

# Music, Vocation, and Discipleship

*Ministering effectively to musicians*

David Fuentes  
Calvin College

Calvin Institute for Christian Worship  
Annual Symposium  
January 2007

preliminary note: This session presents a summary of how full-time musicians tried to live out their faith as they engaged in music making. The attendees at the lecture were mostly pastors, church musicians, and Christian counselors. The presentation you see below took 30 minutes (filled in with plenty of case studies). 20 minutes were reserved for discussion.

# Introduction:

a comparison with a sister project:

ministry to athletes

- ministry *to* athletes vs. ministry *through* athletes
- ministry to athletes vs. general Bible study with other athletes
- Ministry to athletes vs. using verses and metaphors that deal with athletics

St. Paul

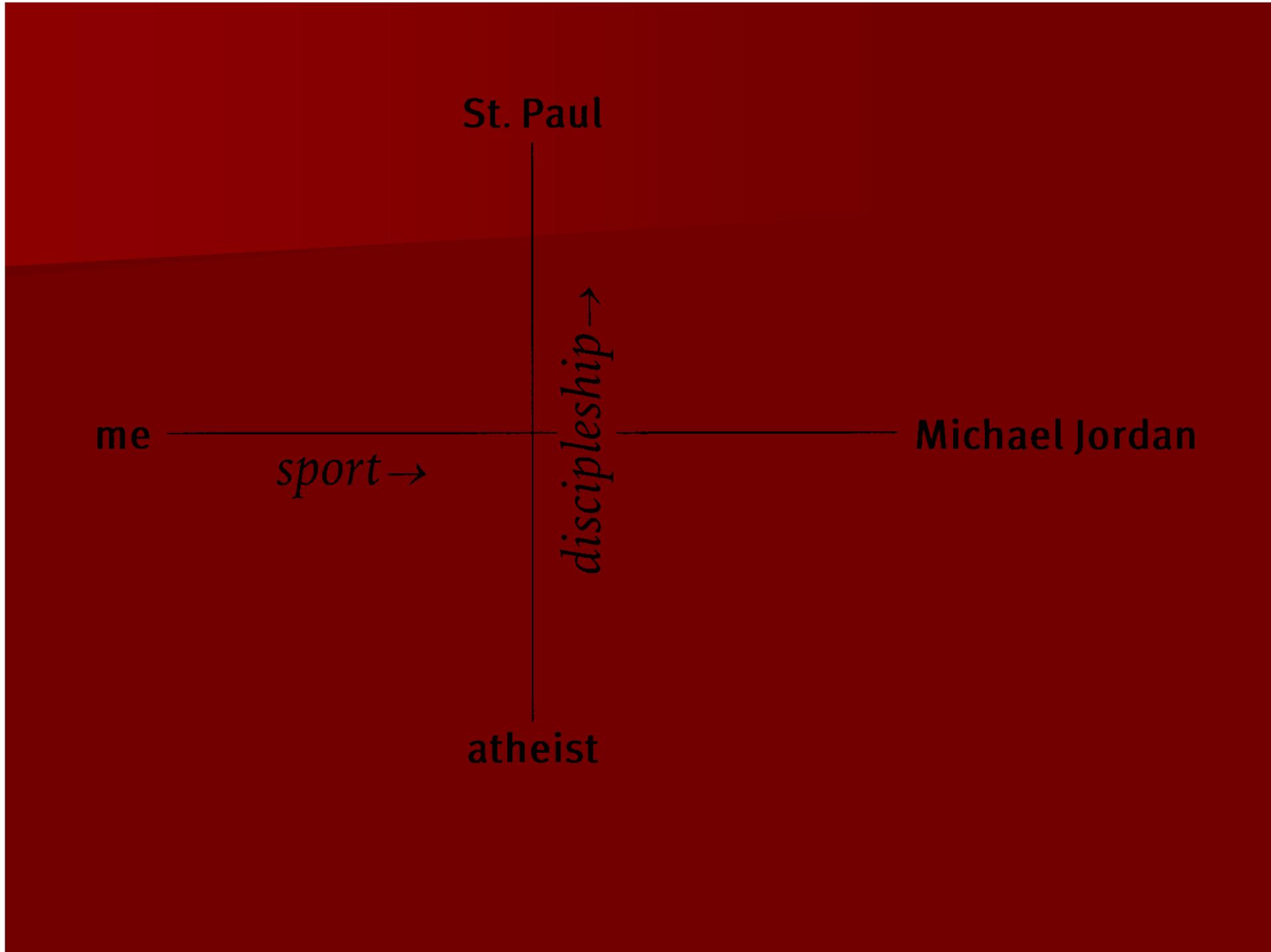
me

*sport* →

*discipleship* →

Michael Jordan

atheist



- Certain challenges and opportunities are unique to athletes.
- Can we bring the truth of the Gospel to bear on some of them?
- The gospel not only makes demands, it offers freedom.

This freedom is modeled for us  
in the person of Jesus Christ,  
who demonstrates new ways to  
approach life situations.

The notion of modeling is quite powerful.

- Jesus didn't write a book,
- He didn't launch a website,
- He sent disciples.

Following Jesus' lead,  
the disciples wrestled with the  
issues of their culture and applied  
the teachings of Jesus  
in a way that made sense  
to the people they ministered to.

- The Epistles addressed *specific* concerns.
- They offered new practices and new ways of thinking, not quick solutions.
- These were to be integrated into one's life in the context of a community.

**Certain challenges  
and opportunities are unique to  
athletes.**

**Certain challenges and  
opportunities are unique to  
musicians.**

the plan of this project

**phase one: gather data.**

interview musicians, hold focus groups

**phase two: assessment.**

identify key problem areas for musicians that might be addressed by the Gospel.

**phase three:**

**development.**

call together people to discuss key points identified in phase two; gather experience and wisdom; referring to the Gospel, find new practices and new ways of thinking.

**phase four:**

**implementation.**

articles? books? train music mentors? build communities of musicians? offer seminars? training camps?

# Calvin College and Christian vocation

Rather than separate from the world,  
we believe that each Christian is  
called to engage with culture—  
using his or her faith and gifts  
to influence a particular field  
to become more like what God intends.

- “Every square inch belongs to Christ”  
(Abraham Kuyper)
- Faculty members are challenged to  
“integrate faith and learning.”

Calvin is one among several colleges & universities receiving support from the Lilly Endowment to strengthen the concept of vocation within higher education.

At Calvin, every subject is studied in light of relevant theological implications, primarily those derived from the doctrine of the creation, the catastrophic fall into sin, the offer of redemption, and the promise of consummation.

It is possible to think very deeply about theology and music, but still not engage some basic issues of discipleship, such as:

- love of neighbor
- adoption
- weakness
- fear and anxiety
- pride
- sharing one's faith
- forgiveness
- thankfulness

... at least not while one is making music

The issue is not, “How can I ‘fit my faith’ into my career of being a musician?”

The primary issue is, “I am first and foremost a follower of Christ; how am I going to do that as a musician?”

*vocation* →  
(making music)

*discipleship* →  
(following Christ)

*vocapleship* →

# Unique Challenges for Christian Musicians

some key areas identified by my study

## three questions to consider for each issue

- What do you see as musicians' concerns regarding this issue?
- How might others minister to those concerns?
- Which challenges and promises of the Gospel provide starting points toward that end?

# Isolation

Professional musicians often report feeling isolated from others.

- What, exactly, isolates musicians from other people?
- How does this affect families, friends, and churches?

*“Some days, I compare being stuck in a practice room to Jonah being stuck in the belly of the whale.”*

# Identity

- Many musicians define themselves by their talent. (e.g., “I am a singer.”)
- This is reinforced by those at the church. Musicians are rarely asked to serve as deacons, elders, etc.
- When a talent defines us, the costs are high: a bad performance means that we fail as a person.

*“I wish I had heard at an early age that my identity is not dependent on being a musician but on being a child of God.”*

# Execution

- Most musicians are unclear about what it means to be a “great” musician?
- So are audiences.
- What is the difference between “excellence” and “faithfulness?”

*“That I would render an accurate portrayal of the composer’s intentions—good or bad”*

# Communication

- Music is often cited as a powerful means of communication, yet musicians are frequently frustrated when audiences don't "get" their music. (Many complain that audiences crave an emotional rush.)
- Unless there are words, music can't convey anything specific, which can either be a bonus or a bust.

*"That listeners would have an intense spiritual, emotional and physical experience that points them to God."*

# Service

- Who do musicians serve? How?
- How do we measure effectiveness?
- Where do things like ministry to “the least of these” fit in?
- Musicians are frequently asked to play for free.

*“That listeners would get a glimpse of the scope of God’s love, peace, power, beauty, and hope”*

# Integrity

- Many areas within the music business require a compromise of one's Christian convictions.

*“The music establishment values things that are antithetical to the call of Christ.”*

# Purpose

- What differentiates a Christian musician from a non-Christian musician?
- Why does music matter so much to people?