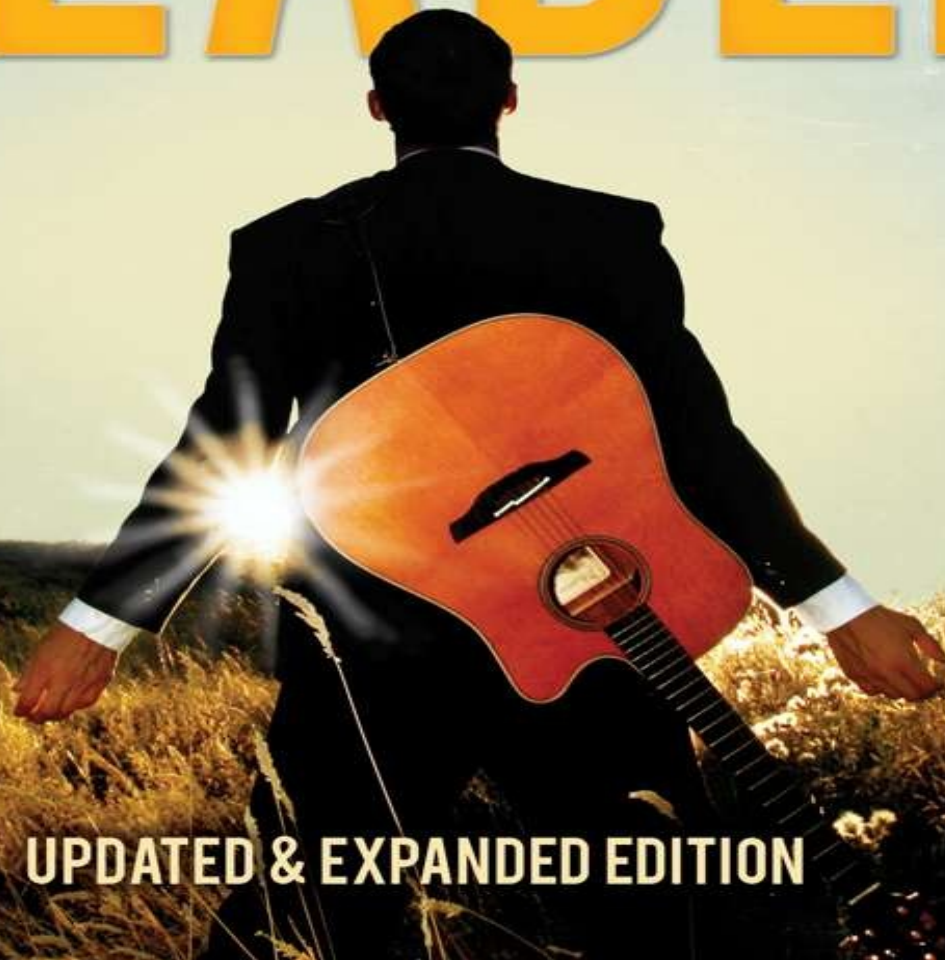


TOM KRAEUTER

KEYS TO BECOMING AN
EFFECTIVE
Worship
LEADER



UPDATED & EXPANDED EDITION

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I gratefully dedicate this book to Dave Lorenz, the man who disciplined me in worship leading and taught me much about simply being a worshiper of God. Thanks, Dave, for your sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, your amazing patience, and your unending dedication to the Lord. I learned more from you than you can imagine!

Thanks to:

The worship team of Christian Outreach Church in Hillsboro, Missouri, for being so patient with me while I've learned the lessons that I am sharing in this book.

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And special thanks to my wife, Barbara, who has been my constant encourager.

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Introduction

ef-’fect-ive *adj.* producing a definite or desired result, efficient

As a worship leader, I have a long-term goal: to consistently lead the people before God that they might know and worship Him. That is my “desired result.” I desire to do it as well and as efficiently as possible.

When I began leading worship, I was quite naive. I believed that if I simply worshiped, everyone would follow. Although there is a dimension of truth to this, I have found that there is more to it than this alone.

Some time ago someone asked me what it was that made me effective as a worship leader. I thought for a moment and then responded, “If you’ve got a couple hours, I could give you some of the basics.” That conversation was the beginning of this book. In over thirty years of leading worship, the Lord has allowed me to learn some powerful keys to being effective in leading His people in worship.

Please note that this book is not titled *How to Lead Worship*. In fact, I have included very few keys regarding the practice of actual leading. This is more a book on *being* a worship leader: the practical everydayness of the position itself.

This book is not meant to be all-inclusive. I do not consider myself an authority on the subject, though I have been privileged to learn some key principles as time has gone by. Because Scripture does not speak directly to most of the practical areas of being a worship leader, much of this book is based on experience using scriptural concepts as a foundation for worship leading. Some of the lessons in this book were learned through struggles, some by trial and error, and some I have picked up from others who have walked before me and alongside me in worship ministry. All, I believe, are valuable lessons that, if applied, can potentially save you much heartache, time, and energy.

If you are the main worship leader at a church, you will find this information geared to your situation and will hopefully find it to be invaluable. On the other hand, if you only occasionally lead worship for a home Bible study or another gathering, you can still benefit immensely from this material. You will just need to make application to your particular situation. For example, the chapter on “Caring for the Congregation” should be understood to mean whatever

“congregation” you are serving, whether it is ten people or ten thousand. Not every discussion in this book will apply to every situation; the information is meant to provide guidelines to becoming a more effective worship leader.

My recommendation for using this book is to read one chapter at a time. The chapters are purposely short to allow for quick reading. When you finish a chapter, prayerfully consider what the Lord would have you do with the information you just read. Then begin to implement the things you believe to be applicable to your situation.

My prayer for you is that the Lord would abundantly bless your work and ministry for His kingdom.

Chapter 1

Maintaining a Strong Relationship with the Lord

Many years ago I heard an elderly gentleman discussing how his priorities had changed over the years. As a youth he had been taught that certain things were important. Over time, however, he had abandoned many of those values and embraced new ideals. But as he grew in years and wisdom, he found himself doing another reversal. Those things that he had left behind were once again becoming top priorities. He realized that the standards he had learned as a youth really did contain lasting value.

I have gone through much the same process in my years of leading worship. I began leading worship mostly out of a deep, intense gratitude to the Lord. He had redeemed me! He had, as the psalmist said, “lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand” (Psalm 40:2). As a result, I wanted to verbalize my appreciation. Beyond saving me, God had become my friend and constant companion. To this day I still have trouble grasping that the almighty God of all creation would desire me. But I had accepted the truth of His Word, and my heart was filled with ongoing gratitude to God.

From the beginning of my walk with the Lord, it was obvious to me and others that He had called me to leadership. So it was only natural that my gratitude to God would spill over and that I would end up leading others into this same expression of appreciation, or worship. In the beginning I simply wanted to love and honor God. The expression itself was more important to me than leading others in it.

As time went on I was more in touch with the process of worship leading than I was with God. My musical abilities and understanding became increasingly important. I looked at the type and style of music being used and its effect on the service. I began to grasp how people’s relationships with one

another affect their worship. Even the other musicians and their abilities came to play a more important role in my understanding of how worship “works.” I began more and more to take my cues from people’s reactions to the worship than from the Lord. I almost completely abandoned the simple gratitude-based relationship I had had with God. Concepts effecting worship leading had become my focus more than the Lord Himself. I was not spending time developing my relationship with the Lord. In fact, the only real quality time I was spending with Him was while I was leading.

At first, at least partly because of the gifts that God had given me, I was able to fool most of the people while I went through the above scenario. No one knew that I was more conscious of the techniques than I was of the Lord. But as time went on, my drifting from God became more obvious to those around me.

Then I hit bottom. I was not leading from a heart full of worship; I was leading from techniques alone. The tools that God had provided to be effective in leading worship had become an end in themselves. The reactions of people had become more important to me than having a heart that desired to please God. In reality I was not leading worship; I was only toying with people’s emotions, including my own.

Fortunately, I once again experienced the rescuing, redeeming power of the Lord. His unending mercies touched me where I needed them most, and I saw the falsehood of what I was doing. By His grace I recognized that the path I was on was quite a distance from the one I should have been on. The Lord graciously brought me back into that simple, grateful relationship we had before. There were no lightning bolts from heaven or earth-shaking revelations, just a simple understanding of His new-every-morning mercies. I could once again lead worship out of a heart that radiated true worship.

In going through this process I discovered some lasting principles. The most obvious was this: the only way to be effective as a worship leader in the long term is to maintain a close relationship with the Lord. Let me explain.

When I was a teenager, I developed a fascination for oil lamps. I had several scattered throughout my bedroom. I quickly learned that if the level of oil in a lamp was too low to touch the wick, the lamp wouldn’t light. In order to light the lamp I would need to add more oil. Get the connection? If you are having trouble getting your lamp to light, perhaps you need more oil. “Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always” (Psalm 105:4).

We must not, however, seek the Lord because of what we can get out of the deal. Have you, as I have at times, sought Him so that you can become a better worship leader? We must seek Him because He is worth far more than anything else we could ever obtain.

Here's the bottom line: if I am not in constant pursuit of a close relationship with the Lord, if I am not allowing Him to fill this empty vessel, then I will have nothing to give. I may have some nifty tricks that will pull me through a few services, but beyond that I'm empty. I need to be daily renewed and refreshed by Jesus, the living water. If I forego this ongoing relationship with Him, I have missed the fullness of His calling on my life.

Anyone aspiring to be an effective worship leader must have as his main anchor point a relationship with the object of his worship, the almighty God. Throughout this book I will discuss ideas and concepts to help you become the most effective leader of worship you can be. However, maintaining your relationship with the Lord is foundational to it all. You would not expect to be a close friend of a person with whom you never spent time. Relationships take time, and lots of it, to develop. It is essential to spend time with the Lord, just as you would spend time cultivating an earthly friendship. Nothing—absolutely nothing—is more important.

Personal Reflection: *What has my journey of walking with God and leading worship been like? Am I closer to or farther away from God than I was when I began? How strong is my relationship with Him now?*

Chapter 2

Walking in God's Grace

How can I lead worship? I have failed God over and over again. I even know better and I still blow it. He could not possibly use *me* to bring people into His presence, could He?”

I can't tell you the number of times I have heard these thoughts from people involved in the ministry of praise and worship. Such thoughts have probably been on the minds of everyone who has aspired to lead God's people in worship. At some point every one of us has felt as though we have failed the Lord by our thoughts, actions, or words, and are convinced that we are unworthy to lead others in worship of God.

Of all the challenges to believers within the church today—and there are many—I believe the most prevalent is a failure to comprehend or fully believe the power of the gospel of Jesus. As I travel and talk with Christians, I notice that the thing people struggle with most is their own consistent inadequacies and failures before the Lord.

There is no question that we have failed the Lord and will continue to do so. For this reason, God has made a way for us to find forgiveness and acceptance through Jesus' atoning work on Calvary. When we confess our sins with a desire to turn from them, the blood of Jesus truly does wash away our sins and the guilt we feel. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). I am convinced that if we grasped this simple concept, we would see major changes in our lives and ministries.

“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the *power of God* for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16).¹ I like this verse because the apostle Paul—the original Mr. Black-and-White in the church—plainly says that the gospel *is* the power of God. The gospel does not just contain the facts *about* the power of God, but it *is* the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. The Bible is very clear that salvation is far more than just being

saved from hell. It is the redemption from sin, the curse of the law, etc., that Jesus purchased for us on the cross. The gospel is the *power* of God.

In practical terms, this means that we will find far more power by realizing and walking in God's grace each day than by trying to live by our own strength. Beating on ourselves when we blow it yields no extra power to change. If we repent, however, and allow the mercies of the Lord to flood our being, we will find ourselves beginning to walk in His power rather than in our own inconsistent strength.

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: *While we were still sinners*, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Did the Lord call you into His kingdom? Of course He did. Did He forgive you when you were born again? Obviously He did. Do you think, then, that maybe, just maybe, He knew beforehand the failures you would commit after you became a Christian? Was He just toying with you then, or is His forgiveness far-reaching enough to have effect even now? Even though He was fully aware of how you would fail, the Lord still called you into His kingdom. His grace is sufficient. More than sufficient.

As you continue your walk with the Lord you will undoubtedly blow it again. It is not a question of living a perfectly sinless life. If we had the power to do that on our own, then Jesus died for no reason. The real issue is how we deal with our sin. Our natural tendency is to act as Adam did when he sinned and try to hide from God. We know we have fallen short, and we think that putting distance between us and the Lord is the best way to handle it. We run away and hide spiritually. Isn't that just like our sinful nature? We attempt to deal with the problem in a way that is opposite to God's way. He would have us turn to Him in repentance—like the prodigal son eventually did with his earthly father—and find grace and forgiveness from our loving heavenly Father. Since Jesus took the penalty of our sin, the Father is ready to offer forgiveness.

The third chapter of Ephesians helps drive home this point: "that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:17–19). Being rooted and established in His love and knowing His love will cause us to be filled up to all the fullness of God. We are not filled up to all the fullness of God by working for Him more diligently. Even praying more or studying the Bible more will not fill us up to the fullness of God, although these will ultimately be by-products of knowing His love. We will be filled up to the fullness of God only when we comprehend and believe that God loves us unconditionally.

When we understand that His mercy can cover any failure, it will be easier for us to continually believe He can use us. Seeing ourselves as holy and blameless in His sight because of Christ's sacrifice will cause us to act differently. If we take the run-and-hide approach, we will find ourselves further from God each time we sin. But if, instead, we run to Him, we will find power that will make an ongoing difference in our lives and in our walk with the Lord.

Personal Reflection: *How well am I receiving God's love for me, even in my inadequacies? In what areas do I need to begin walking in God's grace rather than my own strength?*

[1] Italicized words in Scripture quotations throughout this book are the author's emphasis.

Chapter 3

Having a Humble, Servant Attitude

The ultimate musician in twenty-first century America spends his entire life studying music and usually plays a specific instrument. His course is fixed on a singular purpose: to make it to the top. Good is not good enough; he must be the very best. He may or may not use and abuse people to accomplish his goals. If his talents and training are of high enough caliber, and if he gets to know the right people, he will be rewarded with the opportunity to perform regularly before hundreds, thousands—even the leaders of society.

The ultimate worshiper in approximately 1000 BC Israel spends his time guarding the family sheep and making up songs about the faithful God he serves. He has no aspirations toward anything more and is quite content in what he is doing. He is satisfied to worship and serve the Lord even if no one sees or recognizes his talents. His reward is to intimately know God and to know that God Himself will protect and provide for him. Although it was never his aim, he finds that his musical gifts, which he has diligently cultivated before the Lord, make a way for him to stand before the ruler of the nation.

Is it not amazing how different the modern philosophy of success is from David's? The Bible refers to David as "a man after God's own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14). If David's attitude reflects the heart of God, what does the other attitude reflect?

In Psalm 51:17 David writes, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." It was with great trepidation one day that I realized the words *broken* and *contrite* characterize the hearts and lives of very few musicians today, even in the church. It seems that making the big time is where it's at. Even "making it big for God" is often used terminology. That seems to me to be a long way from broken and contrite.

Ultimately the Lord does not need our talents. He wants our hearts. All the abilities we can muster are of very little eternal consequence. God is looking for a broken and contrite heart, one that is not self-centered but focused on Him.

Long before Jesus was born, David understood the concept of being a servant and being faithful in the little things (Luke 19:17). He did what was put before him knowing that God was the One who held the future. If promotion was to come, it would come by God's hand, not by his attempt to manipulate the circumstances. Even after Samuel anointed him king, David refused to take matters into his own hands. Instead he chose to allow the Lord to work sovereignly on his behalf. How contradictory to our normal ways!

Jesus told us that He did not come to be served but to serve. He taught that His followers should do as He did. "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all" (Mark 9:35). Again, how contrary this is to our society's view of success. Because this is such a foreign concept to us, we need to ask God to reveal how we can manifest this servant attitude in tangible ways in our lives.

We can be servants in many ways. We can serve the Lord by worshiping and obeying Him in all that we do and say. We can serve our church by constantly learning and growing in the things that will enable us to better lead others in worship. We can serve our pastor by honoring him with our words and our actions. We can decide daily that in all we do and say we will, like Jesus and like David, be humble servants.

Personal Reflection: *What are my aspirations as a musician? Do these aspirations reflect an attitude to serve God and others? How can I balance pursuing excellence as a musician with being a servant?*

Chapter 4

Having a Levitical Heart

In this way you are to set the Levites apart from the other Israelites, and the Levites will be mine. After you have purified the Levites and presented them as a wave offering, they are to come to do their work at the Tent of Meeting. They are the Israelites who are to be given wholly to me” (Numbers 8:14–16).

The Old Testament Levites’ main purpose was to be given to God. They were an offering, as it were, to Him. Anything else in their lives was of secondary importance. All that they did and said was consecrated to God. Nothing outweighed their belonging to Him.

Most of us are not Levites in the literal sense because we are not direct descendants from the tribe of Levi. Worship leaders have a connection to the Levites, however, because the temple musicians were taken from among them. Even beyond the musical connection there is a correlation between what God required of the Levites and what He requires of those involved in the ministry of praise and worship. He is not just looking for talented musicians; he wants our hearts. Our main purpose in life is to *be* to His glory.

Ephesians 1:12 tells us that as believers we are to “*be* for the praise of His glory.” How much more is this true for worship leaders? As leaders we should model for others this idea of existing for God’s glory. This should be primary for us. Yet too often we get so busy with the things of God that we miss simply *being* for the praise of His glory. The Lord isn’t nearly as interested in our abilities as He is interested in us. The essence of our existence is not to *do* but to *be* for His glory.

The opening Scripture passage in this chapter states that the Levites were “given wholly” to God. First Chronicles 16:4–6 tells us that the Levites served regularly before the Lord. It wasn’t a once-in-a-while thing for them; it was their life.

This attitude of being given completely to the Lord needs to permeate our lives. Some years ago my wife and I decided to build a house. At the time I was

the bass player on the worship team at the church where we attended. Being the bass player was not a full-time or even part-time position (although I eventually ended up as the primary worship leader at the church for many years). My full-time occupation was in sales for a company located forty miles from our church.

In choosing a location to build our house, we considered many factors. Anyone who has ever moved into a new home can relate. We considered how far it was to work, to schools, to shopping, and to major highways. We discussed neighbors and neighborhoods, utilities, garbage pickup, zoning restrictions, taxes and assessments, and so on. All of these items were important and needed to be considered. Their values needed to be weighed and factored into the final decision. One factor, however, proved to be decisive: the proximity to our church. Even though I was at church only two or three times per week, and even though I was only the bass player, God had given me a Levitical heart attitude. I realized that my main reason for existing was to be given to the Lord. This meant that my first priority was Him and what He had called me to. Everything else, including the eighty-mile round trip for work every day, paled in comparison.

It is important to mention that I did not do this to get something from God. My motivation was to honor Him with my life, regardless of the consequences.

I share this story not in hopes that you will think I am a great guy, but to stir all of us more toward the daily attitude of being given to God. As I read these words while working on the new book edition nearly two decades after writing them originally, I am challenged. All the abilities that I possess, all the talents I can claim are, in the final analysis, of very little importance to God. He wants my life. Without that, He cannot begin to use the other things in me to their full potential.

Our giving ourselves to Him must be without any conditions. Too often we say or think something like, “God, I will be Yours if You will let me be important, if You will let people esteem me.” The Lord has no use for our restrictions. He requires our lives.

The bottom line is this: we must decide that if God never uses us in any “big” way, we will still be His. We are to *be* for the praise of *His* glory, regardless of circumstances or situations. No restrictions, no hidden clauses. We are His—Levites given totally to Him.

Personal Reflection: *Having a Levitical heart means being completely given to the Lord. How do my musical aspirations fit (or not fit) with this idea?*

Chapter 5

Living a Life of Worship

I am convinced that we will never enter into the kind of worship God desires until we live a lifestyle of worship. As worship leaders we need to teach this concept to our congregations, but more importantly we must live it. I have heard it said that worship in the sanctuary is meaningless unless it is preceded by six days of worship as a way of life. This statement is a bit strong if we understand and walk in the grace of God. Nevertheless, it has some merit. We cannot live in a manner contrary to what the Lord wants for us and then come in on Sunday morning and expect to be prepared to worship God. Our Sunday morning worship should be the culmination of an entire week of worshipping the Lord.

John 4:23 tells us that God is seeking true worshipers. It does not say He is looking for worship, but worshipers. Occasional worship is not enough. The Lord desires people who emanate worship, people who live worship—worshipers.

I am struck by the story in Acts 16 about Paul and Silas, who had their clothes torn off of them, were beaten, were thrown into prison, and were fastened in stocks. This sounds like a seriously unnerving scenario. I have tried to imagine what I would have done in that situation. Would I have panicked? Would I have questioned God's judgment? The Bible tells us that Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises to God. Would I react like that if I were confronted with a situation that extreme?

Quite a number of years ago I read several books on the need to praise God in difficult circumstances. The books discussed the necessity of doing this and how very important it is, but I do not recall any of them telling *how* to do it. Praising the Lord in a crisis situation is not a natural response for us. When we find ourselves in any type of crisis, we will react in one of two ways. Either we will panic or we will respond in a way that we have been prepared for. Paramedics, for example, when confronted with a serious automobile accident, are prepared for the situation. They do not panic, because they have been trained

to respond to such accidents. It should be the same way with us. If we cultivate praise and worship in our everyday lives, we will have the proper response—worshiping God—when we find ourselves in a crisis circumstance. This will happen only if we build the daily-ness of praise and worship into our lives.

The Bible tells us again and again that our praise and worship is to be ongoing. “I will extol the LORD *at all times*” (Psalm 34:1). “From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the LORD is to be praised” (Psalm 113:3). “Through Jesus, therefore, let us *continually* offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name” (Hebrews 13:15). Worshiping God is not to be a once-a-week activity. It should permeate our lives.

Ultimately, worshiping God is our reason for existing. “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, *that you may declare the praises of him* who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9). We were made and redeemed for the purpose of declaring His praises. This is not just singing songs. If God wanted music, we could just play a CD for Him. He is not interested in music in itself; He wants our lives. The Lord is looking for lives that declare His praises, lives that are completely given to Him and His purposes, lives of worship unto Him.

A life of worship must permeate everything we do and say. Mother Teresa was once asked what worship meant to her. Without hesitation she said that Jesus had told us how to bless the Lord: “‘In as much as you have done it unto the least of these, my brethren, you have done it unto Me.’ Find the least,” she said, “and treat them as you would treat the Lord.”¹ That’s a powerful concept. What if you were to start your day with a simple, sincere prayer like, “Lord, be glorified in all that I do and say today.” Do you think such a prayer would influence your lifestyle? If all the people of God prayed this prayer every day, do you think it would have an influence on our corporate worship gatherings?

Consider the following scenario: You and everyone in your congregation live a life of worship from Monday through Saturday. The heart attitude of every member is to be given to God for His purposes. Every day there are songs of praise, acts of kindness toward a hurting world, hearts communing with the Lord. Then on Sunday morning everyone comes together to worship the Lord corporately. The corporate worship would become an overflow of what you and everyone else had been doing daily for the last six days.

Would a corporate worship experience like this be different from what you are accustomed to? Most assuredly so! It would not necessarily be more acceptable to God, for only the blood of Jesus makes us acceptable. But the entire attitude and atmosphere would be changed to match God’s heart for our worship.

God wants us to continually have an attitude of worship in all that we do and say. This life of worship will, in turn, enhance our worship in the corporate setting.

Personal Reflection: *What does my lifestyle of praise and worship look like throughout the week? What about during crisis situations? What's one thing I could do differently to positively impact others in my congregation?*

[1] Mother Teresa, in conversation with a friend of mine.

Chapter 6

Thankfulness to God

My eldest son's earliest expression of prayer was simply saying "Thank you" to God. My wife and I purposely endeavored to instill this in him. Yes, we wanted him to have the confidence in the Lord to be able to make requests and petitions, but it was a higher priority for us to train him to be thankful.

We live in a thankless society. I am constantly astounded at the reactions of cashiers, bank tellers, restaurant servers, sales people, and others when I tell them thanks for whatever service or help they have just rendered. Often it seems as though no one has ever given them thanks before. They are not certain how to respond to those simple words, "Thank you."

We as Christians should be models of thankfulness. We should cultivate thankfulness in our everyday interactions with people. More importantly, we need to cultivate continual thankfulness toward God. I already mentioned that when I met the Lord, I needed to be rescued. I needed more than simple consoling. I needed the forgiveness that only Jesus could provide, for I was like the prostitute in Scripture whose sins were so great. Jesus explained to the people that the reason her love for Him was so great was that she had been forgiven for so much (Luke 7:37–50). I have been forgiven for all the sins I have ever committed (and they are many). As a result, I have much love in my heart for my Redeemer.

He not only forgave me when I "got saved," but His forgiveness and tender mercies are new every morning (Lamentations 3:23). Although I was (and am) far from deserving, He continually showers me with His grace. No matter where I go, God is with me (Psalm 139:7–10). Even going beyond forgiveness and His constant companionship, God has now made me His son. "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!" (1 John 3:1). With a realization of such great love, how could I not have a heart that overflows with thanksgiving?

Understanding and meditating on the Lord's marvelous love for us will help

make us a thankful people. However, for many this alone is often not enough. We also need to do as Hebrews 13:15 tells us: “Let us continually offer to God a *sacrifice* of praise.” It is not always easy to be thankful, but it is always necessary. Sometimes we need to offer a sacrifice of praise, a thankfulness even when we don’t feel thankful. After all, if it were easy, it wouldn’t be a sacrifice, would it?

There are other practical steps we can take to help cultivate thankfulness. One is to make thanking God a habit. I’m not talking about a mindless ritual, but a mind-set that helps me remember to thank the Lord for all His blessings.

The experiences that the people of Israel had while in Egypt trained them to be thankless. The harsh work and cruel taskmasters were not conducive elements to creating people who were full of thanksgiving. So when God led the Israelites out of Egypt, they were thankful—but only for a short time. They were elated that their God had rescued them from slavery, but slowly the old habits they had learned under their Egyptian masters resurfaced. The complaining and thanklessness had been deeply ingrained in them over many years of slavery. The realization that God had saved them from their terrible predicament was not enough when new troubles arose.

Israel seems to have missed the concept of making thanksgiving a daily habit. They did not see the importance of replacing their complaining attitude with hearts full of thanksgiving. We can learn from their errors. Perhaps we can give ourselves reminders. Put a note on your bathroom mirror. Tie a string on your finger to remind you to thank the Lord. Drop a rock into your pocket so that when you reach in, you’ll be reminded to thank God. Whatever it takes, do it. We can live lives of thankfulness to the Lord. We as redeemed believers should give thanks to Him each and every day.

Make giving thanks to the Lord a habit in your own life. Mentally stop yourself from complaining or even being complacent. Instead, give thanks to God. A heart that is full of thanksgiving to the Lord every day will be much more effective in leading corporate worship.

Personal Reflection: *How have I overlooked the habit of making thanksgiving a daily occurrence? What do I thank God for right now, and how will I apply the ideas in this chapter?*

Chapter 7

Understanding God's Word

One of the most effective worship leaders I have met is the man who discipled me in leading worship. Before I met him, I did not really understand worship, let alone how to lead worship. He is an extremely gifted vocalist and instrumentalist. I am convinced, however, that his effectiveness in leading worship stems more from his knowledge of God's Word than from his musical abilities.

During services he would frequently say something like, "Let's sing Psalm 121, verses one through four." The rest of us would stare blankly until he started the song and, of course, we all knew the song—we just did not know where the words came from. Sometimes we would sing songs that I did not realize were straight out of the Bible until he mentioned the reference.

My point is not that he knew Scripture references for the songs we sang, but that he knew the Word. He had hidden God's Word in his heart, and had a knowledge of God which many believers lack.

Some years ago someone asked me this question: "Is it more important for a full-time worship leader to have a music degree or a degree in biblical studies?" Although I had never thought about this before, without hesitating I answered, "Biblical studies." Now, nearly twenty years after writing the original edition of this book, I am even more convinced of this. A solid understanding of theology is far more important than a thorough knowledge of music. I have seen and heard about too many worship leaders who have wreaked havoc on their congregations because of a lack of knowledge of God.

Very often worship leaders are in their position because they are gifted musically. They usually have a great deal of creativity and a clear understanding of music and its use. But without a firm understanding of God, His ways, and His dealings with people, they can do serious damage. For example, I have seen worship leaders without an understanding of biblical servanthood and submission split churches apart in an attempt to start churches that "really

worship.” From God’s perspective, such situations should never occur.

When athletes compete in team sports at high levels, they generally have a playbook. The players are expected to study and know the material inside and out in order to be effective in their position. I have known athletes who have spent countless hours studying their playbooks. Yet I also have seen worship leaders who readily introduce songs that have no scriptural basis, because they are not familiar enough with their “playbook” to realize the inconsistency.

Think about this. The songs I choose and the words I say publicly as a worship leader are going into the hearts and minds of people in the congregation. Those words, both sung and spoken, have the potential to greatly alter people’s lives. Because of this, I want to be sure that what I say and sing lines up with the full counsel of the Word of God.

The late Dr. Robert Webber said, “We need worship leaders who first understand the power of song to form depth of character and commitment. And second, these worship leaders need to choose songs that have the content that will form the worshiper.”¹ In other words, as worship leaders, we must recognize how much impact the songs we use are having on the people in our congregations. Then, having made that realization, we need to choose songs that will make a positive and biblically sound impact.

The bottom line is this: if you don’t know Scripture well, you can easily lead people astray. I would suggest participating in guided Bible studies with other believers. Perhaps you could take online theology courses or courses at a local Bible school or seminary. There are plenty of options out there today. Take advantage of them. The more you know God’s Word, the more it will keep you on the right track and help keep you from leading others astray.

Yes, musical talents are an important commodity for a worship leader. But even more essential to the worship leader is a thorough knowledge of God’s Word. It is not absolutely necessary for a worship leader to have a degree in biblical studies, but it would be a much better foundation than musical training alone. Knowing the Word, being solidly grounded in the Bible, is an essential element in being an effective leader of worship.

Personal Reflection: *How well do I know God through His Word? How could I increase my knowledge of the Bible and incorporate this into my worship leading?*

[1] Robert Webber, “Worship Discipleship,” *Worship Leader* (September/October 2004).

Chapter 8

Spiritual Maturity

The following is a too-often repeated scenario: An immature but musically talented Christian is given the position of worship leader at a church. He loves the Lord. Musically he is amazing. In time people begin to tell him what a good worship leader he is and how gifted and anointed he is. But because he is immature, he begins to believe them—too much so. He believes he is so anointed that God must want him to be in charge. There follows a major power struggle within the leadership of the church, or possibly a mass exodus to start a new church. I wish this was a story from my imagination, but it is not. I have witnessed it over and over.

A number of potential errors can be pointed out in the scenario. First, the pastor could have made a poor decision because he did not carefully consider the biblical qualifications given for leadership positions (1 Timothy 3:1–13; Titus 1:6–9; and elsewhere). For some reason these qualifications are often overlooked for worship leaders. Yet the worship leader is usually the second most prominent minister in church services (only the head pastor is seen as more in charge). Frequently the worship leader, besides being the creative type, is outgoing and has a large measure of personal charm and charisma. He or she is usually a popular person. All of these ingredients mixed together can be dangerous. The influence of such a worship leader within the congregation should not be underestimated.

Or the pastor could have erred in another way. If it was necessary, for whatever reasons, to put an immature Christian in this position, the pastor should have at least been willing to disciple (teach, train, counsel, love, encourage) the new leader on a regular basis. Taking the new leader by the hand and walking him or her through the ministry situations, meeting frequently to talk through problems or discussing potential problems, would be the minimum requirements of the pastor under such circumstances.

Or, lastly, the people in the congregation could have been guilty of giving

too much praise to an individual. I am a strong believer in affirming people in their gifts, but sometimes a proper balance is hard to find. Lavishing large amounts of praise, especially on an immature minister, can prove to be counterproductive. As long as the recipient of the praise remembers the One who ultimately gets the glory, there is no problem. But we humans have a tendency to keep a little glory for ourselves, which makes it easier for us to keep a little more the next time. We can eventually end up so certain of our abilities that we feel no need for God. Too much praise can be destructive, especially praise directed toward a person who is not solidly founded in his or her faith.

All of these errors on the part of others (the pastor or the congregation) are valid and need to be considered. Ultimately, though, the responsibility falls on the worship leader to be a solid, mature Christian who knows God and knows His Word. Aside from all gifts, talents, and callings, we must recognize this foundational qualification for leadership. The Lord is far more interested in what we are like as people than all of our accomplishments and achievements. Our character—our maturity in the Lord—is more important than our abilities.

At a worship conference I attended more than twenty-five years ago, one of the speakers made a statement that has stuck with me ever since: “The worship ministry of a church is usually not a place for new or immature Christians.” He was right then and he’s still right today.

Scripture tells us that leadership roles in the church require certain characteristics of maturity. A church generally would not put a new or immature Christian into the role of pastor. Why? Because the pastor will be instructing the people in the truths of God’s Word. It is imperative, therefore, that a pastor has not only studied those truths but also has evidence of those truths in his life. Similarly, the worship leader—as someone who will be forming and shaping people’s lives through the choice of songs and the words spoken—needs to have a level of spiritual maturity in knowing the Lord and understanding and walking in His Word.

Again, I’ve seen it happen too many times: an immature worship leader can wreak havoc in a congregation. As a worship leader, it is imperative that you are growing and maturing in the Lord. Find someone older and more mature to help hold you accountable. Do everything you can to grow up in your faith.

Personal Reflection: *What is the status of my spiritual maturity? Who in my life is holding me accountable to grow in the Lord?*

Chapter 9

Holding Loosely to the Ministry Position

My friend Kenneth began as a volunteer worship leader at a church.¹ The church grew by leaps and bounds, eventually hiring Kenneth as the full-time worship leader. They had a tremendous band and even recorded a live worship CD back before this was common. The church continued to grow and held three Sunday morning services in a rented school auditorium. Finally, they built a large building that seated more than one thousand people. Kenneth led his team with great enthusiasm and compassion and genuinely cared for his people. He mentored some into the role of leading worship and encouraged others to grow in their musical abilities. I did seminars, retreats, and special services with Kenneth and his team several times over the years. This was one of the most solid worship ministries I had ever encountered.

One day, though, things began to change in Kenneth's church. The pastor made a major shift in certain areas of ministry. He began doing things that Kenneth could not condone. For the sake of confidentiality I won't go into the details, but suffice it to say that the pastor did some things that Kenneth couldn't square with Scripture. Kenneth wrestled and struggled for quite a while but finally realized he could not stay in the church. He resigned several years ago and has not been in full-time ministry since.

Cindy had been the full-time worship leader at her church for more than twenty years. She was a gifted vocalist and worship leader with tremendous compassion for those involved in the worship ministry. During her years as worship leader, the church grew considerably, built a new building, and even changed its name. Not long ago, the pastor announced at a meeting at the church that Cindy would soon be stepping down. Cindy was not present at the meeting, but several people from the worship ministry were there and were shocked that Cindy had not told them herself. They called her to ask about it. Cindy was even more shocked; this was the first she had heard about it. When she questioned the pastor, he told her that he was hiring a younger worship leader to take the music

in a direction that would be more conducive to drawing in the younger generation. The pastor explained that he wanted Cindy to stay and mentor the young man.

Cindy was taken aback by the sudden change, but she agreed to do as her pastor requested. But the new recruit didn't want to have anything to do with Cindy. He refused to listen to anything she said. He "knew what he was doing" and "didn't need her help." Frustrated, Cindy resigned. She still attends the church but is no longer in a ministry position. She now works part-time as a receptionist in a medical office.

These are just two of the many true stories I've encountered over the years. They demonstrate that even in the best of situations an entire ministry can change very quickly. It is possible that with little or no warning you could no longer be the worship leader at your church.

Losing a job, even a volunteer ministry position, can be a painful disappointment for anyone. Men, especially, often take a large portion of their self-worth from what they do. What would be your reaction if your worship leader position was suddenly taken away? How would you handle it? Could you honestly walk through such a scenario with grace and forgiveness?

After more than thirty-five years of being a Christian, I know that bad things happen. Because we live in a world that is riddled with sin and because we are dealing with people, some unexpected scenarios can take place. I realize that the Lord can still work in and through those situations, yet at the same time they can be ugly, difficult, and demeaning.

My recommendation is to hold the ministry position loosely. You never know when it could be stripped away from you or when God could call you to move on. Don't make the position so important in your mind that you cannot live without it. Instead, hold the position loosely and make the Lord Himself your treasure. He is worth far more than any position anyway. Then you will be ready to face the challenges that life throws at you.

Personal Reflection: *How tightly am I holding on to my ministry position? If something like the scenarios in this chapter happened to me now or in the future, how well would I trust God and walk in grace?*

[1] Names in this chapter have been changed.

Chapter 10

Self-Discipline

What an awful chapter title: “Self-Discipline.” I am certain that not many people want to hear about this topic. “Discipline myself? That doesn’t sound like much fun to me.”

Self-discipline is not always fun, but it is essential. We must be willing to discipline ourselves in many areas, including prayer, the study of God’s Word, musical practice time, and preparation for leading. For me, this has been one of the most difficult things about being a worship leader. It is easier to procrastinate, be lazy, and be disorganized than it is to be organized, diligent, and disciplined. It is easier for me not to practice my instrument and music than it is to apply myself diligently. It is much simpler not to pray than it is to intercede for those involved in the worship ministry and for the people I lead in worship.

All of these areas require more than a half-hearted attitude in order for us to be effective. If I allow my flesh, my mood, or even the attitudes of others to dictate my discipline in these areas, I will not be the worship leader God desires me to be. I absolutely must discipline myself in order to be the worship leader God intends.

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize” (1 Corinthians 9:24). To put this in the current vernacular, Paul is telling us to “Go for it!” This is not a time to be slothful. It is time to press forward in Jesus with all our might.

Paul’s next statement is even stronger: “Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever” (1 Corinthians 9:25). We have far more at stake than earthly athletes. As Christians we may miss our high callings in the Lord’s kingdom if we take lightly the things He has entrusted to us.

Paul finishes out this line of thought with these words: “Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I

beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize” (1 Corinthians 9:26–27). Wow! “I *beat* my body.” The Greek word literally means to punch or fight. We’re in a battle. We need to bring our physical bodies into submission to what the Holy Spirit is asking of us.

It has been said that God can use us only to the extent that we are willing to discipline ourselves, or, in other words, that He will not override our wills. Given the principle of grace from chapter two and the sovereignty of God, this statement is a little strong. Scripture does record times when the Lord has overridden or changed someone’s will, but this is far more the exception than the rule. God will not ordinarily bypass our wills to put His plans into action. He requires that we be willing to put our will and effort into what He desires for us. Without obedience to God we will never experience His ultimate purposes for our lives.

I can hear the responses to the idea of self-discipline as I write this: “But I have plenty of things to pray about in my own life. Why do I need to take extra time to pray for those whom I lead?” “I would much rather sleep a little later on Sunday mornings than get up early just to prepare to lead.” Unless we are willing to beat our bodies into submission, to discipline our lives, we will never be fully effective in leading God’s people in worship.

James tells us much the same thing. In the first six verses of chapter four, James rebukes the readers for giving in to worldly passions. Then he says, “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” The words *submit* and *resist* are not passive; they demand action on our part. We cannot be complacent. We must discipline our lives. It is imperative for us to submit to the Lord’s will and bring our own wills into submission.

We are wise if we pray regularly for those we lead and those we minister with. We are wise if we pray regularly for ourselves, asking that we might be sensitive to the Holy Spirit. We are wise if we work diligently at our music. These and other things are must-dos as we aspire to be effective in leading God’s people in worship.

The concept of self-discipline needs to be understood in light of the grace described in chapter two. Being rooted and grounded in God’s grace and mercy will give us the long-term ability to discipline our lives for maximum benefit to God’s kingdom. If we will follow His Word and discipline ourselves in prayer, study, practice, and preparation, we will become far more effective in the role to which He has called us. God will multiply our efforts at self-discipline even beyond our expectations—He will pour out His blessing.

Personal Reflection: *Which areas of life or ministry are the hardest for me to be disciplined in? Which part of this chapter did I need to hear more: that, like Paul, I need to strive hard for God's kingdom, or that I must first recognize God's grace as the foundation for obedience?*

Chapter 11

Accepting the Role of Being an Example

Years ago, when I first became part of the worship team at our church, I had a stunning realization. I remember well my reaction to people looking at me, the bass player on the worship team, as an example of a worshipping Christian. Quite simply, I hated it. I had absolutely no desire to be a role model. That was not the reason I had become a part of the music ministry at our church. I simply wanted to worship the Lord with the gifts He had given me. But an example for others to follow...me? No way!

I soon stumbled across this passage in Paul's letter to the church at Philippi: "Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you" (Philippians 3:17). "Well sure, Lord, but that is the apostle Paul talking. Certainly You do not expect people to follow *my* example," I reasoned. But I also realized I didn't have much of a choice. When someone is consistently in front of people in any type of leadership role, no matter how minor—even if that person is just the bass player—they will be seen as a leader. If this is true for the bass player, how much more is it true for the worship leader?

Being an example worshiper even carries over into your off time. Regardless of where you are or what you are doing, people observe you to see what a worshipping Christian is really like. If you are playing with your kids at a park, people will watch you. If you are talking with the manager of the local department store about a problem, people will watch to see how a worshipping Christian behaves. Wherever you go, people will observe your actions. This is at least part of the reason why Scripture requires that leaders have their lives in order (see 1 Timothy 3:1–13; Titus 1:6–9). The demand on leaders especially includes being an example in the area of moral integrity. As a leader, your life must be exemplary.

This can be unnerving, unless you are prepared to have others view you as an example. (It can sometimes be unnerving even if you are prepared for it.)

Some people don't like to accept the responsibility of being a model for others to follow. However, like it or not, being an example comes with the territory. It is easier to accept this than to fight against it. Besides, if people can't watch us to see what a worshiper is really like, who can they watch?

Bill Rayborn, well known in music and worship circles for decades, tells a story that makes the point. Early in his career as a music director at a church, a mother approached him one Sunday morning. She and her husband had just bought their young son a new suit for a special music program at church. The boy wore the suit that morning for the first time. When they arrived at the church, the mother asked the boy to button his suit coat. He refused. "Not yet, Mom," he said. "I want to wait and see how Mr. Rayborn has his coat buttoned."

Like it or not, people will follow your example. The question is not "Will you be an example?" but "Will you *willingly* or *unwillingly* be an example?"

David apparently was a willing example when he demonstrated his worship of God in front of all of Israel. "David...danced before the LORD with all his might" as they brought the ark of the covenant back to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:14–15).

King Solomon perceived the importance of being an example at the temple dedication. Second Chronicles 6:13 tells us that Solomon built a large platform and knelt down on it "before the whole assembly of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven" and prayed. Unquestionably, the king wanted the people to see how he prayed. He was setting a pattern that the people could follow.

Paul, in his second letter to the Thessalonians, said he and his companions made themselves "a model for [the church] to follow" (2 Thessalonians 3:9). Paul, probably more than anyone, understood how vital it is to have role models. Did he start out as one? Probably not. Did he enjoy it? The answer is unclear. What is clear, however, is that Paul accepted the responsibility of being an example for others to follow.

People have a need to be taught, not only by our words, but just as much by our actions. The "Don't do as I do, do as I say" mentality must be removed from our thinking. As worship leaders we can't just talk about worship being a way of life; we must live it. And we must live it to the extent that others can look at us and see what worshipers are really like. Refusing to accept this responsibility is not an option. Like it or not, people will learn from *your* example.

Personal Reflection: *Have I accepted the fact that I am an example worshiper to others? If people in my congregation were to imitate the things I do, what kind of effect would it have on their lives and the life of our congregation?*

Chapter 12

Cultivating the Gifts God Has Put within You

God has given each of us certain gifts to use for His glory.

Now *to each one* the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines. (1 Corinthians 12:7–11)

There is no question that we have each been given at least one gift. Friction sometimes occurs, though, when we consider nurturing gifts. We would much rather wait for the Lord to act sovereignly in our lives and simply make our gifts come to their full potential. We do not want to work at the gifts He has given us; we just want to have them. But that's not the way the Lord designed it.

Paul exhorts Timothy, his son in the faith, “to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands” (2 Timothy 1:6). Another translation says to “stir up” the gift. Another says “kindle afresh.” Fan into flame. Stir up. Kindle afresh. These are phrases demanding action. They require a response. Timothy needed to *do* something. But was not the gift already within Timothy? Of course it was. Was it not a gift from the Lord? Most assuredly so. Then why did Paul tell him to do something? Because that is how God has chosen to develop people's gifts.

“Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, *try to excel* in gifts that build up the church” (1 Corinthians 14:12). Think about this verse for a moment. How

can we try to excel at the gifts of God unless we somehow have a part in developing them? The Lord gives us gifts and expects us to learn to use them to their full potential. Certainly He will lead us and guide us, but we have to work with the gifts to excel at them.

In cultivating the gifts God has placed within you, it is important not to neglect prayer. Faithful prayers have the ability to do far more than all of the other work we can do. And yet prayer alone is not all that the Lord requires. We must work diligently at the gifts that He has given, so that when this life is over we may hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21, 23).

In practical terms, as leaders of worship we need to work at the gifts God has bestowed on us in a variety of ways. If you have musical gifts, have you continued to cultivate them and learn more? Do you practice your instrument on a regular basis? Depending on your level of proficiency, perhaps you should take music courses at a local community college or from a private instructor or even by correspondence. There are numerous training possibilities today, including on the Internet and on DVDs. Perhaps music theory would be in order. Or, if you are experienced enough and have developed your gift to a high degree of expertise, maybe you should consider *giving* lessons. Regardless of the subject, I almost always learn something when I have the opportunity to teach others.

Are you a would-be songwriter? Have you considered taking a music composition course? Perhaps a class on poetry or grammar would be in order. Maybe researching other songwriters would be helpful. Even attempting to correspond with some of today’s writers of popular worship songs might be a worthwhile endeavor.

Has God given you the ability to communicate effectively with others? Endeavoring to enhance this gift with a seminar on public speaking would be a good idea. Anything you can do to bolster your effectiveness when standing before people would be beneficial.

All of these things and more are there for the doing. Regardless of your gifts and how long you have been using them, there is always room for improvement. God has given you gifts to use to serve Him and build up the church. Cultivate these gifts. Fan them into flame. Work to excel at them. And then one day you will hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

Personal Reflection: *Am I developing my spiritual gifts, or have I plateaued? Which of the many suggestions in the chapter would help me further cultivate the gifts God has given me?*

Chapter 13

Keeping Priorities Straight

One of the most difficult things to do in any area of life is to determine priorities. We all have trouble at times deciding what is the greatest need of the moment. In my ten years in the sales field, this was my most common downfall. It was easier to do the more enjoyable aspects of my job than what was needed at the moment. In every area of life, we must learn that what is the most fun should not determine how we appropriate our time.

God has shown me the three main priorities in my life, and yours may be similar:

1. Knowing Him and cultivating that relationship
2. Loving, spending time with, and caring for my family
3. Laboring in the ministry that He sets before me

In order to determine what I should do at any given time, I mentally review this list so that I am not sidetracked. We have already discussed the first priority, maintaining a strong relationship with God, in chapter one. Priority number two is the one I seem to struggle with the most. Part of the reason I struggle is that I am a very “results-oriented” person. For example, I can usually see immediate results from teaching a worship seminar to people from twenty different churches. It is more difficult for me to see immediate results from praying with or playing with my kids or taking my wife out to dinner. And yet these are as important, and often more important, in fulfilling God’s plan for my life than doing worship-ministry activities.

The long-term effect of spending time with my family will far outweigh a few hours of teaching worship leaders. I believe that my children have the potential to have a far greater impact on the kingdom of God than I do. But if I

do not instill in them proper values and priorities now, I may hinder them in reaching their full potential in the Lord. No one else is going to take the responsibility for training my family. That is my job. If I prioritize correctly and spend time with them, the long-term results will be well worth the effort.

It is important that I model my priorities not only for my family but also for the people involved in the worship ministry of our church. If they see that worship ministry is my main priority, then they may end up emulating that. Instead, they need to see that my family is a higher priority for me. When my wife and children stop by during a rehearsal, I encourage my kids to come in and give me a hug. Yes, it may disrupt our practice for a minute, but my family is a priority.

I encourage my worship team also to treat family as a priority. We have a rotating schedule for our team. Each person is scheduled to minister an average of three out of four Sundays. Being “on” when they are scheduled to be “off” is not an option. It is important that they spend time worshiping with their families. It is vital that they and their families see worship not just as a ministry up in front. Therefore it is healthy for the team members to spend time worshiping with the rest of the congregation.

God is first. My family is second. My third priority is the ministry that God sets before me. This is not just any ministry, but specifically that which the Lord is asking of me. It is not always easy to recognize which ministry opportunities are from the Lord, but it is important to attempt to discern this. At times in the past, I jumped head first into any ministry opportunity that came along. I did not seek the Lord as to whether an opportunity was for me; I just did it. Later I realized that not every opportunity that comes along is from God. I need to endeavor to discern what *He* is asking me to do.

One simple way to discern whether an opportunity is from the Lord is to see if it preempts my first two priorities. There may be times, of course, when a ministry trip may be inconvenient for my family and still be part of God’s plan, but in the long term my family must be a higher priority than worship ministry.

I encourage you to determine, understand, and implement biblical priorities in your life and ministry. With these in place, you will find yourself directed more by God and His will than by people’s requests for your time and the many legitimate needs around you. Jesus said in John 8:29, “I always do what pleases him [the Father].” It is vital to recognize that Jesus did not meet every need He encountered during His earthly ministry. Therefore it is all right to say “no” to people’s requests at times. Seek the Lord for His priorities in your life and then follow them.

Personal Reflection: *What would another person looking at my life say my top priorities are? What priorities might God want me to make changes in?*

Chapter 14

Caring for the Congregation

While I was in seminary, one of my professors drilled a statement into us that has become a foundation for much of what I do in ministry: “Don’t just do your ministry; minister to people.”

It is easy to overlook this seemingly simple idea. We are often more ready to accept the responsibilities of the work of ministry than we are to accept the responsibility of caring for people. Although the work and the doing of the work are important, we must recognize that people take precedence. Jesus died for *people*.

For worship leaders, the idea of ministering to people can be difficult to grasp; after all, our first priority is to worship the Lord. But if we value only the personal aspect of worshiping the Lord, we have missed half of our job title as worship *leaders*. We have a responsibility to *lead* people in worship.

The title of this chapter, “Caring for the Congregation,” refers to seeing the needs of those we are ministering to as more important than our own needs. “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but *in humility consider others better than yourselves*” (Philippians 2:3). So what does this look like practically? Consider this example. As you prepare for a service one day, you have a desire to celebrate with great exuberance before the Lord. As you prayerfully consider what the Lord is asking, however, it becomes obvious that what the congregation needs is to bask in the presence of the Lord in intimate worship. Which way do you go?

Placing the needs of others above your own is not always comfortable. There have been instances during a time of worship when I was uncertain as to which direction to go. At those times, I decided I had two choices. I could either stand there and act as if I had it all together, or I could leave the platform and consult with the pastor and other leaders regarding the direction of the service. If I chose to pretend I was “in control,” the people would probably miss something God wanted them to experience. If I chose to leave the platform for consultation,

there was the potential for people to view me as weak and not having it all together. In the end, I knew that the people were too important for me to care about my feelings or reputation. Desiring God's very best for them, I left the platform.

Caring for the congregation means lovingly encouraging them to follow along as you begin a journey in worship that day. Do not beat them. Gently coax them to come along. They get enough abuse every day from the world. From you they need encouragement.

If the people seem slow in following our leadership, our natural tendency is to say something like, "Hey! Are you guys awake out there?" This may be effective once or twice (then again, maybe not), but over the long term we need to take a different approach. What people need is loving, caring encouragement. This will cause them to follow your leadership over the long haul better than anything else. The old adage is true: People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. Try encouraging them instead of provoking them.

Caring for the congregation means listening to and responding to comments and suggestions from people. For example, if over a period of one month twenty people tell you, "We're doing too many slow songs," maybe, just maybe, you should consider the possibility that you really are doing too many slow songs. Obviously you cannot tailor the worship experience to fit the preferences of just one person or one small group of people, but it is important to hear feedback from those to whom you are ministering.

It should be noted that this type of feedback will usually be negative. I have found from personal experience that people tend to act and react in a similar manner regardless of the setting. The unhappy minority speak out, while the contented majority sit silently. The average worship leader probably receives as many as twenty suggestions for change for every one positive comment. Does that mean he or she is doing a poor job? Usually not. People tend to speak out only when they are dissatisfied. In order to guard your heart, you must understand that negative feedback is common.

The natural tendency for a criticized leader is to tell his or her critics that they are wrong and that he or she is right. This is dangerous. If your job is to lead the congregation in worship, then you need to hear people's reactions to what you are doing. Without knowing their response, you will never know for certain whether you are fulfilling your responsibility of leading or whether you are the only one worshiping.

Remember, one of your primary responsibilities is to minister to the members of your congregation. Sometimes they do not respond as you would

like. Sometimes they say things you would rather not hear. Yet they are the people the Lord has called you to lead in worship. Love them and encourage them in all you do.

Personal Reflection: *What are the current needs of my congregation? In what ways could I tangibly demonstrate care for people in my congregation? What has been my reaction to the feedback I have received about our times of worship?*

Chapter 15

Exercising Diplomacy

Willy is the volunteer worship leader at a church of a couple hundred people in a small town in the Northwest. He has been in charge of the worship ministry for eight years now. He has known for a while that there is some friction between Sue, the drummer, and Ben, one of the vocalists, but now it's getting worse. Last night at practice, Ben's usually light-hearted ribbing became more harsh, to the point of being almost nasty toward Sue. Sue laughed it off, but everyone knew she didn't think it was funny.

Cassie leads worship full-time. Hired just eight months ago, she is beginning to wonder if moving several states away from her hometown was a mistake. She was asked to help the church move forward in worship because their traditional worship format was not attracting younger folks. As a recent Bible-school graduate with a degree in music and worship, she was brought in to add some freshness and life to the services. But not everyone likes what she is doing. Truth be told, some are vehemently opposed. Cassie is finding herself in a quandary about how to respond to the mean-spirited things said to her. While she wants to help the church move forward, there are those who clearly don't want to go.

Bill isn't sure what to do. He's been leading worship at a church in the South for a couple years. During this time the pastor has become more and more domineering. Everything must be done just so, and if there is any deviation, he is furious. Bill has tried to comply, but the pastor remains unsatisfied, micromanaging everything that happens in the church. Bill feels boxed in. He doesn't like confrontation, so he thinks resigning might be the best option.

When people act in unkind ways, when they are antagonistic or heavy-handed, it's often easiest for us to back away. Conflict on any level is generally not fun. It takes an emotional and even physical toll on us. Many times over the years, I have asked large groups of people, "How many of you like confrontation?" Only two people have ever raised their hands (two people I would rather not hang around with, if you know what I mean). Most of us do not

enjoy confrontation, yet—and this is the unfortunate part—sometimes it is necessary.

Willy needs to sit Ben down, or perhaps Ben and Sue together, and have a talk. This antagonism can't keep going on, because it will poison the rest of the team. It may seem easier to let it ride, but doing nothing will actually exacerbate the problem over the long term. As a leader, Willy needs to take the bull by the horns and deal with the situation. If he doesn't, it will only get worse.

Cassie must talk with the church leadership—pastor, elders, the church board, or whoever made the decision to bring her on staff. They must be apprised of the opposition she is facing. They need to be informed, and their help must be solicited. Cassie cannot, especially as the new kid on the block, handle this situation on her own. She needs to have the gumption to request help from those who have the authority to offer such help.

Bill needs to talk with his pastor, straight on, face to face. He should document specific situations and circumstances. It is imperative that the pastor understand the facts and how his behavior is affecting Bill. If the pastor doesn't recognize it, then the next step may be to bring in others, such as elders, the church board, or the district superintendent. Walking away is not a good option.

The simple thing to do in any uncomfortable situation is to run. That is how the world deals with such scenarios. "I'm outa here!" or "I quit!" are common responses. As the church, we should offer an alternative. We ought to demonstrate another way: not running away, but endeavoring to talk through and work through problems.

We must recognize that the outcome of addressing conflict will not always be what we would like. We live in a fallen world, and we are dealing with sinful people. Sometimes people will refuse to listen or cooperate at all in the process. That, however, must not stop you from following the godly course of action in endeavoring to walk with integrity and compassion.

Exercising diplomacy—the art of building and strengthening relations between various factions—is an essential part of being an effective worship leader. It's not enough simply to believe that diplomacy is vital. We must exercise it.

Personal Reflection: *How do I tend to handle conflicts? Is there some situation going on now in which I need to exercise diplomacy?*

Chapter 16

Loyalty to Those in Authority over You

Some time ago my pastor, Nick Ittzes, and I had the opportunity to speak for elective sessions during a major worship conference. We each spoke a couple of times on totally unrelated topics. Unknowingly, we each used the other several times as an example in our teachings. We spoke of each other with respect and admiration.

Over the three days of the conference numerous people mentioned to me that they had attended sessions by each of us. Interestingly, their comments were all similar; they were amazed at our relationship and our mutual admiration for each other. At least, those were the words they used. What they were truly expressing—and it came across loud and clear—was a longing to have a similar relationship with their pastors. They realized that the relationships they had with their pastors were far from perfect, and they longed to see improvement.

Pastors and worship leaders can have solid, fulfilling relationships, but it is not always easy. I have heard it likened to a marriage relationship. The pastor, just as the husband, is the one with final authority. That does not mean he lords it over the worship leader, but he is in charge. He has ultimate responsibility for that particular congregation of people. The worship leader, just as the wife, must learn to be submissive. This is not always easy for a creative, “artsy” person. In fact, it can be downright difficult. But the Lord never told us relationships would be easy. Often the important things in life require real work.

I believe the most important characteristic a worship leader must pursue in relation to his pastor is loyalty. This is not a simple one-time verbal assent of loyalty, but a daily walking out of that loyalty. Developing loyalty is not simple. Like love and faithfulness in marriage, loyalty is a decision. It does not just happen; you must work at it. In practical terms, you can put aside your own plans and agendas and adopt the pastor’s instead. You can willingly accept the pastor’s comments and constructive criticism without taking offense or having it adversely affect your relationship. You can decide now that anything short of

obvious rebellion against the Lord and His Word is not worth causing strife in your relationship.

“Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you” (Hebrews 13:17).

The longer I live, the more I am convinced that submitting to leadership is an extremely foreign concept in our society and culture. We do not understand the full ramifications of the word *loyalty*. We are “loyal” until something happens that tests such loyalty, at which point we doubt that true loyalty is worth the effort. As worship leaders, we absolutely must convince ourselves that, just as in a biblical marriage relationship, loyalty in our relationship with our pastor is well worth the effort.

If you can find it within yourself to maintain this attitude, you will find something very interesting happening at the same time. When your pastor realizes that you are completely loyal to him, he will begin to give you more freedom in your area of responsibility, because he will have no reason to fear what you might say or do. He will begin to trust you like never before.

Try viewing the situation from the pastor’s perspective for a moment. In most congregations the worship leader is the second most influential person during the corporate gatherings. As much as one-third to one-half of the service time is taken up by your leadership. Put that fact into the mind of the pastor along with a few horror stories about worship leaders who have wreaked havoc within congregations, and you have a very volatile mixture. If, however, you as a worship leader can demonstrate your loyalty in tangible ways, the pastor will come to realize that he has reason to trust you.

A word of caution is in order. Demonstrating loyalty for the sake of getting more freedom will not work. It is usually obvious whether one’s loyalty is true, heartfelt loyalty or the I’m-doing-this-to-get-something type. Loyalty is not a means to achieve something; it is a godly quality that we should cultivate in our lives. More freedom in ministry given by the pastor is a by-product of genuine, intense loyalty.

There is another and in some ways more important principle at work here: sowing and reaping. In my experience, I have found that when I have sown loyalty, I have reaped loyalty. In visiting churches across North America, I have repeatedly heard negative comments, even in public settings, from musicians about their worship leader. Although I find such comments distressing, I am comforted in knowing without any doubt that my musicians would never do this. They are committed to my leadership. They are loyal to me at least in part because I have been loyal to those over me. You *will* reap what you sow.

If you have not already done so, decide today that you will be loyal to your pastor. The final result of God's blessing on the congregation will be well worth the effort.

Personal Reflection: *Is my relationship with my pastor strong or weak, healthy or unhealthy? What about my relationship with the music team? How is loyalty played out in my church?*

Chapter 17

Sticking With It in the Not-So-Fun Times

I am frequently asked whether I ever get discouraged about leading worship. My usual response is, “Not since last Sunday!” The truth is that leading worship, although it is *often* a lot of fun, is not *always* fun. Sometimes it is just plain hard work. At times it can be highly discouraging. I challenge anyone who has led worship for over one year to tell me truthfully that they have never had a time of discouragement or disillusionment in leading. Such feelings are a natural part of life.

I once prayed and sought the Lord regarding a specific service. I knew I had the mind of God for the service and felt fully prepared to lead the people in an awesome time of worship. I could picture all of us caught up in the wonder and majesty of Almighty God, thankful for His great love and mercy. We would probably be so lost in the Lord, I thought, that we would go on worshipping for hours. There was one minor problem in the whole plan, though: no one told the people. Now, I like to put the best construction on things: probably what happened was that it was the middle of winter, the sun had not shone in weeks, and everyone had just received notice from the IRS that their taxes were being audited. That must have been the problem, right? Whatever the reasons, the people were almost completely unresponsive during the time of worship, as if they didn’t even understand what worship was. Discouraging? You bet.

There have been other times when members of the music team or the sound crew have not displayed the type of commitment I would like to have seen. Often I have been disappointed in team members only to discover later that if I had been in their situation, I would have acted in a similar way. Although my attitude toward them changed when I understood their circumstances, it was discouraging at the time.

At other times our music team has worked for weeks on what we believe to be a hot new song. Then, with great anticipation, we introduce the song to the congregation. Lo and behold, they seem to “like it” so much that they cannot

wait until we finish singing it so we can move on to the next song. Me... discouraged? Ha!

I have heard several worship leaders refer to the “Sunday afternoon let-down syndrome.” This is a feeling of mild depression that sets in shortly after the service. I am uncertain as to whether this is completely psychological, somewhat physiological, or even partly spiritual. It could be caused by anything from feelings of inadequacy because of the mistakes made (a perfectionist mentality in a worship leader) to the withdrawal from the adrenaline “high” during the service. Regardless, many worship leaders (and also pastors) experience this phenomenon regularly, and they find it very discouraging.

Given all of this, it is important to remember why we do what we do. If we strive for popularity, fun times, goose bumps, or anything besides serving God and His people, we need to reconsider our motivation.

I once heard a Midwestern pastor say that if he had taken a step west every time he had considered quitting the ministry, he would be in the Pacific Ocean by now. If I did the same thing I probably would have walked at least halfway around the earth by now. Okay, that might be a slight exaggeration, but I’ve been at this a *long* time.

Each time I think about giving up, however, I realize that I am not leading worship just to have fun. Sure, there are lots (and I do mean *lots*) of fun times, but that is not what got me started, nor will it keep me going long-term. I am convinced that the Lord has called me, and I know He will sustain me.

Trials and difficulties will always be a part of this life. “A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all” (Psalm 34:19). The important thing is how we handle the trials and difficulties. I cannot base my walk with the Lord or even my service to Him on how things seem to be going in my life. There is only one standard I can safely measure against: the Word of God. If I ever begin to rely on good times, people’s reactions, or anything but the strength of the Lord through His promises to carry me through, I have missed God’s best.

When I get discouraged or feel like quitting, I recall some of God’s promises. He who has called me is faithful and He will see me through (1 Thessalonians 5:24). “Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning” (Psalm 30:5). God is with me and will not forsake me in my time of need (Hebrews 13:5). “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion” (Philippians 1:6). Amen!

Thank God for His sustaining power to carry us through the disappointments and setbacks of life. Don’t allow such things to keep you from your ministry of worshiping God and serving others. Be encouraged today by God’s promises for

your life.

Personal Reflection: *How has worship leading been for me—fun and easy, mostly difficult, or somewhere in between? What do I do when I get discouraged or feel like quitting?*

Chapter 18

Using and Cultivating Administrative Abilities

My wife has amazing organizational abilities. She coordinates all of the worship seminars that I present across North America. I have often heard her talking on the phone with the worship leader from a church about the administrative aspects of an upcoming seminar. Sometimes she hesitates in the conversation and then inquires, “Is there a secretary I should be working with on some of these detail issues?” She has learned over time that when a person says certain things in a conversation, it indicates that he or she is organizationally challenged.

Without question, the thing most consistently lacking in the music ministries of churches I’ve visited is good administration. This is not to say that none of the music ministers I have met has *any* administrative abilities. Overall, however, in music ministries organization and administration take a back seat to nearly every other priority. The major reason for this administrative lack seems to be that the worship leader, or minister of music, or head of the music department, is not primarily an administrator. Music leaders usually are enlisted for their artistic, musical, creative abilities, not for their organizational prowess.

It may seem contradictory to be creative and organized at the same time. This phenomenon is, at least in part, due to the left-brain/right-brain functions. The right side of the brain governs the creative and artistic abilities, while the left side controls organizational abilities. Many people in our society use this left-brain/right-brain philosophy to justify a less than desirable performance in an area where they or others are undisciplined. It is understandable to them that a highly talented musician would also be highly disorganized. But does being understandable make such behavioral patterns excusable?

My pastor, Nick Ittzes, is an extremely gifted and creative musician. One day many years ago, God impressed upon him that it was time for him to get

organized. He argued with the Lord that since he was the artistic type, organization was pretty much out of the question. God, in turn, queried whether Nick thought he was more creative than the Creator. Nick's answer was obviously, "No." Then the Lord pressed further as to whether Nick thought that He, God, was organized. Nick has since worked earnestly on being more organized!

These two characteristics, creativity and organization, are not mutually exclusive. It is possible to be a creative artist and to have administrative and organizational abilities. Most people find that one ability comes easier than the other, but both abilities can be developed to a high degree of proficiency.

If you are a creative person and find organization and administration repulsive, I believe that God has a word for you: "Change your attitude!" It is possible to develop at least a portion of organizational skills even if such skills do not come naturally.

You could take a number of practical steps to develop in this area. Here are some ideas. Take a class on administration at a local community college. Participate in a "Getting Organized" seminar. Talk with friends who have greater organizational abilities and ask for advice about your specific situation. Seek the counsel of businesspeople in your congregation about methods of organization they have found to be helpful. Whatever step you decide to take, you *need* to begin developing organizational abilities. If you do not, your artistic flair may continue to blossom but you will never be organized enough for it to have the full impact God desires for it to have.

Another practical step you can take in getting organized is to have others help you in your administrative endeavors. In other words, delegate. Ask someone to take on some of the more tedious organizational tasks such as filing music, handling the input of songs for video projection, or scheduling the musicians. There may be administrative people who would like to help organize special services and coordinate the various music department personnel.

Delegating tasks can be helpful, but it still does not negate the necessity of *your* achieving a level of organization. Without developing your administrative abilities, you will never fully become the worship *leader* God wants you to be.

Personal Reflection: *Where am I on the spectrum between being highly organized and being highly disorganized? What administrative tasks do I neglect, and how can I change that?*

Chapter 19

Choosing Members for Your Worship Team

If you are beginning as a worship leader, you will realize at some point that you could use some instrumental or vocal help in leading worship. When this happens and you decide to form a worship team (or praise team or music ministry team), you will benefit from some ideas on choosing the right people. Since the initial writing of this book, I have compiled an entire book on just this topic.¹ Here, however, I will offer some foundational thoughts on this important subject.

First of all, pray!!!! I am not sure I have put enough exclamation points after that word. When choosing your team, prayer must be the number one priority. If you miss this principle, the remaining ideas in this chapter will be worthless to you.

The question becomes, “So what do I pray about?”

First, pray that the Lord will either raise up the right people *within* your congregation or send the right people *to* your congregation. Be specific in this prayer. What do you need? A bass player? A drummer? A piano player? What level of skill is needed for these positions? What about the musicians’ heart attitude? What about their commitment to the Lord and to your church? If certain qualifications are important to you, make them prayer priorities. The Lord honors specific prayers.

Second, pray for wisdom and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. You, as the worship leader, should have the authority to make the final decision about who is a part of the team. Therefore, even more than having good human ideas, you need the Lord’s wisdom and guidance to lead you in your decisions.

With prayer established as the number one priority, I want to highlight some qualities I look for in prospective music team members.

Maturity is the first thing I look for in individuals I am considering for our worship team. I am not referring so much to age as I am to people’s spiritual maturity. Do they really *know* God? Have they been walking with Him for a long

time? Do they demonstrate a level of spiritual maturity in their daily walk? If I do not know an individual personally, I ask mutual acquaintances about his or her maturity. I want as much information going into the decision as possible. Six months after a person is a part of the team is *not* the best time to find out that he or she has some major areas of immaturity.

The next quality I look for is commitment, both to the Lord and to our congregation. Are the individuals not only mature but also solid believers? Are they strongly committed to the church where they will be ministering? There are many jump-from-church-to-church Christians within the body of Christ in general, and such people are not good candidates to be on our worship team.

Finally, I look at people's musical abilities. Please notice that this is the third quality that I look for and not the first. The other two qualities are far more important. However, musical abilities are indeed important. Musicians need to be skilled enough to do what you need them to do. Poor musical abilities can distract and detract from people's worship.

As you select and work with members of your worship team, clear and constant communication is essential. This is probably the biggest point of downfall for many worship leaders. If you communicate clearly, you can avoid lots of problems. But if you do not communicate clearly, you are setting yourself and your team up for trouble later on.

I believe in having written guidelines for worship teams. I have compiled a sheet with a complete list of what is expected of members of our worship team, including time commitments, spiritual maturity, support of family, and attitude.² When someone inquires about being a part of our worship team, I simply hand them the sheet. I tell them that if they are still interested after reading the guidelines, we can sit down and talk. Over half of the people who express interest never broach the subject again; after reading through the guidelines, they understand the commitment and realize it is not for them. What would happen if we had no written guidelines and such people joined the team? It would be too late for them to realize the commitment was too great. We all would have wasted a lot of time.

Communication is vital all the way through the process of choosing team members, and afterward as well. If you decide an applicant is to be a part of the team, he or she needs to know exactly what that means, what his or her role will be, etc. If you decide an applicant is not to be a part of the team, let him or her know that too. *Communicate*—you will be glad you did.

Throughout the process of choosing team members, do not forget the first thing we discussed in this chapter: pray! This will prevent most problems before they start, and will help you find the people the Lord wants to be a part of your

worship team.

Personal Reflection: *What guidelines, if any, have I used in selecting worship team members in the past? Have the results been positive? How could I modify or implement such guidelines in light of the suggestions in this chapter?*

[1] *Developing an Effective Worship Ministry*, 2nd ed. (Lynnwood, Wa.: Emerald Books, 2008).

[2] The complete list can be found in *Developing an Effective Worship Ministry*, 2nd ed., pp. 43–45.

Chapter 20

Caring for the Members of Your Worship Team

From my earliest recollections of being a part of our church's worship team (*many* years ago), I remember vividly that we were friends. We spent time together. We enjoyed one another's company. We liked each other. To this day, we're still friends.

It was not until I began to travel regularly and minister at other churches that I realized how nonstandard this is. I have seen everything from situations similar to ours, to teams who tolerate one another, to teams who actually despise one another. I have encountered worship leaders who don't care about the people involved in the worship ministry, and other worship leaders who feel as though no one on their team cares about them. Some feel that they cannot communicate their overall goal for worship to the members of their team. Some experience strife during practice sessions or even friction on Sunday mornings. Some have told me they want to quit.

What a tragedy that worship leaders too often do not see the importance of cultivating good, solid, biblical relationships in their worship teams, especially when such relationships can effectively alleviate most problems. Problems will never completely disappear, of course, but they can be minimized by having proper relationships.

Cultivating good relationships can enhance many things in music ministry programs. For example, if I feel that our lead guitarist needs to do a heart check about his motivation for the way he has been playing lately, my comments will be received much better if he is my friend. If, on the other hand, the only time I ever talk to him is when I feel I need to correct something, he will be far less open to my correction. A friendship can make a world of difference.

If the only way you interact with the members of your worship team is on a professional level, then you are missing a big part of what the Lord wants to do

within your group. Loving, caring relationships should permeate everything you do as a team. Relationships like this can even help you perform better musically. Friends—true friends—desire to see one another do their very best. They help each other to reach their highest potential in God, even musically.

It is obvious from both Scripture and experience that wrong attitudes toward one another within congregations is a hindrance to worship. God is building His people into a temple to offer up spiritual sacrifices, or worship (1 Peter 2:5). If the building is not built with right relationships, then the spiritual sacrifices offered in that temple will be lacking. This effect is magnified if the poor relationships are among the members of the worship ministry team, a microcosm of the congregation as a whole. The main responsibility of the team is to lead worship. If there is constant discord within the team, the praise and worship will suffer greatly.

So, how do you cultivate strong relationships on worship teams? Above all, team members must decide that they desire and will earnestly pursue such relationships. Most likely this won't happen unless you, as the worship leader, instill in them how vital these relationships are. This commitment to relationships may not be easy—in fact, for some teams it may be quite difficult—but the final result is well worth the effort.

There are simple and practical ways to cultivate relationships. For example, you can invite team members (not necessarily everyone at once) over for dinner. In so doing you are spending time with them on a social basis, not just a professional one. This will allow you to get to know one another as people, not only as musicians.

We have an annual cookout for the members of our worship team *and* their families. We eat, play volleyball, eat, talk, eat, play party ping-pong, and eat. It is strictly social and a lot of fun. And it does wonders for building our relationships.

We also take time to enjoy one another's company at our rehearsals. This was hard for me to handle at first since I am an extremely time-conscious person. But as I have realized how vital our relationships with one another are, I have also realized the need to have fun together. So our practices are not strict, regimented times. We do have an agenda, but we also take time to enjoy one another.

Here are some additional ways to cultivate relationships. Keep up on the personal lives of your team members. Find out how they are doing at home and work. Send them birthday cards (preferably on their birthdays). Let them know you care about them as people. (Because of the quality home-fellowship groups at our church, I do not feel a need to offer daily pastoral guidance. If, however,

one of the members of our music team is hurting, I am quick to find out how I can help.)

Also, let the team members know how *you* are doing. People will more readily open up to you when you lead the way in being open and honest. Transparency needs to start with someone, so it might as well be you. After all, you are the worship leader.

Understand that you may not see eye to eye with all team members on every issue. Absolute agreement is not necessary. What *is* necessary is that you remember a more vital principle than the one on which you disagree: Jesus' command to love one another. It is a much higher motivation to love and care for each other, even when you do not feel like it, than to tolerate each other.

Cultivate friendship within your worship team. You will be amazed at what a positive overall effect it can have.

Personal Reflection: *What is my relationship like with the members of my team? Do I have difficulty relating to certain members? How can I strengthen these relationships?*

Chapter 21

Getting the Most Out of Your Rehearsals

Many churches have asked me for practical ideas to improve their worship team rehearsals and preparation times. Practice times can become mundane and even boring for participants. I cannot offer the final word on how to handle rehearsals, but I will offer some practical tips in response to some frequent questions.

One of the main questions I hear is, “How often should we get together as a team?” There are no right and wrong answers to this question since so many variables are involved. In many cases a once-a-week practice works best, but your schedule must be determined by your particular situation. Practices are important because working together musically during a service is difficult if you are not very familiar with one another’s musical styles and abilities. The ability to flow as a team is made possible in large part by frequent practices. Without regular interaction, it is difficult to be musically tight.

The length of the practice session should also be determined by your particular situation. A team that consists of two musicians will probably not require as much time as a thirty-piece orchestra. Keep in mind, however, that as your team grows, your practices may need to be longer. Do not lock yourself into a certain practice length now and, if and when you change it, end up with disgruntled musicians. Let them know that there may come a time when the length of your practice times will change.

Another common question is, “What should we do at our rehearsals?” On the surface, the answer seems obvious. But there are more possible elements than you may think. I will list several below. Not all of these need to be a part of every practice; they can be intermixed and used at appropriate times to accomplish your agenda for a session.

1. Worship. This is an overlooked part of the practice time, yet it is difficult to lead worship on Sunday mornings as a team if you never worship together at other times. Our job as worship leaders is not just to provide a musical

background in which others may worship; we are to be the leaders *in worship*. If our times of preparation consist only of practicing music and not actually worshiping God, we are sending the wrong message to our musicians. We are telling them that the musical aspect is more important than what is coming from the heart. Spending time in worship as a team is vital.

2. *Pray*. This, too, is frequently left out of practice times. We should take time to pray for one another, for the congregation, for the pastor, etc. Pray and seek God's direction together for a particular service or series of services. Prayer is important in building team unity. As the leader, you should strike a balance in your participation in the times of prayer. You should be an example for the others in prayer, without making it just *your* time of prayer. Do not dominate the entire time by praying aloud and not allowing others to pray. Encourage them to let their "requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6 NASB).

3. *Work on new songs*. Finally we get to what everyone thinks practices are all about (but bear in mind that this is number three on the list). When attempting to learn new songs, it is best to have music for all musicians. Some may be able to share, but asking twelve musicians to gather around one hand-scrawled 3 x 5 note card can be a bit unwieldy. Some teams prefer to have separate sessions for the vocalist and instrumentalist when learning new songs. This helps them learn vocal harmonies and various instrumental parts without interfering with one another. This, again, will depend upon your particular situation.

One additional note on this: Always try to learn a song thoroughly before using it corporately. This can save a great deal of embarrassment for everyone. On the other hand, keep in mind that working on a new song for months without using it for a service can be frustrating for the worship team members.

4. *Work on old songs*. This is especially important if you add new people to your worship team. Do not assume that new people know all of the old songs. It is good to have a working list of old songs and occasionally check that everyone on the team is familiar with all of the songs. It is also worthwhile sometimes to take an old song and do a new musical arrangement for it. This can go a long way toward bringing new life to something old.

5. *Evaluate previous service(s)*. A great deal can be learned from sincere evaluation, as long as you do not become overly introspective. Looking at what you did musically as well as considering the overall response from the congregation can be beneficial for preparing for coming services. Reviewing previous services is not so you can repeat something that worked last time but to evaluate why things happened the way they did and what could have been done differently or perhaps better. This is not a time to be supercritical. Simply look at what happened for the purpose of learning.

6. *Prepare for special music.* These songs usually involve more work than typical praise and worship songs because they are often more intricate and also because the congregation will not be singing—they only listen. Most worship teams spend more time polishing their special music than they do their praise and worship music.

A major consideration in planning rehearsals is variety. People fall into predictable patterns in many areas of life. The same is true for worship leaders and worship rehearsals. It is important to keep the interest and the enthusiasm of your musicians at a high level on an ongoing basis. This can be partially accomplished by adding variety and thereby avoiding falling into a rut in your worship rehearsals.

The ideas I suggested are not all-inclusive. Combine your own ideas and other suggestions you encounter with these to find the proper balance for *your* rehearsals.

Personal Reflection: *What is my view of our worship team rehearsals? What appears to be my team's view of our rehearsals? Based on what I've read in this chapter, what steps could I take to improve our practice times?*

Chapter 22

Understanding the Purposes of Music

It is amazing to me how many times the Bible refers to music. With over 800 references throughout Scripture, it is obvious that music is something dear to the heart of God. If this is true, music leaders should be as familiar with the use of music in the Bible as possible. Yet I have frequently found that the people in charge of church music seem ignorant of the great variety of uses the Word of God gives. Let's take a look at a few of these.

The first use of music in Scripture, especially obvious from our vantage point as worship leaders, is to praise and worship the Lord. I believe that this is the highest purpose for music. Again and again, especially throughout the book of Psalms, we are entreated to "Praise the Lord!" and to "Sing unto the Lord!" Music is a wonderful way to give expression of our adoration to our Creator, Redeemer, Deliverer, Shelter, Helper in time of need. He is worthy of our praise.

Another use of music is to teach God's Word. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God" (Colossians 3:16). Many people in the body of Christ today know more Scripture because of the choruses they sing than from rote memorization. There is something about putting the words to music that makes them much easier for us to remember.

We can also help release God's power through music. No, I'm not getting spooky on you here. This concept is quite apparent in Scripture. In Acts 16, when Paul and Silas were in jail, they were praying and singing hymns of praise to God and suddenly a great earthquake shook the jail (Acts 16:25-26). Coincidence? I don't think so. In 2 Chronicles three armies "came to make war on Jehoshaphat" (2 Chronicles 20:1). After prayer and seeking the Lord, Jehoshaphat sent the singers out ahead of the army. "As they began to *sing and praise*, the LORD set ambushes against the [enemy], and they were defeated" (2 Chronicles 20:22). I do not fully understand how God's power is released

through music, but I have seen it happen too many times to believe it is just coincidence. I have witnessed physical and emotional healings, conversions, and other powerful things while worshiping the Lord. God's power is somehow released through our music.

Music is also used in Scripture to tell of God's great works and, consequently, to stir up our faith. "Tell of his works with songs of joy" (Psalm 107:22). Musically etching the works of God into our memories causes these works to become more real to us. The children of Israel seemed to comprehend this when the Lord brought them out of Egypt. "Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD: 'I will sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea'" (Exodus 15:1). We can use music with the works the Lord does among us today. What would happen if we wrote songs that told of the salvation of the young mother that took place in our church service two weeks ago? Would it help us to remember and give Him praise? "I will praise you, O LORD, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonders" (Psalm 9:1).

Music also helps bring unity in our services. As we gather together, we each come from varied backgrounds and experiences, and we need a vehicle whereby we can collectively focus on Jesus. There is something about music that aids us in focusing our hearts and thoughts; it draws us together into corporate unity more quickly than anything else can.

Scripture gives numerous other uses of music, but for the sake of brevity I will list only one other. Music prepares the hearts of the people to receive God's Word through the sermon. I have heard this use of music likened to a farmer's field. As we lead the people in praise and worship to the Lord, we are, in effect, plowing the soil of their hearts. Then the sower (the preacher) plants the seed of the Word. Nothing will work better than music for this preparation of hearts. Be careful, however, not to make this your main focus during worship. Our eyes are to be on Jesus, not the upcoming message.

The main point here is to be aware of and open to the various ways that music can be used. If we have a narrow view of the uses of music, we may miss the other ways in which the Lord may use it. He knows no bounds. His creativity is limitless.

Personal Reflection: *Which uses of music have I witnessed to be powerful or effective? What new way of using music might our congregation benefit from?*

Chapter 23

Understanding Music as a Tool

My father was an extremely talented person. He had the ability to do auto repair work, woodworking, electrical work, plumbing, and more, all with a very high degree of professionalism. Having done all of these things for years, he had accumulated quite a collection of tools. He had more full toolboxes than I have tools. (Unfortunately, I did not inherit much of his ability to work with his hands. I did, however, learn a lot from him.) It always amazed me that regardless of the task, he had just the right tool to do the job. He very seldom used a tool to accomplish something for which it was not intended. He used the *right* tool for the job. As worship leaders, we need to understand this concept in our music.

Some time ago I had the opportunity to attend a production featuring a major symphony orchestra. Throughout the evening, nearly the entire gamut of human emotion was portrayed using only musical instruments. There was peace, there was joy, there was sorrow, there was tension. Each was depicted by the use of appropriate instrumentation. It is important to note that this would have been impossible to do if all of the instruments had played continuously throughout the entire concert. Instead, the various instruments helped to create the proper setting and feel for what the music attempted to convey.

We in the church need to learn how to properly convey emotion through our music. We should not just “plow through” our praise and worship times. Instead, we should strive to be sensitive to how we might enhance the music overall by varying the instrumentation.

A good friend of mine drives home the point, saying, “Most church praise and worship music is put through a ‘blander.’ It all comes out sounding the same!” If all our music sounds even somewhat similar, we can not adequately express varying themes like joy, peace, exaltation, and celebration. There must be variety in what we do.

To that end, we need to learn to use each of the instruments we have available as tools. Just as my father used certain tools at certain times, it is

necessary for us to choose carefully which instruments will most effectively portray what we are trying to say with our worship. If we are in a slow, intimate time of communing with the Lord, a blaring electric guitar solo or loud cymbal crashes would probably be out of order. On the other hand, during a boisterous time of jubilant celebration these things might be very appropriate. Obviously these are extreme cases; we also need to pay attention to subtle musical nuances to enhance our worship. Use all of the instruments you have available to their full potential, but do not overuse them.

As worship leaders, we again need to be examples. I usually lead worship with my guitar. At times, however—and more and more frequently—I do not even play. This is not because I do not know the music but because the guitar would not work as well as another instrument to convey the mood of the song. Even vocally there are times when I stop singing or at least back off from my microphone. Sometimes it is because the song needs the soft intimacy of one of our female vocalists. Other times it may be because I feel that the congregation needs to hear one another worshipping the Lord instead of the singers up front.

Before I ask others to sit out from playing or singing, I must first be willing to sit out myself. It is easier for me to tell our drummer to sit out the first two times through an intimate chorus if he has seen me sitting out on other songs.

The bottom line is this: we need to learn to be sensitive and creative with our music to enhance the overall experience for our congregations and allow God to do what He wants to do. If we simply “blanderize” our music, we may miss part of the purpose the Lord has for us and our ministries during our times of praise and worship.

Personal Reflection: *Do the words sensitive and creative describe the music in our church? If not, what specific steps could we take to improve in these areas? What unused tools (instruments or techniques) could we use to enhance our music?*

Chapter 24

Understanding the Power of Music

I mentioned earlier that I spent ten years in sales before becoming a full-time worship leader. During the last half of that time I sold commercial and industrial lighting products. In endeavoring to do the best job that I could, I did a great deal of research on lighting. The effects of light on people are amazing (and shocking). For example, one of the reasons some people experience depression in the winter is the lack of sunlight. Various types and degrees of lighting can also affect people's buying habits. In the workplace, different types of lighting can make people work more enthusiastically. If lighting has such a powerful effect on people, how much more will music? While lighting can make a strong impact, nothing in the "natural" realm can compare with the effect of music.

Music in and of itself is a powerful force. Even before adding the anointing of the Holy Spirit, there seems to be some type of force inherent in music. Music will affect your mood. Studies have demonstrated that it will alter your buying habits. It can help relieve pain. Music can reduce or increase stress. It can make you work more efficiently. It can even affect your eating habits. Secular studies alone have proven all these things about music.

The Bible confirms there is indeed a power in music. David played his harp for the tormented King Saul, and the evil spirit from God departed (1 Samuel 16:23). I find it interesting that this passage says nothing about David singing, only that he played his harp. Further, music can stir up the gift of prophecy. In 2 Kings 3:15, Elisha requested that a minstrel play before he would prophesy. First Samuel 10:5, 6, and 10 refer to a group of prophets with "lyres, tambourines, flutes and harps being played before them." And when Saul met them, he began to prophesy too. Are all of these events just coincidences? No, God has apparently put an inherent quality in music that gives it sway over the unseen realm. Music is a powerful force. This is true for both good and evil purposes.

So what does all of this have to do with us as worship leaders? I believe that it is absolutely essential for us in this hour to begin to understand the power of

music and to learn how to use it effectively. Music during an altar service is not just mood music. It can dramatically affect people's lives, causing them to be more aware of and open to the Holy Spirit's work.

We need to discover through personal experience and the experiences of others how to use music to its full potential. I am not talking only about instrumental sensitivity, although this will play into it. I am referring to finding out how music relates to what the Lord is doing and then using it to accomplish His purposes.

I will be the first to admit that I have more questions in this area than answers. I do not always understand how to accomplish this in my church, let alone in yours. I have no question, however, that we have only begun to scratch the surface of the full potential of music. There is far more yet to be discovered. We may find some of the answers in music training, but we will undoubtedly find more answers while on our faces before the One who created music. He understands this vehicle we call music far better than all of our human teachers combined. If we ask Him and then allow His creativity and sensitivity to fill us, we will be more able to fulfill His purposes in the earth.

Let us continue to seek Him for the ways He would have us use the might which He has given us in music.

Personal Reflection: *What is my current understanding of the power of music? How have I seen the Holy Spirit work through music? How might our congregation experience more of music's power?*

Chapter 25

Compiling a Solid Song Repertoire

Opinions on songs and styles of music are not hard to come by. Everyone has a thought on what is “good” music and what is “bad” music. One person’s least favorite style of music is at the very top of someone else’s preference list.

Over the years I have frequently heard comments like “We do too many fast songs” or “We do too many slow songs.” Some tell me that we do not sing enough hymns, while others say that we sing too many hymns. There are those who think we do too many new songs, while others say we don’t learn enough of them. Everyone—and I do mean *everyone*—has an opinion.

The main key I have found to solve this problem is striking a balance and incorporating a variety of music and types of songs into the repertoire. If I am hearing both sides of the same issue expressed (e.g., “too many fast” and “too many slow”), I figure I am probably just about where I should be musically for our congregation. (Keep in mind, though, that every congregation is different. What may be correct for my church may not be as appropriate for yours.)

Here are some practical ideas you can use in compiling a solid song repertoire.

The first thing I recommend is to examine the lyrics of old songs and potential new songs. It is best to examine the lyrics separately from the music because we musicians can often be swayed by a song that is lyrically poor if the music is great. This is not a good idea. When checking the words, the following are a few things to look for:

- To whom do the words draw attention? (Are we singing about God or about us?)
- Do the words line up with Scripture? (Be careful to check the context.)
- Are they within the experience and understanding of the congregation?

(Many 300-year-old songs are not.)

- Do they rhythmically fit the music? (This is a real problem as more and more people with very little training endeavor to write songs.)

Additionally, you should examine the music.

- Is the music good quality? (Not trite, boring, etc.)
- Is the music within the experience and understanding of the congregation? (Again, the music of many 300-year-old songs is not, but neither is the music of many ultramodern songs.)
- Does it enhance the words? (The words “weeping and mourning and gnashing of teeth” sung to the tune of “The Joy of the Lord is My Strength” would probably not work well.)

You should also check for overall variety within your song repertoire.

- Do you use enough keys in your music? (The congregation can easily become musically bored if you play everything in the key of C.)
- What about a variety of rhythms and tempos? (Fast, slow, 4/4, 2/4, 3/4, 6/8, etc.)
- Do you try different styles of music? (Y’all use any country music? Or hymns?)
- Do you introduce different types of songs? (The Bible talks about psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Also, there are prayers, praises, testimony songs, old songs, new songs, choruses, complex songs, etc.)
- Is there variety within individual songs? (Men sing, women sing, children sing, soloist sings, congregation sings, instrumental section, crescendo, decrescendo, modulate to a different key, etc.—although preferably not all in the same song!)

Constantly be on the lookout for new songs. The Bible repeatedly tells us to “sing a new song to the Lord.” I am convinced that this is more for our benefit than for His: the Lord never tires of our saying, “I love You,” but we tire of saying it in exactly the same way with the same melody. We have a need to sing

new songs. And with so many sources for new songs, we have the advantage of being able to be very selective. Do not just use any song that happens along. Be careful to choose the right ones for the Lord's current work in your church.

Finally, be open to writing songs and sharing them. As the leader of worship in your congregation, you understand the spiritual condition of your people, and the Lord may well prompt you to write a song that is exactly what they need.

In all of these things, be careful to consider the opinions expressed by members of the congregation regarding the music you use. Remember not to take criticism personally, since it usually does not represent the opinion of the majority. However, it is important for you to hear and acknowledge member's opinions, for they are the ones you lead before the Lord.

Personal Reflection: *Am I happy with our current song repertoire, or do I wish we had more or different songs? What are the opinions of people in the congregation? What might be a good way forward?*

Chapter 26

Being Spiritually Prepared to Lead

If you had the opportunity to meet with the leader of your country, what would you do? I have always wanted to meet a president of the United States. If I actually had the chance, I most likely would take time to get ready for such an encounter. I would think about what I would wear, what I would say, and how I would act. If we would do all that for a human being, how much more should we take time to prepare to meet with the almighty King?

Have you ever come rushing in to a service at the last minute and tried to worship the Lord? It is difficult to give God your best. It is better to take some time to prepare your heart.

A number of years ago I had the privilege of attending a worship conference where the late Dr. Judson Cornwall was the main speaker. During one of the evening sessions he read from Revelation 7:9, “I looked and there before me was a great multitude...from every nation...standing before the throne...wearing white robes.” He stopped reading there and made this statement: “The more that I travel and get to know God and His people, the more I am convinced of the absolute necessity of vestments in worship.” Everyone in the auditorium must have had the same quizzical look on his face as I did because Dr. Cornwall caught himself and said, “Oh, wait a minute, we’re not on the same wavelength. I’m not talking about the physical. You can come before the Lord in blue jeans and bare feet if you like. That’s between you and Him. I’m talking about the spiritual: the only way we can come before the Lord is clothed in the white robes which Jesus purchased for us at Calvary.”

Some people say that praise is the door to the presence of the Lord. I understand the underlying meaning of their statement, and yet this view falls short of what the Bible teaches. “I am the way and the truth and the life. *No one comes to the Father except through me*” (John 14:6). “We have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place *by the blood of Jesus*” (Hebrews 10:19). The only way we can come before the Father is by the blood which Jesus shed on the

cross. Singing is not the door; Jesus is. It is only through His death and resurrection that we can even approach God to worship Him.

We need to appropriate those white robes for ourselves before we can worship. We must realize anew each time that it is only by His grace and mercy that we can come before His presence. In and of ourselves we are not worthy, but He, by His own blood, has made us worthy. Peter encourages us to offer “spiritual sacrifices *acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*” (1 Peter 2:5). Our worship itself is not acceptable except through Jesus.

So, practically speaking, we need to take time to prepare our hearts and receive His forgiveness to be ready to worship. We need to, as 1 John 1:9 tells us, confess our sins and receive His forgiveness and cleansing.

Specifically what such preparation looks like may be very different for each person. Our worship team meets at the church 45 minutes before the first Sunday morning service. Over the years, I have instructed them to arrive ready not just to sing and play music but also to worship the Lord. For some team members, the preparation time is in the car on the way to the church. Others may need to take more time at home or perhaps arrive at the church a bit sooner than everyone else. I arrive over an hour before the rest of the team; this gives me plenty of time to prepare my heart. Whatever heart preparation you require, take the time you need to be ready to worship the King.

Personal Reflection: *Have I noticed a difference between worship services when I spend time and when don't spend time preparing my heart? What specific form of preparation would best enable me to lead worship?*

Chapter 27

Being Mentally/Musically/Physically Prepared to Lead

Beyond heart preparation, which we discussed in the previous chapter, there is another dimension to preparing for worship. To me, being musically prepared is obvious, but it is apparently not obvious to everyone. I have been in churches that believe if something happens spontaneously during the service, it is from God, and if something is planned out ahead of time, it is not from God.

Nowhere does the Bible teach this about planning. As a matter of fact, the opposite is true. God Himself had a plan for salvation since before time began. It was not a last minute, spontaneous thought; it was carefully planned out. God didn't finish creation, go off, and take a nap somewhere and then come back and say, "Son, look what they've done! What are we going to do?" No, the Lord had a plan from the very beginning.

Do you remember the time in the Old Testament when King Jehoshaphat sent the singers out ahead of the army (2 Chronicles 20)? Do you recall why he did that? Because he and the people sought God ahead of time, and the Lord told them not to worry because he was going to win the battle for them. Jehoshaphat didn't wait until they were in the midst of the battle; he sought the Lord beforehand.

Further, God's Word promises that if we commit our works to the Lord, our "plans will succeed" (Proverbs 16:3). Even Luke, the Gospel writer, was a planner. He did careful research (Luke 1:1–3) before writing his account of Jesus' life. Was he led by the Holy Spirit in this research? Second Timothy 3:16 says that he was.

It is not wrong to plan. In fact, it is very much within the will of the Lord to be prepared. It only becomes wrong when our planning precludes the leading of the Spirit of God. I often half-jokingly say that I am sure the Lord knows what He wants to have happen on Sunday morning at least by Saturday night. If you

ask Him to clue you in on what your part is to be, you at least give Him the opportunity to direct you to rightly lead His people in worship.

I am frequently amazed at how natural the leading of the Lord can be. A number of years ago another worship leader made a statement that really struck home. “As a worship leader,” he said, “I am not just given to myself; I am given to God and His people.” This means that the thoughts I often have, the things going on in my life, the songs I find myself singing throughout the week, are not just for me; they are for God’s people as well. When I think about this, it makes a big difference in my preparation. It allows me to rely on the leading of the Holy Spirit. I do not need to wonder whether He is leading me; I know He is. In John 10:27, Jesus says, “My sheep listen to my voice.” You are His sheep and you *do* hear and listen to His voice. Understanding and believing this truth makes preparing to lead worship much easier.

Finally, after careful, prayerful planning I am still open to spontaneous promptings during the service. But I have found that if I am open to His leading ahead of time, a major change during the service is the exception rather than the rule. The Lord has promised to lead His church. He did not say it would only be on the spur of the moment. He wants us to plan and prepare in advance, seeking to be led by His Spirit.

Personal Reflection: *What are the main mental/musical/physical things for which I and my team need to prepare? How well have we been prepared, and how has God led us as we have planned in advance?*

Chapter 28

Understanding the Dynamics of the Worship Service

Finally, we get to what everyone thinks about when discussing worship leading. I have purposely devoted only one chapter of this book to the actual service. The art of leading worship could be an entire book by itself. However, it is essential for us to understand that although the service itself is important, any service will only be as successful as the foundations you have laid for it.

I find it fascinating to watch athletic contests like the Olympic Games. Some of the events are over in just a few minutes (some even a matter of seconds), and that is all that we as spectators see. We get to view the climax, but not the things leading up to that climax. We see a person (or a group of people) win the big event, sometimes without much difficulty. We miss the years of training that preceded the win. The hour after hour after grueling hour of hard work and commitment are unseen by us. We view only the event itself.

In the same way, most people in the church see only the actual worship service. They get blessed and assume that the service is all there is to being a worship leader. Like viewers of the Olympics, they miss the important training and preparation involved. But that does not mean the training, the groundwork, and the preparation aren't important. If *you* lay the proper groundwork, your actual times of leading worship will be far more effective. As a result, people will be drawn closer to the Lord, souls may be won, victories gained, and glory given to the Author of praise.

Once you have prepared for a specific service (as discussed in the previous chapters), you are ready to lead. It is important to note that although you have done the necessary homework, it is imperative that you remain open and attentive to the Holy Spirit *while you lead*.

I mentioned earlier that a major change in plans is unusual if you have prepared properly. Notice that I never said that it is impossible. For some reason,

we seem to be more tuned in during the service than at any other time. This may be due in part to the urgency of the moment, since we are now “in the spotlight” instead of just getting ready. Whatever the reason, I frequently encounter variations in the service from what I have planned. Most of the time these variations are minor, yet they still occur. We should accept ahead of time the possibility of variance so that we are not thrown totally off balance when it happens.

Here are a few tips to use during the service. First off, it is helpful to create a flow during the service. Jumping back and forth between different types of songs (fast, slow, fast, slow) or even continually stopping and starting can be disruptive. Use medleys of songs that fit together musically and lyrically and flow from one right into another. This will create a comfortable atmosphere that allows the participants to focus on the Lord instead of wondering what is going to happen next.

When you do break between songs, it is not necessary to tell the people, “The next song we’re going to do is...” This takes the focus off the Lord, and the congregation will get that information as soon as you begin the next song. Use the time between songs to keep God preeminent. I often pray aloud to help maintain our focus on God. Sometimes, usually early in the service, I talk about an attribute of the Lord (e.g., His greatness, His holiness, His omniscience) that leads us into the next song. The point is, always endeavor to keep the attention on the One you are worshiping.

It is also important to avoid progressing too quickly. I am sometimes frustrated by people’s lack of response to worship, especially at the beginning of the service. Then I realize that I have spent much time in prayer and preparation for the service. Many of them have spent no time in preparation (this is not an excuse for them, but it is a fact), and they are not mentally, physically, or spiritually prepared to enter into worship of the Lord. If I simply forge on ahead, I may leave many of them behind. Instead I must allow them to progress ahead with me and be careful not to leave them in the dust.

One thing I have found beneficial when this happens is repeating songs a few times, especially shorter songs. This allows the truth of the words to penetrate the minds and hearts of the people more thoroughly than just singing a song one time through. Try to find a balance between repeating a song enough times to allow it to sink in and moving on before the song becomes overly repetitious.

Lastly, keep your eyes on the Lord. This is probably the best advice for any and all situations, but especially for problem situations. When the microphone fails to work, when you break a guitar string, when things are not going quite as

planned, keep your eyes on the Lord. Always remember that you are not there to impress people or to show off your talents. Your job is to lead people before the throne of God. Keeping your eyes on Him will make it easier for people to follow.

Your preparation time will be extremely beneficial to you during the worship service. You will be less likely to become flustered or distracted if you have sought the mind of the Lord ahead of time. Keeping your focus on God will be much easier if, because of preparation, you can be less conscious of the music and the details of what is going on and more conscious of God and what the Holy Spirit desires to do in the hearts of the people.

Personal Reflection: *Which suggestion in this chapter (e.g., preparing, creating flow, praying, repeating songs, keeping one's eyes on the Lord) stand out to me? What areas of the service does our worship team do best? What areas need work?*

Chapter 29

Ministering Beyond Your Comfort Zone

You don't have to like it; you just have to do it." How clearly those words from my childhood still ring within me! I disliked hearing them at the time because they meant that I had to do something that, at the very least, made me uncomfortable.

Incredibly, I now occasionally find myself saying those same words to my children. I also say them to myself, even in the arena of being a worship leader. There are times when I must go beyond my comfort zone. Sometimes this ends up being for my benefit, and sometimes it is to help others achieve all that God has for them.

Several years ago I began to realize that God had called me not only to lead His people in worship but also to disciple others into a worship leading role. In doing this I have encountered those who do not do things the same way I do. For example, I usually lead worship using my guitar, yet a couple of the people I have worked with over the years, although fine vocalists, play no musical instruments. "How, Lord," I have asked, "am I supposed to teach them to lead worship?" The answer was obvious: "Show them."

I was not comfortable the first Sunday I left my guitar at home and led worship using only a microphone (and a few hand signals). In fact, I felt highly self-conscious and even somewhat inhibited. I was dependent upon (and vulnerable to) the instrumentalists. I made it through that Sunday and soon became comfortable leading praise and worship without my guitar. Through this experience, I was able to show those whom I disciplined that it is possible not just to muddle through leading but to be very effective at leading without playing a musical instrument.

If we stay only where we are comfortable, we will never grow or cause others to grow. We have a need to stretch ourselves and thereby cause growth.

Even as I write, the worship team I lead has temporarily lost our main piano player because of a new baby in her household. To help us through this phase we

added a new keyboardist to our worship team. She is an extremely gifted high school student. When our piano player returns, however, the “new kid” will not pack up and leave. She will remain with us, learning more about playing our keyboard synthesizer. She will, in fact, be taking over much of the synthesizer playing from one of our seasoned veterans. Will the veteran keyboardist be leaving the team? No, she will be working with the new girl to help her be effective in that role. This will probably not be as comfortable or easy as playing the synthesizer herself, but comfort must not be our major aim.

Jesus told us clearly to “go and *make disciples* of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). He did not tell us to do it only if we felt comfortable doing it. He told us just to do it.

I have learned from having children how God must feel toward us sometimes. Especially when my kids were younger, regardless of what I was doing, they wanted to help. It was usually much easier for me to do the work myself, but if I did not let them help, they would never learn. It is important for me to teach my children, even when it is easier not to. Certainly God feels the same way toward us at times.

Ephesians 4:11–12 tells us that the role of leaders in the church is to equip the rest of the people for the work of the ministry. It is easier for us to do what we are good at and nothing else, but that is not God’s best. I would have been more comfortable continuing to lead with my guitar and never showing others how to lead without it, but then they (and I) would have missed God’s plan. Sometimes we need to go beyond our comfort zone to help build His kingdom.

Personal Reflection: *When have I been drawn outside my comfort zone as a worship leader? What have been the results? Are there any current circumstances where I need to step out and minister to others?*

Chapter 30

Desiring and Pursuing Excellence

I visited a fascinating exhibit at the St. Louis Zoo with numerous displays of exotic animals from around the world. Unfortunately, all through the exhibit there are both subtle and blatant references to evolutionism. As I walked through the display, two feelings came over me. The first was pity for the learned scientists who believe that everything came into being simply by chance. The second was an overwhelming awe of the God of creation who made all of the creatures. His creativity is limitless. The variety in the creatures in the exhibit was so great that it seemed to take more faith to believe they were an accident than to believe they were created by God.

God held nothing back when He created the earth on which we live. Why, after all, did He make creatures in the ocean depths that no humans would discover until the twentieth century? Why did He make each animal unique? And why so many different kinds? It is apparent that God's creation was not just a half-hearted effort but the absolute best it could be. This attitude of excellence was manifest in Jesus also. When the people witnessed His healing ministry, they responded, "He has done everything well" (Mark 7:37).

In the church, and especially in the music department, we need to grasp the concept of excellence more fully. Too often I hear things like, "Well, it's good enough for church" or "The congregation will be singing along, so they won't notice our mistakes." This attitude is the total opposite of God's attitude.

If we really want to follow the Lord, then we have no choice but to desire and pursue excellence. Excellence is part of the nature and character of the God we serve. Therefore we need to strike the death blow to mediocrity within the church. If we pursue excellence in our ministries, I believe we will see the blessing of God poured out upon us to maintain it.

Praying for an attitude to pursue excellence is the main key. Throughout Scripture, God repeatedly caused His people to stand out from the crowd. "To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of

literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds....In every matter of wisdom and understanding which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom” (Daniel 1:17, 20). God is no respecter of persons. What He did for Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Daniel, He can do for us if we will ask Him.

In our society we frequently hear that everything is relative and that there are no absolutes. But as Christians we know there are certain standards we can and should uphold. Striving for excellence in all that we do is one of these standards. It is not just a good idea; it is an absolute. It has been said that excellence speaks a language all its own. We must pursue excellence with all our might.

One key point here is how we measure excellence. God’s Word is the final true measuring rod. Walking in grace and in accordance with God’s Word, we need to be careful not to compare ourselves with other people or other people’s ideas. “Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else” (Galatians 6:4). If we are stretching ourselves to strive for *more* excellence, we are headed in the right direction. If we are striving to compare to or be better than others, we are headed in the wrong direction.

All of the topics we have discussed in this book are part of pursuing excellence. Maintaining your relationship with God, caring for people, getting organized, and ministering beyond your comfort zone are all steps in the pursuit of excellence. But beyond the practical steps is a heart attitude that says, “Regardless of what others think, regardless of what it costs me, I will pursue godly excellence, even as my Creator has pursued excellence in His work.”

If we will pursue this attitude of excellence in all that we do, God will be honored and will honor our efforts in return. Continue to seek the Lord and ask Him for His creativity in pursuing excellence in all that you do. He will not fail you.

Personal Reflection: *What kind of attitude of excellence do I have when it comes to worship leading? How can I as a leader encourage my church and my worship team to pursue excellence?*

Epilogue

If you made it this far, I hope you have learned a few things along the way. You now know the sum total of all that I have learned about being an effective worship leader. (Okay, maybe there are a few things I have held back for future writings.)

What else can I say at this point to spur you on in your walk with God and service to Him? Just this: I have the utmost honor and respect for you as a child of the King. Without question, as a worship leader, you are fulfilling one of the most challenging, difficult, and yet spiritually rewarding roles in the church today. As a “front-line warrior,” you can have a powerful, long-term impact on the people God has allowed you to lead. Never belittle the calling or the gift that the Lord has given you. “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6). Your ministry *will* have the effect He has ordained for it.

May the Lord continue to lead you on from strength to strength until His return. Amen.

About the Author

Tom Kraeuter (pronounced Kroyter) is one of America's leading voices on Christian worship ministry. He serves as executive director of Training Resources, a ministry devoted to strengthening Christians in their relationships with God and with one another. He is an author, worship leader, and gifted communicator who has ministered in hundreds of churches to tens of thousands of worshipers. Tom's ministry is marked by his ability to apply Scripture to everyday situations.

Churches of all sizes have hosted Tom as a special guest and conference speaker. His most popular teachings are on worship and church unity. He has been welcomed by churches from more than forty denominations, including Baptist, Evangelical Free, Pentecostal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Mennonite, and Vineyard.

Tom is the author of more than fifteen books, including *Worship Is...What?!*, *The Worship Leader's Handbook*, and *Reflecting Mercy in an Unmerciful World*. He has attended Christian Outreach Church near St. Louis, Missouri, for more than thirty years. He and his wife, Barbara, have three children.