

I did it His way!

Recently I met a retired bishop from South Africa. As we talked, he told me about his plans for retirement. He said that he'd been asking God, "what is it that you want me to do that you will bless?" For months that had been his prayer. However, through that time God spoke to him and he realised that he'd been asking the wrong question. Rather he needed to ask God, "Lord what is it that you are doing that I can bless?" It sounds like a similar question but is actually significantly different. Instead of racing ahead and doing what seemed best, he knew he had to wait and see what God was doing.

There are two ways in which we can lead worship - initiation or response. My desire as a worship leader is to lead God's people in song by responding to what He's doing. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does." (John 5:19) This is why ultimately the Holy Spirit has to be the worship leader. Matt Redman says; "When we see the Holy Spirit as the worship leader, we realise more than ever that we can't make worship happen." Too often though we try. We slip into the mindset that by playing the songs louder or faster, or using the most popular songs around, we will have an amazing time of worship. We initiate in our own strength. This however can not be the model for leading worship. Worship is more than just singing songs or dancing. It's about a hearts response to God. On this point Bob Sorge helpfully says,

"He [God] is honouring those leaders who are coming carefully into his presence, waiting upon Him to initiate toward us, and then helping the people to respond back to the Lord with their reciprocating initiative. In this model there is much less of a tendency toward hype because the Holy Spirit is seen as the one responsible for moving the people to worship - not the worship leader or musician."

Most of us know the pressure to lead worship in a way that provokes a response. Maybe we throw in a song that we know will get some hands in the air. In the end though this is all hollow. The real role of a worship leader is first to respond to what God is doing, whatever that involves. God's ways are higher than our ways. I remember a time a few years ago when I was leading worship at an event in the North East of England. There were about a thousand young people packed into the tent. As I came to what I thought was the end of the worship I turned to Mike Pilavachi, who was leading the service, and waited for him to end in prayer and then speak. Instead he suggested we wait as he felt there was something more to happen. We waited for a while and then started singing the simple refrain 'Praise the Lord oh my soul, Praise the Lord.' After a while the band stopped, but the young people continued to sing. The band left the stage

and Mike and I sat at the side and joined in with everyone. What happened next was amazing. After quite some time there was a hushed silence and then someone else started another song. After that there was a time of singing in the Spirit. Then people started cheering and shouting out praise to God. Again there was a holy silence and after a while new melodies and songs started to fill the air. We had an incredible time of responding to God and the floodgates of heaven opened. God poured out his Spirit in a very powerful way. We worshipped like this for at least forty-five minutes and the wonderful thing was that no one was on a stage leading it. There was no one telling people what to do next. The Holy Spirit was leading us and a thousand young people joined together in response. It was a night I'll never forget and it reminded me of the need to always lead God's way. That at times means getting out of the way and making space for God to work.

Sometimes when leading a time of worship we need to lead strongly and move quickly from song to song. We also need at times to take our foot off the accelerator and wait to see what is happening. A question we always need to be asking is, 'Lord what are you doing?' With all the pressures of leading the band, remembering the chords and words and then of course observing how the congregation are responding, we can forget to ask. I've discovered that it's when I keep asking that maybe a thought comes to mind. Sometimes it's a different song; sometimes it's a line to sing out. As I've tried to obey and step out in this, often something is unlocked. We encounter God in a profound way. I would like to say that every time I step out everything kicks off wonderfully but sadly that is not true. As the people in my church will tell you there have been some disasters. There have been times when I've felt God's put on my heart a line to sing and I sing it out again and again, yet no one really responds. Occasionally I've gone into spontaneous times of worship and have left everyone behind, as it wasn't Spirit-led. Rather it was Tim-led. That doesn't seem to work as well.

David Ruis says, "We cannot discover the worship God is seeking for apart from the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We must submit to His guidance and leadership in all aspects of worship, both as gathered community and in our individual paths of life. Just as we do not know how to pray (Romans 8), so we must rely on the work of the Spirit in us to draw from us the worship in which God delights." As Worship Leaders we must learn to lay down our own agendas and respond in the way that God requires. We need to lead worship His way. We need to live out our lives in the way God requires us to. As we do this I've no doubt that we will reach new depths and new heights of worship.

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