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The Importance of Supporting Those Creating the Music that Connects Us to God

“I also discovered that the portions of the Levites had not been given them, so that the Levites and the singers who performed the service had gone away, each to his own field. So I reprimanded the officials and said, “Why is the house of God forsaken?” Then I gathered them together and restored them to their posts.”

Nehemiah 13:10-11 NASB

In Chapter 12 of Nehemiah, the priests and the Levites return to Jerusalem and the wall is dedicated. Verses 46-47 read: “For in the days of David and Asaph, in ancient times, there were leaders of the singers, songs of praise and hymns of thanksgiving to God. So all Israel in the days of Zerubbabel and Nehemiah gave the portions due the singers and the gatekeepers as each day required, and set apart the consecrated portion for the Levites, and the Levites set apart the consecrated portion for the sons of Aaron.”. Nehemiah 12:46-47 NASB

However in the very next chapter, we find a back room deal involving nepotism going on. The portion that belonged to the Levites, the singers, and the gatekeepers was taken from them, and nobody was doing anything about it. Finally Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem in verse 10.

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What I find extremely interesting is what happens next. “All Judah **then** brought the tithe of the grain, wine and oil into the storehouses.” Nehemiah 13:12 NASB. Going back to the dedication of the wall in chapter 12, “and on that day **they offered great sacrifices** and rejoiced because God had given them great joy,” Nehemiah 12:43a NASB.

In other words, when the people were being led in times of corporate worship (songs of praise, and hymns of thanksgiving) their natural response was to tithe, which is a big part of worship. However, when those leading worship were no longer given their due, (“I also discovered that the portions of the Levites had not been given them, so that the Levites and the singers who performed the service had gone away, each to his own field.”. Nehemiah 13:10 NASB) they had to go find work elsewhere to provide for their needs, and with nobody leading those times of corporate worship in song, the people stopped giving. The good news is that once Nehemiah brings them back and restores them to their posts, all of Judah immediately starts tithing again.

In the New Testament, we find Paul being able to fund his own ministry work. Even more so, in Acts 20:34 it says that Paul earned enough money to provide for others, suggesting that there were at least seasons of Paul’s career as a tentmaker in which he was earning far more than he needed to support himself. Now he was preaching and teaching, and working alongside those he was called to reach was a benefit. The role of those called to lead worship is a little bit different, and until recent times, God provided opportunities for them to earn a living through their music.

Songwriters are essentially psalmists, a type of prophet who conveys things from the heart and mind of the Lord to people (prophecy), and even though the Lord knows our thoughts before we even think about them, a psalmist also conveys things from people to the Lord. In other words, it is their calling to help us connect with God. Songwriting is (or at least used to be for many) a full time job. For those unfamiliar with today’s music industry and economic model, let me bring you up to speed.

Songwriters historically have been paid royalties, \$0.091 cents on every song sold. In fact, when the only way to get music on-demand was to buy it, the market provided a living for not only the Artists, but the Songwriters, Producers, Studio Musicians, Sound Engineers and others involved in promoting that work and bringing it to market. By comparison, in today's streaming model, the songwriter gets approximately \$0.000351 cents. That means if you own 100% of your song (No Co-writers, No Label, No Publishing Company) that if you get a million streams, you make \$351.

In 1999 there were over 5,000 full-time songwriters in Nashville alone. As of 2019 there were only 238 at last count. Everybody wants a shot to get on a Hit Song that's going to make some money, and according to *Music Week*, it took an average of 5.34 people to write the 100 biggest hits of 2018, and estimates for 2019 are 6.84 songwriters on a top hit. The biggest song in all of 2019 had just over 1 billion streams, meaning the average songwriter would have earned \$52,342 which is about the average U.S. Median Income. So what's wrong with that? Nothing for the number one song, but the numbers drop quickly from there. Number 5 only had 802 million streams, meaning almost a 20% drop in income to \$41,155. You can imagine where number 20, 50, 100, or lower come in at, which explains why we've lost over 95% of the full-time songwriters in just the past 20 years. These numbers are primarily in secular music. How much more important is the Christian songwriter to the church as a whole?

So what happened? Piracy, and the economics of streaming. In the late 1960's you would find singles in the record store for about \$1 each. Sixty years later, when someone does by a single, it's generally the same price.

Piracy, the outright theft and copying of a song, is no different than someone saying that if they can figure out a way to hack your electric door locks and start your car, that they are entitled to it. Scale doesn't matter. Theft is theft, and we all know it makes God's Top 10 list.

Piracy started in full force in 1999. Of course the major labels sued to shut the pirates down, but by the time they succeeded, the damage was done, and people relished the thought of getting their music for free, without giving a second thought to those creating it. "But I pay for

my premium music streaming service”. Once piracy was stalled, streaming filled the void. It seems logical. Pay a monthly access fee for any song ever written. The problem is, it’s like an All-You-Can-Eat-Buffer for \$10, where everyone is coming in and eating \$12 worth of food. There’s not enough money to go around to fairly compensate all those involved in creating the music you love.

“OK, so I’ll buy the music that the worship team at my church puts out, as well as some of the other Christian Artists that I like”. That’s a great start in supporting those who create the music we sing to God! Now how do we get everyone to be as generous and thoughtful as you?

Ask 100 people on the street today if they’d be willing to buy a song for \$1. A handful might, but most would say, “Why? I get all the music I want for free (Ad supported) or I pay a small monthly fee and I can listen to millions of different songs anytime I want”.

Now ask those same 100 people who their favorite Artist is. Then ask, “If your favorite Artist released a new song exclusively for sale, would you pay \$1 if you really wanted it?” I can almost assuredly guarantee, their answer will be, “Of course!”

So why don’t all Artists just band together and say, “We’re going to start pre-releasing our music for a window of time before making available for free on streaming platforms”? Basically do what the Movie Industry does. It goes from Theater, to Purchase/Rent, to Stream by subscription, and finally to free (ad supported) TV. That would be a great idea, but how do you coordinate every Artist being willing to start?

The Founders at Crowd Music credit God with giving them the solution to restore the livelihoods of those creating music in all genres, and to enrich the lives of us all.

“He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?” Micah 6:8 NASB

NEXT: How Artists & Music Creators can use Crowd Music to empower and expand their ministry