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Defining a Worship Leader

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It's a good thing for us to define the idea of *worship leader*. On second thought, maybe we just need to rethink it.

I know that the usual definition of this term is someone who leads the musical performance during a church gathering. I'm not refuting that. But I'm wondering if we can get to a deeper meaning than just during services. Here are some thoughts.

Living a Connected Lifestyle

Worship leaders are responsible for living a *response* lifestyle. If we don't pray, if we don't listen and hear, we have nothing to lead others into. In a video about Rich Mullins, Michael W. Smith said something like this about Rich's music...

It was like he would go into places that you couldn't see, into the darkness, and he would go and meet with God. Then he would come out of the darkness and write about what he saw and heard.

This is a great description of what being a worship leader is. You can't lead people into places you have not gone yourself. We are the ones who "go into places," and when we come out, we show others not only what we have seen but also our response to it.

Create Conversation Space

We, through music, prayer, art, scripture reading, etc.—are creating a place for response to happen. Jesus' conversations with each person will cause different responses; some people may respond with joy, others with repentance. It's not in the methods themselves. The words, harmonies, crescendos, pictures—these are all catalysts for creating an open doorway to the Spirit. I've found this to be true a lot when I paint live. I'm rarely on the observation side of live painting. But from my conversations with people, I have found that as they watch me, their minds are trying to decipher what I am painting and when the final product is going to emerge. As the mind does this, it begins to put meaning to the shapes, colors and the overall composition in the painting. I can't tell you when this happens, but at some point in this process, it seems that a conversation with the Spirit begins. I believe this, because when I'm done with the painting, people come up to me and give me different accounts of what the painting means. *This color means this, right? This painting is about this, right?*

Are they wrong? No. The Holy Spirit is beginning a conversation with each person and speaks to them about what they need to talk about. The painting process is just the catalyst for conversation. The words of songs are this too. So is the music. So are our words. We are being asked to be the curators of this conversation space.

Leading Gifted Responses

This is where worship opens up to everyone and we have to begin to change the way we think about worship leading. If worship is to respond to God, then leaders help teach us how to respond to God in all giftings.

Unfortunately, the church often highlights only the gifts that can be seen during a worship service (e.g., leading music, preaching, tithing, ushering, etc.).

But most of the gifts God has given to his people are going to be lived outside the church service. The kingdom is much bigger than our services, and responding to worship is going to lead us to our everyday happenings. Worship leaders can be gifted with hospitality, leading us to a place of comfort and acceptance, teaching us how to care for others. People gifted in numbers and finances can lead us to a place of stewardship. Gifted quiet people can lead us to a response place of silence and meditation and help us deepen our prayer lives in the midst of a loud world.

My point is, worship leads us outside the body, to live what we have experienced.

Worship leading is not an occupation for good musicians and artists in church services. It's so much more. For those of us who do lead in music and art, we must go to that place of response outside of our responsibilities at church. We must go there in our craft and then lead when we play at coffee shops and bars or lead when we hang art at galleries and so on. We

lead in this world, in the neighborhoods and communities we dwell in, by responding out of our time with God with the gifts he's given us to proclaim his kingdom.