

USING YOUR GIFTS FOR GOD

Validation, Safety, and Release

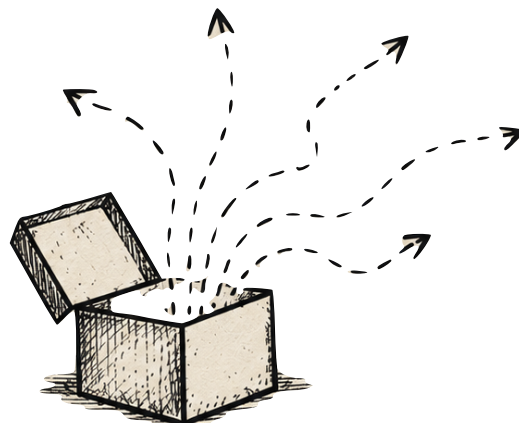
I spent more than twenty-five years as a worship pastor. I have stood on more platforms, rehearsed with more musicians, planned more worship services, and sung more worship songs than I could ever count. I love musicians. I understand worship leaders. I know that world because it was my world for a very long time.

And I've said something for years that tends to make people uncomfortable: We have too many Christian musicians and not enough musicians who are Christians.

There is a difference.

A Christian musician often finds a ready-made world waiting for their gift. There are worship teams, Christian bands, church services, conferences, worship nights, and Christian audiences. The Church knows exactly what to do when someone walks through the door carrying a guitar and happens to be good at it. We give them a microphone. Then we tell them they are using their gift for God.

After spending more than twenty-five years leading worship and the last fifteen years immersed in the harvest, I have become convinced that a significant number of people currently standing on worship platforms would have greater Kingdom influence somewhere else. I would go further. I think half of today's worship leaders shouldn't be worship leaders. Not because they aren't talented enough, but because their talent might be far more fruitful somewhere else.



THE SAFETY OF THE PLATFORM

There is something wonderfully affirming about leading worship. You stand in front of people who already value what you do. They came expecting you to lead them. They know the songs. They understand the language. When the moment is powerful, people respond. Afterward, someone tells you how much the worship meant to them. Someone thanks you. Someone tells you that a particular song was exactly what they needed.

There is validation in that environment. There is also safety.

Take that same musician and put them in a club on Friday night and everything changes. Nobody cares that they led worship on Sunday. Nobody is required to listen. The guitarist standing beside them might be better. The audience might continue talking while they play. The venue owner cares whether people show up. The other musicians may see the world very differently. The songs have to stand on their own. Credibility isn't granted by a position. It has to be earned. Relationships aren't built around shared beliefs. They have to form between people who may have very little in common beyond music.

The worship platform offers validation. The harvest requires vulnerability.

That raises an uncomfortable question about how often we have confused the safer place with the more faithful place. We sometimes describe getting onto the platform as “stepping into your calling.” For some musicians, stepping off the platform might require far more faith.

MUSICIANS WHO ARE CHRISTIANS

Imagine a church filled with exceptional musicians. Some of them lead worship. Others don't.

One plays guitar in one of the best local bands in town. Another writes songs with musicians who have no interest in Christianity. Another plays jazz every Thursday night at a local restaurant. Another produces records. Another plays community festivals, clubs, weddings, theaters, and whatever gigs come along.

And the Church celebrates all of them.

Imagine pastors laying hands on musicians and commissioning them for the club with the same enthusiasm they commission musicians for the worship platform. Not because those musicians are going undercover. Not because the gig is secretly an evangelistic event. Not because somebody expects them to squeeze a worship song between two covers.

They go because they are musicians.

They become excellent at what they do. They enter the musical life of their city. They meet artists, bartenders, producers, sound engineers, club owners, servers, songwriters, promoters, audiences, and other musicians. They become known. They become trusted. They become friends.

And Jesus goes with them.

The Church hasn't lost its musicians. It has released them.

BUT THIS ISN'T REALLY ABOUT MUSICIANS

Music simply makes the problem easy for me to see because I spent so much of my life inside that world. The same thing happens everywhere.

A talented designer walks into a church, and eventually someone asks them to create graphics. A filmmaker gets recruited to make church videos. A photographer starts photographing church events. A chef starts cooking church dinners. A gifted business leader ends up on a finance team or board. A great organizer gets handed an event. A gifted communicator gets encouraged toward a teaching platform. A technically gifted person joins the production team.

We discover something valuable in someone and almost instinctively ask, “How could we use this here?”

That question reveals our gravity. It pulls gifts inward.

We find people with extraordinary abilities, passions, experiences, and relationships, then redirect those things toward sustaining what we have built. We call that getting involved. We call it serving. We call it using your gifts. Sometimes we even call it using your gifts for God.

But when did using your gift for God become synonymous with using your gift for Church?

YOUR GIFT IS A PASSPORT

What if we started seeing gifts differently? What if a person’s gift isn’t simply something the Church needs to find a place for?

What if their gift is a passport?

A musician has access to musicians. An artist has access to artists. A filmmaker has access to filmmakers. A teacher has access to educators. An entrepreneur has access to entrepreneurs. An athlete has access to athletes. A chef has access to kitchens filled with chefs, servers, managers, and restaurant workers.

Their gift gives them entrance into relationships, communities, conversations, and worlds that most pastors will never enter. Their gift takes them places a church program never will.

And we keep asking them to bring it back here.

What if the better question isn’t, “Where could we use your gift?” What if the better question is, “Where does your gift give you access?”

That is a completely different way of seeing people.

Instead of looking at someone’s ability and seeing a volunteer position, we begin looking at their ability and seeing a harvest field. Instead of asking how their gift could strengthen our organization, we begin asking where their gift already gives them relational credibility. Instead of recruiting them inward, we equip them and release them outward.

EQUIPPED TO GO SOMEWHERE

Paul wrote in Ephesians 4 that Christ gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry. We tend to think about equipping as preparing someone to do something. There is another dimension we often miss.

Equipping prepares people to go somewhere.

The artist goes into the arts community. The entrepreneur goes into business. The teacher goes into education. The athlete goes into sports. The musician goes into music. The neighbor goes into the neighborhood.

The point isn't to turn every Christian into an undercover missionary carrying an agenda into every relationship. The point is that they already belong there. They already speak the language. They already have credibility. They already have relationships. They already have something in common with the people around them. They already have access.

The Church doesn't need to manufacture a ministry opportunity for them. The opportunity is already surrounding them. Our responsibility is to equip them to recognize it.

WHAT IF WE RELEASED OUR BEST?

This is where the idea gets uncomfortable.

Churches naturally want talented people. If someone is an exceptional musician, we want them on the worship team. If someone is an exceptional communicator, we want them teaching. If someone is an exceptional leader, we want them leading something.

It makes sense organizationally. But the Kingdom asks a different question: *Where will this person's life bear the most fruit?*

Sometimes the answer will be inside the gathered Church. Sometimes the answer will be somewhere far beyond it.

That means releasing people might cost us something. Our worship team might not be as impressive. Our production might not be as polished. Our events might require more work. Our organization might lose someone extraordinarily talented.

Release always feels different from accumulation.

Accumulation asks, *"How do we keep this person?"*

Release asks, *"Where is Jesus leading this person?"*

One builds organizational capacity.

The other expands Kingdom presence.

STOP PULLING GIFTS OUT OF THE HARVEST

For years, churches have talked about helping people discover their gifts. I think we need to keep going. Discovering someone's gift isn't enough. We need to help them discover where that gift takes them.

There are worlds surrounding our churches filled with musicians, artists, educators, athletes, entrepreneurs, scientists, designers, chefs, filmmakers, writers, builders, gamers, gardeners, coaches, and countless others. Sitting inside our churches are people who already have passports into those worlds.

They don't necessarily need another volunteer position. They need to be equipped, trusted, and released. They need a Church willing to celebrate what Jesus does through them even when none of it happens on a Church platform.

What if your gift was never meant to bring you deeper into the Church?

What if it was meant to take you further into the harvest?

We have spent enormous energy trying to get people's gifts working inside the Church. It's time to expand our imagination.

Stop pulling people out of the harvest. And stop pulling their gifts out of it too.