

The Constant Expectation of the Heavenly

Matt Redman

I've been leading worship through music for half of my life now, and have experienced the good, the bad, and the sleepy of worship meetings. Times when everything flows well and we journey seamlessly into the courts of God, Times when the going is a little tougher, but in the end we journey somewhere meaningful. And a few of those "ground swallow me up" meetings where nothing seems to go as planned.

And then there are those other occasions when something far deeper and brighter happens - a breaking through into something even more heavenly. Times when every person in the room is overwhelmed by God and overflowing in unstoppable adoration. Times when God presences Himself amongst in such a powerful way that every heart is bowed and every tongue stilled. Moments of an intensely intimate reverence at the sight of the glory of God. And though these heightened times can be occasional, I'm trying to get up to lead worship every time with a "constant expectation of the heavenly".

I'm writing this article two days after one of those moments. Forty eight hours ago I was in a packed room in Atlanta at the Facedown songwriters gathering. On the second night of the gathering, as we worshipped our hearts out through music, something happened. It was an "otherly" moment - a heightened sense of the glory and grace of God. As we journeyed deeper through spontaneous singing and prayer, there was a very real sense of adventuring in the Holy Spirit before the throne of God. For me it was one of those meetings you dream for as a worship leader - and once you have such an encounter, there's no going back. It's a little like surfing a great wave and then waiting for the next big wave to come. You're hesitant to leave the water until you encounter more of the same. In a sense, all you can do is wait in expectancy, knowing there is nothing you can do to conjure up that moment - but you determine to make yourself ready to flow with the next big wave that arrives.

So every time we get up to lead worship, we must do so with a longing for heavenly and holy moments. And a knowledge that no amount of striving or experience could ever make these moments happen. They cannot be manufactured or formularized. They are grace, pure grace. The only thing we can do is prepare our hearts, and create an environment of dependence. As Oswald Chambers said:

"Complete weakness and dependence will always be the occasion for the Spirit of God to manifest His power".

Sometimes our sense of expectancy can be dampened by seasons of dryness. In these seasons it can be so easy to give up seeking God for breakthroughs. The temptation is to settle. Especially if we've had years of much perseverance and little progress. I have a deep respect for all those who lead week in, week out in a local church setting and never give up on the quest for freshness and deep encounters with God. From my experience, a conference is one thing - anyone can be fresh at a conference - there's more expectancy in the air, and it is a one-off event. But the Sunday morning service is a whole different thing. So as lead worshippers, how do we maintain a constant expectation of the heavenly in the seasons when worshipping together feels routine and labored? Gerald Coates speaks well into this, noting that maturity is "living with the actual whilst aiming for the ideal." This is great advice for any lead worshipper. We must not allow us ourselves to become depressed or discouraged by these seasons. Instead we lean on the Sovereign plans of God and learn to ride out, even embrace, these times, all the time crying out for sacred congregational moments in the Lord's presence.

Perhaps the key to holding onto a constant expectation of the heavenly is to remember that worship is a spiritual thing. Sometimes we get caught in the mindset of merely seeing our congregational times together as a 'musical thing'. We see and hear instruments, we pour our voice through song. Many have settled simply for these elements of our congregational gatherings - and pleasant and uplifting as these things may be, they are only the mere shallows of the mighty deep. In the most powerful and profound worship meetings, "deep calls to deep". It is a spiritual event - the deep places in us responding to and resonating with the deep places of God. As 1 Corinthians tells

