

It's summertime. Oh yeah. Such a happy season of sunshine and pool time and in most cases lack of school. I'm sure the weeks and months ahead will be filled with various summer programs also. Opportunities to touch your community with God's love. Moments to help lead kids closer to the heart of God with each song you help lead. I'm sure you are expectant for some fruitful weeks in this season.

I want to encourage you to spend time in prayer throughout your week and in the hours leading up to the worship sets you lead. Throughout your week ask for God to give you wisdom in how to lead this week's songs. Pray for the kids and families in attendance. Pray for the wisdom of your Pastors and leadership as they seek God's direction. Ask God to help your mind soak up the lyrics and parts to new songs. Confess that you have the mind of Christ and diligently work to learn your parts. It can be a few minutes here and there but add to your daily prayers time spent praying for this ministry that you serve in. Make it be an automatic part of your time spent in preparation to lead worship.

Often times in church world, we are really good at gathering together and asking God to bless what we do. Even though I think that's really good, I find too often that many are relying on that prayer in the moments before to be the saving grace of the day. It's all too familiar that we haven't done our part. We haven't spent time rehearsing and preparing. We're not confident of our cues, our lines, the arrangement or the lyrics. We're still thinking through what it is we're going to say to lead the songs. When we haven't done our part on the front end of things I see that prayer as a 911 call. It's a panicked "Help me, I'm in trouble" scream. In some cases it can be an example of the boy who cried wolf. Have there been days where the practice and hours before were a disaster and there were emergencies? Of course. God can move on those days in ways that will blow our mind. My point is don't use that prayer time as an emergency band-aid 52 weekends a year. Ask God for His help when you need it. Use that prayer time right before as the final chance to turn your heart and attention on the reason you're serving in that area. Focus your mind and your heart and ask for God to bless what the work of your hand has done.

DISCUSSION TIME

- *Why do you believe prayer is an important part to our preparation?*
- *Study and discuss the prayer of Moses in Psalm 90:17 "May the Lord our God always be pleased with us. Lord, make what we do succeed. Please make what we do succeed."*
- *Spend some time praying for each other and the upcoming events, in addition to today's worship sets.*

Based on last week's devotion I'm curious: have you spent some time in prayer this week? If not, what were the reasons that held you back? *(Take time to stop and discuss. Encourage making a healthy habit in this area.)* 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says: "Never stop praying."

Obviously, we can't pray every second we are awake. But we can learn to pray throughout our day when we are hit with this piece of news or that. When we notice an attitude shift or start stressing about what needs to be done, we can stop and ask for God's help. Take time to stop and talk with God. He is our friend and He wants to help us. Psalm 54:4 says: "But I know that God helps me. The Lord is the one who keeps me going."

Some of you deal with stage fright or being nervous. Make it a matter of prayer. The kids you lead in worship, they don't bite. They aren't going to throw tomatoes at you if you do a bad job. Don't be scared and overly concerned. Pray and ask God to help you. That's what He is there for. He is our friend and He is our helper. He can help you overcome your fear. He can help you navigate how to lead this group of kids in worship. He can show you how to be a friend to someone on the team that needs a friend. Prayer is a portal that we have to go straight to God's ear. It's one of the many benefits of being a child of God. Embrace prayer and make it be a daily part of your life.

DISCUSSION TIME

- *How have you seen prayer calm your fears and worries?*
- *We don't need to struggle with being anxious. God's word instructs us to not worry about anything. Study and discuss Philippians 4:6 "Don't worry about anything. No matter what happens, tell God about everything. Ask and pray, and give thanks to him."*
- *What is something you're believing for and want to overcome? Take some time to pray with and for each other.*

Prayer is something we do in the spiritual realm to prepare but practicing and rehearsing is what we do in the physical. And it's an important thing. Only working on learning new songs in the car as you drive to church isn't going to cut it. Waiting until the day you need to know your part by is not going to work well. It takes time for you to study, learn, memorize and truly soak up the arrangement and the heart of the message of the song. I've said it once and I'll say it again: "There is freedom in preparation."

Stepping foot on stage when you know the song well is always more fun than stepping on stage knowing you could easily mess up the lyrics and fall flat on your face. You can't lead effectively when you're preoccupied with trying to remember what comes next. You can't engage your audience when you're busy staring at the stage monitor for the next lyric to pop up. Sure, it takes time to learn the material and know it well but it is time that is well invested.

Try some different methods of learning and studying songs to see what works well for you. There are times I put a song on repeat and play it for hours letting it soak into my subconscious. You may need to physically write the words out. Try a few things and see what helps you learn and memorize the material effectively. Remember, there is freedom in preparation. It's always worth it!

DISCUSSION TIME

- *Share a time you "fell flat on your face" because you didn't know the song well enough?*
- *Share an example of the freedom you feel when you know your part well and can effectively be in the moment, lead well and engage your audience.*
- *Study and discuss Proverbs 20:4 "Anyone who refuses to work doesn't plow in the right season. When they look for a crop at harvest time, they don't find it."*

This month we've talked about prayer and about being prepared. There's one last tip I want to encourage you with and that is to lead with authority. If you have been given the job of worship leader there is someone who believes in you and your ability. They have entrusted you with the expectations that you'll get the job done effectively. The best thing you can do is sing with confidence and talk to your audience with authority to get them excited. There's a lot of respect that is gained from having this kind of boldness. We learn about this from Jesus' example. Look at Matthew 7:28&29. "Jesus finished saying all these things. The crowds were amazed at his teaching. That's because he taught like one who had authority. He did not speak like their teachers of the law."

One of the biggest things I see in young/less-experienced vocalists and leaders is a lack of confidence and thus a lack of authority. If you're going to get up there and lead, then you might as well lead as if you're the leader. Take charge. Own it. It's your stage. It's your moment to navigate the ship and take your audience on a journey to experience God's presence through their worship. Keep in mind this instruction and promise we have in Joshua 1:9 "Here is what I am commanding you to do. Be strong and brave. Do not be afraid. Do not lose hope. I am the Lord your God. I will be with you everywhere you go."

DISCUSSION TIME

- *When you go see a favorite band or artist perform do you see them reluctant and apologetic or bold and owning the night?*
- *Share the characteristics you notice in your favorite worship leader? What do you see in them you can apply to your worship leading?*
- *Why do you think us "leading with authority" is an important ingredient to our ability to lead well?*