

Is it time for the Church to reevaluate Lecrae?

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Addison



If Lecrae were looking at himself objectively, even *he* would caution church leaders considering "bringing him in." In his attempt to reach and engage today's hip hop culture, the popular rapper has made some decisions that are destructive to the souls of men. Lecrae may be able to work with secular artists and not be influenced by their music content – but our youth are not.

It was January 2005 at an extended family lunch in the Dallas area. My husband and I were passionately sharing with a cousin our mission to reach university students, when she leaned in and asked, "Have y'all heard of Lecrae?" We replied, "No" and asked her to tell us about him.

"He's an awesome rapper, with a passion for the lost — kinda like y'all, but he's a hip hop missionary," she explained. "I was a part of Plumblin' with him. Y'all should check him out."

In a matter of months we were in contact with Lecrae Moore to bring him to the University of Louisiana. I remember standing on a back wall with a humble Mrs. Moore. We talked the entire concert. I didn't know the couple, but they already had my respect and admiration. About a year later Lecrae would be on his way back to Louisiana for an outdoor concert I was helping to emcee. By this time there wasn't a church venue NOT seeking to bring him to their youth group. I can't tell you how many missions videos I've watched featuring "Send Me" as the background track.

The point is: the Church embraced Lecrae.

Lecrae became a safe mouthpiece for the hip hop culture, and he was an effective liaison between young churchgoers and their out-of-touch parents. Lecrae was penning the songs that helped define a generation. He wasn't just telling his story; he was telling *the* true inner-city conversion story. Lecrae had crossed over, though not in the way the world would describe. His accounts were raw and unapologetic. And though he often stood before a sea of white faces, he was who he was. His story was his story, and he never diluted it.

Ironically, Lecrae made it cool to be unashamed ... UNashamed. He made it cool to let people know you were listening to "Jesus Muzik." Lecrae ushered people to the cross when they heard their own struggles in "Prayin for You." Yes, Lecrae was respected without reservation by the Church, and his ministry opportunities were without limits. Ministry, after all, was his aim.

"After the show, after the set, after the music stops what's next?

Will there be fellowship, prayer, disciples?

Will you open your Bibles after the music stops?"

- Lecrae (After the Music Stops)

So what's happening today? Why are some churchy people giving Lecrae a hard time? Why are we questioning his judgment and cautious of his influence? The answer is simple: We just can't get with his raw beats. No, that's not true; we were drawn to his rawness. Maybe it's all the tattoos he's been sporting lately. Of course not! Even pastors are sporting tats in their

desire to be "relevant." Well, maybe we're all secretly jealous of his success. Yes, that's it. The Church has a way of wanting to keep its most talented locked away in the choir robe closet.

All exaggeration aside, the truth of the matter is this: If Lecrae were looking at himself objectively, *he* would caution church leaders considering "bringing him in." In his attempt to reach and engage today's hip hop culture, Lecrae has made some decisions that are destructive to the souls of men.

When Lecrae said he was a rapper who happened to be a Christian, I was fine with that. When he said he was about to stretch some people, I was fine with that. However, his constant and unapologetic exposure of the most impressionable among us to wickedness has me not only concerned, but disappointed.

Lecrae may be well able to work with secular artists and not be influenced by their music content. However, our youth are not there. They are looking to a person we trust to tell them, even point them to good music. With Lecrae's recent moves he's telling our youth Kendrick Lamar is good for their soul. He is introducing them to the likes of Pete Rock, Rapsody, David Banner, B.o.B, Paul Wall, and producer Boi-1da. If you happen to be unfamiliar with these artists, use your favorite search engine and school yourself.

Sometimes when the world starts to love you and recognize you, that feels better — more successful than "center stage" at the biggest church. And for some reason, members of the Body of Christ are constantly seeking validation from the world. We think somehow God's fruitfulness is dependent on our celebrity.

I had such high hopes for Lecrae and his ministry. But my hopes have very nearly been dashed. The closer I look at Lecrae, the more disappointed I am. He had an opportunity to show the world what unapologetic Christianity is. **Instead he has sought to mask his faith in exchange for a position / a mark on the world stage. When will we see the Christian who all of the sudden gets recognized by the world but remains Christian? There was nothing wack or self-righteous as far as I could hear in Lecrae's lyrics. Why does he suddenly need to introduce and endorse people who wage war against the God of the Bible?**

In some ways it would appear Lecrae has outgrown the Church ... or has he? Lecrae is doing something very interesting and financially smart. He is making his way up the ranks in the world's system while maintaining a *working* relationship with the Church. While he's not a Christian rapper — a title far too limiting — he's also not a secular rapper.

Hmmm. In effect, Lecrae engages in public quality control of the very audience that helped him launch his career, build his label, and market his name. He does this by maintaining *his* position of individuality, constantly touting the fact that he will not be defined by his music. **Essentially he's telling the church that his music isn't necessarily for you, but you're free to listen. He wants to hold onto the Church while strategically not allowing the Church to hold onto him.**

What am I saying? Ever the shrewd businessman, Lecrae knows that he must maintain a working relationship with the Church. After all, Kendrick Lamar isn't signing him up to do 40-plus city tours. No, that would be New Song. And it's not MTV sending him to host relief concerts which promote the Gospel. No, but you will find Franklin and Billy Graham adding his name to their events based on the trust and reputation he so wonderfully built years ago. So what does all of this mean? It means that Lecrae has bankrolled his lifestyle off the Church — the same Church he now distances himself from when on the world's stage.

I don't know many pastors who are looking to bring in neutral artists for their church outreach. And I certainly can't think of any pastor who would be willing to allow his youth to be exposed to music laced with vulgarities simply because they can catch a positive artist in the second verse. It's simply ludicrous.

With his recent actions, Lecrae is making several scary statements to our youth and the Church:

1. Success can only come when the world loves you (something Jesus cautioned).
2. Being a Christian is unfruitful when attempting to reach the lost; you'll be far more effective as a positive person.
3. The music we (Christians) make is mediocre, and if one is to be taken seriously as a musician, then one must necessarily reject the Gospel/Christian category.

4. Church affiliation is a drag and street cred reducer. The Church is best relegated to the position of purse and place of *private* worship.

I don't really care that Lecrae wants to be known as a rapper who happens to be a Christian vs. a "Christian rapper." But I do care about how that new assertion has been played out. It's quite selfish to enjoy the euphoric joy — that is secular artists willing to shout you out or lay words over your tracks while impressionable people look on and are introduced to a sinful worldview. **Lecrae is single-handedly reversing his more than ten years of hard work. Again, this is by far more eternally destructive than his assertion that he is no longer a Christian rapper.**

Maybe I go too far with my observations of Lecrae's influence. Maybe I'm too dramatic; maybe not. One of his closest disciples, Andy Mineo, recently implied that Christian rap was lame and somehow subpar until he entered the scene. What a slap in the face to The Cross Movement, who were, by the way, instrumental in Lecrae's move towards God. What about Da Truth or Flame? Have they been missing the mark simply because MTV or BET isn't calling? Maybe once they win a Grammy, God will approve of their mission and smile on them with props from Sway and Kendrick Lamar. Maybe they'll have the wonderful fortune of sandwiching hope between fresh-baked trash.

Forgive me if I sound a little zesty in my observations, but I'm completely disappointed. Lecrae will scarcely allow anyone to have a serious interview with him regarding his new positions. In fact, he has pretty much only allowed himself to be in venues where he can be adored, where questions come at him "soft pitch." And if you challenge him or question him, it's all over. Lecrae, having realized the weight of his name, will unapologetically blacklist you. How's that for real talk?

The thing that saddens me most is that Lecrae had or has an opportunity to 100 percent utilize his gift for God without falling into the tired category of "crossover artist." Imagine the glory it brings to God for him to be as great as he is (and he is great) and still be a F-A-N-A-T-I-C. Can God do great things? Can the Church quit simply be the launching pad for talented people? I mean, is Lecrae really asking us to see him as many secular artists see themselves? They have a relationship with God; they mention Him during acceptance speeches ... then keep it moving; nothing more to see. What a sad commentary.

I hope that people around Lecrae will ask him tough questions. I hope that as he continues to pray about his new direction, he sees the faces of the hundreds of thousands of disciples following his lead from a distance. The truth of the matter is this: Lecrae may be versed enough in church culture to know how to appease us — I'll give him that. His answers to criticisms are almost convincing; they hold up to the scrutiny of the young and culturally unaware. However, some within his camp are not as savvy. So if you want to know how Lecrae really feels about the Church and Christian hip hop, listen when his disciples speak.

"A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher." - Jesus (Luke 6:40)

I'm not ready to give up on Lecrae. Personally I feel he, as a brother, deserves the opportunity to explore areas of weakness and make adjustments. But on the flip side, I'm not willing to give up on the Word of God and His righteous standards. I'm also unwilling to sit quietly by as Lecrae drops poison into the drinking water of the very people we've trusted him to lead.

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