

Greetings!

How's your love life lately? Nooooo! Not the one you're thinking about! Let me rephrase that - How's your worship going lately? Okay, so you're thinking what's that got to do with my "love life?"

Worship is a love affair! It's you and God entangled in intimacy! So, how's it going?

Worship on Big Blue

I called it, *Big Blue*. It held 66 passengers and was almost as long as my first (and only) mobile home (aka - trailer). With the investment of a new battery, I rescued it from a used bus graveyard and drove it from Bainbridge, Georgia, across the Florida line, to my home in Woodville.

After two weeks of wet sanding by hand, the yellow had faded and the large black letters "School Bus" were barely readable. Another week of taping the windows (A lot of them!) and other assorted pieces, and it was ready to paint. My neighbor, Larry, did an outstanding job and since Big Blue was making its debut as a church bus, he only charged me \$15 for the paint.

The year was 1975 and no special license was required to drive it, just the raw nerve to run it between the trees of Wakulla County's dirt roads. To this day I still feel the thrill, just thinking about that first ride behind its wheel!

As a newly ordained minister, with my first church in Sopchoppy, Florida, I followed the trend and began a "bus ministry". Leaving my home each Sunday morning and Wednesday night, I would drive the twenty-eight mile trek (not counting dirt road detours) through Wakulla County picking up any kid with guts enough to get on board. "Faster Pastor Chris!" they shouted as they bounced head high in their seats from the dirt road ruts. What a rush!

Climbing up the steep steps to the driver's seat, I would pull out the choke knob and start Big Blue up. After a couple of minutes letting it warm up, I would begin my *spiritual* journey. Before reaching Thomas' grocery, about a mile away, I would begin praying. A few miles further, I transitioned into singing and before long the tears, laughter and yes, even the shouting would commence.

There was no air-conditioning, very little heat when needed, no CD player, radio or MP3 player; just me, Big Blue and God. With the noisy wind blowing through the windows, I would sing at the top of my lungs, and when the ecstasy of the moment overtook me, I would shout my thoughts of adoration for Him to hear over the sound of the bus. It was wonderful; twenty-eight miles of *unadulterated worship*.

I am "blessed" today to have an MP3 player, Skyangel worship radio 24/7 and a host of other "worship" options at my disposal, but something is missing. I've fallen into a trap and I've passed that trap to others as well. I remember saying to someone who needed to release themselves into God's presence, "Get a really good worship CD, put it on and allow yourself to worship Him". That's not necessarily bad advice, but I may have given them a crutch that they might still be using. Let me get right to the point! Have we come to a place where it is more about the music and the atmosphere than it is about the love affair?

I attend a church with an awesome worship team and I play Skyangel's worship radio station some sixty plus hours a week. They're singing in the background even as I write these words. My MP3 player is loaded with Israel Houghton, David Crowder, Casting Crowns, Brian Doeksen, etc. etc. . . I find myself many Sunday mornings at church with hands raised, teary eyed and a feeling in my spirit that only those who have felt it for themselves can understand, but something is missing.

Here are my thoughts on it. We have become a *performance driven, needs based* society, and as a result we have allowed it to affect our love affair (worship).

First, our worship has become performance driven. I have advised married couples who were having difficulty being intimate with each other with this thought, "Intimacy is not achieved through performance." Sound advice for a married couple, isn't it? And yet, isn't this the very approach we often take when worshipping God? We must have the right music, played by the right musicians, in the right way, or we can't get into the "spirit of worship". It then becomes the performance that dictates our ability to worship rather than our love for God. Just maybe, we have come to love the atmosphere created by the music more than Him.

Second, we are now a "*need based society*", where almost everything revolves around having our personal needs met. So, with that in mind, may I give you my definition of intimacy? *True intimacy is not about self-gratification, but becoming lost in another until you are as one.* If our worship is only about how we feel rather than about how we make God feel, then isn't it an act of self-gratification? Is it no wonder then that God may refuse to participate in what we call worship?

When a husband and wife's relationship is not *love driven*, what often lies at the bottom of its motivation is each one wanting their personal needs met. And where do you think they'll end up - in a counselor's office, wondering what's going wrong.

Music does not make worship better; it only makes the process of worship different. If I need soft music, candle light and no interruptions to tell my wife that I love her, I wonder what she'll begin to think.

And that's just a thought . . .

My Final Word

I must admit, I'd love to take another ride on Big Blue; no MP3 player or CD's, no worship music; just me, Big Blue and God!

Since the days of the woman at the well, "true worship" has been hotly debated. The process of worship has changed in the church over the centuries and I, for one, am thankful that it has. While I love a good hymn now and then, I'm not a big fan of hymnals. I still remember the lecture from a deacon in my first church about drums "in the church." It was sin! Nothing else to be said on the matter! He would have given me up as hopeless had he seen me playing the congas on our worship team - "in the church" no less!

Years later, I saw Big Blue while I was sitting at a stop light on Adams Street in Tallahassee, Florida. It was a hot summer's day and the bus, filled to capacity with children, was on its way to a Christian summer camp. I watched with delight as the bump in the road caused the kids to bounce in their seats wondering, do they ever sing and worship as they ride along? I hope they do.

Having a love affair - but wanting a date out on Big Blue,

Chris

