

Is your ministry a “Cover Band”?

By Rev. Shane Rowe

*“But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make **full proof** of thy ministry.” – 2 Timothy 4:5 (KJV)*

Most people would describe or define a “cover band” as a group of performers who copy, imitate, or reproduce faithfully the works of another, typically popular, group or multiple groups. In the Christian community, we, as usual, have created our own labels to describe our versions. We call them “disciples”, “students”, or sometimes “followers”.

This month’s teaching deals with a current, prevalent trend among ministries, churches, and some denominations that I believe to be one of the greatest hindrances the church has encountered to date. While this trend has no specific name, as of yet, I prefer to refer to it as “Cover Band Syndrome (C.B.S.)”. Now, before you decide I’ve lost my mind or just *really, really* need to get more sleep, allow me to explain a few things and I promise I will make more sense shortly.

First of all, for those of you not familiar with the concept of a cover band, a cover band is what musicians and audiences call a band that performs, primarily or exclusively, someone else’s songs or compositions. While some go as far as to attempt to imitate the original performer’s “sound and look”, right down to the last detail, most simply perform the arrangements faithfully while using their own voices and only similar “looks” or image. The bands whose tunes they “cover” are usually popular, even if only to a small “target” audience. The idea behind this is to become “known” or accepted by audiences who have never heard of you, but have heard of the original band, by playing songs that people are already familiar with and already like. Thus, if the audience likes the songs, they will automatically like the cover band and want to listen to them as well. “It ain’t much, but it’s a living.” Sometimes, it’s even a moderately profitable one.

The problem with being a cover band is that, no matter how hard you try or successful you may be at copying the original, you are still only a copy. You will never attain the success, glory, accolades or influence of the original. The same doors will not be opened to you. You will never be paid, treated, or appreciated the same as the original.

While most of these bands start out playing covers to “get their foot in the door” or to get an audience to initially listen to them, they usually assume that, once they have the crowd’s attention, they will switch over to their original material and win them over to their music. They wrongly assume that they can ride the coattails of the original artists to the same fame, riches, and glory. For the majority of these bands, nothing could be further from the truth.

Unfortunately, the crowds have come to hear and see the music and shows they already know and love, not the new band's stuff. The cover bands end up being forced to play the familiar tunes or find themselves without an audience. **As the old saying goes, "Why settle for an imitation when you can have the original?"** Most of these artists, many who are extremely talented and creative in their own right and truly deserve a stage of their own, have either short lived careers or find themselves bouncing from one cover band to the next without ever even coming close to fulfilling their hopes and dreams or living up to the potential for greatness they actually possess.

Right about now, you may be asking, "What does any of this have to do with the Church?" If you can be patient with me just a little longer, I truly promise it will all make sense momentarily. But first, we need to examine the current "ministry trend" I mentioned earlier that the Church seems to be embracing the world over.

There has never been a time in the history of the Church, at least in recent history, that believers have gained so much influence and popularity with secular society. Our authors, musicians, actors, speakers, and business people seem to be popping up everywhere. We are dominating and conquering the charts in the arenas of movies, music, television, literature and even politics. While I don't have time to get into details or name the many examples of this present today, one can simply take a trip down the aisles of their local Wal-Mart, shop at any music, video, or book retailer, or just pick up any newspaper or magazine and you will find believers or their products being sold, advertised or discussed right alongside "worldly" products, personalities, and ideas.

Not only are we gaining ground in secular arenas, we are now crossing over racial, denominational, and doctrinal boundaries in the "Church" arena that our predecessors only dreamed about. Methodist bands are ministering at Lutheran events, Wesleyan Pastors are teaching at Catholic seminars, Baptist ministers are preaching at Pentecostal conferences and the list goes on and on.

While I believe that this has the potential to be very beneficial to the body of Christ in helping us to unite and work through our differences for sake of the Gospel, it appears to be having an effect that nobody, I hope, was counting on. Instead of being motivated and encouraged by the achievements and positive ministry results of others to press forward ourselves and fulfill the call and purpose God has placed in our own lives, we seem to be preferring to capitalize on the success of others and attempt to repeat them in our own lives, right down the finest detail.

It seems as though a "new" or "improved" formula of "*How to Succeed in Ministry without Really Trying*" is hitting the "marketplace" of the church everyday. Often, they are accompanied with books, tapes, videos, and

workbooks (all at typically premium prices) that are supposed to help you and your ministry (everybody has one) become just as successful and anointed as the author's. All it takes is for a minister to appear on TBN or be featured in an article in Charisma or Ministry Today and they become the "next great thing" to come along in the Church. They become "Superstars" and their "followers", "disciples", and "students" are popping up in churches and ministry groups, both independent and denominational, everywhere.

Authors like Rick Warren, John Maxwell, Rick Joyner and John Bevere, to name only a few, all have systems and formulas in place that are supposed to make you the best Christian you can be, show you your God-given purpose in life and ministry, and explain *in detail* how your church and ministry should be ran. Sound's good, doesn't it? They offer worksheets, examples, training classes, video lessons and workbooks to go with them, and even live video feeds that you can use to get your church or ministry on board. You don't have to do a thing but pay for it all.

Believers are spending millions of dollars every year hoping to find the "Magic Formula" that will help them fulfill their dreams and reach their potential with a seemingly minimal input that produces maximum results.

Instead of spending time in prayer, bible study, and fasting to find God's perfect plan, purpose and anointing for their own lives and ministries, many seem to be choosing, for lack of a better term, the "easy way" and use someone else's visions, methods, and, apparently, their anointing. All the while, they are assuming they will achieve what these ministers and ministries have. (Sound familiar yet?) It's almost like they think, "This other group has what we want. They will tell us how they "got" it. If we use the same formulas, ideas, and practices, we will "get" what they have (e.g. what we want). "

Following this line of thinking, many ministers, churches, and organizations are heading off to the nearest "Church Growth Seminar" and spending hundreds, sometimes thousands, of dollars at a time buying up materials that they believe, and are sometimes represented to, have the "Magic Formula" for success in ministry, marriage, family, and just about any other endeavor in life. Many truly and deeply believe that these "methods", if followed exactly, will cause them to be just as successful, famous, respected, and anointed as the ministries they bought them from. Just like with the cover bands above, they head out, often intending to eventually "be themselves" and fulfill their hopes, dreams, and potential, while ending up doomed to "perform" for the new crowds, as *they* desire, or lose them completely.

Now, I need to make it clear that I have nothing against these, or any other, ministers, teachers, or organizations sharing what God has done for them or the plans and programs God gave them to use. I, in fact, believe that this is a scriptural concept.

The entire Bible shows us the successes, failures, methods and beliefs of believers in the past to serve as examples for our lives and ministries today. However, they are examples only (2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 2:21, Romans 4 - sample of examples being used). We were never meant to attempt to repeat every aspect of their examples. We are to apply the “spiritual” truths or lessons we learn to our lives. No expectation or encouragement is ever given to attempt to go back and “re-live” every detail of their physical, or day-to-day, life or ministry. Even when it is obvious that God wants us to follow in their “spiritual” footsteps, we are still only told to *apply* these truths to **our** individual lives (*Philippians 2:12-13*) and to make “full proof” of **our own** ministries (*2 Timothy 4:5*).

God created us as individuals, each one unique while at the same time similar to others (*Psalms 139:14-16, Genesis 1:26-3, 1 Philippians 2:1-11*). If God had intended for us to all be the same or even to be the same as just one other, then He would have created us in that fashion. We, as individuals, do not come to this life from some “cookie cutter” assembly line. While we may all be cookies *of sorts*, we are different flavors made from similar, yet different ingredients. While one flavor will not appeal to everyone, it will always appeal to someone.

There is no “perfect plan” or Magic formula” for ministry anymore than there is one in life. The attitude, style, methods, or appearance that works for one individual or group will not work for all. It may only work for that original person. In fact, even when something is seemingly considered universally to be a good thing, too much of that one good thing can be too much!

Imagine if every network only produced the same T.V. show, just with different, yet similarly looking and acting stars. There was nothing else but that one show, 24/7. No new scripts, no new characters, no new sets, just the same thing over and over again. It worked for one. It will work for all! Right? How boring and annoying would that be? How long do you think it would take you to decide to quit watching T.V. altogether? What if you simply could not stand that show in the first place? Wouldn't you want someone to create something with you in mind, something that met your needs or desires? **By carbon copying other ministries, we are not only alienating entire groups of people that we already have, but are ensuring that we will never reach other groups, who we don't have, before they ever find us.**

Now, I am in no way advocating that you or I should cut ourselves off from other ministries and groups (*Hebrews 10:24-25*). I'm not even advocating that we quit buying books, tapes, videos, and etc. from other ministers or ministries.

What I am calling for is that we exercise wisdom and discernment and take all things to the Father in prayer and supplication (or petitioning)

before applying them to our own lives and ministries (*Ephesians 6:18, Philippians 4:6*).

Just because it worked for one, doesn't mean it is even supposed to work for anyone else. **There may be bits and pieces or even entire sections from these works that we can use in building our lives and ministries, but we must build our own to completion** (*2 Timothy 4:5*). We must consult the master architect of our lives for His perfect blueprint to work from. We must gather our own equipment and materials from the specific list He provides us. If applicable, we must choose the specific crew to help us that He has chosen. If we do things His way, He will even provide the finances and power (anointing) needed to complete the project and even to keep it running after construction is complete! (*Philippians 4:19*)

Yes, it will be more labor intensive and take more time to build your own "dream house", but when it is done, everything you, and those you invite to share it, will need and truly desire will be there. Most importantly, God and His anointing will be there because it will be the house He chose, from before time began to share and dwell in with you.

If you have any questions or comments about this month's teaching, you may feel free to contact me via email (shanerowe@freshrainonline.com), by phone at (317) 462-3634, or by postal mail: Rev. Shane Rowe, 1555 E. Main Street, Greenfield, IN, 46140.

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7/17/2004 6:31 PM

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