is closed off by a prayer by Sergio, which leads to Pastor Ben coming up and sharing his sermon to the congregation. Afterwards Josiah comes back up with the team and leads a response song to the message, after which Pastor Ben comes back up and closes the service off with a benediction. As people exit out of the sanctuary, the praise team is usually playing something upbeat as the congregation meets for fellowship and refreshments in the back. And while there are times where the order must be changed due to things like communion and baptism, Pastor Ben Tabbal and the rest of his ministry team at Living Water Mission Church English Ministry always try to keep worship flowing and prevalent throughout every service from beginning to end.

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<sup>11</sup> (Tabbal 2009)

<sup>12</sup> Huh, Paul. "The Great Table of Grace: Eucharist and the Korean Churches." *Journal of Korean American Ministries & Theology* (Columbia Theological Seminary: Korean American Ministries) 1 (2008): 9.

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