

Confessions of a Growing Worship Leader

Insecure Moments

I confess that I am deeply insecure.

My buddies and I were having coffee this morning, and I told them about a client who had recently viewed a video project I had pieced together. Long story short...there wasn't any single thing about the completed video project that they wanted to keep. They didn't like any of it, except for a few moments here and there. Whether it be in video, in music, or simply life in general...this kind of a thing has never happened to me. And the experience has left me deflated. Did I mention that I'm insecure already?

As worship leaders, how many of us allow the whims and the quips of others to literally set our sails, or sink our ships? When people commend us on a great worship set, we feel great about ourselves. And when people say negative things about our music, we feel terrible about ourselves. Why is it like that?

Tangent.

I need to take one for a moment. Can I just tell you how much I hate it when people look at me after a worship service and say, "Great worship, Gary!" I know what they're saying. But I always feel like they're commending me for something that's not mine to own. The only One we should ever say those words to is God, and I think that worship leaders need to correct people when they blame us for good worship (or for bad worship). I actually had a guy approach me a few weekends ago after a worship service and say, "Gary. You're guitar playing on 'Not to Us' was incredible." Think about it.

Back to the task at hand.

Insecurity. Back to the coffeehouse. So one of my buddies says these words to me. I've been pondering his words all day long. Here's what he said about being insecure.

As artists, we constantly put our work "out there" for people to taste, see, touch, smell, and worst of all, critique. It's what we do. We can't NOT do this. But for artists, it's nearly impossible to separate our work from our hearts. We are what we do. I know we're not supposed to do that, but let's get real. Have you ever met a real, passionate artist who didn't lump his heart in with his work? Where do we think that art came from? It came from his or her heart, after all. I'm not suggesting that it's right and fine. I'm suggesting that it's impossible to divorce our art from our identity.

So...my buddy continued his line of reasoning. The problem isn't that we open up our hearts for critique. The problem is that, when our hearts are opened up in the making of our art, there are competing voices speaking into these wide-open vessels of core identity, at the precise moment of our heart's opening. And the voice that we need to listen to and embrace is the voice of Christ. He's the One who keeps whispering, "Son. Daughter. I know you. I get you. I love you. I appreciate you. You are honored in heaven. And the angels were drawn to worship God because of you today." I even think Jesus looks at us and says, "Great worship set. I enjoyed that one. Nice break in the middle of that Tomlin song!"

The voice we need to be careful of is the voice of the Enemy who convinces us that our failures as artists define us—that same voice, spoken by the Father of Lies, who spits out crap about our unique abilities, claiming that there are a ton of people who could do our craft better than we can, and cheaper. It's that voice who says, "Thank God you're only part-time. You could never cut it as a full-time worship leader." Or, more basically, he just says, "You suck."

When my buddy was done, I had this feeling of being light, buoyant. The problem, I suppose, isn't insecurity. The problem is who we listen to when our art causes our hearts to open wide. That precise point in time, my friends, is when we had better be on the top of our discernment. That exact moment is when we MUST know who's saying what, and why. Those moments, made cumulative over time, really do shape the way we hear praise and critique.

"Gracious Father. Thank you that I am your son. I pray for discernment in the indiscernible moments, for wisdom among the folly of worship leading, and for an ongoing reception of unconditional love in the face of the conditional acceptance of a fickle congregation. In the moments where I am laying my heart out for the world to see, help me to listen solely and consistently to you in those moments. May the ongoing spittle of the Enemy not land near me. And may I believe You more than I believe him. My heart has become accustomed to his lies as if those words were my own thoughts and beliefs. Differentiate Lord, I pray. Amen."