Worship Leader – Get Off The Platform



Worship Leader – *get off the platform*. Let me tell you what I don't mean by that – and what I do mean.

I don't mean that you should stop leading, or even performing, from a platform. Physical platforms serve a necessary function in many worship environments. I am a fan of platforms that support both effective worship leadership and penetrating performances. Being a few inches or feet off the ground is no crime, when the elevation is for practical purposes.

I do mean this: Worship Leaders – get off your fixation with an ever increasing *leadership platform*. *Get off of it*. More specifically, get off the *ambitious desire* for a certain kind of leadership platform that you think will make you feel fulfilled in your calling.

The Hidden Motives Of Our Heart

Even those who hunger after God have them. Those unspoken, hidden desires for platform that fuel the wayward motives we don't think we have. But deep down we can't shake the feeling that we are *missing something* in our lives if we don't have the right platform, the right opportunity, the right audience.

"I write songs better than most of them" the inner voice whispers suggestively. "I should be one of the main worship leaders at this church," the inner voice barks with indignation. "I can do that harmony better than her," the inner voice confidently suggests.

Maybe your voices aren't as harsh as those that have growled in me over the years. But what do yours say? What silent platform are you pushing for, and more importantly, how is that pushing working for you? My guess is that it's draining energy from you, creating tension in relationships, and stirring up a constant froth of discontent in your heart.

Here is what I want to say to you: *Listen to your heart. Stop determining what is valuable, or important, based on having a certain, visible platform. Let it go. Get off the wheel. Be free and trust again.*

Here's why we must get off the platform.

Why We Are Fixated On Gaining A Platform

As I listen to the worship white noise around the work we do as spiritual leaders, I get a sense that many are fixated on this idea of gaining platform. The industry around us, the values attached to stages and microphones and heads nodding in approval, suggest that the most important worship leadership work that we do is *what we do in front of the largest amount of people*.

There is that dark shadow again.

The ones who really achieve something in the Kingdom are in front of the *crowds*, right? We won't say that out loud, but that's the way it feels. The rest of us? We're just plodding along in hopes this "thing" breaks loose one day, and our message is really *heard* (or we finally make a living from our creative work).

So we quietly push for a platform. We push to be recognized. We push to be *heard*. Then, when we have one platform, we crave another. But when we push for platform, especially if we get it from our raw efforts, we find that the platform we gained isn't so satisfying in the end. We are in a hurry. We feel like everything is urgent (we must achieve greatness of skill within years, as opposed to achieving greatness of character over decades).

Our internal frenzy is incessant. Our only healing is to stop, pause, and let go.

When God creates a platform it is often slow, hard, decades in formation,
and it is usually clear in the end that it was
God who amplified your voice.

Maybe you learned to push for platform from your parents as you grew up, or from well-meaning church cultures that told you that spiritual leadership is a veiled popularity contest.

And then we are swimming in a social media culture that weighs influence based on "Likes," Shares," and "Followers."

[Commercial Break: If Jesus had a Facebook page back in his day, I wonder what the Share, Like, and Follow scorecards would have read? I know one dark day that very few would have liked, shared, or followed his status: "Hanging on a Roman cross after giving all the love I had to give, bleeding to death in agony, and feeling forsaken by my Father." Hmmm. Your next "Like" could have you hung beside him. You'll wait for the resurrection status, thank you. Those go viral.]

Pursuing Platforms Can Be Toxic

After working for a few decades with Christian leaders of many shapes and sizes, I've come to believe that the avid pursuit of more visible, influential platforms can slowly toxify our spiritual life. A heart fixated on achieving the next "level" of platform is not just in a *bad* place – it is in a corrupted, distorted, and denigrated place that can shut down our Kingdom voice for decades. I've seen the pursuit paralyze and confuse leaders for long time periods.

Hear me, I have no problem with people having holy desires, and even achieving visible platforms from hard work. I am simply challenging us to examine the motives of our heart related to *how* we gain platform – and especially *why* we are pursuing it. God is always looking on the heart, and we had better always be listening to what he is finding there.

Aspirations (1 Tim. 3:1) can be a good thing according to the Apostle Paul, but only when burning in a heart that has truly learned that the way *down* in service is the way *up* in influence. In many church movements, they talk a good game about this, but at the end of the day you push and push until your ambitions are realized.

So we look to Jesus for our healing. *I* look to Jesus, for *my* healing.

Platforms According To Jesus

Jesus did what needed to be done, then asked for the crowds to keep it quiet. He should have watched a social media boost video. That was the wrong choice, right?

When he had a hillside of thousands, he spoke a true word and served them. That's good form. When he had Nicodemus, alone and by a night fire, he spoke a true word and served him. Hmmm. One "Like" won't gain you much social clout, but it's good practice for the really *BIG* game ahead, right?

What if the small game is the *ONLY* game God ever wants to you play? Holy Mr.-Holland's-Opus, Batman. For Jesus, a platform seemed to almost be a necessary evil – the inevitable result of a natural positioning that occurs when *one has actually acquired spiritual authority in a sphere of influence.*

But building authority takes *time*. And we don't have much of that to spare, we think. Building authority takes hiddenness, obscurity, unmet desires, and thwarted dreams – for years. It takes guts grown in the wild lands of sleepless nights, groaning for God to do something *small* (at the very least) with your life because you're so sick and tired of asking him to do something *big*.

Then Jesus breathes into you these words:

"Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me — watch how I do it.

Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you.

Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly"

Matt. 11:28b-30 (The Message)

Visibility Or Faithfulness As A Measure Of Effectiveness?

I live in Nashville Tennessee, where thousands and thousands of Christians evaluate if your life and movement are effective by how visibly influential you are. I can only smile, and hold my tongue, when I hear language like this. Unfortunately, it characterizes the "platform mentality" of many churches and worship leaders I've encountered over the years. To be visible is to be effective. The more visible you are, the more "true" you are to your calling.

It's hogwash. Numbers only mean what God wants them to mean. For someone, their one Alzheimer patient they care for is worth the 1000 that someone else is called to care for. And so it goes. When we cross the line, love and faithfulness is the only measure we'll see in God's eyes if we can stare long enough. No Google Analytics will come with us.

What do we really want? We really want to have that elusive weight of *spiritual authority* in what we do.

Authority is not just having a message, with a burning desire to speak it (or sing it). Authority is having the weight of character, experience, insight, input, and humility to *bear* that message to others. If we don't have authority rising from character within, it's like (as my friend Rich Nathan puts it) shooting a cannon out of a canoe.

We'll sink ourselves with the next platform God knows we *weren't ready for*. But we pushed for it, and couldn't learn from the long season of hiddenness. So a lesson is waiting to happen – unless some faithful leaders and friends see it coming and check us before we hit that wall.

That is why Christian leaders – especially worship and creative leaders – must master, must practice, the spiritual art of *hiddenness*. Obscurity is your friend. It is time to build, to hone, and to practice true greatness when no one sees you or seems to care. But the next time you show up to the little thing, there will be a bit more heat on your life, that's for sure. That's how it works.

The Spiritual Art Of Hiddenness

Learning to be hidden means we put the trumpet away, and cultivate a hundred little acts of faithfulness that no one will see. We show up. We play for the one, the two, or the 10. We master the secret place. We cultivate our joy before the audience of One.

Then, as we are faithful in little, sometimes God decides – "I'd like to use you to touch a few more people." But sometimes he doesn't. Because he doesn't care about you touching the hundreds like you care. Like I care. He cares about you mastering touching the few. Oh. Our heart sinks. We wanted to do great things for God, and all he does is *hide* us, dishing us out in little spoonfuls for the few.

I'm going to be brutally honest, and entrust my honesty to you. I've led worship or spoken, over my lifetime, to tens of thousands of people. In truth, it's not much compared to others. But when I moved to Nashville, it felt like that all went quiet. No one *really* knew who I was, except in relation to something I'd done before they'd heard about. It was old news. Then I was in a box. I was hidden, or at the very least, misunderstood. I was a widget for someone's next need.

But my dreams about the future? Only a few close friends deeply cared.

One early morning, I awoke depressed and in a strange, cold sweat. My wife, knowing my passionate sense of calling, asked me what was wrong.

I said "I don't know. I just know that my heart feels broken. Like I am missing my calling completely."

So, I went for a run. As I turned the first corner, a word popped into my head. And it stopped me in my tracks.

"Obscurity."

That was the word of the Lord to me. "Dan," I heard in my heart, "You are afraid of never being heard again. Of your voice being lost. You are afraid of dying in obscurity, when there is so much you feel you must give before you die. But Dan, you will never be hidden, you will never be obscure to Me. I will always hear you."

I was undone. I stood silently on the side of the road. My groaning for a visible platform drained from me like water leaving a hose when the valve is opened. I was content. I was at peace. I didn't fear obscurity.

Showing Up Where God Shows Up

Our job is to show up. Again. And again. And again. For years. For decades. We show up.

And here's the deal. God creates a unique platform for our voice as we hone what we are about in the hidden places. In reality, the only real platform we will ever have is the one that Christ gives us anyway, and that means that every platform, be it the size of a hospital room or the size of a stadium, is to be used for speaking out the full reality of Christ's presence and promises.

So we learn those in secret. Really learn his presence, and his promises.

A Servant Is A Servant On Or Off A Stage

Over the years, I have met many worship leaders who can step onto a stage, or step off of the stage, and they are humble servant in both cases. They don't have to have the large platform to be fulfilled, and to be deeply in touch with who God has designed them to be as a servant.

When they are asked to step off the stage, for a short or long season, they remain a servant. Hiddenness doesn't bother them, because they are finding the Lord's business to do where they are. When they are asked to step on to a stage, for a small group or a big crowd, they remain a servant – and don't need to the stage to find fulfillment.

I have friends with worship ministry platforms leading tens of thousands – and friends with ministry platforms of 5. They are both being the same – faithful. To crave another's platform is to long for the ground that is holy under someone else's feet.

Let's not leave the ground that is holy under our own feet.

A servant with a role is a servant. A servant without a role is still a servant. We are at Jesus' beckon call, and no leader's mistake in recognizing our gifts will thwart that mandate.

Real Authority Is Better Than A Platform Any Day

Authority is that hard won spiritual muscle that no one sees – but everyone feels. Authority is density, and density creates its own gravity over time.

I know many of these people. They are my heroes.

Once you have authority, platforms may be created for you by God so you can serve with that authority. Sometimes, he'll even invite you to work with him to build a platform he wants to co-create with you. But you'll never need to push others to get your way.

You will learn to seek favor with God, and if you have favor with God, you will have favor with anyone he wants you to have favor with. The converse is also true. You can relax into the "unforced rhythms of grace."

My counsel, as a fellow traveler who struggles with my own silent ambitions?

- Show up in the little places.
- Don't push for a platform; let God bring it.
- Cultivate, sharpen your character and gifts as you learn from other leaders.
- Humble yourself and learn leadership at the feet of Jesus.

- Don’t fear obscurity.
- Build for the long haul.
- See the silence as a gift and a time to grow.
- Watch how leaders you respect value platforms.
- Just serve. Quietly serve. Faithfully serve. Over decades.

Then, when a platform reveals itself (they are often temporary), you can bear it. You can bear a true message on it. You won’t be like those large planets in the solar system – large, spinning, colorful *gas* – with little density or substance to create a gravity around you.

You will have gravity – *gravitas* – a weight of spiritual authority about you.

Then Jesus can elevate what he wants to – though a crowd will not always be his target. If his dream for you is hiddenness from the many, for exposure to the few, then you’ll be fine with that. You’ve practiced being obscure – and you know that you will never be obscure to Jesus.

I’m praying for you as you serve.

Question: How has being hidden shaped you as a leader? Would you trade it for anything?

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