

Israel Houghton Sends a Powerful Message to the Church

Israel Houghton leads millions into worship with seeming effortlessness. But he's had to be willing to lay down his music for God to get him there. Check out our second installment of this exclusive interview, and [click here](#) to read Part 1 if you missed it.

CHARISMA: Have you always been uber-creative?

Houghton: Yeah, I think so. I was always drawn to music and tremendously influenced by a myriad of different types of music. Nobody ever told me that you couldn't merge things, that you couldn't blend things. I just said, "Hey, this would be really cool with that." I've always been fascinated by sights and sounds and video elements and lighting elements and musical elements.

CHARISMA: Has God ever asked you lay down music so you could learn new facets of what it means to worship Him?

Houghton: Yeah. I don't know if it was music altogether, but it was definitely the chase toward significance. It's funny, in those early years you say, "God bless me. I want to have impact and I want to be used by You"—and He says OK. Then, after a while, you have to compete with the very thing that He gave you.

I remember having that moment when I felt like if I pressed the gas pedal a certain way, I would probably see something happen—but I also had the feeling that I wouldn't enjoy or appreciate the results because it was something that I was pushing for. I ended up helping to start a church from scratch literally two blocks from where I started leading worship at

19. And my prayer this time around was, “Lord, I’m done. I’m done with helping people know my name, with trying to pursue some sort of career path. I just want to worship. I just want to be used by You.”

That was a return for me, of going back to my first love. I remembered those first times of leading worship, with my legs shaking and with the good kind of nervousness that comes with being completely dependent on God. I think the more you learn, the more you can slip into saying, “Yeah, I got this”—and the less time you spend with God. As long as people are saying, “Wow, that was great. You’re really anointed,” it’s easy to start believing that must be an indicator that you’re doing it right. And you gradually get further and further away from where you were supposed to go. It doesn’t make you a bad person or anything like that, but you’re not on target anymore.

For me, it was an intense realization of that. When I went back and took the knife to my Isaac, so to speak, I said, “OK, I’m going to be content to be used in whatever capacity.” The ironic part is that’s when God began to open doors that were so obviously Him. My responsibility at that point was to walk through them and to be a good steward of those moments.

CHARISMA: If God is more concerned with the positioning of our heart, what role does excellence play in worship?

Houghton: It’s important to define *heart*. Often that word is synonymous with “Hey, that was a good effort; it wasn’t very good, but it had a lot of heart.” On the flip side, I’m created in God’s image. If His breath is in me, if the way He thinks and creates is also in me, then it is possible to create with a good heart, with a pure motivation and purity of expression, *and* do something excellently.

If you look at David or Solomon, those guys were incredible, and they did what they did to honor the Lord. If you look at

early music history, all those great composers were commissioned by the church and created music with such excellence and passion that to this day, hundreds of years later, we're still affected by the excellence and the historic timeless nature of what they put out.

To me, I feel like when David said, "I'm not going to give to the Lord something that doesn't cost me." That's how I look at it from the standpoint of music and production and creativity. I want to make sure that whatever I've been given, I maximize in giving it back.

In regard to doing something with excellence, my motivation changed a long time ago. It used to be that I wanted people to *ooh* and *aah*, so to speak, but that's different now. I want to honor God. I want to make a statement that says the church is a powerful force in the earth, and I get to be a part of the accompanying sound of that force. It's an exciting thing.