

5 Reasons Church Leaders Should Pay Attention to Christian Hip-Hop

Imagine trying to be a missionary in another country without even attempting to learn the language. Any explanations of the gospel would be useless. Your listeners would have no idea what you are saying.

In some ways, many American churches are in the same situation with their surrounding neighborhoods. The church is using one language to speak and sing about Jesus, while the culture either doesn't understand or ignores it completely.

Christians can bemoan those changes and wish culture still talked like us, or we can do something about it. Right now, one of the most dominant cultural influences on young adults and teenagers is hip-hop music.

So how are church leaders supposed to properly understand a cultural language that has historically not often communicated a biblical worldview? The same way you learn any language, listen to those who speak it. Thankfully for pastors and church leaders, there are several Christian artists who are seeking to live as missionaries in the hip-hop culture, while creating art that challenges listeners and glorifies Christ.

They are rapping on *The Tonight Show* about biblical solutions to real world problems. They are appearing on MTV to communicate a different, gospel-centered way to live. Millions of people are listening, but are church leaders?

Using the early church as an example of ministering cross culturally, here are five reasons church leaders should be paying attention to Christian hip-hop even if you never buy a song.

1. Cultural understanding – Walking around Athens, Paul's spirit was troubled by the idols dominating the city's landscape. Yet, instead of shrinking back, he went into the Areopagus, used the idol to the "unknown god" as a starting off point, and preached the gospel. For many Christians, the rap world may be as foreign as the streets of Athens. But more people listen to hip-hop on Spotify, a popular music streaming service, than any other genre. Christian rap artists can help pastors and leaders recognize this "unknown god." This will not be an automatic gateway to reaching millennials, many of whom are hip-hop fans, but it is a way to better understand them.

2. Effective communication – When the Holy Spirit filled the disciples on Pentecost, they began to speak in different languages. Because of this, people from numerous areas were able to hear and understand the message. This opened the door for Peter to proclaim Christ. Speaking someone's language grants us gospel opportunities. When it comes to hip-hop, simply understanding the concerns that are present in that community can open the door. It's not about using the right slang words or sounding cool. It's listening to people, getting to know them, and sharing Jesus as the answer to their problems, as well as your own.

3. Different perspectives – As the gospel spread and the church grew, conflict and issues arose within the early church. The Greek-speaking widows were being overlooked in the food distribution. The apostles heard the complaints and addressed the issue by appointing deacons to meet the needs of those who had been unintentionally ignored. Artists like Lecrae can become to church leaders like those Greek widows were to the apostles. They can help us expose cultural blindspots and uncover opportunities for change. Lecrae's autobiography *Unashamed* shares the tragic story of his childhood and the redemption Jesus brought to his life. Those of us who come from a completely different background can

listen to Lecrae's perspective and learn how Christ can bring change in situations different than our own.

4. Theological conversations – During his missionary journeys, Paul often went to the Jewish synagogue in each city. Acts 17:2 says that was his habit. He went to the synagogue where people would already be talking about spiritual matters and then he pointed them to Christ. There in Thessalonica, he won both Jewish and Greek converts. In our culture today, hip-hop music is often the most theological genre, even if it can be misguided. Kayne West, one of the top rap artists today, says his latest record is a “gospel album.” It may not give a biblical gospel. But he, along with virtually every other rapper, is talking about theological issues. Christian hip-hop artists are bringing gospel truth to these conversations. They allow church leaders an entry point to a spiritual dialogue happening in our culture we often miss or ignore.

5. Ministry reminders – Paul not only gave theological instruction to churches in his letters, he gave ministry updates. Churches would be told the spread of the gospel, the state of Paul's work, and specific prayer requests for people and his ministry. Believers were able to see that the church was much larger than their local gathering. In a hostile culture, it reminded them of their ultimate victory in Christ. We need those same reminders today as we face an increasingly antagonistic culture. It can be encouraging to hear how God is at work far beyond our circle of influence. Artists like Lecrae, Trip Lee, Propaganda, and others offer pastors and church leaders that opportunity along with the privilege of joining in the work through prayer. Find out how God is at work and pray that He continues to use these artists to reach those far from Christ with the life-changing message of Jesus.

You may never own a rap album, but you need to pay attention to Christian hip-hop. You need to hear how God has redeemed these individuals and is working in and through them to create

quality art that unashamedly preaches Christ crucified in a language that may be foreign to you.

Aaron Earls serves as the online editor for *Facts & Trends* at LifeWay Christian Resources, and blogs at [. Connect with Aaron on Twitter at @WardrobeDoor.](#)

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