

# Beauty in the Back Row

Like it or not, the *American Idol* syndrome is alive and well in most Western churches today. We see it in the modern worship arena, with many young Christians believing that becoming a worship leader is the next best thing to being a rock star. Somewhere along the way, we've reinforced a model that equates spiritual success with stage time.

I've seen the same principle at work in the prayer movement, where true Spirit-led intercession is, in certain circles, overshadowed by a belief that the quicker you can lather a crowd into a praying frenzy, the more anointed on the mic you are.

I don't mean to be cynical, but it says something about the American church when corporate worship and prayer can require as much spiritual discernment as listening to a politician. That's why my visit to Kansas City's International House of Prayer (IHOP) for this month's cover story was a breath of fresh air. I've been intimately connected with the prayer movement for almost a decade; and as a worship leader for almost 20 years, I've also watched the dynamics change in corporate worship (not just stylistically, but in the emphasis given to what happens musically from the platform).

But after spending time with IHOP's leaders and experiencing firsthand the corporate worship and prayer culture established there, I'm reassured that a major influencer for both movements is pursuing higher goals than just great stage shows, larger crowds and more spiritual lather. That's because at IHOP, the platform is not the point.

Don't get me wrong: Everything at IHOP stems from what happens in the ministry's 24/7 prayer room, and logistically, the focal point of that room is a worship team on a platform and a prayer leader on the mic. But you'd be hard pressed to find an

IHOP staff member—at least one who's been there more than six months—clamoring to be onstage, despite most of them having grown up in an *American Idol* culture.

This is the fruit of leadership that places equal importance on the back-row intercessors as on those onstage. At IHOP, the midnight to 6 a.m. prayer shift isn't for the B-string players; it's prime time, with or without the crowds to prove that, because it's for an audience of One anyway.

Mike Bickle and Misty Edwards, probably IHOP's two most well-known leaders, credit this to a process of identity transformation. "God gives people an invitation when they come through our doors to get their identity right," Edwards says, adding that the "police force" against fighting for the limelight is IHOP's unglamorous, 50-hours-a-week-without-pay lifestyle.

It's obviously working. Amid a generation of rock star wannabes, IHOP is producing a rare, humble people content to let Jesus get all the spotlight. Particularly from the back row.