An Open Letter To My Fellow Worship Leaders: The Secret To The Most Effective Worship Leading On Planet Earth

My Fellow Worship Leaders: In the short space of this blog post, I'd like to respectfully offer what I see to be the powerful secret at work within the most effective, influential and impacting worship leaders/songwriters of our generation.



The following is my observation, gathered over 25 years.

Many worship leaders are *skilled* in leading worship. A smaller number are strongly *gifted* to lead worship. Even fewer still, in my view, are distinctly *called* to lead worship as a vocation.

And yet I perceive that even fewer still, of all those leaders, have learned the real secret to the most effective worship leading on planet earth today.

Good And Great Worship Leaders

Of those who are skilled, gifted, and called to lead worship, most are devoted, love to worship through music, see the stage as a sacred responsibility, embrace the opportunity to create rich worship environments for the life of the Church, and sacrificially engage with the leadership challenges that come with what can be a thankless turf.

But among those, there is one secret ingredient that marks the watershed difference between a *good* worship leader and a *great* one. In fact, some worship leaders who are less skilled and naturally gifted can make up for any lack by applying this Secret.

The Secret We All Need To Know

My simple thought is this. After 25+ years of watching worship leaders, spending time with them, and seeing them lead thousands and thousands of people in worship (including me), it's become glaringly obvious from where I sit that there is a Secret the most effective of them are unlocking.

It results in a *gravitas*, a weightiness, to the leadership of some. Conversely there is a lightness, or a less substantial authority, in others.

I think the difference is real, intuited, and perceived by communities even if it's not clear "why" they sense the authority they sense.

That Secret is not just experience, musical giftedness, or leadership calling. It's definitely not about popularity. It's more than all of that. Something far more powerful is at work.

That Secret is, from my vantage point… the s*ecret.*

I.e. The Secret is what is happening *in secret.*

More specifically, the Secret is in what is happening in the *secret place.*

The secret place is that private sanctuary where we meet with God alone, and He meets with us.

Like Moses in the Tent of Meeting, the secret place is where we are fed by a regular, ongoing encounter with Christ – then carry authority into the world because of it.

The most effective worship leaders on planet earth today have
a Secret Life with God that is larger, and more substantial,
than their public life with God and people.

These people regularly worship, and deeply pray, with their instrument – before an Audience of One.

The Silent Equity Of Intimacy

Here is some straight talk to myself and to you as one of my worship leading peers.

Some worship leaders have made their secret life with God
the steady standard and foundation for their
public worship leadership life.

Others have not. The public expression of worship, or even the preparation for the public expression of worship, has become enough for them.

And sometimes *them* is *me*.

And when we believe the latter, that the public and the preparing is enough – we lose the silent equity that only comes with real *intimacy*.

We can't fake this part, make it seem real with great sound, or learn it by watching others.

We simply have to *become* this kind of secret life leader.

The secret life of worship in all its facets, and a secret-life expression of worship (musically if we are worship leading musicians), forges spiritual authority when the door is locked and the shades are drawn.

When God is the only one listening, time and time again, the worship leader changes on the inside.

And that inner change, wrought by God's love, propelled by God's comfort, and stirred by God's inexplicable friendship – will always have public implications.

I, we, *believe* these worship leaders when they lead. It's unspoken, but something about their leading resonates deep within.

Effective worship leadership starts in the secret place – it starts in a worship leader that is very familiar with meeting with God with an instrument in hand – when no one else is watching.

When David danced in front of the ark in 2 Samuel 6, with Michal looking on in disdain, he was just doing something he was already familiar with – celebrating the presence of God.

His "undignified" approach was a private habit that took on public significance. His standard for public leadership was the secret place.

One Example Of The Secret Applied

Matt Redman is a great example of this to me. Matt and Mike Pilavachi met to worship apart from the crowd for a long time. They put in many hours together, just worshipping Jesus away from the crowds, in Matt's younger years.

The result? Two great worship influencers in our generation.

And God put His hand on Matt in our time, stirring greater intimacy and passion in his private life and public leadership. We sense it in his songs, and they have connected with a generation.

[Matt is a good friend, and though I don't need to say it here, anyone who knows him sees this reality at work in him. His worship leadership has authority because of the Secret Place. He's imperfect, but he lives this truth and we have all benefited from it.]

And he's not the only example. Many with small and large communities to lead are known to God. He knows because He spends a lot of time with them.

I know we think we all get this, but as I watch our industry-driven worship experiences, I have to ask this of myself and my peers again and again.

How Does The Standard Of The Secret Place Apply To Us?

Here it is, from the heart, as far as I can tell.

Worship leaders who primarily only lead when the band is behind them, and the stage is beneath them, lack an authority that, over time, others are purchasing in secret.

Yes, calling, musicianship, and experience matter greatly. But it is all trumped by this one reality.

The hours spent in a place where no one is listening to us pour out our heart, except for God, make sense of the hour we spend on a stage on a Sunday morning when everyone is listening.

Every worship leader must proactively cultivate their secret life of worship on a daily and weekly basis.

[Some of my worship leader peers have decided they have "outgrown" this practice, associating it with their earliest days of passionate faith. But they've neglected it to their peril, and some I have seen lose their moorings – not only in worship and leadership, but in their faith overall. That is a loss that lasts forever, and is often passed down to generations.]

Our effectiveness as worship leaders utterly depends on us valuing and cultivating our secret life of worship.

Though we may not be perfect in our consistency, we must be constant in our quest to linger behind closed doors (with our instruments) with God alone.

There, real worship leaders are built.

That is the Secret I see at play in the most effective worship leaders on planet earth. I'd like to see it at play within each of us.

With Love, Friendship, and Admiration,

Dan

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Question: What do you observe about effective worship leaders?

Resource: The Essentials In Worship Leading Study addresses this in the worship leader, as does the Essentials In Worship Songwriting Study in the songwriter.

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