

About Those Music People . . .
(Several things you'll never hear from your church musicians)

By Trenton Thomas

Artist, musicians, actors, geeks . . . these are convenient, all-encompassing labels many people apply to the few people who have spent enough time, effort, and brain power to achieve something out of the ordinary. Most people spend their childhoods playing ball in the local sports fields or having fun with their friends. The teen years are spent ðhanginøoutö and trying to become as popular, influential, or wealthy as possible. Most people. Then there are those people who you never did get to know very well. For some odd reason, they kept saying strange things like, ðpractice,ö ðrehearsal,ö or ðIøve got to work on . . .ö Very unusual people they were . . . or were they? Very possibly, they were simply dedicated to something most people never took the time to understand.

Long, lonely hours of practice, practice, practice or study, study, study are frequently and incorrectly labeled ðtalent.ö While natural abilities or inclination are a must, they only go so far in most cases. Itø much easier to think of someone else as ðtalentedö than to attribute to them hard work, long hours, and dedication. That, for some reason, usually gets attributed to athletes who, letø face it, are a little more relatable and ðcoolö (probably because most people have played a sport or two). That being said, ðartistsö are probably some of the most underrated and misunderstood people in our society. Unfortunately, this spills over quite grotesquely and equally unnoticed into our churches.

Some churches seem to have an abundance of ðtalentedö people, while others have only one, or even none at all. Either way, the preaching of Godø Word is likely (and rightfully) proclaimed as the center of the service and itø most important part. This is entirely true, and can be backed solidly by Scripture. However, an unbalanced focus on it can and often does lead to a major oversight in many churches.

The last part of Matthew 10:10 can be frequently heard quoted by pastors, missionaries, and evangelists all across America. ðFor the workman is worthy of his meatö has almost become a catch phrase in many circles. Another oft-quoted passage is found in Deuteronomy 25:4, instructing that the owners of oxen not muzzle them when they are treading grain. This is repeated in the New Testament (1 Cor. 9:9, 1 Tim. 5:18) to solidify the fact that those who do the Lordø work deserve to have their needs met by the work they do. Unfortunately, it is extremely rare to hear a pastor apply these same verses to those in their church who faithfully give countless hours of their time to make the service and church itself run smoothly.

At this point, many theologians are probably having some red flags pop up regarding the direct application of these New Testament passages (written about pastors and elders) to laymen who help in the church. I am not, however, attempting to apply the same type of honor or reward. I would like to point out, however, that the principle remains unchanged and solid. Those who labor in the work of the Lord deserve the practical, helpful fruits of their labor. This articleø main focus will be on musicians, but there are many other positions to which this principle may be freely applied. Churches utilize janitors, maintenance personnel, cooks,

designers, landscapers, and a host of others to help the church run smoothly and present it's best for God's glory. Most of these things are done silently, done for the Lord, and done for free. I know people who work at church for more hours than they would at a part-time job, yet have never received (or asked for) one cent for their labors. Unfortunately, quite often they never receive a word of thanks either. Many churches pour money and effort into missions or service projects, while entirely overlooking the people in their own church bodies who minister the most.

A pastor does countless things for his church members and spends countless hours that go completely unnoticed, un-thanked, and unpaid. He does these things out of the same service to the Lord that all the above-mentioned people labor. However, he does (usually) get paid enough to live on, and will usually be recognized occasionally for the "extra" labor. This should not be minimized, and these things sadly need *vast* improvement in most churches. Maybe your church has a music pastor. If this is the case, keep in mind that he is probably doing much of what the other pastors are doing (visitation, preaching, teaching, organizing, counseling, discipling, studying, etc.), but he also has the added burden of all the music of his church. Probably only fellow musicians truly know the time, effort, practice, coordination, and hard work this entails. Much of this work is done behind-the-scenes and after all his other pastoral duties have been fulfilled. More likely, however, your church is in the majority. You have no "music pastor," and a layperson does most of the musical work and organization. Your pastor relies on this person heavily, and countless hours are spent by this person practicing, organizing, and doing the multitude of things necessary to make a church's music run smoothly.

Have you ever considered what your church would be like without any music? Have you ever wondered why we have music in the church? Why is it such an important part of our services? A study through the Chronicles will help give a beneficial overview of the historical and Scriptural importance of music in public worship. Here we see that hundreds of professional musicians were employed full-time in the work of the Lord. These musicians played a major role in the worship and service of the temple. While the prominence of music diminishes in the New Testament (due in large part to the "underground" nature of the church), it's importance and usefulness has not diminished. (See Eph. 5, Col. 3 for example) However, very few church people (pastors included) ever stop to think of the work involved in that music.

Take the Christmas cantata for example. Most choir members start learning their pieces around October. That means someone had to figure out which pieces would be sung and order them by the first part of September. This involves reading through countless pieces of music to determine their musical and theological quality. That same person had to learn all the parts of the pieces well enough to teach them to his choir (who probably has little formal musical training). A pianist had to practice the pieces until they could present a solid foundation for the singers. The director then had to prepare his choir rehearsal carefully each week (a process which, if done right, takes several hours at the least), and the choir had to meet regularly for rehearsals (which, by the way, someone had to schedule—probably the director or pianist). Then there are all the extra last-minute rehearsals, the sound check, the dress rehearsal, and the actual performance(s). Hundreds of hours of accumulated time go into a simple Christmas program. Add a drama, and you've added hundreds more. Now, broaden the lens to think about the skills involved in directing/accompanying this cantata. Remember the start of this article? Those musicians, if they are skilled and well qualified, probably gave up a majority of their life's free-

time acquiring the skills necessary to lead or accompany that Christmas cantata. Now the preparation time has suddenly jumped to years. Most pastors have never studied as long or worked as hard learning how to preach a good sermon as their church pianist has on accompanying the hymns sung before that sermon.

So . . . with that in mind, have you thanked your church musicians this year? Most churches give their pastors love offerings, gifts, or Christmas bonuses this time of year. Most churches give their musicians a pat on the back, at the most. Yet these musicians do this for the Lord. They labor in the Lord's work, *ministering* to their congregations in a powerful and effective way. They present Scriptural truths that edify, teach, encourage, convict, and strengthen the church body. They use the skills they have worked so hard to acquire to aid in preparing the hearts of the people of God to receive the "seed of the word." They "soften the ground" so-to-speak. These hard-working ministers, however, are usually completely overlooked monetarily. They are often completely neglected in the support of the church body to whom they minister. Take a moment this Christmas to express appreciation to those who have done so much for your spiritual edification—both in the musical realm and in the other overlooked parts of your church's ministry. Most of these musicians aren't looking for a pat on the back or a dollar in their hand. They do what they do out of love for the Lord and a desire to minister to those in the body of Christ. They will probably be shocked that you've taken the time to appreciate them!

To those of you who are church musicians, always keep in your mind the admonition of Galatians 6:9-10. Don't grow weary in the work that the Lord has equipped you to do. Your ministry is important. However, remember that it is a ministry. Matthew 6:3-4 is a good principle to live by. "But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly." And for all of us, there is the admonition found in Mark 10:44, "And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all." Let's be humble servants, keeping in mind our great Example, "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Phil. 2:6-8)

The cause of the Gospel of Christ is so much greater than any one of us, or even all of us together. God uses whomever He chooses in whatever way He sees fit. Our opportunity is to allow ourselves to be used. God has given each of us gifts and abilities, and He wants us to use them in His service. Let's encourage one another. Appreciate and care for those who labor for your benefit. Most of all, "Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body." (Heb. 13:1-3) Getting rid of the labels could be the first step . . . !