

The Best We Can Possibly Be

By Tony Guerrero

“No sane person would get on stage, hold a guitar without ever having played one before, and expect God to miraculously make them play an amazing guitar solo.”



What,

exactly, does the command to “play skillfully” mean? It doesn’t mean that God expects us all to play guitar like Phil Keaggy, or sing like Celine Dion. What it means is that we are all to strive to play at the best of our abilities for the Lord. And striving to play at our best doesn’t mean that all we need to do is try our best on Sunday mornings with our limited abilities. It means we work hard at our craft during the week so that, when we do show up for a church service, we are mentally and technically prepared and strengthened and playing at our own personal absolute best. The sacrifice of playing skillfully is in the preparation, not the performance.

IMPROMPTU EXCELLENCE

On a visit to Australia, some years ago, I witnessed a performance by trumpeter Phil Driscoll. He was playing with a large local worship ensemble and at one point had the singers leave the front of the stage. He then motioned for several musicians to come forward, one by one, and take their turn improvising. It was a Spirit-filled night and the presence of the Lord was palpable. These musicians, some of whom had maybe never before been called on to come front and center, played so beautifully that even they seemed surprised.

Many who knew these musicians commented on how they had never heard them play that well before. The next day I heard people talking about how inspirational God must have been at those moments to cause those players to play that way. Well, yes and no. Now, while I do give God all the glory for that night and for the inspiration that was so apparent, I have a hard time believing that God just decided to grant those musicians skills they’d never had before for that one moment. I believe that none of those musicians played anything beyond what they’d physically practiced and prepared for. They may have never been inspired to play that way before, but the technical skill had to have been prepared and readied in advance. It was ready when God inspired them to utilize it. No sane person would get on stage, hold a guitar without ever having played one before, and expect God to miraculously make them play an amazing guitar solo. Practice, practice, practice.

HONING GOD-GIVEN ABILITIES

God does want quality, and He not only wants it from the professional musicians, He even wants it from the amateur! Quality isn’t about how good you are compared to the rest of the world; it’s about how good you are with the talents God has given you. How good are you willing to work at getting? Making a “joyful noise” is fine for those who were not blessed with any musical talents, but for those who have been so blessed, at any level, it is basically bad stewardship to not offer our best and work on making our “best” even better. Those of

us called to lead, and/or, serve in the ministry need not be the best in the world, but we should honor God by being the best we can possibly be.

IS QUALITY ALWAYS IMPORTANT?

At the risk of sounding contradictory, the answer here is no. There are two issues of quality we must distinguish between: “Giving Your Best” and “Presenting the Best.”

GIVING YOUR BEST

Not every church event requires top quality musicianship. A gathering of true believers does not require human efforts to attract them. For instance, a group of pastors meeting for fellowship will worship in song regardless of whether or not the musicians leading them are top-notch. They understand what goes into such meetings—budgets, musician schedules, and so on. They certainly can be more forgiving in the level of musicianship.

However, this does not mean that a musician in this setting should not be doing his or her absolute best. A Christian musician should always, in every setting, attempt to play at the best of their abilities. Every musical offering should be preceded by the sacrifice of practicing and preparing ahead of time.

In the setting mentioned above, it would be easy to say to ourselves, “These are all pastors—they don’t need the music to be great.” However, the ultimate target of your offering should not be those pastors, but God. God deserves our utmost efforts.

PRESENTING THE BEST

Quality is necessary whenever the community is the target. Remember, we are competing with the world for the attention of our community, especially the non-believers in our community. If a visitor is at an event and has not quite understood or accepted the gospel message yet, it is our duty to do what we can to make the setting attractive enough for them to want to return. Those for whom music is a normal source of attraction will instantly compare your music to the music they can get elsewhere—nightclubs, concerts, festivals, radio and T.V. It is in these cases where it is imperative that we not only can compete with the world, but we can beat the world! Rick Warren states that a church that isn’t actively targeting their community is basically saying to the local non-believers that they can “go to Hell.”

Sure, countless people have become Christians without the presentation of great musicianship I’m referring to. All conversion is the work of God, not man. Still the issue of our responsibility as musical leaders to always strive for the absolute best. It’s our job then to find the balance in working to become a skilled musician for the Lord and the excellence He deserves in the service of worship.

This is an excerpt from Tony’s book, Attracting Quality Musicians. Find out more at www.tonyguerrero.com.