9 Ways Worship Leaders Can Become More Sensitive To The Holy Spirit As We Lead

One of the most important aspects of effective worship leading is cultivating our responsiveness to the Holy Spirit's guidance during a worship set. Should I repeat this chorus? Should this musical moment rise or fall, as I sense something is happening in the congregation? Should the voices stop, and the instruments keep going? Should I end this song now, to get to the next one sooner than I had planned?

All of these questions point back to our ability to get beyond being "song leaders" in our communities, and to become the sensitive "worship leaders" the Body of Christ needs.

Here are some practical tips I've drawn from others, and from my own experience as a worship leader seeking to respond to the Spirit's leading in gathered worship.

1. Cultivate Your Daily Listening To The Holy Spirit's Voice.
Without a cultivated, increasing awareness of the Holy Spirit's voice and activity in your own life, you'll struggle to discern the work of the Holy Spirit in the midst of the worship environment. Your response will be slow and wooden, when it needs to be quick and fluid. Keep the gears oiled by pressing into the Holy Spirit's work in your daily life, and learning how to hear the voice of God.

2. Use Your Instrument To Sing Your Prayers In Private.
Your personal, secret place life must include your worship leading instrument on a regular basis. Singing our prayers accompanied by our instrument in private, influences the dynamic of how we lead worship in public. We learn to prayerfully repeat choruses, lean into the sense within us to "go for it," and perceive when to pull back and allow the instruments to lead.

3. Sensitively Push The Edges Of The Worship Boundaries In Your Community.
Define the boundaries in your community for worship expression, and aim for the edge of those boundaries. Often worship leaders are so concerned with not offending anyone (and there is a quality of this attitude that is good and right as we serve our leaders and community), they stay 10 feet away from the edge at all times. With a secret life that nurtures and hones your fluidity in communicating with God using your instrument, you'll find yourself more ready to lean into a moment in which you sense God is inviting you all to a fresh encounter with Him.

4. Aim For The Song That Has "Heat" On It During The Set.
When preparing your set, be aware of that song that seems to have "heat" on it. In the set, do whatever it takes to get to that song, and maximize its purpose for that gathering. I have found that, often, the rest of the set is aiming in some sense toward that one song.

5. Get Feedback On Your Sensitivity As A Worship Leader From Voices You Trust.
Get feedback on your sensitivity to the Holy Spirit while leading from those you know, trust,

and seem to have their heads on straight about God's goals in worship. Your pastor and pastoral team is first on that list; not your spouse. Even if their insights aren't perfectly accurate, their honesty will reveal areas in your worship leading that still come off rigid or immature. We have blind spots that only honest feedback can reveal.

6. Video Record 2-3 Sets, Then Watch Asking "Is This Leader Sensitive To The Holy Spirit And The Community?"
Video record a few of your worship sets, and then sit down and watch them through. Get beyond the sound of the recorded music. Ask, "Does this worship leader seem sensitive to the songs, to the Holy Spirit, and to worship dynamic in this congregation?" You may see, and hear, what others are seeing and hearing for the first time. Audio can work, but video reveals more – it is the visual with the audio that the congregation is experiencing.

7. Analyze The Worship Leading Of Those You Respect In This Area.
Watch closely, and analyze, the worship leading of someone you respect as being sensitive to the Holy Spirit. Take good notes, and even look at the details of how they transition between songs, rise and fall, and end songs. Recognize that we don't want to mimic the form (how they do it) without the content (who they are as a follower of Jesus); that comes off hollow. Cultivate your own life of hearing and responding to the Spirit, and then apply that to the worship leading dynamic.

8. Use Worship Circles To Train Yourself And Your Team To Get Beyond The Music.
Use worship circles (extended times of acoustic worship with a room full of worshippers and musicians in the round) to cultivate a community of musicians rising and falling in worship dynamics together. Often, in my experience, this is the environment where team musicians (as well as worship leaders) learn to hear the Holy Spirit. Microphones and amps can get in the way of this training of the heart and spiritual sensibility. Take the gear away, and worship for an hour or two with others.

9. Practice Following The Holy Spirit In Rehearsal.
Practice following the Holy Spirit in rehearsal. Often bands are just ripping through the songs in rehearsal, trying to learn them. As a worship leader, I look for a moment in the midst of rehearsal that we can extend the part of one song to create an atmosphere that transcends the music. Sometimes my team wonders why I keep repeating that phrase, until they understand that we're going beyond the music and join in. Always look for at least one moment in rehearsal that will open you and the band up to allow the Holy Spirit to lead during the actual set.

About the Author:

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