A WORSHIP LEADER'S GUIDE TO CLEANING TOILETS



"Learn the lesson that, if you are to do the work of a prophet,
what you need is not a scepter but a hoe."
Bernard of Clairvaux

There is a deep transformation that happens when cleaning up the waste of those you are leading in worship. This is my story of going from worship star to janitor in one day.

A couple of years ago, when I was about to finish up my *prestigious* Master's degree in Worship Studies, I got word that our church was making some cuts and had to let the cleaning company go and they **put me in charge of all church janitor duties.** 15,000 square feet of carpet to vacuum, tile to mop, walls to dust, 20 trash cans to empty, and yes, 11 toilets to clean. I thought for sure I would have written a hit worship song by now or maybe have an assistant after all these years, but nope… I'm a 40-year-old janitor/worship leader for a resource-strapped church. Sweet. Dream come true.
Here's the thing. I know most worship leaders know the *right* answers. We are like trained ponies. "It's not about me, it's about Him," "I'm here to serve," and "We're not here to perform" are common mantras in the worship world; we can rattle them off even when we are literally behaving in opposite fashion. Many of us, myself included, simply drift because we have found our identity being

on that stage. I've done several symbolic foot washings, sung songs about getting into the pit with the poor and living a truly humble, justice-seeking life, but here **God was calling my bluff.**
Hours of vacuuming communion crumbs, dusting unseen spaces and scrubbing toilets for my church taught me some valuable lessons. Jesus is always cleaning toilets. He hasn't stopped washing feet. He does it for the least deserving. He is a God that literally gets down in the dirt with the lowest of lows. It's hard to remember the power of incarnation when we've been on the stage for so long. Stages big and small still elevate and separate us; we must from time to time step back and recalibrate.

But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

– Matthew 20:26b-28

The blogosphere is obsessed with telling us how to look and act while ON THE CHURCH STAGE, but I believe the true test is how our heart responds to challenges unique to worship musicians:

- *When was the last time you just showed up to church to worship without working?*
- *How do you respond when others more gifted than you want to serve?*
- *Are you training up others to do what you do?*
- *How do you respond when asked by a pastor to lead a song you don't like?*
- *Do you tithe, surrendering control of a portion of your money to the leaders of the church?*
- *How do you respond when you don't get your way or you are asked to change something last minute?*
- *Do you hold doors and greet each member of your worship team or is it* all *business from minute one?*
- *Are you present and attentive during a sermon each service?*
- *How do you talk to your sound and tech teams?*
- *Have you confessed thoughts of envy, pride, insecurity, and jealousy of other's gifts or opportunities?*

It might not feel like it, especially if you are a volunteer or underpaid, but being on that stage year after year can erode your previously pure motives. Is it time for a heart calibration? Do we need a season of cleaning toilets? Serving off stage? We have no less or more value than those we lead – we go to Jesus, our ultimate example of humility, together.

My name is Mike O'Brien and I am passionate about teaching and mentoring worship leaders and teams. My calling is to use my experience as a producer, worship leader, songwriter, and multi-instrumentalist to come alongside musicians, helping them more fully worship God with their instrument and lives. Find out more how I can help your worship leaders and teams HERE.

