Team Player Or Independent Artist?

Worship Leader:



BY ANDY PARK

My generation is famous for its resistance to authority. The culture of drugs, sex and rock 'n' roll from the '60s and '70s was all about freedom from authority. My peers highly valued their right to independence and "doing your own thing." Being able to "make your own way in life" is respected by our culture. I feel pulled away from being a committed churchman by all these influences. When you add to all of that the non-conformist artistic mindset and the rebellion that is in the heart of every son and daughter of Adam, you have a potential problem!

Independence and self-determination are high values for the modernist and post-modernist. I want to make my own plans and control my own destiny. But since I'm just one member of an integrated community, and I'm responsible to the other members, I can't make all the rules and always get my own way. I enjoy lots of artistic freedom in leading people and leading worship, and my pastors are happy to give me lots of freedom. But it's all within the greater context of *serving* in the church. I'm part of a body of people. Though my personality tendency is to be solitary and self-sufficient, I am constrained by my connection to the greater whole.

If we import the value of self-determination from the modern age into Christianity, it's like oil on water – it doesn't mix. In the spirit of an entrepreneur, I would use every opportunity to promote myself and my music. But is that what worship is all about? Not according to the Bible. As far as I can see, worship is about surrender – giving yourself as a living sacrifice.

The strange and challenging thing about worship leading is that we are using a musical model from our culture, but we are turning it upside down. In any secular concert, the guitar-playing, band-leading vocalist is *the focal point*. It's all about the skill, cleverness and magnetism of the performer. The performer is there to further their reputation, to demonstrate their prowess, to impress people.

In worship leading, we might be doing a popular form of music, but we come for the purpose of furthering the reputation of Jesus. We come to show off *His* exploits, to reveal *His* personality, to make people fall in love with *Him*.

In his book *Music, The Brain And Ecstasy*, Robert Jourdain describes the personality profile of the great composers of history. "Studies of the great classical composers show the same kinds of personality profile as all kinds of creative people. They show strong independence in every respect, tending to be solitary and socially reserved, shunning group activities and establishing few close friendships."[I]

Shades of these artistic traits can be seen in Charles Wesley, the preacher and hymn-writer. "What are we to make of his paradoxical nature – patient yet impulsive; retiring, yet resolute; frail, yet a fighter; controversial and hot-tempered, yet gentle and forbearing; otherworldly, yet intensely human; introspective, yet exhilarating; a rigid conformist, yet a bold pioneer..."[II] Isaac Watts, the outstanding hymn-writer, "was fond of studious retirement, and so devoted to his books, that in the early part of his career he seldom went out."[III]

My generation, the "baby-boomers," has an inbred desire for self-determination. We don't like it when people tell us what to do. Many of my peers have no sense of community or social obligation – all they're committed to is themselves. In 1979, sociologist Robert Bellah surveyed a couple hundred average, middle class Americans. "Many had no sense of community or social obligation. They saw the world as a fragmented place of choice and freedom that yielded little meaning or comfort. They even seemed to have lost the language to express any kind of commitment to anything - church, family or community – other than themselves."[IV]

Nevertheless, nowadays it's very common to find people who love God but have no felt need for the church. This flies in the face of the New Testament definition of church. The New Testament is filled with references to the community of believers – the saints in Christ Jesus, the people of God, the family of God, etc. The believers are always together – eating together, worshiping together, sharing their possessions, encouraging one another. The early church father, Cyprian (250 A.D.), strongly stated: "You cannot have God for your Father if you have not the church for your mother!"[V]

I know several people who have quit going to church because they've had disagreements and disappointments in church relationships. Ironically, the process of working through those misunderstandings is the *only way* to maturity. It's impossible to mature in Christ apart from being joined to the church.

Rodney Clapp, author of *The Church As Culture In A Post Modern Society*, describes "freelance" Christianity as a dangerous rejection of the body in which Christ dwells. The view that church is optional "misconstrues human personhood as fundamentally atomistic (rather than social) and the church as a collection of individuals- rather than as a corporate body whose members have identity and purpose by being part of a church."

Unless I'm working and serving in the church, I won't grow. The only way I can mature is to serve others. "As each part [of the body of Christ] does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love."

Unless I'm worshiping God, hearing Bible teaching and praying with others, I stagnate in my faith. When I attend a prayer meeting, I'm impacted by the zeal of other Christians as they intercede for the lost and cry out for more of God. My indifference is confronted as I hear their passion for the Lord and His work. My enthusiasm is like water in a leaky bucket – unless I keep filling up the bucket with more water, it all drains out. I find that water in fellowship with other Christians. The way I gain compassion for the poor and the lost is by hanging out with people who have that kind of heart.

If I spend too much time away from the vitality of Jesus' body, I become narrow sighted, focused on my own problems. I lose vision for God's kingdom. I am tempted to blend in with my culture rather than being about my Father's business. I am tempted to rationalize my indifference and make compromises.

I relate to John Piper's statement – "I wake up carnal every morning. I have to get saved all over again everyday."[VI] How do I do that? I push myself into prayer, worship, service and fellowship with Christians. I don't do it because I always feel like doing it. I do it because it's the only right choice. Sometimes I don't feel like going to leadership meetings, but I do it because it's the only way I can play my part on the team.

John Wimber made it clear that he was interested in raising up pastors who could lead worship, not specialists in worship leading who had no pastoral heart. In order to cooperate with the direction of the church, be sensitive to people's needs and benefit from the counsel of other leaders, I have to join hands with the other pastors.

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I Robert Jourdain, *Music, The Brain And Ecstasy*, Avon Books, Inc., 1350 Avenue of the Americas, N.Y., N.Y. 10019, page 191.
II Frederick C. Gill, *Charles Wesley, The First Methodist*, published by Ebenezer Baylis and Son, LTD., The Trinity Press, London, England, 1964.
III David G. Fountain, *Isaac Watts Remembered*, Gospel Standard Baptist Trust Ltd, 8 Roundwood Gardens, Harpenden, Herts, England 1974, page 51.
IV Charles Colson, *Against The Night*, Servant Publicatons, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1989. Colson quotes Robert Bellah's *Habits Of The Heart*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), page 228.
V Cyprian, On The Unity Of The Church, AD 250
VI quoted from a message by John Piper given in Parksville, British Columbia in 1999.

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