

**“CAN YOU TELL ME HOW TO GET OUT OF SESAME STREET?” THE PROBLEM OF ANEMIA  
WITHIN THE LOCAL CHURCH<sup>1</sup>**

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**I. Problem 1: Aesthetic Hunger in a Church that Gives Us a Small View of God:**

- A. *Why do worship services often fail to meaningfully nourish us?*
- B. In many other areas of our lives we have very significant experiences that truly enrich our daily lives in qualitative ways; they feed the whole person. Are more fulfilling experiences found elsewhere?
- C. One reason why so many of us leave our worship services malnourished is because our view of God is poor. God is small in vision because our worship services have unnecessary aesthetic roadblocks that are keeping us from beholding our glorious God.
- D. How we worship reflects our understanding of whom we worship.
- E. When our view of God is diminished in our worship services, a vacuum is created whereby we seek satisfaction from other venues; our attention is directed to more fulfilling experiences.
- F. When God is not the object of those existential affections, we can find ourselves, and perhaps easily so, feasting on what is readily available and attractive, the cheap and perhaps even the vulgar. Those experiences may be memorable, even taste good, but they are unhealthy.

**II. Problem 2: Can't Seem to Live Rightly on Sesame Street:**

- A. Growing appetite for nonsensical amusement.
- B. How we learn is as important as what learn.
  - 1. First commandment: no prerequisites are needed.
  - 2. Second commandment: no perplexity is allowed.
  - 3. Third commandment: the avoidance of serious exposition.
- C. Many of our churches suffer the same threefold malady: No prerequisites are needed; perplexity is avoided; serious thinking is neglected.

**III. Three-fold Malady for Two Polarized Churches:**

- A. Example 1: The Sensational Church
- B. Example 2: The Blind Church

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<sup>1</sup> The entire manuscript of today's presentation is available at [www.prshockley.org](http://www.prshockley.org). Look for tab "spiritual life" at top of home page. Open tab and scroll to the bottom and you will find complete manuscript at the bottom of far left column. It will be in PDF.

#### **IV. A Closer look at Anemia in the Local Church:**

- A. Aesthetic experiences can touch the deep struggles of the human condition as we yearn for fulfillment, identity, meaning, and purpose.
- B. Aesthetic anemia can emerge when four events take place:
  - 1. The Congregation focuses on aspect of worship to the neglect of all other related aspects.
  - 2. The functional use of the arts is ignored, done poorly, or are indulgent.
  - 3. When any given worship service swings to either two non-aesthetic extremes, namely, a (a) humdrum, mechanical, mindless, or routine manner or (b) a chaotic, disconnected, or disorganized manner, the worship service can keep us from focusing on God.
  - 4. Worship services can fall short of what they could have been when there is either too little effort or too much effort (doing/activity) or excessive or deficient in the particular setting where the worship service is taking place.
- C. When churches exclude or separate themselves from the community or are absorbed by the community, they lose their distinctiveness in reaching the community for Jesus Christ, failing to offer a distinctive voice filled with real hope.

#### **V. Conclusion:**

- A. Pursue the “*looking at*” with excellence unto the glory of God because it may keep people from “*following it along*” to the God of the Bible.
- B. Refuse to allow worship services to become preoccupied with the trivial, be governed by the routine, the mechanical, the chaotic, and the indulgent.
- C. Do not even allow what is good to become the enemy of what is best. When worship activities are done in non-aesthetic ways they become unnecessary roadblocks that can dim our opportunities to behold God.
- D. While many in our culture have been raised on “Sesame Street,” as those who belong to the Father of creativity, we can surely think of engaging ways of excellence to stretch minds, grows hearts, and deepen souls while not becoming a puppet on “Sesame Street.” Prerequisites can be offered, perplexity can be encouraged, and exposition given. Although “Sesame Street” was a nice place to hang out for a while, most of us were glad for the opportunity to *move on*. Similarly, those who are occupied with the trivial and the mundane will relish in opportunities to dynamically grow, experience a new depth of faith, and anticipate new horizons whereby their vision of God increases, not decreases, where aesthetic hunger is nourished best, and souls dynamically changed unto the glory of God.