

Music Moment 3

Ray Gibbs

Communication Continued

Heb. 13:15 By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.

John 4: 24 God is a spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Subjective Communication

In our previous “Moments” we have talked briefly about “Gods purpose for music”, and a few of the techniques that can enhance the communication of music in worship. Now we get to what I believe is the most important skill that a musical communicator can have. Even if some of the techniques mentioned in the last “Music Moment” are missing, if you are willing and able to let this happen, the Lord can use you in a profound way.

I have a powerful memory that is still vivid in my mind (which at my age is remarkable). Soon after I was saved in our little church in Memphis, TN, (1981 or 82) our song leader/choir director sang a special; “Pass me not oh Gentle Savior”. His voice was like the gravel plant he worked in during the week. He had no formal musical training. He wasn’t particularly musical. But when he lifted his eyes, they filled with tears, and he croaked out the sweet words of that old song, my heart melted within me, and I cried within myself. The Lord did a work in my heart that day, and He gave me an important lesson; you don’t need technique (although it can help), to communicate a song and the spiritual message within it, you need a willingness to let others see the Lord doing a work in your heart

All the technique in the world is useless if this quality is missing. On the other hand, I believe that a fine technique can enhance and free the communication. I am not arguing against training and building techniques. But the real purpose of technique is to get the impediments out of the way (tensions, distractions, strains), and let the message shine through. There is an old saying in the music business, “The purpose of good technique is to make itself invisible”.

So how do we bring the truth of the message out in a song? Let’s look at the mechanism of communication.

When we sit someone down to talk seriously, we meet eye to eye. We connect and begin to try to gauge every thought and emotion that person has. What we get in communication is more dependant on the responses we discern than the words that are said. We determine whether that person is telling the truth by what we can read in his face and what we can hear in his voice. We can see fleeting changes of emotion in his countenance that we read as truth or falsehood. Although most of us don’t realize that we are reading these things, we have grown more and more sophisticated in this age of television in seeing these clues that we instantly realize when someone is faking emotion. This kaleidoscopic display coupled with the words that are being said give us a message that we either believe or disbelieve. When someone is going through a heavy emotion we “read” these micro signs even if there is no large reaction on the face and we respond in sympathy. Our emotions correspond to his emotions and we can really say “I know how you feel.” This is called “empathy.” The same thing happens when we listen to a singer or choir who really is having an experience with the Lord while they are singing a song in church. We respond to the experience they are having with the message and we experience it also. This is the vehicle for real communication in a singing ministry. I have experienced the same thing when listening to an offertory by a pianist or an instrumentalist. So this experience is not dependant that the words are present (although usually, they should be known by both the player and the listener).

The communication is more than the words. It is the singer’s response to the words that strikes a chord in our heart and we are ministered to. To do this the singer, must let himself be vulnerable. This may be the hardest part of the minister’s job. My computer dictionary defines vulnerable as “Exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed either physically or emotionally.”

We all are afraid, to some extent, that others are going to find out that we are not as perfect as we’d like them to think we are. I suppose this is alright, it keeps us on our best behavior. In ministry, however, it is a problem. We cannot allow ourselves to show a response to the scriptural thoughts in a song if we are afraid someone will discover that we need to get something right. We need to be completely transparent when we are ministering in song. We must learn to be honest with ourselves and with God when we are standing in front of the congregation. If you can imagine yourself doing this, you are probably cringing. All of a sudden we are stripped of all pretense and pride. I believe this should be the perpetual state of a godly Christian, but how many of us actually live in such a state? It is profoundly uncomfortable, but it is right. That is the condition that will allow you to have an impact

on other's lives.

How do we do this? First of all we need to spend some serious time in prayer. Realize that you have a serious responsibility. If you got a call from Saint Peter, telling you that you were scheduled to sing in the throne room of heaven next week, you would take that opportunity very seriously. You would pray like never before. You would make sure that all was right between you and God. Then you would prepare that song like your life depended on it. Do you realize that every time you sing in church, you are essentially doing the same thing (and maybe somebody's life does depend on how serious you are in your preparation). Your audience is God. All that are in the service are fellow performers and the song that God hears is the song that comes from our hearts. We might as well be in the throne room of heaven. So praying for God's power is the first and most important step.

Next, we need to spend time with the material we are singing. You cannot know your song too well. Live with the words. Meditate on relevant scripture passages. Say the words over and over again out loud and for meaning. Respond to the message God has for you in the song.

Third, realizing that God has called you to deliver this message in song, put away all thoughts of self. If you are like me, this is not easy. To truly minister, you need to stop thinking about how you look, whether "they" like you, if your voice is good enough, or if you have spinach on your teeth. The message is so important, these other things just don't matter. When you really achieve this, you will be amazed how free you feel to express God's truth.

Lastly, listen to the words of the song as you are singing it in the service. Most of us sing a song and think about everything but the words. Do I have enough breath? Can I reach the high note? Why is that man frowning? Did I remember to put on mascara? Hear and realize the words!

You notice that I said nothing about "use expression" either in the face or in the voice. Don't fake anything but don't be afraid to let your response to the message show.

These are just a few of the "techniques" of subjective communication. I hope there is enough here for you to chew on.

In our next "Moment" we will discuss the question of "excellence". How important is it that we do well in our service to the Lord. How good is good enough.