

HEART OF THE ARTIST

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Worship in Community

By Third Day's Mark Lee

My wife and I were driving through downtown Atlanta the other night. Now, any time we suburbanites venture "inside the perimeter" is a bit of an adventure, but this time we were struck by something odd. An SUV to our right swerved from side to side, then started venturing into our lane. I honked my horn, and as we pulled up beside the car, I prepared myself for a confrontation. What I saw caught me off guard.

The stunned young man behind the steering wheel was wearing earbuds. Apparently, he was so engrossed in whatever he was listening to that he forgot about that crucial little detail called driving until my honking startled him back to reality.

In many ways, I am like that guy. Listening to the music, he got caught up in his own world and forgot about the driving part. I do the same thing when I only read the Bible by myself. I sometimes focus so much on what God might be saying to me that I forget to look for what He's saying to us.

THIRD DAY has just entered a new touring season around a worship album. Every night before we take the stage, we read a Psalm and pray together. Reading the Psalms in a cramped dressing room with my bandmates has helped me see these writings through the lens of community. For the first time, I think I'm seeing them the way they were meant to be seen.

Normally, we read the Psalms as poetry, but that's only part of the picture. It would probably be more accurate to compare them to reading the lyrics in a hymnal, or even the liner notes of a worship album with all of the "selahs" and the little notes "to the director of music" reminding him to sing to a particular tune or point out something important.

The Psalms are songs to be sung together.

I often get asked about the difference between one of our worship albums and a regular THIRD DAY album. There's something special about a worship album. We approach the whole thing differently. We're thinking about the keys to the songs, the melodies, all while constantly asking ourselves, "Can a group of people sing this together?" To that end, we brought in some friends to sing on the album. This element gives the album an

extra sense of community. We've even brought out a choir director on tour, and we invite local singers in each city to act as our choir for each concert.

The Psalms were written many centuries ago, but their original intention echoes out when believers get together to sing. Hopefully, a little bit of this happens at a THIRD DAY concert. We're singing onstage like usual, but it's more than that—a local choir is helping us lead those who have gathered. We're all singing together. Maybe the lines between performer and audience are blurred a bit, and we simply become a chorus of believers singing praise to God.

That's why music was created, so we can worship the Creator. Music wasn't meant to only be performed, it was meant to be shared, together.

There is a place for studying the Psalms by yourself, but they are better when we read them aloud together. There is a place for listening to worship music by yourself, but it is so much better when we sing songs of praise, together.

Headphones are cool too. Just take them off when you drive!