

Putting the Pleasure Back into Leading Worship

By Brent Helming

With a hearty “Amen” another worship set was complete. Yet, as I put my guitar on its stand and walked off stage, I was disturbed by an empty feeling in my heart. For the last thirty minutes I hadn’t really led worship. It felt more like I just sang a bunch of songs. Where was the passion? Where had the joy gone?

As I’ve had the opportunity to speak with a number of worship leaders, I’ve come to realize that I’m not the only one who has wrestled with joyless, passionless feelings concerning worship. But how is it that worship leaders lose their joy and passion? As I’ve examined my own situation, one thing is clear. The problem isn’t with God or with the activity of worship. The pathway to restoring pleasure (life & joy) in worship rests in the degree to which God is pursued as the delight of the soul.

Pleasure is not found in technique.

There are hundreds of articles and numerous seminars/workshops that focus on “How to create, deliver and prepare worship sets.” Much of the information within these resources is excellent and quite helpful. However, there is absolutely no technique in and of itself that can create and sustain true satisfaction and joy with regard to worshipping our heavenly Father.

Much like a painter who must first master the craft of applying the right kinds of paint and color to the canvas, so a worship leader must learn the art and technique of leading worship. However, before the painter can apply the colors, there must first be an object that has captured his heart and imagination. He must be captivated by a vision that drives him to paint.

We worship leaders are no different. Focusing too narrowly on the “how to” of worship will always lead to frustration and disillusionment unless we have embraced our beautiful Lord and Savior as our driving passion. This may not seem like an earth shattering revelation. But oh, how easy it is to drift over into the maze of the technical while losing sight of the object of our worship.

To combat this we need to nurture within us the same all consuming passion for God that the psalmist displayed when he wrote, “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for thee, O God, for the living God” (Psalm 42:1-2). “My soul thirsts for thee, my flesh yearns for thee, in a dry and weary land where there is no water” (Psalm 63:1).

Worship is the overflow of our joy in knowing God.

In his work, “Reflections on the Psalms,” C.S. Lewis wrote, “I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation.”

John Piper writes, “Worship is basically adoration, and we adore only what delights us.”

From these two striking statements it follows that if we long to experience lasting authentic joy and fulfillment in the leading of worship, then our worship must flow from a place of absolute delight in King Jesus. We need to come to a place where our joy and satisfaction in God overflows into the praise and worship we're leading.

The only way to ensure that we experience this joy and satisfaction is to spend time in His presence away from the worship platform.

I want to make sure that I'm not being misunderstood. Not all worship must flow from an emotional state of happiness and joy. Jesus said that we must "...worship the Father in spirit and truth..." which by definition means that our worship needs to be authentic.

So if you are like me, feeling happy is not a constant. In fact I am sometimes downright despondent and in great need when I come to worship. I am saying, however, that for worship to be the overflow of our "delighting" in God, then we must become well grounded in who God is, what He's done for us and what He continues to do through us.

Only then can we respond in confidence and grace-assured worship to our king, even though we may be feeling physically and emotionally drained or saddened. Whenever I begin to feel that I'm drifting into that place of feeling empty or joyless concerning worship (the place where worship becomes a duty instead of a joy), I check the barometer of my delight in God. Nine times out of ten, I find that I've been spending too much time trying to lead worship out of head knowledge instead of spending time soaking my heart in Jesus' refreshing streams of living water.

Psalms 37:4 says, "Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart." The desire of my heart is to first, be the most devoted worshiper that I can be and second, to be the most effective and anointed worship leader that I can be. In each of these two things I want to feel the pleasure of the Lord and the satisfaction that comes from knowing and serving Him.

The pathway to achieving the desires of my heart is to follow the command of Psalm 37:4 and "delight myself in the Lord..." so that when my heart's desires are not being met, I know the answer isn't to create a more seamlessly flowing worship set. The answer is to immerse myself in "delighting" in the Lord. This is the unquenchable source of pleasure and passion for leading worship. "In thy presence is fullness of joy; in thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore." (Psalm 16:11).

Brent Helming has been involved in Pastoral and Worship Ministry for over 16 years. He has traveled both nationally and internationally leading worship and teaching at Churches and conferences. He has written numerous worship songs such as "Your Beloved", "Jesus Lead On" and "God of All Splendor", along with an interactive work book titled "Hot Tips for Worship Leaders". Brent is currently developing a Coaching and Consulting Ministry for Worship Ministries and Leaders (WorshipDevelopment.com) and lives with his son in Escondido, CA.