

Subtle Warning Signs of Spiritually Dead Ministry

“Enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise ...” (Ps. 100:4).

For the last few years there is this spontaneous phrase that keeps welling up from the inside of me when I am ministering to the Lord in worship ... “It’s my privilege, it’s my honor to give you praise.” Maybe not so spontaneous anymore, now that I’ve been singing it for two years. Ha!

I have been on quite a journey when it comes to worship. I started singing on a worship team regularly when I was 11 years old, started leading worship songs when I was 15, and became a worship leader in my early 20’s. I’ve led worship in hospitals for five people over 85 years old and in stadiums of 70,000 people of every race, age and color.

Now, in my mid-30’s, this journey has allowed me the honor of meeting and running with some of the most prominent worship leaders, musicians and songwriters of our generation. I’ve seen a lot and I’ve heard a lot. I’ve been inspired and I’ve been disappointed. And the truth is, I’ve probably been inspiring and disappointing to others myself. But there is one massive and extremely critical crossroads for every worshiper on their journey—this includes *you* if you love Jesus at all—and it is regularly being taken for granted or even ignored in our process of praise. It’s the crossroads of “professional” vs. “privilege.”

One of the most frustrating things to me is that some of the enemy’s most successful strategies are the ones that take a little truth and manipulate it just enough to get us a fraction of the way off course so that a few years down the road we find ourselves actually miles off course in our hearts

toward the Lord, His people and His purposes. I call it the “pusher” method. It’s a little too much pressure on something that could be good and it ends up becoming the master of our lives. It *pushes* us out of bounds.

Let me give you an example of what I mean. The simple intention of offering the Lord an “*excellent gift*” in worship—our skill, our preparedness, our execution—can get *pushed* just enough that the excellent offering becomes striving, performance and man-pleasing, and the original desire to give the Lord a good gift gets lost under the execution of that desire. This results in insecurity or pride. Which results in striving. Which ends in disillusionment and burnout from doing something that was always intended to fill our hearts with joy and bring refreshing to our soul.

Another example—for those that aren’t on worship teams but maybe attend a corporate worship service or regularly listen to prominent worship music—would be this: You initially get saved or have a tangible encounter with the Lord and corporate worship becomes the tool for you to express your overflowing gratitude and adoration to Jesus. But after attending these services awhile, the pusher comes and that overflow response becomes a routine. That routine becomes a job/responsibility and that familiarity breeds contempt. You find yourself singing along like it’s the mindless elevator music in the background of your daily life but your heart is far from Him. This results in a dullness in your spirit, a desire to seek other things that move your heart, and ultimately can result in a sinful choice to fill a desire for communion with God that got buried under a going-through-the-motions, duty-based Christianity.

Do either of those sound familiar to anyone?

Maybe it’s even that you had a worship encounter with some highly-skilled band at a conference and that sweet encounter becomes the tool the enemy uses to *push* you into feeling

dissatisfied with anything other than that kind of worship atmosphere. In turn, you adopt a critical spirit towards your local worship team and instead of communing with the Lord at a corporate worship service, you find yourself frustrated that it's not what you experienced at that last conference, so you just choose to chat it up in the lobby instead.

Or you spend so much time standing on stages "leading worship" (aka singing songs and executing your corporate schedule), that you begin to bank on your position as a worship leader or worship musician and you mistake that excellent execution for anointing, only to find that your heart is no longer moved and it just feels like one more responsibility on your list. Punch in. Punch out. "I'm working ... ah-hem, I mean worshipping," instead of actually connecting with the person we all showed up for in the first place!

There are so many scenarios I could describe but here's what happened: We came to the crossroads of privilege vs. professional. We had a choice whether to view any worship opportunity as a gift and privilege, to stand freely before a most holy God that laid His life down for us and saved us from eternal death, and actually respond by loving with all our hearts ... *or* to professionalize the worship opportunity and to disconnect our hearts, making it more about the act or execution or the checking off our list.

We are really good at "professionalizing" worship! But friends, that is extremely detrimental to us as well as grievous to the Lord.

I have the fear of God on my life to keep my heart in a constant place of gratitude for a veil that's been torn in two. A most holy God made space for me to be close. He's a friend and counselor that desires to share His heart with me on a regular basis. I never want to forget the pit He drew me out of, the gap that His broken body bridged, and the suffocating sin His sweet breath of life overcame in my death-

doomed body.

There is a reason that the Word instructs us to enter His gates with thanksgiving, friends, because an intentional and continual thankful heart will guard our heart from familiarity! It's humbling to be thankful. And I never want to forget that I am *not* qualified to stand before Him apart from the war He waged on my behalf.

He purchased with great zeal in His heart a place for me to sit with Him in heavenly places! I *did not* earn that! I cannot qualify for it apart from Him and I am so deeply and completely grateful for *every* and *any* opportunity to approach Him with a song in my heart and His praise continually on my lips for all that He is and all that He has done.

When we enter His gates with thanksgiving we remember the *privilege* of worship and we respond with praise. But when we stand at that crossroads and we decide to choose a professional heart posture over a privilege heart posture, we make way for the enemy to wreak all sorts of havoc in our hearts and lives.

We cannot forget to be thankful. We stir up our hearts to bless the Lord. We remember how His love is better than any earthly pleasure and from that place of humble privilege, we praise. Yes, let's do it with excellence. Yes, let's celebrate the sweet and special encounter moments at those conferences. But not at the expense of an intentionally humble place of gratitude. Always gratitude.

Because, "It's our privilege, and it's our honor God, to give you praise ... we give you praise."

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