The Sound Of Your Life

Character And The Worship Leader

BY DAN WILT

Many times I have had both the privilege, and the challenge, of sharing with worship leaders on the topics of integrity and godly character as primary hallmarks of an effective worship leader. I often prompt the discussion by asking a leading question, such as "What is the strongest, and most powerful instrument you lead with as a worship leader?" The responses are as varied as the musical preferences in the room. "My voice." "My guitar." "My keyboard." "My drums." (yes, many worship leaders are pulling it off!) Someone inevitably speaks up, in a commonly shy manner, and gives the answer behind the answers: "My life." All heads in the room nod in agreement as we strike a profound spiritual chord together.

The Sound Of Your Life Biblically and experientially, we understand that a powerful life is the most permeating, inspiring, transforming and impacting leadership instrument the Lord wields in His hand. Put another way, your life and mine are God's "worship leading instruments" of choice – especially when they make a "sound" that is pleasing to Him.

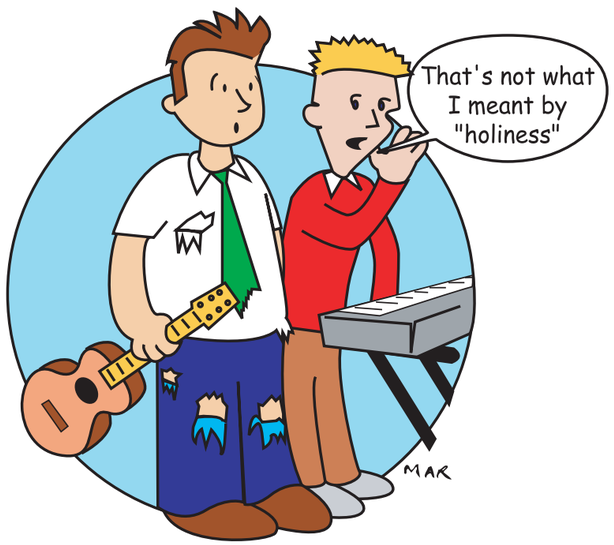
Our musical gifts notwithstanding, God seems intent on finding worship leaders (of any age, I might add) marked by a richness of spiritual tone – tone derived from private intimacy with Jesus, personal integrity with others, public commitment to Kingdom activity and purified motives within. Such virtues are simply given musical voice through the instruments with which we lead.

A musician searching for a beautiful instrument listens for depth, richness and sustain. God searches for beautiful hearts – deep, rich and sustaining — to lead His people in worship.

The Frequencies Of The Heart Every worship leader must eventually embrace that a great guitar sound thick with tone does not hold a candle to a great life thick with spiritual authority. That elusive "sound" we as worship leaders are endlessly looking for starts in the frequencies of the heart.

To deepen the analogy, the sound of the heart is made up of notes, rhythms and lyrics which are primarily forged in the deep fire of our daily choices through joy and suffering. We call the music of our heart our "character." Horace Mann once said, "Reputation is what men and women think of us. Character is what God and the angels know of us." Your character is the hidden you, the music you live by, the postures of your heart with which you approach life.

The lasting quality of our worship leadership depends on the lasting quality of our character.



In Galatians 5:22-23, we read about the fruits of the Spirit. For our application, we will call them the "sounds of the Spirit." Essentially, the "sound" we seek to manifest is the character of Jesus, meant to be alive and expressed through men, women and children filled with His Spirit. Hear how Eugene Peterson translates this important passage for us:

"But what happens when we live God's way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard – things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely."1

We will briefly look at three areas of character, or sounds of the Spirit, that should resonate from every worship leader's life:

1) The Sound Of Holiness
Holiness is pure living. Holiness is manifest in a heart that chooses innocence and honesty in the face of a world bent on self-indulgence. The sound of holiness is heard from a heart postured to honor God at all costs by following His ways, living honestly, openly and accountably to God and others, convinced that by those means God empowers us to live "blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation" (Phil. 2:15).

2) The Sound Of Faithfulness
Faithfulness is committed living. Faithfulness is manifest in a heart that keeps its commitments vibrant to God, and to people. The sound of faithfulness is heard from a heart that is involved in "loyal commitments": showing up on time, doing tasks thoroughly and being consistent with our promises. We expect God to then, according to His promises, show Himself to be faithful and dependable to us (2 Sam. 22:26).

3) The Sound Of Integrity
Integrity is consistent living. Integrity is manifest in a heart that lives a public life consistent with our private beliefs. The sound of integrity is heard from a heart that is righteous in both their hidden, and overt, dealings. Integrity is about "truth in the inmost places" (Psalm 51:6) ruling and reigning in our motives and attitudes, making us men and women of our word.

The Character Of The Worship Leader John Wimber continually reminded Vineyard worship leaders throughout the years, "We value character above gifting." Christ-like character is central to the worship leader's calling because our heart attitudes, on such a visible leadership platform, eventually influence every member of the congregation or group that we lead. We disciple not just by "how we are" as a worship leader, but more concretely by "who we are" as a worship leader. The audible music and notes are not the only song we are singing.

A few years ago, a man walked up to me after a worship set, and paid me one of the highest compliments I've ever received. "Dan, your guitar was not played nearly as beautifully as your heart was this morning. Your heart led me to the throne of God." Humbled as I was, I have never forgotten that my authority to lead people in worship in public life is rooted in my secret life with God.

The lasting quality of our worship leadership depends on the lasting quality of our internal character.

Used By God Every worship leader I know hungers to be "used by God" in some profound way. Yet, over the years I have witnessed many life battles won and lost on the ground of the "hidden issues" in a worship leader's lifestyle. Even those with a tremendous desire to be "used by God" have ended being "used by" and "used up by" the enemy of our souls.

If we want more of God's power to work through us, we must first allow His purpose to be worked in us. Our interior foundations must be able to bear the weight of our spiritual responsibilities. True character is never conferred in a momentary miracle; true character is purchased over time. Godly character is formed in us, over time and experience – there are no shortcuts or power encounters that remove those two elements.

Lead With The Sound Of Your Life Lead worship from the foundation of a life that, both privately and publicly, resounds with love, obedience and honor toward Jesus. Your strongest leadership instrument will become the sound of your life, and your worship leadership will manifest the favor and strength that only God can give.

1 Peterson, *The Message* (NavPress Publishing Group, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000), p. 472.



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