

More than hit songs – a journey

Brian Doerksen

We live in a *pop* music culture; we are surrounded and saturated with 'hit' pop songs that are played constantly. TV shows like American Idol are built on the back of hit songs; movies are laced with emotional songs that become the soundtrack of our lives, and as we drive in our cars, we are being bombarded with radio signals; satellite or FM pumping out the latest top 40 hit. While I am really grateful for being able to turn on a Christian radio station. . .I am concerned with something; our 'hit music' culture is influencing too much of the way we are 'leading worship' in North America. I am not saying that we shouldn't appreciate good music in culture (I sure do!), but we need to be careful to not be shaped by culture; especially by the 'hit song' mentality and then transfer that mentality into our expression of worship when the church gathers.

Now I believe that writing new songs of worship is critical; scripture does say 'sing to the Lord a new song' does it not? But I believe that our calling in writing a 'new' song is not to write a 'hit' song; it's to write a 'God-song' a song that is thoroughly biblical in it's words and content, and yet still accessible to people who are being impacted by our churches; that's the music part that needs to keep on changing and adapting. Sometimes when people are writing new worship songs they have no idea how much pop culture is influencing the lyrics they are writing. A recent song presented to me by an fairly seasoned writer and worship leader had a chorus full of 'All I wanna do is . . . All I wanna do is . .' I gently pointed out that while those words may 'roll off the tongue' in a pop song kind of way, they sound like a 'hit' pop song, not a congregational worship song that will stand the test of time due to it's strong biblical content . . .and in this season of history, we are desperate for a renewal of biblical content in our worship. And sometimes, I think that worship leaders have no idea how much the 'hit song' culture is influencing the way they choose songs to use in their congregations.

I think there is a very simple alternative.

Let's move into leading people on a journey. Let's invite people into God's epic story; and let's call people into the unique story of our local church. Let's seek God and ask Him, "Where are You leading us?" "What part of Your epic story do you want us to focus on at this gathering?" Then when we put our song list together prayerfully, we always have a goal in front of us; that theme or aspect of God's

character. Actually it's more than a goal; it's a person! Jesus is our real 'worship leader' and we are joining into what he has already accomplished, and into his intercession that is going on now at the right hand of the Father. When we keep Jesus always before us, and the goal that His Spirit reveals to us, each time of worship is shaped by that clear biblical revelation; not just by what is popular right now! Because what is popular always changes quickly; even more so in our generation. In other words, don't just string together a worship set based on the top 25 songs from the CCLI website, which is simply our worship culture's equivalent of the Billboard top 50!

Leading worship is not singing hit songs! If we were called to entertain people then it makes sense to sing a string of hit songs. We need to be selecting or writing songs for a reason; not just to sing a song because it's popular! The only songs we should be singing in our gathered times of worship are songs that are an important part of the journey. I believe this is one of the reasons why biblical laments are so seldom used in the North American church. If our set lists are primarily chosen by popularity then these honest songs drawn from the Psalms will not win popularity contests. But if we lead worship based on journey, we will include songs that contain lament, not because they are popular, but because they are part of the human journey into the heart of God.

We are called to invite people on a journey, and so we as worship leaders need to know where we are going! And we need to constantly remember that we are drawing people into the presence of God where our gathering is all about Him and His character, so that all of us are transformed as we journey.

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If you want to be encouraged to think LONG TERM instead of singing 'hit songs' in your worship leadership, check out www.theworshipleader.com; a wonderful university level program that is training worship leaders to deepen their biblical understanding in a very interactive way.