

What Can Churches Learn from Taylor Swift?

Let's lay down our religious limitations on God and look at a pop culture phenomenon. We might find some epic clues on life, authenticity and even ministry. This phenomenon, she goes by the name Taylor Swift.

Anytime someone puts me in my place on social media, I don't instinctively sing a popular worship song, I go straight to Swift's "And the haters gonna hate, hate, hate ... baby, I'm just gonna shake, shake shake..." Swift has defined "the hook" that draws us in and keeps us hearing that song in our head whether we like it or not.

This woman has taken the world by storm in the last few weeks, and while this isn't the first time, this deluge is worth investigating.

Recently she took home six trophies at the American Music Awards. She is now the most decorated artist in history, while at the same time holding all 10 songs on the Billboard Top 10. And all from her newest album "Midnights," released barely a month ago. Once her new concert was announced, fans promptly broke the internet in the rush to purchase tickets through Ticketmaster, who later apologized for not being able to handle the sudden surge.

What is happening and should we be paying attention? There is an underlying reason why the world is talking "Taylor."

Taylor Swift finds ways to keep fans included in her creativity, from "Easter egg" hints for upcoming albums to songwriting with a mind toward those who may feel completely alone. She has repeatedly displayed transparency about her own struggles.

Is it possible this musician reminds us of how Jesus spoke in parables to meet the people where they were as fishermen, farmers, children, the marginalized and the religious? He always spoke their language in a way that included them into His story.

When Taylor first came on the scene, I remember being amazed how this songwriter had somehow climbed into every teenage girl's journal and written their heartache and deepest desires. From the beginning, her transparency and openness created a place for young girls and those who felt isolated and alone to find the words they couldn't quite express.

What can we learn from an industry leader, whether you like her or not, who is making a distinct historical mark? What can we learn from a woman who seems to really care and carry a level of compassion for the person on the other end of her voice?

I am a pastor who had to learn to love my voice, my language, my translation and my childlike simplicity. It actually took me years to get past the fear of being seen as not enough. My deepest desire was to minister in a simple way that could bring hope, while simultaneously equip the beautiful human in front of me.

My constant question has been, "What can they take from my message on Sunday that gives them hope and tools in the face of an angry boss, crying kids or no money to pay bills on Wednesday?" Is my "hook" strong enough to remember without having to pull out a concordance and five Scriptures? I think we can all learn from Taylor and her songs that the world is looking for something tangible and real.

What if encouragement, authenticity and letting go of our polarized judgment of one another is the most anointed thing we can bring to the table of life?

What if our honesty about not having it all together might

create space for someone to find solutions in our story?

What if the soundtrack to our lives created a frequency of healing that impacts the masses like Taylor is impacting the masses?

What if church truly felt like a place where our expression was valued?

In the end, what can we learn from this moment? Can we look at our message and see if the space we create can pull someone in who otherwise would be hiding in the dark moments?

Is it possible to learn from this time, tweak our interaction with the ones who don't fit our definition of 'church family?' Can they open their journal, throw away the key and know they can be heard and accepted?

I hope so. I pray we look beyond our natural inclination of judgment and ask if there is a story here waiting to be released. {eo}

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