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an interview with

Zoro is a truly unique person and musician. I had the honor of writing a quote for his new book "The Big Gig" and as I read through it I realized he had a lot of good things to say to Christian musicians in general and me (and possibly you) in particular...

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Zoro the Drummer What Matters Most?

by Bruce Adolph

Christian Musician Magazine: So Zoro, my friend, you are a professional musician and you play on all of these great stages around the world. Music is what you do. . . . so why have you now written a book?

Zoro: The book is just another aspect of who I am. As I consider what my gifts are, God has given me the gift of communication. And under that larger umbrella of communication are all the other forms of communication. For example, drumming is a form of communication, as is writing, and speaking. And those are the three mediums in which God has pre-wired my DNA to flow in those areas.

So writing has always been a part of me, and a part of my heart. The book has been a thirteen-year long vision process to bring it to publication. I literally wrote the book because, as a young musician myself, I was always going into bookstores and looking for a book that could teach me how to succeed as a musician in all of the areas of life, professionally and personally. So really, I am writing the book that I had longed to find myself when I was starting out. Writing is just another expression that comes from me, and it's not a foreign or strange form of communication to me at all.

CM: I remember when we worked together before at Stick It magazine where you were the editor and I helped out with ad sales. You taught me something that I've always kept in my mind, and that is that drummers are much more aware of, and willing to help out other drummers than other musicians seem to be, maybe more so than guitarists, for instance, who tend to hide their tone and their secrets. I've found drummers to be a very open community of people.

Zoro: Yeah, it's true. There is a brotherhood among drummers that I think is very reflective of what the Kingdom of God must be like. Because, really, what is God's whole thing, except for brothers to dwell together in unity? That's God's whole desire for mankind, is that

brothers would dwell together in unity like the early Christians did. And the drumming community, as far as all the communities in the music industry, they really have that picture better than any other community that I've seen. They are a very loving brotherhood that is into sharing and building one another up. People come from all backgrounds and all colors and looks and demographics. And yet, when you see a bunch of drummers together at a drum festival and sharing with one another, I think it's like a sneak peek at what it must be like in heaven, only heaven won't have the sin! It's just brothers and sisters loving one another. And in heaven, no one is trying to one-up the other person; they are just lifting each other up. And when you can do that in the drum community, it's pretty cool and it just makes me think that this is a little taste of what heaven will be like. . . . times a bazillion! (laughter)

CM: In the book you talk about the gift of music, and you include a very interesting quote from Johann Sebastian Bach. Do you have that memorized?

Zoro: Sure! This is one of my all-time favorite quotes because it really tells you why many of the classical composers created the music that they did. The quote says, "The aim and final end of all music should be none other than the glory of God, and the refreshment of the soul."

So the whole purpose of music is that it glorifies God. Music is not our idea; it's God's idea. He owns all the notes. He owns all the grooves. He owns all the patterns. And it's really about the motive of one's heart; because there is no such thing as Christian notes or Christian beats vs. non-Christian notes or beats . . . They're all His notes! Every note and groove and beat is His. What does exist is the motive of someone's heart. Are you worshiping yourself, as most of the world does apart from Christ? Or are you using the music to glorify God, and is the motive of your heart right? Because all of the music

in the end is His music, and He's not into one style more than the other, just like He's not into one type of plant or tree or animal more than the other: They're all His!

So to me, it's like the whole point for musicians is to acknowledge that the gift of music that they have is a supernatural, divine gift that they did not give to themselves. That's why it's called a "gift"! They were given this gift. Now it's up to them whether they acknowledge God as the giver of the gift, and if they do then they can serve God with the gift. But ultimately, none of us who have a musical talent gave it to ourselves. So our job is simply to say, "Thank You for this free gift which I did nothing to earn!" And then we do our part to develop that gift and turn it into something extraordinary. He gives us an ordinary seed, and we can make it extraordinary by how we partner with Him in developing the talent. But in the end, it should be as J.S. Bach said, it should be to glorify God, because anything else is just futile.

CM: I see that in the book you utilize quite a few quotes. Can you tell us why?

Zoro: It's because words, to me, are power released. Words can change someone's destiny. The words that people spoke over me when I was young carried such an impact in my life, both positive and negative. Negative words are destructive and they can ruin someone's future or destiny based on the bad word that someone speaks over you. And vice versa, people lifting you up with words of affirmation and confidence can change your destiny. So as a young boy, I clung to positive, affirming words because I didn't hear enough of them from people, other than from my own mother. There weren't a lot of people in my life who spoke great words to me. So I clung onto anything that sounded positive that I could recite to myself and speak to myself.

The Bible talks about the power of the tongue, and I show my belief in that by having over 400 motivational quotes in the book. I



three things together in a pyramid, they are never going to be fulfilled. The first thing is that you need to know God. That's your first success. Your Spiritual success is found in knowing Him. Knowing that He has a purpose for your life, and that the purpose of your gifting is to serve Him and to serve other people. But Hollywood is a world of 'self', and so if you only serve 'self' then you end up self-destructing like every other rock-star and famous musician who serve self. But if you serve God, you'll find life and a deeper meaning.

When you look out and you watch the news and the media and you see all of the famous people,

took my time finding just the right quote to say just the right thing for the book over a period of many years, because it would support the point I was trying to make. We become whatever we watch, listen to, and read. Those things shape us the most in our lives. So there is power in the words that we read, and obviously the most powerful ones come from the Bible. But there are also many great quotes that God has given to men of notable achievements and fame, and those words have power. I think that if people would just read words like that and recite them to themselves, it would change their destiny. So that's why there are so many quotes in the book, because I know of nothing more powerful than words.

CM: You also talk about the three essential components of true success being Spiritual, Personal, and Vocational. Would you comment on those for a minute for us?

Zoro: There are so many different viewpoints about what success is. And many people think that to be a successful musician means to be famous, and to be a rock-star, and to make a lot of money. And that is *one* aspect of what we would call "worldly success". But that's not the *only* gauge of success. I wanted to communicate in the book right away what God gave me as the definition of success, because it's a different definition from what most of the world thinks of as success.

The subtitle of the book is "Big Picture

Thinking for Success". And that's because you're not really successful in God's eyes unless your success includes the big picture. To be just an incredible musician, but to be an arrogant person, or to never uplift other people, or to be a terrible wife or husband, or to have terrible relationships, or to never have a relationship with God . . . well that's not success by God's standards . . . that's man's success. And man's success always leaves you wanting!

So I've done a lot of analyzing over the years of being in the business and hanging out with millionaires and billionaires and famous actors and super-models and business CEO's. I've seen so many people who were unhappy, despite having all the success that the world chases after. It makes you wonder, "Why aren't they happy?" And I've realized that it's because they're only successful vocationally, and God wires all of us to have personal relationships with people. If we're not flourishing in those personal relationships, then we'll be dissatisfied and unhappy. And then, if we're not flourishing spiritually, then we will be disconnected from our purpose in life. And if we're disconnected from our purpose, then it's like, "yeah, I made a million dollars doing this, but I'm still not satisfied." Why? It's because you've never connected to the purpose of your gift. The purpose of your gift is to serve God with that unique gifting in a way that only you can do.

If people don't understand how to put those

like the Bernie Madoff's, and the Michael Jackson's of the world, you see that there is such unhappiness in these people who have empires, but are missing the personal and spiritual success.

I'm not interested in building any kind of success that doesn't honor God, because at the end of my life, what's it going to matter? God's going to care more about how we did in our personal life than in our professional. And in our artistic world and artistic business there are a lot of egos and self-driven people. Families are thrown under the bus, and God is nowhere in the mix anymore, and people become miserable because you have to flourish in all three areas.

That's why I set up the book by saying, "Success means a lot of different things to different people, but *this* is the kind of success that I'm talking about."

CM: You also talk about, from the musicianship side of things, the "art of interpretation". Tell us a little about what that is.

Zoro: "The Art of Interpretation" is a chapter that is subtitled "Mastering the Language of Music". It's one of the longest chapters of the book. The whole premise is to teach people that music is a language that is spoken all over the world. English, for example, is spoken all over the world, but it is spoken differently everywhere you go. There are different



accents in the mountains of Scotland than there are in Wales, or England, or Australia, or New Zealand, or America, or Canada. And yet, it's the same basic language. And I look at music in that same way. Music is one vast language, but there are many different dialects in that language, and many different accents. So in order to be a skilled musician, one has to learn the dialect of the musical language that you are speaking.

I give an analogy in the book where I compare being a great musician to being a great actor. When you're playing for people, you should always be asking yourself, "What role am I playing today?" In other words, I know I'm

a drummer . . . but who are they looking for? Are they looking for a totally skilled jazz guy who's been playing for 50 years? Or are they looking for a dude who doesn't have a lot of technique, but is just pure heart and can just slam the drums like some of these new rock-styled bands.

It means to study enough different music to understand that there are subtle and vast differences in all of these languages of music. To be a great player, and to be authentic, you have to know that and play to the style that the song and the situation requires. Just like a great actor might be playing a character from New York . . . but what part of New York?

There's a different accent in the Bronx than there is in Brooklyn, or Jersey, or Manhattan. And if you want to sound like a character that is from that part of New York, you have to speak exactly like them. Otherwise, everyone from that area will know that you're not from there.

It's the same way as a musician. And the only way that you can do that is to study vast amounts of different styles of music, and emulate songs, and learn them note for note, so that you know what the difference is between applying a hip-hop shuffle from the 90's, and a blues shuffle from the 50's. Because yes, they are all triplet related, but they are completely different in the way you approach them because certain fills didn't exist in certain eras.

So to be an authentic musician, one has to really look at himself or herself like a great actor. I've met people like Denzel Washington. And you hear about other great character actors like Robert De Niro and Anthony Hopkins. They *become* the characters that they play! They go to every extreme to try and transform themselves into the people that they are playing. And I feel that that's what musicians don't do enough of. They just think that their one sound fits every situation. But that's not how you become a great, skilled artist. You become a great, skilled artist by really studying songs and having a song repertoire in every genre and era of music. Technically speaking, there is what I call "The 4 T's":

Time, Technique, Touch, and Taste.

Those are parts of the elements of expressing yourself that every musician needs to have.

CM: Thanks for taking the time to talk with us today. What would be a few final things that you would want us to know and remember from the book?

Zoro: I would say that one of the most important things for a musician to learn is the idea of servanthood in relationships. We need to ask ourselves, in all areas of life, "How best can I serve my friends? How best can I serve my significant other? How best can I serve my children?"

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One of the things I describe in the book is those times when people ask me about the best gig I've ever done, or the most fun I've ever had on a gig. And I always tell them that the best gig, to me, is being a father. That's the absolute best gig I've ever done, and my most rewarding, and most fulfilling. . . as well as the most challenging! But I love being a father above all things... of course it really helps to have a beloved wife who is a great mother. And you will not get to be a good father or mother in this business without some serious effort. It has to be something that is on the front burner of your life, not the back burner. I've made many changes in my career and shifts in my life in order to make being a father more important than my personal gain or my career. But I've never regretted it for a second, and God has taken care of me through all of it and prospered me in new areas as I've made those decisions to be a great dad. For instance, when I travel all around the country and do "one-offs", I'm usually on the absolute earliest flight leaving, and I'll get there on the latest possible flight when I arrive. I'll take a red-eye on a Friday night to get there, and I'll come back as early as possible on a Sunday, so that my kids are really only missing me for one day, Saturday, instead of me being gone for 3 days: Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

And it's true that doing that is physically harder on me than other schedules I could keep. I've had a lot of colleagues over the years who have done it the other way, and left early on a Friday and come back late on Sunday. But for me, I knew that I was never going to get those hours back with my children, so I was willing to bite the bullet and sleep as little as possible, knowing that my kids will only be young once.

To really prioritize personal relationships takes a personal sacrifice. That's what Christ was all about: showing us that true love is sacrificial. In today's world, as you look at Hollywood and the musician community, the minute something isn't working out . . . people bail and fly the coop. There are so many dead-beat dads out there today, and many musicians that are dead-beat dads. And I feel like, at the end of my life, God isn't going to give me a reward because I was a good drummer. He's going to say, "Guess what Z? I know you were a good drummer. I gave you that gift! It was free! What did you do with your *life*?" In other words, I don't think we're going to get some kind of a reward because we were great at something, because He's gifted us all to be great at something. The reward we get will be based upon how we

stewarded the gift, and how we stewarded our influence. How did you use the platform that God gave you? How did you treat your husband or your wife? How did you treat your children? Or was your whole life all about you?

So really in a nutshell, the big idea is to inspire people to give their whole life to everything they do, and to leave nothing on the table. I want to cause them to ask every day, "Am I doing my best?" At the end of the day, can you say that you've given your practice time your best? Have you given your spouse your best? Have you given your children your best? Have you given your fellow man your best? Have you given God your best? If we can't say that every night, then we are not living to the fullness of what God has made us capable of. He's given us the capability to give our best, but it's our choice as to whether we want to do it or not. I'm just one of these guys that wants to end his life, regret-free, knowing that yeah, I've made mistakes and I've done things wrong like everybody else; but every time God corrected me, I was willing to be corrected so that I could become a new and improved version of who He created me to be. He's created everybody with limitless potential, and I think we take that for granted in so many areas, like in our vocational life and our spiritual life.

My goal is to raise up modern day Daniels, Josephs, and Esthers . . . people of excellence, who will approach life with a spirit of excellence in all that they do. I want to lead by example and show them the way. I know that when all is said and done, what matters the most is: How many people did I help and impact with my gifts?

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