

What Revival Sounds Like

My front-row seat to today's global revival of worship has taught me lessons far beyond music

As 2010 began, I had no idea whether I would write another song or make another record. I felt deep down that I wanted to, but I wasn't sure if I had anything to say. Writer's block is usually associated with isolation—you withdraw yourself from community, from people and from normal life, and you quickly find you have nothing to say.

But life with God is the opposite. It's impossible to have nothing to say because He is always speaking, and the world is always speaking about God. Through word, conversation, creation, media, friends, tragedy, kids dancing, silence—because God is alive, there will always be a brand-new conversation to be had every day. He's our friend, so He wants to talk. If you always remain plugged into a local church, a "God conversation" or miracle is always ongoing, so songs are never far away. You can hear God's voice anytime, anywhere and in any way because He always wants to speak into our present something eternal.

And so the songs I've written since then are my prayers—my conversations with the Almighty. "Back to the Start," "Take Me," "I'm All I Can Bring," "Waiting Here for You," "Catch Every Teardrop"—these are just conversations with God, my Friend, knowing that He knows. I'm always astounded at how kind He can be.

God Wants to Move Us

Now here's something else: Music and revival always go hand in hand. And a spiritual awakening is surely the greatest event a community can live through. Whether it's in your school, workplace or basketball club, we can always be sure that God wants to move in power and presence among His people.

And when I say “His people,” I mean *all* people, not just the ones who belong to the white middle-class club. The prophet Joel was preaching about this in Joel 2:28-29: “And that’s just the beginning: After that—I will pour out my Spirit on every kind of people: Your sons will prophesy, also your daughters. Your old men will dream, your young men will see visions. I’ll even pour out my Spirit on the servants, men and women both” (MSG).

Hmm. “Every kind of people” sounds like *every kind of people*, which must mean everyone, then. It must include the broken, the poor, the rich, the homeless, kings, murderers, mothers, teachers, tax collectors—and even worship leaders!

We all need God, and we desperately need revival when a nation enters a deep period of repentance before its Maker. Throughout history, we see the same patterns—from Azusa Street to Wales to Brownsville to Toronto to Buenos Aires: God reveals Himself in all His glory and there is a conviction of sin, which leads to repentance. Not just in ones and twos, either, but masses of ordinary people turning to God.

When we are repentant, it means simply that we’re sorry, and then our shame leads to saying “thank you”—thank you to God, thank you for all He is, thank you for who He is, thank you that He took my sin away, thank you to Jesus for dying so I could have life, thank you for my health, my kids, my car, my garden, my guitars and so on.

This spirit of thankfulness leads to gratefulness, and gratefulness leads to worship. It’s simple, really. We fall in love with Jesus, and the most natural thing in the world is to sing about Him, to tell Him how amazing He is and, in turn, to sing to the world that He is alive.

Our Worship Saves and Frees

When God is on the scene, there is always worship. There’s always music. When the Israelites were rescued at the Red

Sea, what was the first thing they did? They sang, danced and partied (Ex. 15).

One of the body's instincts is to sing when it's happy and to dance when it's joyful. When God starts the process of setting us free from sin, taking our burdens and calling us sons and daughters, it's the happiest moment a human being can experience—and this is why prayer and worship is so key to us privately and corporately.

When we sing together, the atmosphere changes. In our hearts, in our streets, in our nations—it's the greatest thing we will ever do on the planet, and it's our greatest weapon against the enemy. The devil can steal a lot from a human being, but he can never take away our ability to worship Jesus, King of kings, Savior of the world.

So worship as a “weapon”? Yep. We always think about evangelism as a guy preaching the gospel and inviting people to come forward and give their lives to Christ. But one of the most evangelistic things we do is worship.

Nehemiah 12 talks about what happened at the dedication of the temple: “At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were sought out from where they lived and were brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps and lyres. The musicians also were brought together from the region around Jerusalem. ... And on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away” (vv. 27-28, 43, NIV).

Amazing that the banging of a few drums plus songs and praises to God affected the whole region! We don't just sing to God; we prophesy to our communities that Jesus is alive and that His blood shed on the cross means we can be free.

Freedom is the most attractive trait in a person, and as

Christians we should be the most free people on the earth. We get to be friends with God—and that is something to celebrate and be happy about!

The prodigal son returned to find his dad had thrown a party for him. As he came back, he could hear the sound of celebration. It was a sign that his father had forgiven him and just wanted him back.

In the same way, we need to celebrate more in our churches and not create boring institutions that seem to speak the opposite. Of course we need reverence, but reverence is no friend of religion, and religion is a man-made device invented to control things rather than bring freedom and release.

First Corinthians 10:14 says, “So, my very dear friends, when you see people reducing God to something they can use or control, get out of their company as fast as you can” (MSG).

Can you believe that we still try to contain God? The Holy Spirit is like a fire; you can’t tame Him or put Him out, and it’s always best to let Him burn in us. The process of purification starts in our hearts, and then this turns into praise.

It’s always better to praise than procrastinate. I feel this is the biggest thing God is asking of me right now. Will I go deeper? Will I let him have control? Can I surrender? Will I let the Spirit of God breathe in me so powerfully that I become more like Him? I feel it’s time to go back to the beginning.

It’s Time to Move Your Feet

My latest work has been released under the title *God’s Great Dance Floor, Step 01*—and I’m glad for it. It’s time for me to learn to dance again. I’m a terrible dancer, and if I’m at a party with my wife, Anna, I would rather sit on the sidelines with all the blokes and talk about cars.

But there's freedom in letting go. I'm done with holding it all together and being respectable. I'd rather be like King David now, ready to jump for joy because someone saved my life, because Jesus dared to believe in me, because He saw something in me He loved.

The church has become too boring again, preferring to pursue "perfection" or "excellence" than to celebrate our faith with the passion and excitement kids have. We have to continually find ways to suck religion out of ourselves and our meetings. The church must be a home for the homeless, the broken, the joyful, the grateful and the saved. When we have this, we'll stop noticing the band was off-key or the heating was broken or we didn't get to sing our favorite song.

Excellence is overrated. I'd rather have passion any day. So if you do one thing this year, let it be that you open your heart, move your feet a little and be more childlike. We will only ever feel alive when we are alive in him.

Revival begins with us first. We cannot revive anything unless we are first revived, and this requires time with God and a heart surrendered. That's easier said than done, sure, but let's promise ourselves we won't grow up too fast. Let's remain childlike in our faith, in love with Jesus and skipping through our days rather than falling under the weight of our challenges. Free people are happy people, and I would like to be one of those—always ready to sing and always brave enough to dance like King David.

I'm glad I found some new songs and was given the privilege of making more music. I'll see you on the dance floor.

Martin Smith was the frontman for the worship band *Delirious?* for two decades, writing such modern-day classics as "I Could Sing of Your Love Forever" and "Did You Feel the Mountains Tremble?" In April, he released his solo debut, *God's Great*

Dance Floor, Step 01.

To download a song from Martin Smith's new album, *God's Great Dance Floor, Step 01*, go to