

Review

Newbold, Bradley D. *The Worship Target: Growing Gracious and Holy Affections Through Congregational Worship*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2024. 170 pages. ISBN 9798385231591

By Melissa Davis, DMA

Bradley D. Newbold's book, *The Worship Target: Growing Gracious and Holy Affections Through Congregational Worship*¹, urges ministry leaders to refocus their attention on what God desires of them in congregational worship. Pricked by singer Steve Green's words at a 1989 concert, desiring that the audience 'set all of [their] affections on Jesus Christ', the book is saturated with the author's heart to see God's church worship him in Spirit and in truth. Newbold introduces an eighteenth-century treatise and the concepts of *passions* vs. *affections* as the book's framework to help refocus corporate worship. Through examining *passions*, our gut-level, intense, short-lived, emotive reactions to what is happening around us, and *affections*, a deliberate act of will with the aim of building a long-term relationship, he reveals how believers appear to be missing the mark in corporate worship today and that they need a refocusing if they are to attain authentic worship. Newbold boldly asserts that the church and its leadership must strive to target genuine gracious and holy affections in worship 'instead of targeting the passions.'(48) The book explains what worship is, how the congregational focus has shifted over time and how the congregation can grow in maturity towards the target. With thorough research from worship treatises backed by scripture, thoughts from other scholars and a few personal stories, Newbold aims to make key concepts readily applicable. The book as both a compass and probe, asks the reader to "think differently about a topic that you have probably already formed strong opinions about."(58)

Spanning centuries of theological thought, Newbold reveals how ideas from New Testament times to the Enlightenment and the Great Awakening formed the foundations of modern worship. He argues that the late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century's focus on passionate worship has distracted from worship's true purpose. Modern churches are falling prey to the notion that success in worship is measured by the intensity of congregants' emotional responses. Newbold argues, "Loud volumes and higher keys will get more people to raise their hands in worship and give the leaders the illusions of success." (69)

¹ Newbold, Bradley D. *The Worship Target: Growing Gracious and Holy Affections Through Congregational Worship*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2024.

When we target true affection for Christ in worship, we will find Christ....When we target passions in worship however, it will be challenging to grow in our affection for Christ because passions, when targeted, are too overpowering for much else to happen...a passionate response is not the target...by targeting truly deep-level affectionate worship time, we can grow in our relationship with Christ and have a joyful (dare I say passionate) experience that honors God in worship. (13-14)

Newbold asserts, “Our target in leading worship should be deeper than eliciting broad physical responses and assessing the effectiveness of worship services should involve more than how well worshippers respond physically to the music and the message.” (xxi-xxii) He cautions worship leaders about music’s inherent power, “Music can be a distraction from worship anytime it is the overwhelming aspect of our services. If the congregation walks out talking more about music than the God of the music, then we have missed our target.” (25) Holding up a mirror to human behaviours, Newbold shows worship leaders’ blind spots, and how their ill-informed focus on eliciting the passions in worship takes them far from their target. Even with the challenges of their lost sense of community, men not singing in our corporate gatherings, worship leaders choosing unsuitable song keys, ranges, complex rhythms, inappropriate volumes for congregational singing, and lighting that promotes individual worship more than communal singing, Newbold reminds the worship leader to maintain focus, “Our job is not to replicate the latest and greatest in contemporary Christian music but to lead our churches to a genuine worship experience that allows them to grow in their gracious and holy affections for Christ.” (103)

Jonathan Edwards’ treatise, *Religious Affections*², provides a framework for understanding patterns of human behavior in corporate worship that persist today. Newbold urges modern worship pastors, “If we target the light...we will most assuredly find the heat. For that reason, ardent worship pastors will be wise to spend time in Edwards’s writings, seeking out holy and gracious affections.” (68) Edwards’ *12 Signs of Gracious and Holy Affections* challenges worship pastors to gauge where they are in their journey of fostering authentic worship. Newbold then implores the reader to use discernment through Edwards’ 12 signs of false affections, what author Sam Storms calls the *12 Signs of Nothing*³. At first glance, this provocative title appears to be a judgmental criticism of worshipers, yet worship leaders soon read that they must be discerning of what they see, as physical manifestations are not necessarily all

² Edwards, Jonathan. *Religious Affections*. Lexington, KY: Feather Trail, 2009.

³ Storms, Sam. *Signs of the Spirit: An Interpretation of Jonathan Edwards’ Religious Affections*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007.

authentic worship. Getting to know God must precede all outwardly expressions and this knowledge will increase their holy and gracious affections. The book aptly repeatedly reminds the reader of the worship target - growing genuine affections for Christ; however, the pathway to this target seems overwhelming. The author himself remarks on the reader's likely fatigue at the beginning of Chapter 6, claiming that 'the content is intense' and requires a break. (58) Perhaps a more streamlined approach would allow for more focus and attainable goals.

Newbold's assertion that "when we focus on God and worship Him, we find that style doesn't matter" (7) feels unsettling, given that style has always been central to how different cultures express worship. Music style may not affect members of a church's dominant culture, who often overlook that their worship style reflects their own culture, but as theologian Marva Dawn argues, "Music that shapes community will use many styles to invite greater inclusivity⁴." 'A heart of worship' is not true worship's only criteria if leaders mean to form a loving, corporate worshipping community. While their focus is on Christ, the way a song is presented can either help or hinder people from different backgrounds in engaging with its message.

As author Sandra Van Opstal notes, worship occurs within a cultural context. The form and environment affect how people engage; therefore, inclusivity in prescribed worship practices is important⁵. While Newbold's Online Resources list for finding good songs is valuable, it is worth mentioning that many of these mainstream resources may not be as musically diverse as some might perceive, leaving some church communities having to create their own resources that speak more to their cultural values. As Newbold states, "The challenge for each of us is finding the music that works for us and our situations." (134).

This book makes a great course text for Christian higher education but may be less readily adopted by the modern worship leader given current trends and targets. Still, Newbold appeals to worship pastors in their priestly responsibility of leading God's people in worship and lovingly warns, "holy affections are light with heat.⁶ If we as worship pastors target only the heat, we may never find the true light." (68)

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⁴ Dawn, Marva. *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995, 178.

⁵ Van Opstal, Sandra Maria. *The Next Worship: Glorifying God in a Diverse World*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016, 45.

⁶ *A rephrasing of Edwards' thought*. Edwards, Jonathan. *Religious Affections*. Lexington, KY: Feather Trail, 2009, 111.

the 50-member Tyndale Community Choir, uniting Christian singers throughout the GTA. A dynamic mezzo soprano soloist, Ms. Davis has toured internationally singing in France, Wales, the Caribbean, the United States, and throughout Canada in concert and playing lead and principal roles in various opera productions. With numerous invitations to give community vocal and worship music workshops, she has also been invited to present clinics, lectures and recitals at York University, the University of Waterloo, Tyndale University, the University of Illinois, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, the University of Arkansas, and the University of Toronto. Dr. Davis has served as a music faculty member at the University of Arkansas, as Director of the Music Department and Assistant Professor of music and worship arts at Tyndale University and joined the York University music faculty as Assistant Professor of Voice in July 2023.

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Melissa Davis, review of *The Worship Target: Growing Gracious and Holy Affections Through Congregational Worship*, Bradley Newbold, Northwest Institute for Ministry Education Research, www.nimer.ca n Research, www.nimer.ca (November 14, 2025).