

Swept off your Feet

Beyond Worship-as-Usual

Connecting with God for a Strong Finish

CHAPTER 11d

Worship and Praise

Merged in the Marketplace

Conflict of Interest

Each week, *worship leaders* enter *houses of worship* to perform *worship music* before a discriminating audience. Stage-presence affects attendance, which influences the offering, which pays bills and supports salaries. The economics associated with Christian ministry depend largely on audience satisfaction. When compensation hinges on approval ratings, the temptation to accommodate popular trends elevates. As elders, deacons, church boards, and pastors monitor performance, job security suddenly becomes an issue.

To flourish in this competitive environment, career praise artists must do more than practice their vocation. They must connect with the Holy Spirit to offer effusive praise and authentic worship.

Pop styles and techniques are not the gold standard for leading others in praise and worship. Their knack for excellence notwithstanding, most professional entertainers fall short as model worship leaders. Their performance usually caters to market-driven forces leveraged by the entertainment industry. Jesus warned His followers against such behavior. In the Sermon on the Mount, He addressed conduct in gen-

eral, which also applies to leading others during a worship service (another phrase conspicuously absent from the Scriptures):

“Be especially careful when you are trying to be good so that you don't make a performance out of it. It might be good theater, but the God who made you won't be applauding. “When you do something for someone else [e.g., lead them in praising God], don't call attention to yourself. You've seen them in action, I'm sure—‘playactors’ I call them—treating prayer meeting and street corner alike as a stage, acting compassionate as long as someone is watching, playing to the crowds. They get applause, true, but that's all they get. (Matthew 6:1-2 MSG)

Jesus offers the following advice based on our Heavenly Father's example:

When you help someone out, don't think about how it looks. Just do it—quietly and unobtrusively. That is the way your God, who conceived you in love, working behind the scenes, helps you out.¹

Jesus warns us not to put on an ostentatious show for God to watch. He said:

“And when you come before God, don't turn that into a theatrical production either. All these people making a regular show out of their prayers, hoping for stardom! Do you think God sits in a box seat? (Matthew 6:5 MSG)

An erect stance under the spotlight of stardom contradicts the posture of a worshiper. Because true worshipers see beyond their reputation, they humbly bend below their popularity ratings.

Worship and Praise Merged in the Marketplace

According to singer, songwriter, and record producer Charlie Peacock, entertainment corporations owned “all the major Christian record

¹ Matthew 6:3-4 (MSG)

companies” in 2004.² With the sale price of *worship music* tied to corporate stocks, the focus has shifted, according to Peacock, “from long-term potential to short-term profit.”³ He asserts, “It’s all about meeting or exceeding corporate projections.”⁴

Capturing thirty percent of a multimillion-dollar U.S. market, Peacock points out that the quarterly earnings report “domesticates” worship music.⁵ Fiscally responsible executives discriminate between marketable talents—with a bias for consumers at the checkout counter. And ‘Worship Music’ is the business label for this commercial product.

Worshippers who praise God with their music should guard themselves from being manipulated by this industry. Record companies operate primarily to sustain profits. They appear to be more concerned with their public image than their ability to convey the truth about God. Professional entertainers who bow before the reputation of a record label may do so at the expense of the truth.

True worshippers bow before a much higher standard of excellence than moneymaking trends. Relying on their Heavenly Father to meet their needs, worshippers maintain an artistic urgency that refuses to compromise in style or expression. Connecting with their Creator, they radiate proficient praise far beyond commercial standards. Responding to the truth about God may or may not generate riches and fame. It will however, humble our soul and restore our vision. As we connect with God’s passionate love, we will excel at making His praise glorious.

While Christian musicians ride their wave of fame and fortune in an enterprise that some are calling worship, God is at work for the good of those who love Him. As financial magnates promote this multi-million

² Charlie Peacock, *At the Crossroads, Inside the Past, Present, and Future of Contemporary Christian Music*, WaterBrook Press a division of Random House, Inc., Colorado Springs, 2004, p. 188.

³ *At the Crossroads*, p. 188.

⁴ *At the Crossroads*, p. 189.

⁵ *At the Crossroads*, p. 153.

dollar industry, Jesus elevates high profile songs as a means to a better end.

How long will we allow commercial markets to dictate the lyrical message and musical score of God's praise? Performance-based ventures, patterned after legendary entertainers may backfire, or they may become a blessing. Charlie Peacock sounds a note of optimism:

Anyone who has studied world history, or church history, knows that thirty-five years of misdirected musical stewardship is but a blip on the screen of the history of human failure. We will recover from this as better and more faithful people, eager to make great music as caretakers of God's creativity.⁶

Properly understood, the performing arts help us connect with the truth about ourselves and the truth about God. When praise complements His worth, artistic leaders inspire us to respond with worship. Before we develop our stage presence however, we should refine our deportment in God's presence. Before we participate in a religious performance, we should first recognize God for His performance.

The Big Picture

God seeks and He intends to find multitudes of worshipers on earth uniting with worshipers in heaven. His children will shine like stars as they gather on this world's stage to convey the word of life with creativity and enthusiasm. From a platform of highest praise, this assembly will bow with reverent humility before His majesty.

All the earth will worship You, And will sing praises to You; They will sing praises to Your name. Selah. (Psalm 66:4 NAS)

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⁶ At the Crossroads, p. 204.