

Rev. Dr. Michael W. Waters

Workshop: “All I Need is One Mic”: Freestyle Faith for a Fearless Generation

September 2, 2016

21<sup>st</sup> World Methodist Conference - Houston, Texas

### **Workshop Description:**

From modern day slavery and sex trafficking to poverty and urban terrorism, our global society faces unprecedented challenges which threaten to fracture local communities and families. Our world desperately needs a new generation of fearless hope-bearers committed to countering these negative realities with Christian faith in praxis. In this interactive workshop, the Rev. Dr. Michael W. Waters, award-winning author of *Freestyle: Reflections on Faith, Family, Justice, and Pop Culture*, will reveal how the body of Christ purposed as God’s “one mic” can “inspire and...manifest hope each day: hope in a newer and brighter day in the face of darkness, hope in the ultimate victory of good over evil, and hope in the fulfillment of each one of God’s promises toward us” (*Freestyle*, p. 14). This workshop will also include musical performances from special guests.

- I. Greetings and Introductions
- II. Opening Performance: Big TAT the Ambassador for Christ; DJ Suave Burgandy; Joy Tabernacle A.M.E. Church Praise Team
- III. Workshop Begins: The Importance of the Microphone in Hip Hop Culture
  1. One of the four pillars of hip hop culture is MCing.
    - a. The rapper, or MC, is the primary voice and storyteller in hip hop culture. Their lyrics have largely created the canon and classics of the culture. In the tradition of the Old Testament prophets, many rappers give vivid depictions of the struggles of daily life, particularly in the urban center.
  2. The microphone literally amplifies the voice of the MC by allowing their words to reach a larger audience.
  3. In my book *Freestyle*, the importance of the microphone to the culture is illuminated by my sections “Check One” and “Check Two”.
    - a. “In the world of hip-hop, many freestyle artists have been known to speak, “Check one, check two!” into the microphone. The phrasing serves two purposes: 1) to put the freestyle artist on rhythm with the beat and 2) to encourage his or her audience to give undivided attention as the freestyle artist begins to flow or rap...” (*Freestyle*, 16).
- IV. The Rapper Nas
  1. Nas is considered by many to be one of the greatest rappers/MC’s to ever live.
  2. His 1994 debut album *Illmatic* is considered by many to be the greatest hip hop album ever recorded.
  3. In 2013, the Hiphop Archive & Research Institute and the W. E. B. Du Bois Research Institute at Harvard University established the Nasir Jones Hiphop Fellowship. The Fellowship was created to provide selected scholars and artists “an opportunity to show that ‘education is real power,’ as it builds upon the achievements of those who demonstrate exceptional capacity for productive

scholarship and exceptional creative ability in the arts, in connection with Hiphop.”

4. On April 16, 2002, Nas released the song “One Mic”.
  - a. In this song, Nas expresses several concerns for his community, and thus, the future of the world with vivid imagery. Nas raps:
    1. “Mad violence, who I’m gon body? This hood politics, acknowledge it. Leave bodies chopped up in garbages. Seeds watch us, grow up, and try to follow us. Police watch us, roll up and try knockin’ us.”
      - a. Here, Nas speaks about the never-ending cycle of violence in his community.
    2. “Everybody gotta die sometime. Hope your funeral never gets shot up. Bullets tear through the innocent. Nothing is fair.”
      - b. Like the Old Testament prophets, here, Nas speaks about the suffering of the innocent.
  - b. Nas also offers glimpses into his personal theology and of the faith that guides him while facing the challenges of this world.
    1. “All I need is one mic, one beat, one stage...One God to show me how to do things his son did.”
      - a. Here, Nas express faith in God to guide and direct his path as God did Jesus Christ.
    2. “All I need is one life, one try, one breath, I’m one man. What I stand for speaks for itself.”
      - a. Here, Nas speaks with confidence of his power to change society.

## V. Our World Today

1. We are alive at a very important time for our rapidly changing world.
2. There is much pain and despair all across the world.
  - a. There is abject poverty across the world. According to the United Nations:
    1. 925 million people do not have enough to eat - more than the combined populations of USA, Canada and the European Union;
    2. Nearly half the world’s population, 2.8 billion people, survives on less than \$2 a day.
    3. About 20 percent of the world’s population, 1.2 billion people, live on less than \$1 a day.
    4. Nearly 1 billion people are illiterate and 1 billion do not have safe water.
    5. For every \$1 received in aid, developing countries spent \$13 on debt repayments.
  - b. There is great violence in the world.
    1. As of March 2016, 9 million Syrian refugees had been displaced because of armed conflict and terrorism.
    2. On average, 31 Americans are murdered with guns every day and 151 are treated for a gun assault in an emergency room.
    3. Drug-related violence and extortion is driving migration patterns in Mexico and countries in Central America.

4. The violence of the most violent terrorist group in the world, Boko Haram, has kept nearly 1 million children from being able to attend school across Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger as others have been violently attacked and kidnapped while at school.
- c. Sex-trafficking is a global phenomenon.
  1. According to the U.N., 20% of all trafficking victims globally are children.
  2. According to Equality Now:
    - a. Trafficking women and children for sexual exploitation is the fastest growing criminal enterprise in the world.
    - b. At least 20.9 million adults and children are bought and sold worldwide into commercial sexual servitude, forced labor and bonded labor.
    - c. Almost 6 in 10 identified trafficking survivors were trafficked for sexual exploitation.
    - d. Women and girls make up 98% of victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation.

## VI. The World Needs a Fearless Generation with a Freestyle Faith

- A. The church needs a new generation of leadership that will faithfully face the pain in our world and work to eradicate the causes of that pain every day.
  1. In my book *Freestyle*, I offer that “Hope tells us that the power of Jesus Christ, as manifested in and through our work, can transform all communities. Animated by the Holy Spirit, we must continue to engage the marginalized, the oppressed, the neglected communities, and the troubled culture. The freestyle hip-hop aesthetic plays a key role in hope’s enterprise. Freestyle flows from the heart. As it flows, it speaks in a firm and mighty voice. In the same way, we are called to let hope flow from our hearts. When we do, we speak life. Freestyle is most beautiful when we flow together” (*Freestyle*, 139).
  2. Consider the words of Paul found in Ephesians 4:4-6: “For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, in all, and living through all.”
    - a. Together, we can change the world with our freestyle faith! Together, as God’s “one mic”, amplifying the voice of the mission of God in and to the world, we can “inspire and...manifest hope each day: hope in a newer and brighter day in the face of darkness, hope in the ultimate victory of good over evil, and hope in the fulfillment of each one of God’s promises toward us” (*Freestyle*, p. 14).
  3. Jesus is our example for how we should “rock” the mic and transform the world, for Jesus served faithfully as God’s one mic:
    - a. “The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the LORD’s favor has come.” (Luke 4:18-19).

VII. Interactive Graffiti Worship

A. Graffiti is also considered one of the primary four pillars of hip hop.

1. First emerged in the early-1970's in the South Bronx borough of New York City. It was created by Black and Latino youth coming of age in a context of poverty, violence, and addiction, a context of great challenge.
2. These youth infused their communities with vivid colors and words of hope using walls and other surfaces as their "one mic" to speak life into their context.
3. Look at the walls around us. We have a blank canvas. Let us use it as our platform. Let us make it our "one mic" to express our hopes for the future of our world and our commitment to working every day towards the manifestation of the same.

VIII. Closing Prayer

A. Let us now offer prayers to address the concerns before us.

IX. Final Performance: Big TAT the Ambassador for Christ; DJ Suave Burgandy; Joy Tabernacle A.M.E. Church Praise Team

X. Dismissal and Book-signing