

Guidelines For Worship Leaders (Part II)

In part one of this series we explored and expounded upon Ephesians 5:18 – 20, which I believe is the most solid scripture in the New Testament to build a Music Ministry on. And being continuously filled with the Spirit is imperative as the solid foundation to build your ministry or Christian life on as well. In part two I want to continue this study by sharing the next principle or guideline for worship leaders.

1st Corinthians 14:12 states, “Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church”. To really understand this scripture we must examine the historical background of the people in the church at Corinth. One of the first things that come to mind about these people at Corinth was their desire to be ‘spiritual’. And that is a good desire. Further, they wanted to have all the gifts operating at all times. (Nothing wrong with desiring spiritual gifts either!) But as you read further into Paul’s letter to the Corinthians you will find that there was a real Christian maturity issue.

Their desire for spirituality was becoming one of wanting to be, “more spiritual than others”. This is nothing more than childish one-upmanship. If you are proud of how spiritual you are you definitely have a maturity issue. And the only building up you will accomplish is the building up of yourself! Not only that but you will spend much of your time being a judge of how spiritual other people are in comparison with yourself. You see, there were visible gifts being manifested in the Corinthian worship services but yet there were very obvious moral problems and other serious issues. So much so that Paul had to write and give specific instructions as to what should take the highest priority when the church joined together for worship. And His emphasis is on Love and Edification. Let’s look at the word edification.

Paul uses a word that was used (in the original Greek) as a construction term. It means, “to build up”. It has been commonly translated into English as the word ‘edification’. Paul uses the word to try and get the Corinthians priorities straight. He even goes further and says that everything in the worship service should be done for the building and strengthening of the believers! With this principle as a guideline let’s look at how we can apply edification to Music Ministry.

First, when choosing music for the worship service every song must be carefully selected with this principle in mind! Content is of the utmost consideration when choosing songs for the Worship service. Lyrical content has to take precedence over any other musical considerations. Many worship leaders today are more concerned with the vibe, the groove, and the cleverness of the hook than they are with building up the body of Christ! I will go further and say if the musical hooks or styles do not support and help underscore proper theological content then don’t use the song in a worship service! Also if the music is drowning out the

vocals then there can be no way for the congregation to be edified. Might as well be mumbling gibberish if there are no intelligible words for believers in the congregation to be encouraged and blessed by. If the songs you are considering for the worship service aren't based on solid Biblical principles and lyrics then don't do it!

Now hold on a minute! You might ask, "Aren't you dissin' on an awful lot of the new Worship music being produced today"? Absolutely not!! What I am saying is that there is a proper time and place for music that is appropriate to the occasion. And the Biblical guideline is that whatever you do in the worship service is for the building up of the body of Christ. There are plenty of other avenues where all kinds of styles and genres can be performed but the worship service isn't the place for un-intelligible music that can't feed the Body of Christ. The bottom line is you can't bypass the mind in worship.

Go back to the 14th chapter of 1st Corinthians for a moment. In verse 15 Paul exclaims, "What should I do then? I will pray with the spirit, but I will pray with the mind also; I will sing praise with the spirit, but I will sing praise with the mind also". In plain words there has to be a proper balance. We must be filled with the Spirit as we sing and lead worship but just as important is that we worship with our minds! In verse 26 there is the all inclusive statement, "Let all things be done for building up". Could it possibly be stated more clearly than that?

A common trap that Worship leaders fall into is what I call the "response trap". This is where the congregation's emotional response becomes the most important thing. The success of the worship service is gauged solely by this factor. Edification and lyrical content give way to "this will get them pumped up and on their feet!" This is where music can become mere manipulation. It is an unbalanced approach to over-emphasize emotional responses in worship leading. I had a well-known evangelist one time explain to me how he wanted the music executed in his crusade one night. He said, "Brother, I want you to start off with up tempo songs and work them up to a feverish pitch until I signal you to bring them back down to earth! Then at the altar call I want you to use slow tempo 'tear jerkers' while I herd them down to the front!!!" This is a tragedy that some would use the emotional nature of music to manipulate people in such un-spiritual ways.

Music can make people want to dance, cry, shout, mourn, ad infinitum! There is an incredible diversity and range of human emotions that are touched by music. And it is a wonderful gift of the Creator. But when you bring intelligent, understandable lyrics into your music a profound change takes place. The listener is forced to hear content! Now there are two key ingredients...lyrical content and the music. And properly wedded together they can be used to touch people's lives in ways that no other form of communication can. They can uplift, strengthen and build up lives to the glory of God! This is what Biblical Music Ministry is.

In I Samuel 4:1-11 there is a great story about the Children of Israel. They were preparing to go out to battle. A great shout of victory rang out and the children of Israel felt assured of victory in the upcoming battle that day. But to their shock and dismay their army was soundly defeated! And the lesson applied to worship leading is this... You can get pumped up with fast, up-tempo songs filled with cheerleading rah-rah rah and hype but that is no guarantee of victory in the real world! Or you can use one slow-tempo song after another until possibly everyone in the building is crying. But will it make a real change in their lives in the weeks to come? Again, there is nothing wrong with expressing emotions in the worship service but I once heard somewhere this quote, " Nothing sets the heart on fire like the truth"! Make sure your excitement and emotions are built on solid ground.

I don't want to leave the reader with the impression that I am in any way suggesting that we lead worship music in a robotic mechanical way. A valid criticism of many worshipping churches is that they make one feel like your attending a funeral. After reading the Psalms how can a case be made for lifeless and un-emotional responses from the gathering of God's people? You can trace back in Church History where platonic thought crept into the churches teachings and emphasis. (This is a fascinating study and will be covered in depth in another article). It has had a detrimental effect on the church ever since. The idea that you have to stiffen up and inhibit all body movement in the presence of God is just one of many harmful and un-biblical ideas that came from this source. Also I don't want to imply that there are not times in the worship service to " Be still and know that I am God". Quiet times and moments of reverent silence can be appropriate responses in a worship service. Indeed, there is room for wide range of emotional responses. However, keep in mind the rule of scripture, " Let all things be done decently and in order". If you're emotional responses are interfering and disturbing others and preventing them from being edified then you are out of order.

Let me leave you with the following statement to consider. The only thing that makes Christian music specifically Christian is the lyrical content. All instrumental music can be played and performed to the glory of God. And you might be a Christian who plays or writes in a wide variety of styles as well. But it is the lyrics of the song sung intelligibly in words one can understand that truly edifies ones spirit, mind, and understanding. Of course instrumental music has a profound effect on a persons emotional state. But those will always be of a subjective nature and on an individual basis. But when I sing, " Let everything that has breath praise the Lord ", everyone can understand and participate in the worship of the living God!

Let the principle of edification always be your guide in the songs you sing or write for the worship service. Only in this way can you be assured that your efforts to sing and make music for the Lord will not be in vain! Rest assured that people's lives will be built up, encouraged, and touched for the glory of God!

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