

A sepia-toned photograph of a man, Steve Pruitt, performing on stage. He is wearing a dark jacket over a collared shirt and light-colored jeans. He is holding an acoustic guitar and singing into a microphone on a stand. The background is a simple stage setting. The image is partially covered by a blue vertical bar on the left side.

STEVE PRUITT

THE
MAKING
OF A
WORSHIP
LEADER

A PERSONAL JOURNEY & PRACTICAL GUIDE

The Making of a Worship Leader
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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this book to Gary & Susan Evans, Jeff & Karen Smedley, Kevin & Kristi Wilson, Danny & Melinda Jones and Adrian & Christi Carpenter. The times we spent in worship together will always hold a fond place in my heart. I look forward to the day when we will worship together again around the throne of God.

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PREFACE

How does God make a worship leader? I am not sure that I have the complete answer to that question, but I do know that it usually occurs over a period of time. Though the Word of God stands as a plum line of truth, it is often through experiences that a truth is established in the heart.

In “The Making of a Worship Leader” I have shared some personal experiences that have helped to shape my worship leading philosophy as well as some practical ideas for beginning worship leaders and pastors. My prayer is that you will find something in this book that will encourage, inspire and train you to be the worship leader God has called you to be.

CHAPTER 1

A Personal Journey

Who would have thunk it...

My journey in worship leading had a humble beginning to say the least. Like a lot of children and teenagers growing up I had an infatuation with lead guitar players and rock-n-roll bands. However, it wasn't until I was 23 years old that I actually began to learn to play the guitar.

While training to do mission work I met a man who has become a life long friend. He motivated me to learn to play guitar. Not having a clue as to the type of guitar to purchase, I bought a Yamaha classical guitar. My friend gave me a copy of a chord chart, taught me how to read it and told me to start practicing. That was all the instruction he gave me, but I was determined to learn so off I went.

Those early days almost drove my newly wed wife crazy. I plunked and planked practically every wakened hour I was at home. The first two chords I learned to play were E minor and A minor. A worship song I was familiar with had those two primary chords in it so I played it incessantly. A few months later, having learned about six chords, I wrote my first worship song and played it one morning during Sunday school. I don't remember the song, but I do remember the people looking at me as if they were saying "Don't quit your day job."

A few months later my wife and I moved to a different city to take a youth pastor position. By this time I had eight to ten chords down pat; bar chords had not yet come into the picture. I didn't know a lot of chords, but the ones I knew I could play fairly well. Each week we met with the youth I used my new found talent in an effort to lead our young people in worship.

Two years into this project the church fell into financial woes. As a full time paid church employee I was forced to find another job while continuing to be the youth director. Months later the church leadership made a decision to eliminate the youth ministry, and I was asked to play guitar with the Sunday morning worship team. The church eventually folded and merged with another church.

Discouraged and disappointed I informed the new church leadership (which included my former pastor) that I did not want to be a part of any ministry in the church for a while. My thought was to be a "regular" church member with no major responsibilities.

About one month into the merger the new pastor asked me if I would lead a couple of songs at an organizational meeting. Reluctantly, I agreed. Later he came to me and shared how God had spoken to him while I was leading the worship that night. He said that God brought King David to his mind and how God had prepared him to be Israel's worship leader while tending sheep. His conclusion was that I had been through a season of preparation, and God was now calling me to be the worship leader of the new church.

My initial response, at least on the inside, was "no way!" I didn't want the responsibility. I wasn't ready to risk another disappointment if it didn't work out. Besides, I had only stood before a congregation to lead worship one time and then I didn't play my guitar. I had played back up, but leading a band was

not in my comfort zone. I wasn't that good of a guitar player and didn't have a clue where to start. My insecurities were having a field day. The reasons for saying no were mounting by the minute. Fear began to grip me as this pastor shared what he believed to be God's will.

I had been taught to respect and submit to spiritual authority. This left me somewhat afraid to share how I was feeling on the inside. Looking back I realize some of what I was taught was a little off base. However, with the knowledge I had at the time, I made a decision to trust that my spiritual authority was hearing from God so I accepted the position.

All of those hours playing E minor and A minor chords; all the hours of planking, plunking and sore fingers along with the disappointment of a failed ministry had brought me to this point. God had prepared me for something that I had neither dreamed of nor aspired to.

Preparation time seems to be a common thread that runs through all God ordained leaders. It seems that the higher the calling the deeper the preparation. Or maybe it's the higher the level of anointing the more extensive the preparation. I heard a man share once that God was dismantling him so he could re-mantle him. God has a way of removing us from our comfort zone and stripping us of what is familiar. The end result is our total dependence upon him. Moses, Joseph and Paul all experienced a time of preparation and a dismantling of the familiar.

Moses was born in the house of Pharaoh. He knew the ways of Egyptian royalty that equipped him for a time when he would be God's spokesman to Pharaoh. However, he fled from all that was familiar to him and spent forty years learning to be a shepherd before he was ready to lead a nation out of slavery to a land of promise (Exodus 2). When God's preparation time ended Moses had lost all confidence in his own abilities and begged God not to use him. Even though this angered God he was not deterred (Exodus 4:14). God knew it wasn't the abilities Moses possessed that would accomplish his purpose but his own power.

Joseph was also stripped of all that was familiar to him being sold into slavery by his own brothers. Having risen to prominence in his master's house he was falsely accused of sexual misconduct toward his master's wife and was thrown into prison (Genesis 39). During Joseph's incarceration he was given authority over the prisoners and the day-to-day operations of the prison. Just when it looked like Joseph's dreams were not going to come true God gave him the interpretation of a couple of dreams that eventually led to his release.

Upon interpreting Pharaoh's dream Joseph was made ruler over all Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. He had ruled as a slave and a prisoner before he was given authority to rule a nation. However, even Joseph acknowledged that it was not his ability to interpret dreams that gained him favor with Pharaoh, but God had given the interpretation (Genesis 40, 41).

The Apostle Paul was educated at the feet of revered biblical scholars and rose to great prominence among the religious elite of his time. He was so convinced that he was doing God's work that he accepted orders to arrest, imprison and execute the followers of Jesus. After his conversion Saul not only experienced a name change, he went from being the hunter to being the hunted. It seems that he spent some preparation time in Arabia, then returned to Damascus before making his way to Jerusalem. Leaving Jerusalem, Paul went to Tarsus where he possibly spent some time making tents (Paul's occupation was that of a tentmaker Acts 18:3) before Barnabas sought him out and took him to Antioch (Galatians 1:17-18; Acts 11:25).

Like Moses and Joseph, Paul was stripped of all that was familiar. His climb up the ladder of success was interrupted by the purposes of God. In his letter to the Philippians Paul describes his transformation.

For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

Philippians 3:3-9

Maybe you are learning your first chords. You may not believe that God would use you to lead others into his presence. Well, these days could be days of preparation so don't despise small beginnings. Make sure all of life's circumstances become stepping-stones and not stumbling blocks. Allow God to "dismantle" you and shape you into what he desires. He is not nearly as interested in your ability as he is his glory.

Let's do a Jericho March...

In 1983, upon finishing a short term mission in Haiti, Renae and I moved from our home in northern Alabama about fifty miles south to become youth pastors in a small church in Alexandria, Alabama. We had a strong sense that God wanted us in full time ministry, but we struggled at times with exactly what it was he wanted us to do. When we were asked to take this position we jumped in with both feet. One thing we didn't realize was that in a small church full time ministry doesn't always mean full time pay. So I had to do some work outside the church while still being expected to be a full time youth pastor. It was in this church that I had my first experience leading worship in front of a congregation.

I will never forget that first Sunday morning Renae and I led the worship service. I had played back up guitar in the worship band but didn't feel confident enough to lead worship and play at the same time. I opted instead to let the piano player serve as the lead instrument. Renae and I stood up front on the stage with the back up singers to the side of us. At this juncture in our worship experience we only knew to do what we had seen modeled by the worship leader at this church. This was the way he did it, so we followed suit. With the help of the supporting cast we proceeded.

In attendance that Sunday was a lady who came to our church maybe three or four times a year. She came across as one of those people who make their rounds to various churches. I noticed each time she came to our church she brought ballet shoes and a tambourine. When the music began she had on her dancing shoes and she went to town on her tambourine.

We were into our second or third song that Sunday and just as I was gaining some confidence, this lady ran down the center isle right up to the stage demanding my attention. "Let's do a Jericho March!" she exclaimed. For those who are unfamiliar with the term "Jericho March," it is simply a dance where most of the church members get in a line and march around the sanctuary. It acquired the name from the story of Israel marching around Jericho.

Needless to say I was horrified. I had neither planned for this nor had I been briefed for such a situation. Now knowing how to respond I asked, "What?" I had heard her, but I was hoping she wouldn't repeat it. I guess I thought the question would buy me some time to figure out how to respond if she did. "Let's do a Jericho March!" she yelled. I am sure God saw the predicament I was in and dropped my answer in my mouth. "Well, if that is what God leads us to do." I said to her. I am not sure if my answer satisfied her or offended her. All I know is that she turned around and danced to the back of the sanctuary. I never saw her in that church again. By the way, we didn't do a Jericho March, and the rest of the service went without a hitch.

Although at the time I was clueless how to respond to this lady, looking back now I see the wisdom in the answer God gave me. After leading worship for more than thirty years I have learned that there are as many opinions about how to direct a worship service as there are people. The calling of a worship leader is to know the direction of the Holy Spirit in any given worship service. The Holy Spirit is the real worship leader because he knows the mind and heart of the Father. It's the heart of the Father that we are after in worship.

Joshua in his conquer of the city of Jericho didn't employ the normal procedures for capturing a city. Instead he did just as the Lord commanded him. It's not difficult to imagine the thoughts running through the minds of the children of Israel when Joshua told them to start marching around the city (Joshua 6). It's also not difficult to imagine the thoughts of Gideon's 300 men when he told them they were going to fight the Midianites with pitchers, lamps and ram's horns (Judges 7). Regardless of how it looked these two leaders of Israel followed God's plan and victory was accomplished.

Being led by the Spirit was an every day occurrence in the life of Jesus. He always did what he saw the Father doing. Jesus said, *Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel.* (John 5:19-20)

Jesus' willingness to be led by the Father was particularly demonstrated in his healing ministry. He didn't have a predetermined technique when praying for the sick. His methods varied from situation to situation. He discerned from the Father what was needed in each case and joined himself with the Father's will.

In Luke 13:10-13 Jesus healed a woman who had a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years and was bent over and could not rise up. The healing took place on the Sabbath in the synagogue. So Jesus was at church when he recognized this woman. He first pronounces her loosed from her infirmity, then he laid hands on her. She immediately arose and glorified God.

In Mark 7:24-30 Jesus healed a girl who had a demon. He did this upon request of the girl's mother and never saw the girl. You might say he healed by proxy. Another occasion where Jesus healed without seeing the person is found in Matthew 8:5-13. Here, at the request of a Capernaum centurion, Jesus heals a paralyzed, tormented servant.

Mark 7:32-35 tells of a deaf mute man whom Jesus healed by putting his fingers in the man's ears, spitting and touching the man's tongue. Mark tells us that before Jesus prayed for this man, he took him aside from the multitude. Though I feel sure Jesus had a good reason, I suppose if the Father told me to do something like that I wouldn't want everyone to see it either.

Jesus once healed a blind man by spitting in the man's eyes and laying hands on him. In this case Jesus prayed twice before the man was completely healed (Mark 8:22-25). Knowing that Jesus prayed for someone twice before perfect healing came should be a faith booster for us. In yet another instance Jesus healed a blind man by making clay with his saliva and putting it on the man's eyes. He told the man to go wash in the pool of Siloam. The man did so and came back seeing (John 9:6-7).

I have often made fun of TV evangelist or faith healers because of the "weird" ways they pray for the sick. Even now I'm somewhat skeptical of some things I see. What do you think people thought when they witnessed Jesus putting his fingers in a man's ear, spitting and touching the man's tongue? They probably thought he was weird. Don't we often dismiss things as real or legitimate because of the way the package is wrapped? What if the Holy Spirit leads us to do something in our worship that we think is weird? Will we be obedient or will we be more concerned about what man thinks?

The worship leader should have the same mind as Jesus when he stands to lead others to the throne of God. Apart from God's guidance we have no idea how to lead worship. We might know how to put a set of songs together, lead the band and encourage the congregation, but our efforts will lack the anointing of God. Being led by the Spirit of God is the difference between being a song leader and a worship leader. Virtually anyone who can carry a tune can be a song leader, but worship leaders are made of those who diligently seek the Father's will and submit to his authority.

A worship leader should also be submitted to the spiritual authority of the local church and open to correction and suggestion. It is vital that church leadership communicate the vision of church to the worship leader. This will enable the worship leader to respond to situations in a way church leadership will support. It is equally important that church leadership give the worship leader freedom to lead worship within the vision of the church. Church leadership should also be open to suggestions from the worship leader. Working together will produce worship that will please the Father.

Help would have been nice...

When I first became a worship leader I had little training as a musician or singer. I had taken a few voice lessons years before and had taught myself a few chords on the guitar. When I started learning to play guitar I had no idea that I would ever lead worship. Being asked to lead worship was a total surprise to me. It wasn't something I aspired to do; neither did I feel qualified.

I grew up in and attended a Methodist church until I was in my mid 20's. The norm for Sunday worship consisted of a choir director who led the congregational music then a choir special. At times there would be someone who would perform a solo special. The services were very structured. Don't get me wrong I'm not knocking this. I sang in many choirs and did many solos and cantatas. The experiences I had were positive and laid a good foundation for my future calling.

After leaving the Methodist church to become a youth pastor I was exposed to a different style of worship. The worship leader was more of a front man. There was a band instead of just piano and organ. Instead of a choir there was an ensemble. We sang for several minutes without interruption and there seemed to be flexibility for the Holy Spirit to lead.

To my knowledge, prior to becoming a worship leader, I had never seen anyone lead worship with an instrument. As a youth pastor I had led our small youth group in worship, but that was the extent of my experience.

Needless to say when I took the worship leader position I had some work to do. At the time I was working a full time job so I spent almost every minute away from work studying worship and practicing music. I read everything I could get my hands on about worship and worship leading. I attended conferences and seminars at every opportunity taking home as much information as possible. If there was a way to get other worship leaders and speakers to pray for me I was in line. I watched videos and listened to audio tapes for hours. You get the picture by now I'm sure. I put myself through worship leading school. However, there was still one thing I lacked; a mentor. There was no one to model and no one to personally train me.

Oh how nice it would have been in those early days to have had someone, in the flesh, to help me along. I did have a great pastor who mentored me in the ministry, but he didn't have experience as a worship leader. He didn't know how to put together a worship service, choose band members or lead rehearsals. Most of this I learned by trial and error that kept me in trouble much of the time. A good mentor could have made the process less stressful and taught me things I could never learn in books.

Jesus' disciples are great examples of men who learned how to do ministry while serving at the feet of a master. There seemed to be an inner circle even with the disciples. Jesus often set Peter, James and John aside to witness events unseen by the other disciples. In the Old Testament we find other anointed leaders who served their masters before being released to ministry. Joshua and Elisha are two good examples.

Joshua served Moses during Israel's years in the wilderness until the time of Moses' death. In Exodus 17 we read an account of Joshua's obedience to Moses even in the face of death. Moses commanded Joshua to choose some men and go into battle with the Amalekites, which Joshua did and the battle was won (Exodus 17:9-13). Later Moses took Joshua with him up the mountain of God where they stayed for forty days. Exodus 24:13 records Joshua as Moses' assistant. Joshua would accompany Moses to the tabernacle where God would speak to Moses face to face. When Moses would return to camp Joshua would stay at the tabernacle (Exodus 33:11).

When it drew near for the time of Moses death he asked the Lord to set a man over the people so that they would not be like sheep without a shepherd (Numbers 27:16-17).

And the Lord said to Moses: Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight. And you shall give some of your authority to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient.

Numbers 27:18-20

Moses spent time in his last days encouraging and strengthening Joshua. He also validated Joshua's calling in the sight of the people. As the children of Israel were preparing to cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land, God spoke this to Joshua, *This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you.* (Joshua 3:7) God too validated the anointing of Joshua and established him in the sight of man.

The prophet Elisha had his ministry validated by the prophet Elijah. However, before Elisha received his anointing for prophetic ministry he became Elijah's servant (1 Kings 19:19-21). When the time drew near for Elijah to be taken away he asked Elisha to stay in Gilgal while he went to Bethel, Elisha refused. Two more times Elijah asked Elisha to stay where they were while he went to Jericho and then to the Jordan, but Elisha would not leave Elijah's side (2 Kings 2).

When they arrived at the Jordan River Elisha had the opportunity to witness the parting of the river when Elijah struck the water with his mantle. Once the two men had crossed on dry ground Elijah asked Elisha, "What may I do for you before I am taken away from you?" Elisha responded, "Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me."

So he (Elijah) said, You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so. Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah

went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he cried out, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen! So he saw him no more. And he took hold of his own clothes and tore them into two pieces. He also took up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood by the bank of the Jordan. Then he took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, and said, Where is the Lord God of Elijah? And when he also had struck the water, it was divided this way and that; and Elisha crossed over.

2 Kings 2:10-14

We can see by Elisha's response to Elijah's departure that the two had a father and son relationship. It is also interesting to note that Elisha crossed back over the Jordan the same way he and Elijah crossed. Because he refused to leave Elijah, Elisha learned the ways of a prophet and received the prophetic anointing. When the sons of the prophets at Jericho saw Elisha they immediately recognized that the spirit of Elijah had been passed on to him (2 Kings 2:15).

Everyone sensing the call of God to lead worship should spend quality time reading books on worship and doing bible studies on the subject. Conferences and seminars are helpful. Take voice and music lessons if you need to. But, whatever you do, if at all possible, hang out with someone who is leading worship. Attach yourself to someone who can lead you along; someone who is anointed in worship leading and can be a model for you.

Watch how they lead worship and how they relate to the band and other members of the worship ministry. Ask them to mentor you. While you are waiting for your turn to lead, wash their feet and learn to serve. Be teachable and always be open to correction and rebuke. Though it may be unpleasant at times you will gain valuable wisdom. It is during this process that the mantle for leading worship will be passed to you. You don't want to lead worship without that blessing and anointing.

The head and not the tail...

I vividly remember the first worship band practice I led as a full time worship leader. Here I am the worship leader of a church that was once two churches. Many of the members of the praise team I didn't know nor was I totally convinced I wanted to know them. The truth was I didn't want to be the worship leader. Only out of submission to the pastor's request was I in that position. At first I had no job description, no training and no clue as to what I was doing.

The night of our first practice Murphy's Law was in full swing. If it could have gone wrong it did. To start things off the pianist didn't show up and didn't let me know that she wasn't coming. This really left me holding the bag. I was still unsure of my guitar playing ability and counted on her to be the lead instrument. Some of the songs I had chosen to use I couldn't play on the guitar. I found myself changing the song list while the other band members watched intently. I could hear them thinking, "This guy doesn't have a clue as to what he is doing." They were right.

The pianist was a member of the "other" church. Many questions swirled in my head; most of them out of my own insecurity. Does she not like me? Did she not approve of the merger? Would she show up for church on Sunday? Can she play the songs I am going to use or should I even have her play since she didn't come to practice? There were no guidelines. No one in spiritual authority was there for me to consult with. I was hung out to dry. Secondly, I had asked another young lady in the church to do a special song during the offering. She didn't show up either.

Once I had gathered my wits and plotted a new course of action, I began to share the order of worship with the praise team. Imagine my despair when some of the members began to complain about certain aspects of the service. I wanted to cry. I wanted to gather my belongings, walk out of the building and never come back. Somehow we managed to put together the first week's service.

Upon arriving home I shared with my wife my intentions of meeting with the pastors the next day to resign. I was emotionally spent. I felt used and unappreciated and really thought no one cared how I felt. This was not a pity party, I was really hurting.

What I want to share next is in no way meant to be offensive, but I want to share it to show how the mercy of God touched me at a very low time in my life. As my wife and I lay down to sleep that night I said to her, "I am nothing but an ass." She assured me that was not the case, but I insisted and gave several examples to back my claim.

The next morning I rose early to attend a five o'clock men's prayer meeting at a local YMCA. We met in an upstairs room with several chairs and tumbling mats available for us to sit or kneel. While some of the men prayed aloud I slipped out of the chair I was sitting in and knelt on one of the mats. Even with my eyes closed I noticed the room getting strangely dark. I opened my eyes to investigate and found that several of the men had gathered around to pray for me. One or two of them knelt beside me putting their arms around my shoulders. Others laid hands on my head.

As this was taking place one of the elders leaned over and whispered in my ear, "The Lord wants you to know that you are the head and not the tail." Imagine the shock! You have to understand that none of these men had attended band practice the night before, and certainly this elder had not heard the conversation I had with my wife while we were in bed. The word he gave could have only come from God. In fact it did.

Moses told Israel that if they would keep God's commandments that God would bless their nation. He said, *And the Lord will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath, if you heed the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you today, and are careful to observe them.* (Deuteronomy 28:13) I realized that though man had confirmed my call to lead worship it was God who had called me. To resign would have meant to walk away from the commandment of God. The only response I could give was, *Let it be to me according to your word.* (Luke 1:38) God used that word to break me so he could make me the worshiper and the leader he intended for me to be.

The prophet Jeremiah seemed to see himself at the bottom of the ladder, but God saw him different.

Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations. Then said I: Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth. But the Lord said to me: Do not say, I am a youth, for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord. Then the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me: Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant.

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Later God used Jeremiah to speak these words to Israel, *For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.* (Jeremiah 29:11)

If you are a "fledgling" worship leader, struggling to figure out who you are and what you are doing, be encouraged that God has called you for such a time as this. He is using circumstances and yes, your insecurities, to mold you into the leader he wants. Don't get discouraged and give up. Look through the fog of despair and see the hand of God. Take refuge in the shadow of his wings. His blessing is on the way.

I finally got it...

In 1986 when I became the worship leader at Vineyard Christian Fellowship in Anniston, Alabama I had very little confidence in my guitar playing ability. I had only been playing for a few years and had not led worship with the guitar except in small group settings. After taking the reigns as worship leader I was content to allow our pianist to be the lead instrument. Most of the time I didn't even play the guitar because many of the songs we sang I had not yet learned to play.

Our pianist was extremely talented. She was very well known as the premier piano player in our area. Once we had a few rehearsals under our belts she could follow me wherever I took the worship. The band revolved around her skill, and I grew increasingly dependant upon her presence.

A few months into the process, due to her husband's illness, she began to miss church on a regular basis. The main problem was that we would not know until we got to church that she would not be able to come. I found myself spending Sunday school time changing the song list we had practiced earlier in the week to songs I could play on the guitar. This put a lot of pressure on me not to mention the rest of the band and the singers.

A couple of months into this problem I attended a Vineyard worship conference in Anaheim, California with a friend of mine. The turning point in the conference for me was the testimony Carl Tuttle

gave of how he began to lead worship in the Vineyard movement. So much of his story was my story too. I began to realize God had called me, not our piano player, to be the worship leader. God assured me that he knew my playing ability when he called me and that he had not made a mistake. He validated the anointing he had on me and filled me with boldness and determination to carry out his calling on my life.

When I arrived home from the conference I began to work harder at my guitar playing. I simplified the song list by removing songs too difficult for my ability and adding songs I could easily teach the worship band. If I could not play it we didn't sing it until I could. I spent hours listening to cassette tapes so I could strum the right rhythms to songs. Each week my confidence grew as a musician and leader. Though I had never seen myself as a musician (and still don't) I knew God had called me to be a worship leader.

A week or so later our pianist showed up for practice one evening sort of out of the blue. She had missed several practices and we had not heard from her. It must have been a shock to her when she realized I had somewhat revamped the way we were doing worship. The guitar (my guitar) was now the lead instrument. (Let me say here that this lady didn't have the attitude that she was in charge. Out of my insecurities I had allowed the worship team to be built around her.)

The following week my wife and I met with her and asked that she resign. I knew this would leave our worship band without a piano player, but we believed it would be best for the team and for her. She concurred and graciously stepped down.

There are times in any ministry when you have to choose who you want to loose. If a team member is having a problem that affects the entire team it is always best to confront the situation lovingly but with honesty. To leave a problem unattended will eventually cause disruption in the entire team or ministry. You gain the respect of team members when they see that you are genuinely concerned with each person and the ministry as a whole.

The following Sunday after the pianist resigned a young lady came up to me after our worship service. She had noticed that our piano player was absent a lot and wanted to know if there was any way she could help. I said yes, and she became our piano player for a season. God supplied what we needed.

This experience taught me that God doesn't always call the qualified, but he always qualifies the called. We see this clearly in the men Jesus chose to be his disciples. He didn't go to the synagogues and call biblical scholars, but he went to the seaside and summoned rugged uneducated fishermen. However, after three years with Jesus and being filled with the Spirit, those who were educated took notice of these men. Luke records, *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.* (Acts 4:13) Validation from man is okay, but ultimately it is God presence and anointing that validates our calling.

Gideon is a great example of a man who didn't think he was qualified to do something great for God. While threshing wheat one day in the bottom of a winepress the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon and said, *Mighty hero, the Lord is with you.* (Judges 6:12 NLT) The angel went on to tell Gideon to go and rescue Israel from the hands of the Midianites. Feeling inadequate Gideon responded, *But Lord, how can I rescue Israel? My clan is the weakest in the whole tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least in my entire family.* (Judges 6:15 NLT) In other words Gideon was saying, "I'm not qualified." Gideon saw himself as a zero, but God saw him as a hero.

The key to Gideon's success was in the reply of the angel; *I will be with you and you will destroy the Midianites as if you were fighting against one man.* (Judges 6:16 NLT) After God shrank Gideon's army from 32,000 to 300 warriors, God defeated the Midianites just as he said. However, Gideon and the Israelites could take no credit for the victory. God made sure of that, he told Gideon, *If I let all of you fight the Midianites, the Israelites will boast to Me that they saved themselves by their own strength.* (Judges 7:2 NLT)

God saw Gideon in a different light than Gideon saw himself. God knew it was his spirit working through Gideon that would accomplish his purposes. God demands the glory. No flesh will glory in his presence (1 Corinthians 2:29). Gideon simply made himself available and learned that God's strength was made perfect in his weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

If we make ourselves available there is no limit to what God can work through us. The key is knowing that he has called us and that he is with us. *He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.* (1 Thessalonians 5:24) *For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.* (Philippians 2:13)

From idea to international...

It was in the early 1980s that I was first introduced to contemporary Christian music. With increasing exposure to the music market I became troubled at, what seemed to me to be, the "peddling of the gospel." It wasn't that I was necessarily opposed to artists or authors selling their albums or books, but it appeared that Christianity had become so commercialized that the message was lost in the price tag.

In a conversation with my wife I expressed a desire to record my music, write some books and acquire the resources to give them away. At the time it seemed like a ridiculous proposition. Where would I ever come up with the kind of capital needed to finance such an adventure? We were living on \$150 a week that our church was paying me to be a "full time" youth pastor. Though I bartered work for our house rental, \$150 a week (\$135 after we tithed) didn't stretch far with two children. So, I put that idea on a shelf in my dream closet.

Let's fast forward to the early 1990s. By now I am a part time paid worship leader for a two church merger. Around 1992 a man by the name of Sidney Smith came to minister at our church. Sidney had ministered at our church previously, but during this particular visit he and I spent quite a bit of time together. He "summoned" me to one of our pastor's home on one occasion and on another occasion requested that he and I spend an afternoon together at my home. In addition to these sessions, I was in all of the meetings Sidney held with our church leaders, worship team and congregation.

Sidney not only instructed me about the heart of God for worship, but he also spoke prophetically into my life. A couple of the things he prophesied were that I would have an international ministry and that my music would be sung in countries outside of the United States.

My first thoughts were that there was no way this would ever happen. I figured that to have an international ministry I would have to get on an airplane and I hate to fly! Besides, it takes a lot of money to run an international ministry. Now, I knew that God was big enough to supply what we needed if it was his will, but I just couldn't get past the thoughts of getting on an airplane.

Somewhere around this time Nike began their "Just do it" commercials. I expressed to one of my friends that I thought we should begin a "just worship" ministry. It was one of those "off the top of your head" thoughts. Basically I just thought it was a cool phrase. Even though my friend put together a mock brochure for Just Worship Ministries nothing ever came of it until...

Around 1999-2000 our family moved into the Internet era when we went "on line" for the first time. Honestly I knew a little about computers but had no idea of the enormity of the World Wide Web. I guess I was behind the times, but the term "World Wide Web" was not even in my vocabulary.

My son Matthew loves computers and began experimenting with HTML and web design. One evening in 2001 he was sitting at our computer pondering over a name for his web site. He asked me what I thought would be a good name and without really thinking I blurted JustWorship.com. When he submitted the information to register the domain name we were both amazed that it was available. We discussed what we would put on the site and in a few days JustWorship.com was on line.

In just a few months we began receiving e-mails from all over the world. I was amazed. People were thanking me for the articles on worship and asking for advice on worship related subjects. One night while answering e-mail from Australia a light went off in my head; I have an international ministry! I began to laugh as the thought crossed my mind that I didn't even have to get on an airplane. Not only that, but my international ministry had no budget other than the \$25 we paid to register our domain name.

It has been more than 30 years since that initial conversation with my wife. It has been almost 20 years since Sidney Smith told me of an international ministry. JustWorship.com celebrated its 15th anniversary in 2016. My books have been downloaded for free in more than 200 countries and territories. Various churches in the United States and abroad have used some of the worship songs I have recorded. In Azerbaijan my songs have been translated into the native language. Some of the articles I have written have been translated into German and Spanish. Still others appear on web sites originating from many parts of the world. Not to mention countless more that have been used in church bulletins, Sunday school lessons, personal devotions, online newsletters, worship team training and quoted in college dissertations.

I am amazed at how much God can do with so little; so little money, so little talent and so little fame. I'm not that great of a writer nor am I even close to being a good guitarist or singer, but God has used me to touch hundreds of thousands of lives. If he can do this through me, he can do the same with the vision

or dream he has given you. Like Jesus did the with bread and fish of a little boy, if we make ourselves available he will take the little we offer to him, bless it, break it and feed multitudes.

CHAPTER 2

The Role of a Worship Leader

Worshiper...

I have received dozens of e-mails from young worship leaders who are struggling to understand their calling. Many of them do not have role models or mentors to help them as they develop their calling and talent. Confusion and frustration often arises because of the lack of communication between church leadership and these rising leaders. Much of this anxiety can be avoided if the worship leader has a clear knowledge of his role in the ministry of the church. Job descriptions are helpful, but they will vary from church to church. However, there are some key roles in ministry in which all worship leaders should fill.

The first role I want to mention is the role of a worshiper. That may sound somewhat obvious, but it is very important.

A few years ago I was asked by a church to help them with their worship ministry. The pastor had somewhat filled the role of worship leader and at times had their guitar player lead worship. When I agreed that it was God's will for me to take this position I implemented a rehearsal night. The pastor and I agreed that if someone could not attend practice then they would not be allowed to participate during Sunday worship. I quickly learned that the guitar player could not make rehearsals so I asked that he not play.

Sunday after Sunday I watched him stare at the words of the songs and never open his mouth to sing. Not once was there any outward expression of a heart that was in love with Jesus. Here was a young man who was part of the worship ministry and at times led the Sunday morning service. He was a very talented musician and performer, yet he didn't appear to have the heart of a worshiper.

Those who are called to lead worship must be worshipers. It makes no difference if they are on stage or sitting in the congregation. If a person can't worship without being "up front" they have no business being "up front."

Worship obviously goes beyond outward expressions. A worship leader should live a life of worship. Character building is vital. Daily devotion and time spent in worship when no one is watching are important aspects in leading worship. There must be time spent in developing a personal relationship with the One we worship.

Without a doubt King David serves as a role model for everyone who desires to be a worshiper. More than likely David's initial worship experiences took place while he was tending his father's sheep; when no one was looking. It was here that he developed an intimate relationship with God.

Reading through the book of Psalms it is easy to grasp that no matter where David was or what kind of situation he was in he always made his way to God through worship. It was because of David's passion for worship and intimate relationship with God, that God referred to David as a man after his own heart (1 Samuel 13:14).

It is impossible to be a worshiper or an effective worship leader without being a person after God's heart. It's God's heart that we want to touch during private and corporate worship. If we don't touch God's heart in our private worship, how can take others to the place of God's heart? I have always felt it

is easier to take someone to a place where you have already been. If I do not know the way to God's heart I can't effectively take someone else there.

Servant...

The next role I want to mention is that of a servant. The role of a servant applies to every Christian, but especially to those who are called to lead a certain area of ministry.

Jesus put a high value on the role of a servant. He said, . . . *but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.* (Matthew 20:26) Again he said, *But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant.* (Matthew 23:11)

My thought is this; it is one thing for someone to stand in front of the church to sing or play an instrument, but will they take their turn in the nursery? Will they show up for workday at the church? Will they help set up the sound equipment or manage the overhead projector? Of course there is no way a person can do it all. The question is: What kind of attitude and willingness do they display when asked to serve in other areas of ministry that do not look so glamorous?

It is very important that the worship leader be a servant to the pastor and other leadership in the church. This is accomplished by knowing and implementing the vision of worship established by the leadership, being flexible to last minute requests and coordinating special events that the pastor feels is necessary for the spiritual growth of the church. A willingness to submit to spiritual authority is at the heart of every servant. Before a person becomes a leader they must learn to be a follower.

Again we take a look at the life of King David. His worship leading experience began while serving his father as a shepherd boy. David learned to kill the lion and the bear before he took on the giant. He later played music for King Saul during Saul's anguish caused by distressing spirits. Then David served as a military commander in Saul's army. Upon Saul's death David became a servant to all of Israel as king and led Israel's army into battle.

A worship leader should also be a servant to those who labor with him to lead worship. Those who labor in leading the congregation into the presence of God are very important. The goal of every worship leader should be to make their job as easy as possible. The worship leader should make it a priority to see that each team member has the tools they need to perform their ministry well. This may include having lyric sheets and music available for musicians and singers, making sure visual aids are available to the people who need them, having the proper sound equipment set up and tuned to individual preferences. All of this means being the first to arrive at practice or church on Sunday and the last one to leave.

Several years ago while leading worship in a local church I received a blessing that I believe depicts a servant's heart. In those days I was playing an Applause guitar. After years of use it had become increasingly harder to play and would not hold a tune. It seemed like every other Sunday I was breaking a string. One service I broke two strings during the worship service.

My finances were not so great at the time so I could not afford to have the guitar fixed nor could I replace it. Just before Christmas a good friend of mine who played bass on our praise team began to approach individuals in our church asking for donations to purchase a new guitar for me. He made it his personal goal to see that I had an instrument that would enable me to lead worship more effectively. Because of his efforts I was able to buy a very nice guitar that I still use to lead worship.

Today my friend is the worship leader at his church. Is it any wonder that God would call a person to lead worship who has such a servant's heart? Service is its own reward, but great are the rewards that await the servant.

Shepherd...

Another important role of a worship leader is the role of a shepherd. The role of a shepherd includes all of the things that I have suggested above plus one important factor; the personal touch.

Asaph describes the heart of a shepherd in King David.

He chose his servant David, calling him from the sheep pens. He took David from tending the ewes and lambs and made him the shepherd of Jacob's descendants—God's own people, Israel. He cared for them with a true heart and led them with skillful hands.

Psalms 78:70-71 (NLT)

There are three characteristics mentioned in this passage that David possessed as a shepherd; he cared for the people of Israel, he had a true heart or was not clouded with self-ambition, he led them with skillful hands or with wisdom. Let's take a look at each of these characteristics.

1. David cared for Israel. A worship leader must love people. He must be willing to get his hands dirty and get involved in the personal lives of those he leads. The worship leader may be enthusiastic about teaching someone to worship, but he should also be concerned whether or not they have the money to buy groceries, pay the power bill or have a rebellious teen that is causing them grief. A good shepherd cares about the total person. When a worship leader/shepherd shows genuine concern about the welfare of others and is willing to get involved however possible, it builds trust. It is impossible to lead without trust.

2. David had a true heart. In other words he genuinely cared for the people with no strings attached. A worship leader should be free of selfish ambition or motives. Those with selfish ambitions tend to view people as projects and use them as a means to an end. The heart of a shepherd/worship leader has the best interest in mind of the people he is leading in mind.

3. David led with skillful hands or wisdom. When people are viewed as projects there is the tendency for a leader to become a "pusher." A shepherd leads, he doesn't push. Have you ever tried to push a string? When you push a string it just wads up. People are the same way. They will respond positively to a leader, but they will respond negatively to a pusher. A shepherd/worship leader will seek God for wisdom as he leads. He will always seek to do God's will in God's way and treat God's people with gentleness and kindness.

Jesus said, *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.* (John 10:11) Laying down his life for those in his trust is a characteristic of every good shepherd. A worship leader may be a great singer or musician, but if he is not willing to lay down his life for the sheep he doesn't need to be placed in such a vital ministry.

The ministry of worship leading is a very visible ministry; as visible as that of a pastor. It is imperative to fill that ministry with someone who has the heart of a pastor; a heart for people.

Mentor...

The last role of a worship leader that I want to mention is that of a mentor. I get more in depth with this topic in the next chapter, but I want to touch on it here.

For a worship leader to be an effective mentor he must not only be a worshiper but also encourage others to worship. This is accomplished by modeling, teaching and releasing. Mentoring worship takes place in corporate and small group settings or whenever the occasion presents itself.

David was a model mentor. He didn't just teach a Sunday school class about worship, he worshiped in the presence of all Israel. David wrote in Psalms 34:3, *Oh magnify the Lord with me, let us exalt His name together.* First David says, "I am going to magnify the Lord; I am going to be worshiper. Let me show you how it is done." Then he invites others to join him by saying, "Let's magnify the Lord together; do it with me."

In many of David's psalms he teaches worship by encouraging Israel to recall the mighty acts of God. He often speaks of God's attributes as reasons making him worthy of worship. David also wrote songs of praise and set them to music. He taught the songs to other leaders who in turn taught them to others. Once he had successfully placed the Ark of the Covenant in Zion he released singers and musicians to lead worship.

One of my favorite things to do is to invite a group of people to my home for a time of fellowship, maybe on a Friday or Saturday evening, and at some point pull out the guitar and spend some time worshipping. Some of the best worship services I have witnessed have happened during impromptu times. Doing this sends the message that, as a Christian and a worship leader, worship is a high priority in my life regardless of the place or occasion. It says, "I am going to magnify the Lord; come do it with me."

Teaching is also a vital aspect of mentoring. This can be accomplished in several different ways such as teaching a Sunday school class, a brief lesson before Sunday worship service, conferences, newsletters and casual conversation. Over the years it has been my pleasure to take members of the praise team to worship conferences. On many occasions I have either paid their conference fees or hotel room so they

could afford to go. I have also bought guitar strings and other accessories for those I have mentored. It is important that a worship leader invest time and money to encourage others to be worshipers.

Maybe the most important aspect of mentoring is releasing others to minister. The work of a mentor is incomplete without it. The Apostle Paul encouraged Timothy to take what he had heard from him and other witnesses and commit them to faithful men who would be able to teach others also (2 Timothy 2:2). Paul released Timothy to teach and in doing so encouraged him to release others to teach. The idea of training others to lead worship is that in turn they will be released, not only to lead worship, but to train others.

If you feel that you are called to be a worship leader take some time to examine your heart and life. Examine to see if you meet these four important criteria we have mentioned. Ask yourself the following questions: Am I a worshiper? Do I worship not only in corporate settings, but do I have a personal devotional life of worship? Am I a servant? Am I willing to submit to spiritual authority or do the menial tasks of ministry? Do I genuinely love people or do I see people as stepping-stones to self-promotion? Am I willing to get involved in their personal lives even when it is inconvenient for me? Do I want to train others to worship and to lead or do I just want the attention that being “up front” affords me?

We all have areas in our lives and ministry that need work. The key is to recognize our weak areas and submit them to others who will hold us accountable to change. As worship leaders we should be examples of humility and brokenness; willing to repent and change as God grows us into what he has called us to be.

CHAPTER 3

The Importance of Mentoring

An eternal investment...

One of the most important and God-given tasks of a worship leader, is to train others to lead worship. I believe scripture gives us a mandate for training others for ministry. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, *And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.* (Ephesians 4:11-12) At the risk of taking liberty with the scriptures I believe you could add worship leaders to the list. In many churches worship leaders are known as worship pastors. The title worship pastor carries with it more responsibility than that of a song leader. Almost anyone who can sing can lead songs, but a pastor has the responsibility of caring for the church body. This includes nurturing and training the body for ministry.

It is essential for worship pastors/leaders to recognize the anointing and abilities of others and make a place for them to be trained and nurtured. Too often egos get in the way (especially with musicians) and leaders become threatened by others who have the same anointing as they do or are more musically talented. Fear of loosing their position elevates pride and disposes humility. It was the fear of loosing their position that caused many of the church leaders in Jesus' day to miss the time of God's visitation (John 11:48). These leaders led many astray. This fear is harmful not only to the worship leader but to the entire body of Christ who stands to be blessed by another's ministry. Only those who love the body should be given the title and responsibility of worship pastor.

There are probably many different training programs available, but I think the most effective model is the way Jesus interacted with his disciples. In Mark 3:14 we read that Jesus appointed twelve that *they might be with Him and He might send them out to preach.* Jesus first and foremost wanted these twelve guys to hang out with him. He valued relationship. More than wanting to teach his disciples to follow a list of rules, Jesus wanted to draw them to himself.

To be effective in training someone for ministry a leader has to hang out with his disciple. It is critical to build a relationship where trust is established. It is equally important to build a friendship that goes beyond the ministry training. This will keep the relationship from being mechanical and keep the leader from making the disciple his project.

When people become projects the expectation level rises. There is little room for them to make mistakes. But a trusting relationship extends ample grace and gives plenty of room for failure. If people know they have this room they are much more likely to take risks. It is in taking risks that they learn the ropes and become more effective leaders. This type of relationship gives the leader a platform for critique and correction. It also gives the disciple freedom to respond in a positive way.

A few years ago I had the privilege of mentoring a young man who is now the worship leader at his church. Gary and I met at a college and career bible study where I led worship a couple of times. When we met we had no idea what would ensue. Gary and his "soon to be" wife began attending our church. After learning that he played the bass guitar I invited him to play with our praise band. It became obvious that Gary's vocal and musical abilities far exceeded mine and that God had anointed him to minister

musically. However, before the mentoring process progressed too far Gary and I began a friendship that still exists today.

Our friendship made the entire mentoring process a real pleasure. We laughed together, cried together, worked together, played together, worshiped together, ate together, ministered together and prayed together. All the while I was modeling how to lead worship and be a worship leader/pastor. Gary would go visiting with me and we also attended worship and other church conferences together. Some of the mentoring was deliberate but much of it occurred during the process of our friendship.

I believe Jesus mentored his disciples much in the same way. They spent a lot of time together and experienced a broad range of emotions together. Jesus' disciples observed his life and witnessed his humanity. He obviously called the twelve to prepare them to carry on the ministry once he returned to the Father. Though there were times when the training sessions were obvious, I feel confident that parts of it took place in the course of everyday relationship.

The life of a mentor...

The life and ministry of Jesus gives us a perfect example of what the mentoring process should look like. His relationship and interaction with his disciple serves as a pattern for us today. The training of these twelve men was a priority to Jesus. He knew why he had been sent to earth and knew someone would be needed to carry on the ministry once he was gone.

The bible gives us many scripture passages that describe why Jesus came to earth. In John's gospel Jesus tells us that he came that the world might be saved (John 3:16-17). In his epistle John says that the Son of God was manifested to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). Matthew quotes Jesus as saying that the Son of Man came to serve and to give his life a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28). Jesus said that he came to seek and save that which was lost (Luke 19:10). He also shared in the synagogue the mission given to him by the Father.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set a liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

Luke 4:18-19

There is another reason Jesus came that is one of great importance. Jesus came to glorify the Father. In other words he came to show the world what the Father is like. The life of Jesus was total abandonment of self to the obedience of the Father's will. Jesus' life was centered in the Father's will (John 5:30). He always did what he saw the Father doing (John 5:19). He always said what he heard from the Father (John 12:49). His teaching focused on the heart of the Father. Everything Jesus did drew attention to the Father. When he chose his disciples to *be with him* it was so he could show them the Father (John 10:30; 14:7-10).

To show what the Father is like is the primary goal of mentoring. The life of a mentor should glorify God. Those who are being mentored must see the life of Jesus lived out in the mentor. This is far more important than learning chord progressions, vocal techniques, or song selection. The mentor must lead his disciple to the Father. He does this not only by how he leads worship and what he says but also how he lives.

A mentor (or any believer for that matter) should have the Father's will at the center of his life. He must not only know the Father's will but have the Father's heart. Knowing the Father's will and having the Father's heart only comes through intimate relationship with the Father. Intimacy is only accomplished by spending time with the Father. Many times in the gospels we read where Jesus drew himself away from ministry to spend time with the Father. A mentor must be careful not to allow ministry to take the place of intimacy. When ministry begins to take the place of relationship or intimacy with the Father, the mentor will have a tendency to draw others to himself instead of God.

The anointing to lead worship doesn't come from doing it like someone else. It doesn't come from good musicianship, vocal ability or a certain musical style. The anointing comes from intimacy with the Father. To be an effective worship leader one has to know the mind and heart of the Father. The only place that is learned is through intimate relationship. A good mentor will help and encourage his disciple to develop that relationship.

Several years ago I began to pray a short prayer before I started each worship service. It goes something like this, “Holy Spirit, lead us into the worship that best pleases the Father.” My goal in praying that is to remind myself and those who are worshiping with me that the Holy Spirit is the worship leader. He knows the mind and heart of the Father. Because we are in relationship he will tell me what is on the Father’s heart so we can worship him in spirit and truth. What was anointed the last time we worshiped may not be anointed the next time. The goal is what the Father wants.

A few years ago I was in a small group meeting with a friend of mine. He was leading worship and before he began he prayed, “Holy Spirit, lead us into the worship that best pleases the Father.” I wanted to shout. Why? Because HE GOT IT! To be honest I didn’t know anyone was really listening to my prayer, but Gary was and he understood the principal behind it.

Our leading styles and musical tastes differ some, but it was never my goal for my friend to be just like me. My goal was that he would develop his own relationship with the Father so he could lead worship the way the Father desired. As mentors we miss the mark if we make disciples of ourselves. Our goal is make disciples of Jesus. The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “*Imitate me as I imitate Christ.*” (1 Corinthians 11:1) We must imitate Christ so that those we lead will see him.

The perfect example...

The method Jesus used to train his disciples for ministry is a great model for leaders who want to effectively train others. Along with having an intimate relationship with his disciples, Jesus incorporated a three-step method of training. For the purpose of our study let’s look at how Jesus trained his disciples in the ministry of healing.

Step one in Jesus’ model was; he healed while his disciples watched. Mark 3:13-15 says *Jesus appointed twelve disciples to be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons.* Luke, in his gospel, records that immediately after Jesus chose his disciples, he came down from the mountain, and a multitude of people were waiting on him. He spent the next several hours healing everyone there who had a sickness or infirmity (Luke 6:17-19). It is as Jesus were saying, “Okay guys, I have called you to do this and this is how it is done.” Before he sent his disciples to preach and heal he demonstrated or modeled the process for them.

The mentor must demonstrate how to lead worship. This is a vital step in mentoring someone to be a worship leader. It is good for the disciple to spend time watching and listening to the mentor. This will open the door for questions and answers that will be valuable when the disciple is released to lead. It also gives the disciple a good foundation, a good place to start. It also gives time for relationship building.

When my friend Gary first came to our church he didn’t play with the worship team. Later when we invited him to play he didn’t lead but played bass. During these first few months Gary watched as I led worship in corporate and small group settings. I modeled how to lead worship as Gary and I built a relationship that laid a foundation that facilitated the mentoring process. I don’t know how long this step in the process took, but I do know that during this time God stirred Gary’s heart and began preparing him to be a worship leader.

Step two in Jesus’ model was; his disciples healed while he watched. After an appropriate amount of training and teaching the disciples were pushed out of the nest. Luke 9:1-2 gives the account of Jesus sending the twelve out to do the works he had taught them. Another similar account is found in Luke 10:1 and 9 where Jesus enlisted 70 others to do the works of the kingdom. He gave them authority then sent them into the world.

Though Jesus may not have physically seen the disciples perform the miracles, he was available for consultation. In both Luke 9 and 10 Jesus released the people and they reported back to him. This enabled him to monitor the progress of his disciples (Luke 10:17-20). In a sense Jesus was looking on as his disciples were doing as they had been instructed. There were also times during this process that Jesus and his disciples did the work together.

When Jesus returned from the Mount of Transfiguration he found his disciples disputing with the scribes because the disciples were unable to heal a boy with a demon. This took place after Jesus had commissioned them. The disciples had cast out demons before; why didn’t it work now? Jesus took charge and cast the demon out of the boy. Later the disciples questioned Jesus as to their inability to cast out the demon. Jesus was available to answer their question and give advice (Matthew 17:14-21).

There were other instances after the release of the disciples that Jesus demonstrated the work to which he had called them (Luke 14:1-4). Though scripture does not explicitly say so, we might be safe to assume the disciples made other mistakes while learning to do the kingdom works. By Jesus releasing them before his departure he was able to help them over a few bumps.

It is easy to conclude that step two in the mentoring process is the releasing of the disciple to lead worship under the supervision of the mentor. The late John Wimber used a phrase, "Things are better caught than taught." The best way for someone to learn how to lead worship is to lead worship. The disciple needs to get out there, make some mistakes and gain some victories.

The way it happened with Gary and I was he began leading worship with me in small groups. I led and he played and sang back up. Later the roles were reversed. Eventually he led and I was a part of the small group. Later Gary was released to lead worship in corporate settings. During this entire process I was able to answer questions and give constructive input.

Step three in Jesus' model was; he left and his disciples healed. There came a time when Jesus had to leave his disciples, at least in the physical. Before he left he transferred the authority given to him by the Father to his disciples. In his first appearance to the disciples following his resurrection, Jesus said to them, *Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.* (John 20:21) In the "Great Commission" Jesus commanded his disciples, *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.* (Matthew 28:19-20) In other words go and make disciples of others the same as I have made disciples of you.

It should be the thrill of every mentor to release his disciple into the ministry. The whole purpose of the process is to get to this point; whether formally or informally as mentors we have to let them go. With Gary, though I prayed over him several times, it more or less happened informally. He began leading worship in our church without my immediate supervision. Later a career opportunity moved him to another city and in time he became the worship leader at his new church.

I believe the model Jesus used to train his disciples is one we can incorporate as we mentor future worship leaders. The first step for mentors is to recognize the people God is calling and then begin establishing a relationship that fosters the mentoring process. There are few greater joys than seeing someone minister in whom you have invested time, money and relationship. The apostle John tapped into this joy. He wrote, *I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.* (3 John 4)

CHAPTER 4

Practical Guides to Worship Leading

Support Your Local Worship Leader...

Occasionally I receive e-mails from worship leaders who are experiencing difficulties with band members. Let's be honest. Sometimes musicians are not the easiest people to please. They want their microphone to be the loudest. They want their instrument to be the loudest. They want their monitor to be the loudest. They want to sing it their way. They want to play it their way. They want to hear it their way. I know this not only from experience but also because "I are one." It's no secret that creative types can be very moody and in fact sometimes down right cantankerous. And when you get a group of them together you have the potential for disaster if there is not a sense of unity and purpose.

For all of you worship team members out there—being a worship leader, music minister or whatever title you may give it is not an easy task. Any leadership position is difficult at best. Those who minister among us are taking on a responsibility for which they will be held accountable before God. Not to mention that they cannot reach their maximum effectiveness if they are consistently "taking attitude" from those they are trying to lead. And if a leader is not effective the ones who suffer the most are those he or she is leading.

The writer of Hebrews penned this, *Obey your spiritual leaders and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, and they are accountable to God. Give them reason to do this with joy and not with sorrow. That would certainly not be for your benefit.* (Hebrews 13:17 NLT) The King James Version reads, *Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.*

There it is! The ole dreaded six-letter "S" word; submit. Let's face it, we hate that word. Our carnal nature doesn't want to submit to God much less someone God has chosen to lead us. One of the reasons I believe we hate that word so bad is because we have not understood it. Also, we have seen extreme cases where spiritual leaders have in essence brain washed their followers and led them to destruction.

Our first submission is to God and his word. Nowhere in scripture are we commanded to neither submit to nor obey any man or authority that would lead us away from the Word of God.

There is more than one Greek word translated "submit" in our bible, but in Hebrews 13:17 (above) the word is *hipeiko* which means to yield, be weak, to surrender. In the context of this verse the word yield means to surrender something in deference, to grant or concede. In no way does it suggest we are to be puppets in the hands of a leader. Puppets have no voice and no choice. Submission is making a choice to follow. Submitting doesn't rob us of our uniqueness, but it may mean that we have to put aside our way of doing things in deference to the one who is leading.

In Hebrews 3:17 the word obey is *peitho*. *Peitho* means to assure, assent, agree, have confidence, trust, yield, make friend, and rely. In other words be cooperative. A good leader will always make room

for counsel and discussion, but eventually a decision has to be made, direction has to be given and followed if a ministry is to be successful. Those of us who are “following” must submit to that direction in a spirit of humility; doing all things as unto the Lord. The Apostle Paul wrote, *And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.* (Colossians 3:23-24) *Do all things without complaining and disputing...* (Philippians 2:14)

Worship leaders are not above making mistakes. They also should be subject to spiritual authority and held accountable for their spiritual growth and the decisions they make while doing ministry. However, those of us who minister under their direction should give them honor and show them the respect that is due their position.

Developing a worship philosophy...

It is important for each church to develop a working philosophy for their worship ministry. Having a worship philosophy helps to establish the values, priorities, and practices of worship in the church. Once a philosophy is established the information or vision can be disseminated to the congregation. This will help each person to understand where worship fits in the priority list of the fellowship. The amount of energy, time and money spent on worship will determine the value and priority of worship in each church.

There are a number of questions you want to consider as you begin developing your worship philosophy. Answering these questions will help you think through the value your church places on worship and how worship is defined by your church leadership. (I gleaned some of these questions from a workshop at a conference I attended in 1987 at the Anaheim, California Vineyard Christian Fellowship. Carl Tuttle taught the workshop.)

1. What are the priorities and practices of your church?
2. Where does worship fit in those priorities and practices?
3. What kind of people do you minister to?
4. What are the strengths and weaknesses of your church?
5. What is your definition of worship?

The following is a worship philosophy our church adopted while I was the worship leader at a Vineyard church in Alabama. I still use it today. Some of the wording has been changed, but most of it is in its original form as shared in a workshop by the late John Wimber. You can use this philosophy or use it as a guide to help develop your own.

OXFORD CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP WORSHIP PHILOSOPHY

In order for you to understand the philosophy of worship, we have outlined the values, priorities, and practices of worship at OCF.

VALUES: The following are values that we hold at OCF and seek to instill in those to whom we minister.

1. Worship is given solely for God's glory and honor.
2. We are to be intimate and self-disclosing with God.
3. Nothing is done for effect or to manipulate God or the people.
4. We are committed to honesty and integrity.
5. Although our worship may be emotional, we do not want to work up emotions. We want to "dial down" in worship and let our emotional responses flow out of our interaction with God.
6. We welcome the ministry of the Holy Spirit in whatever way he chooses to work among us.

PRIORITIES: The following priorities control the philosophy of worship at OCF.

1. Our worship is directed and focused upon God.
2. Worship is a two-fold communication process. We worship God and he touches us.
3. Worship is practiced as a lifestyle on both the corporate and individual level.
4. We set aside time to worship. Quality worship be cannot hurried.
5. We invest money for musical instruments and sound equipment so that we will have quality in our worship.
6. We expend energy to rehearse, set up and prepare for worship. Spontaneity is best when it is under girded with thorough preparation.
7. We teach others to worship so they may experience intimacy with God.
8. We feel free to integrate change as our worship grows and expands. We are careful, though, to maintain consistency between our values and our priorities when we do initiate change.

PRACTICES: The following are practices that are found in the worship at OCF.

1. We engage in practices that are biblically sanctioned, either implicitly or explicitly.
2. We encourage the whole person to enter into worship through the use of the body (raising hands, kneeling, bowing, dancing...); soul (reading of scripture, singing, shouting, recalling God's works...); spirit (spirit to spirit, love tongues...).
3. We worship whenever we gather in various groups or settings even if they are spontaneous.
4. We encourage an uninterrupted flow of worship. Thus, we will sing many songs in succession without interjections from the worship leader.
5. We worship in a contemporary musical style. This helps people to identify with what they are singing to God.
6. We generally encourage moderate practices when we worship in corporate settings so others are not distracted.
7. We always seek to expand and deepen our present foundation. We seek new songs, new modes of expression, and new experiences with God.

I personally believe that worship should be the first priority of every church. Worship is meant for God and our most important ministry is to minister to him. Therefore, it is my opinion that most of our money, energy and time should be spent on the worship ministry.

With that said, let me say that a worship ministry consists of much more than a song service during corporate gatherings. Worship should penetrate every area of our Christian walk and service. This means that worship should be the ultimate goal of every ministry in the church including teaching, preaching, evangelism etc. For instance, my personal motivation for converting the lost is not to keep them out of hell. It is to see them forsake a lifestyle that glorifies Satan and turn to a lifestyle that glorifies God. As the Apostle Peter wrote, *But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light...* (1 Peter 2:9) Our deepest desire should be to produce disciples who have a passion for Jesus and yearn to worship him in spirit and truth.

A lifestyle that glorifies God is a lifestyle of worship. It's all about him. He is our top priority. Keep that in the forefront of your mind as you work with leadership to develop a worship philosophy for your church.

Recruiting worship team members...

I believe scripture teaches that those who are called to Christian ministry are to be held to a higher level of accountability (James 3:1). This no doubt applies to those who are called to lead worship be it the "worship leader/music minister" or other members of the worship ministry. Though one person may be delegated to oversee the worship ministry and be the one "out front," it is my philosophy that all members of the worship ministry are worship leaders. As such there are certain criteria such as character qualities, spiritual maturity, and anointing that should be examined when leadership considers someone for a position in the worship ministry.

As we consider folks for ministry we must first realize they are human. All of us have some baggage we are carrying around no matter how good we look on the outside. Love, mercy and grace should always

be a high priority when recruiting team members. Having a little baggage doesn't necessarily disqualify someone for ministry. On the other hand, having a great singing voice or being a hot musician doesn't necessarily qualify someone for ministry. I have seen talented musicians who could not flow with a band and were not teachable. I have heard great singers who thought their time had come and everyone should step aside to behold them. We always want to deal with people in love, but we must also use wisdom when choosing those who will lead others into God's presence; for their sake and the sake of the ministry.

Here are a few questions (not necessarily in order of importance) to consider when choosing worship team members.

1. Is the person a worshiper? Do they worship during congregational worship services? Do they worship in private?

2. Does the person have a servant's heart? Do they volunteer in other areas of ministry? Do they mind getting their hands dirty? Do they have compassion for others?

3. Do they have a problem submitting to authority? Are they spiritually accountable to others? Are they teachable? Are they argumentative?

4. What is life like at home? Are they rebellious or submissive to parents? Do they have a stable marriage? What are their kids like?

5. What is their level of spiritual maturity? Are there any outstanding character flaws? Any addictions?

6. What musical abilities do they possess? Are they accomplished or a beginner? CAN THEY CARRY A TUNE? (Please don't put a tone-deaf person in the choir. They may be a tremendous worshiper, but the choir is probably not their calling.) Will they be able to mesh with the other worship team members?

7. Do they have an anointing and calling to lead others in worship? Do they have a heart for God's person and presence?

When is the right time for them to join the worship ministry?

These questions may seem scrutinizing but there is a lot at stake. Placing a person who is not ready for the responsibility and accountability in such a visible position will do them more harm than good. Also, they will eventually cause disruptions or disunity in your worship ministry that could filter down to the congregation in time.

In recruiting worship team members it might be wise to choose someone who has been in your fellowship for a while. Unless I know someone very well I do not let him or her serve in any ministry for at least six months after they join our fellowship. This gives me the opportunity to get to know them and to observe their life style. Be aware of people who walk into your church and want to offer their ministry. My experience has been that most of the time these people are seeking self-promotion.

A few years ago while serving as a worship leader in a Vineyard church a lady approached me one Sunday morning that I had never met. She came to me with a brief case containing accompaniment tapes and asked if she could perform during the worship service. On another occasion a young man who had never attended our church approached me just prior to the worship service and asked if he could play a trumpet solo. I denied the requests of both of these parties because I did not know them well enough to trust their motives. Later both of them joined our fellowship and were allowed to participate in the worship ministry after a period of time.

You should have a plan for recruiting members for the worship ministry. If you don't one of two things will probably happen. You will never recruit anyone causing your ministry to stagnate, or you will recruit the wrong people. Some possible tools for recruiting might include a questionnaire for potential team members. Wisdom should be used in determining the appropriate questions. You might also have rehearsals to determine their musical abilities. Always be honest with people.

The most important ingredient in recruiting worship team members is prayer. You must hear from God. Do not get in a hurry just because you have a need. It is also important to have other members of the church leadership, especially the pastor, involved in the final decision phase. There is safety in a multitude of counselors (Proverbs 11:14).

A word to pastors: Be sensitive to the suggestions and cautions of your worship leader. Always seek unity when deciding if someone is ready or capable of participating in your worship ministry. If your worship leader is hesitating about someone you feel is ready, wait until you are in agreement before

proceeding; especially if you know that your worship leader is humbly seeking God. Always “pulling rank” on those who serve with you will cause them to become frustrated and will eventually produce puppets not leaders.

Be careful not to implement changes in your worship ministry without the knowledge or input of your worship leader. This may seem obvious, but I know of ministries where this has happened. People who serve with you need to know they have a voice and that you are sensitive to what they feel they are hearing from the Lord.

Practice time...

No amount of practice or rehearsing can move the heart of God to inhabit our praise. That does not mean rehearsal times are not important. I believe God takes delight in a sacrifice that costs us something. And practice costs us something. It costs time, energy and money.

For years pastors and teachers have used the Tabernacle of David as a pattern for worship in the church today. As we study the worship surrounding the Tabernacle we learn that it didn’t “just happen” there was thorough preparation. 1 Chronicles 25:7 reads, *So the number of them, with their brethren who were instructed in the songs of the Lord, all who were skillful, was two hundred and eighty-eight.* The New Living Translation reads like this: *They and their families were all trained in making music before the Lord, and each of them--288 in all--was an accomplished musician.* Notice two things about these musicians; they were instructed or trained and they were skillful or accomplished.

The Hebrew word used for instructed in 1 Chronicles 25:7 means to goad, i.e. to teach (the rod being an Oriental incentive); expert, instruct, learn, skilful. A goad is a long stick with a pointed end used for prodding animals. 1 Chronicles 15:22 states that a guy by the name of Chenaniah was the instructor in charge of music because he was skillful. The Hebrew word used for instructor here means to chastise, literally (with blows) or figuratively (with words); hence, to instruct.

Several years ago my late father owned a trucking company that hauled pigs. Every so often I would go to the livestock barn with him. When they began loading the pigs on the trailers there would always be a few pigs that didn’t want to cooperate. The loaders had these metal batons that resembled police batons, maybe a little larger. These batons had batteries in them and had a couple of electrodes, I guess, sticking out the end. When a pig refused to go up the ramp the loader would prod it with his baton, stinging it with an electrical current. I know that sounds sort of cruel, but it worked. The unruly pig quickly got in line.

I am not suggesting that these musicians were beaten with batons if they missed a chord on their harp or clanged their cymbal in the wrong place. However, the term “being instructed” does give us the idea that these musicians dropped some sweat preparing for their shift around the Tabernacle. Why was being instructed so important? Could it have been because they were going to be offering up sacrifices of praise in the manifest presence of God? This instruction produced skillful musicians; musicians who were in line musically and spiritually with the flow of worship.

The psalmist exhorts us to, *Sing to Him a new song; play skillfully with a shout of joy.* (Psalms 33:3) The Hebrew word for skillfully is yatah. Yatah means to be or make well or literally to sound beautiful. Two other Hebrew words are used to define the word skillful. One means to separate mentally or distinguish, i.e. to understand. The other means to know; to ascertain by seeing. The Tabernacle musicians learned by being shown what to do and they practiced what they learned until they became accomplished musicians making beautiful sounds.

I believe practice is essential on two levels; individually and corporately. For those of us who are not accomplished musicians it is obvious why we need to practice. Yet, even for accomplished musicians it is important to spend time alone with the Lord on your instrument. It is equally important for a singer who doesn’t play an instrument. It is during these times that God can give new melodies, new riffs and new songs that can minister prophetically to the Body of Christ. Individual practice time is a great place to learn how to be led by the Spirit and flow with worship as he leads.

I’ll let you in on a secret. Before I ever sang a prophetic song on Sunday morning I sang several of them to the wall in my bedroom. As I practiced for the upcoming worship service I would inevitably detour from my practice to spontaneous worship. As the Lord began to speak to me I would sing what I heard him saying. No one heard it except God and me. Spending time doing this gave me confidence in my ability to hear God and I learned how to flow musically while singing spontaneously. Some of the

prophetic songs God gave during those times became congregational worship songs or words of exhortation for our church.

One of Saul's servants gives this description of David in 1 Samuel 16:18. *Look, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skillful in playing, a mighty man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a handsome person; and the Lord is with him.* How did David become skillful in playing? I believe he spent hours playing his instrument while watching his father's sheep. He was alone with the sheep and God. Did you notice the servant said that David was a man of valor and war? How did he know this? Though Samuel had anointed him king, David had not yet killed Goliath much less led the armies of Israel into battle. Look at David's response to Saul's reluctance to let him fight Goliath.

But David said to Saul, Your servant used to keep his father's sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard, and struck and killed it. Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God. Moreover David said, The Lord, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.

1 Samuel 17:34-37

David learned to kill the lion and the bear before he took on the giant and the Philistine army. Many of us want to lead the armies before we tend the sheep. We want to sing to the crowds before we sing to the walls in our bedrooms. Too often we want the rewards without putting forth the sweat necessary to achieve them.

The writer of Hebrews wrote, *But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.* (Hebrews 5:14) The definition of a person who has come to full age is one who has learned to discern good and evil. They learn to discern good and evil by exercising their senses. The Greek word used for exercised in this verse is *gumnazo*. *Gumnazo* means to practice naked or train. Mature Christians didn't just wake up one day with the ability to discern good and evil. They trained their senses by using them. I believe this dynamic applies to both personal and corporate worship as well.

During corporate rehearsal the worship team learns to flow together as a unit whether it is a contemporary band, choir or orchestra. Each member brings with them their personal practice times and together they become one voice. The more time spent together the more natural the worship flow and the more mature the group becomes.

It is much easier to take someone to a place you have already been. As the worship team experiences the presence of God together in practice or rehearsal they build a runway that helps to launch the corporate body into God's presence. Not only does the team learn to flow together musically but their spirits are joined together as well. This unity of spirit makes a huge difference when they take the stage for corporate worship.

I mentioned earlier that practice costs us time, energy and money. You may be asking, "How much practice is enough?" In my opinion individuals can't practice too much. However, corporate rehearsal or practice time may depend on the maturity and skill level of the individuals. Many bands or worship ministries require weekly rehearsals. My perception is the more the better. Weekly rehearsals are good especially when you are incorporating new team members.

During my years of leading worship I have led bands that needed a lot of practice and some that didn't need as much. Some of the bands would practice every week. Some of them would practice every two weeks and sometimes we would get together on a Saturday occasionally and spend the day learning new stuff and worshiping. Regardless, we always met a few minutes before church began to get focused on the upcoming service.

The worship philosophy I adopted as a worship leader in a Vineyard church years ago says that spontaneity is best when it is under girded with thorough preparation. There is not an organization in professional sports that would dare field a team having not practiced. Though a team may have to stray from their original plan during a game, they are able to adapt to whatever schemes the other team may throw at them because they have prepared. Should we do less in preparing to lead others into the presence of the God of the universe? Regardless of our skill level we should always strive to bring God the best sacrifice we have to offer. He is worthy of our best. Nothing less will do.

Criteria for choosing worship songs...

Choosing the right worship songs will greatly enhance the effectiveness of your worship leading and give your congregation an effective vehicle to ride into worship. On the other hand choosing the wrong songs will become a roadblock to your worship leading experience and the worship experience of your congregation.

I don't pretend to have the corner on the market, but here are some questions I ask myself when choosing worship songs. I'm sure there are many more.

1. What style or genre of music fits the vision of my church? Church leadership should answer this question. The location of the church and the age group of people who attend the church can be determining factors in answering this question. Worship is for God and ultimately we want to choose songs that minister to him. However, as worship leaders we should use songs that will lead the congregation into the presence of God with us. Otherwise we aren't needed.

2. Can the congregation easily learn the song? Is the song "wordy" or does it contain difficult chord progressions and key changes? Most folks in our congregations are not professional musicians or singers. That's not to say they are inept and can't learn a difficult song. Yet, we must be careful not to lose them. If we do we will find ourselves singing solo to a group of confused and frustrated spectators.

3. Can I and the praise team learn the song without much difficulty? It is important for a worship leader to know his/her skill level and that of the team members. Playing songs that are difficult for you and the band to play will make it equally difficult for the congregation to follow. Wait about using such a song until the band can flow with it.

4. Does the song express my heart toward God? Can I worship with this song? I think it is important for a worship leader to use songs that lead him/her into the presence of God. Many times that is an indication that the song will lead others into God's presence as well.

5. Are the lyrics of the song biblical either implicitly or explicitly? That's a no brainer you might say, but there are popular worship songs (as well as old hymns) out there that are a stretch for biblical content and theology. A word of caution: Don't get your theology from songs!

Getting input from members of the worship team can be helpful in choosing the proper worship songs. If a team member has heard a song that led them to worship it could work well for the entire congregation. Members of your congregation, especially those who are worshipers, may hear or know a song that would be good to use. As worship leaders we should always strive to be led by the Holy Spirit above all. However, listening to the worshipers God has placed around us can prove to be a tremendous blessing.

One final note: In choosing which of my original songs to use for congregational worship I use the same set of questions and criteria. Receiving input from others is especially important to me in this process. Of course I have to be willing to have "thick skin" when it comes to my little babies (songs). Some of the songs I write are best kept between God and me. Or just to myself. Sometimes I can just picture God throwing them back.

Introducing new songs...

Introducing new worship songs to your congregation can be a catalyst for fresh worship responses. Singing new songs often revives the worship experience that has gone stale or has found itself in a rut. There is no exact science in how and when to introduce new worship songs. Here are some tips that might be helpful.

To get started you should have a core group of songs. The number of songs in a core group can vary. I keep a list of 100 songs of which about 60 are in my core group. When new songs are introduced I eliminate a song that has been used for a long period of time or didn't work well with the congregation. That doesn't necessarily mean I never use the song again, it has just been removed from my core group. Choosing a core group of songs depends on the worship philosophy of the church and the style of music your congregation responds to. Before choosing songs the worship leader needs to have a clear understanding of the church's vision for worship. The worship leader also needs to know his/her skill level and the skill level of the worship team members.

Depending on how much time you have set aside for worship, you will want to use 4 to 6 of your core songs during each set. In addition you might add 2 to 3 new songs each month. When adding new songs it is beneficial to use them for 4 or 5 weeks in a row. This will give the congregation time to get familiar with the lyrics and melody. Sometimes once a new song is played for a month there is a tendency to drop it from the worship set for a month. It might be more effective to use the song again after a week or two. Doing so will give the congregation the opportunity to really make the song their own. They will take the step from learning the song to worshipping with it.

If a particular song seems to have a significant anointing you might continue to use it for a long period of time. Be sensitive to the Holy Spirit in determining how long you use a song. You don't want to turn off the anointing nor do you want to continue using the song after the anointing is gone. If the song just doesn't seem to facilitate worship in your church by all means "can it."

As a general rule I place new songs either first or last in the worship set. Usually if the song has an up-beat tempo it is the first song. If the song is more intimate I put it at the end. Putting a new song in the middle of the worship set can be distracting. You don't want your congregation to stop worshipping to learn a new song. Another good time to introduce new songs is during the offering or during the ministry time or invitation. If you introduce a new song during the ministry time you will want to make sure it fits in that context. Even though the congregation may not fully participate during those times they will hear the song and will readily recognize it when used during the regular worship time.

Finally, you need a plan for scheduling new music and you need to work the plan. This will include having learned the song yourself, having music and lyrics available for the worship team, adequate rehearsal time and having the lyrics available for the congregation. If nothing is planned, nothing will happen.

Song selection and the worship service...

There are no concrete rules when it comes to selecting a set of songs for a worship service. Many factors can determine what songs are sung and the order in which they are sung. One such factor is the amount of experience and skill level of the worship leader and band members. The style of music and the order of worship are usually determined by the pastor or other church leadership.

There are many different scenarios each of which must be considered when selecting songs for worship. It would be almost impossible to cover all of them in this article. The scenario I want to address here consists of a contemporary worship service with a worship leader and band. Let me stress that what I share is simply a suggestion or at best a good place to start. By no means is it a final authority. The Holy Spirit is the final authority. Only he fully knows the mind of the Father. He is the worship leader, and in the end what he wants sung is what counts.

For those who are just beginning to lead worship my best advice is to keep it simple. Don't try to be too spontaneous or play songs that are outside of your skill range. You need to assess the talent of your band members and select songs that are in their skill range as well. By staying within your capabilities your band will sound better and it will cut down on the frustrations of trying to learn harder music. You can build up to the more complex stuff as your band matures and you get more comfortable leading.

By complex I mean style or arrangement; the number of chord changes and rhythm patterns. If there is a complex song that you really want to use try to find a way to simplify it. You don't have to play every song exactly the way it is recorded. Let's face it, not all of us are professional musicians and neither are our band members. Don't be ashamed of where you are, but don't stay there forever. Do what you do well and begin stretching yourself to the next level.

In putting together a song list I have found it helpful to choose songs that flow well together. I like to use songs that are in the same key or that easily modulate to another key. For instance; if I want to flow from one fast song to another without stopping I might use two songs that are written in the same key and that have very similar rhythms. If I want to change keys I might use a song written in the key of G and modulate to the key of A flat or A. Modulating a step or a half step up usually makes for the best transition.

Most of the time beginning a worship set with up beat songs followed by slower songs is best. Celebration or praise seems to pave the way into the more intimate times of worship. Much of the time the faster songs speak about God (praise); the slower songs speak to God (worship).

The number of up beat songs you sing depends on how much time you have set aside for worship and the vision of the church leadership. It also depends on the setting of the meeting whether it is a Sunday celebration, special worship night or a home group meeting. Though beginning with up beat songs is a general rule it isn't written in stone. I have led worship many times and felt the Holy Spirit nudging me to begin with intimacy. Many times the celebration would come after an eventful time of worship and ministry.

Moving from fast songs to slow songs you might use a transition song. This would be a song that is somewhere in between slow and fast. A good "call to worship" song is appropriate here. You might consider choosing a song that makes an easy transition into the slow song portion of your set.

In choosing slow songs I generally use the same rule as choosing fast songs. Usually once I begin singing songs to God I don't go back to singing about God. The idea is to keep a continual flow of intimacy with the Father. Sometimes it is appropriate to choose songs that have the same theme such as love or the cross. The pastor might suggest songs that convey what he feels the Holy Spirit is saying to your particular congregation.

It is a good idea to prepare more songs than you think you will use. This will give you some room for flexibility, sensitivity and spontaneity. Like we mentioned in our worship philosophy, spontaneity is best when it is under girded with thorough preparation. Sometimes just playing instrumental music during the set lends itself to a great time of worship. Other times complete silence is in order.

Personally I do little or no talking between songs when I lead worship. Singing several songs with no interruption lends itself to a more meaningful time of worship. The congregation doesn't gather for worship to hear us talk. We don't want to distract them from their time with the Father. There are times, however, when a word of prophecy or a prayer is appropriate. Always be sensitive to the Holy Spirit. When speaking stay away from cheerleading and/or scolding the people. I don't believe rebukes are in line during worship. How would you feel if right in the middle of an intimate time with your spouse they were to say, "Honey you burned the pancakes this morning." or "Darling you forgot to take out the garbage?" There are times for correction and rebuke but not during lovemaking.

The appropriate way to end a worship set is always the hardest for me to discern; mainly because I never want to stop. Since there is no set rule, submitting to church leadership and others we trust gives guidance in times of uncertainty.

Appropriate Dress for Leading Worship...

Several years ago as a young worship leader I made a gallant effort to put together a dress code for our worship ministry. Little did I know what I was asking for or the grief I was about to suffer. I quickly learned that there are about as many opinions on proper dress as there are people and that coming to a mutual consensus was virtually impossible. The feedback I received left me with the feeling that I alone was judge, jury and executioner. The part of the worship team that wasn't totally infuriated with me was asking me every Sunday if what they were wearing was acceptable. That was one battle that I swore to myself I would never wage again; until now.

I feel I need to qualify what I understand to be true concerning this subject. So, let me begin with these thoughts even though this list could and probably should be longer.

1. I fully understand that the way people dress varies from culture to culture and that even within cultures what is appropriate dress will vary from one people group to the next.

2. I fully understand that maintaining an appropriate standard of dress for a Christian is just as important when they are not attending a church service as it is when they are leading worship.

3. I fully understand that churches vary on the group of people they wish to reach and how they dress is one way of reaching out to those people.

4. I fully understand that economic status sometimes can or does have an impact on the type of clothes to which a person has access.

5. I fully understand that what is considered appropriate dress has changed from generation to generation though I am not convinced that is altogether a good thing.

6. I fully understand that there is no scriptural guidance on how worship team leaders or members should dress when leading worship outside of the guidelines given in scripture for all Christians.

It is not my objective in this article to establish a particular standard or dress code for worship leaders and team members. Some of you reading this will think the standards we set were too strict and some will think they were not strict enough. My objective is to get those in leadership positions within the local church to take the time for prayerful consideration about what their standard should be. And to take a close look, again with prayerful consideration, to see if the way their worship team members' dress gives proper glory to God and is not a distraction for the people for which they lead worship. I would urge leaders not to take this issue lightly or for granted.

There are a few scriptures that speak to the issue of proper dress. Let's begin with a commandment God gave Moses for the people of Israel. Deuteronomy 22:5 reads, *A woman shall not wear a man's garment, nor shall a man put on a woman's cloak, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD your God.* (ESV)

In *Manners and Customs of the Bible*, James M. Freeman writes the following concerning Deuteronomy 22:5: "The distinction between the dress of the sexes being less than with us, there was a greater need of this regulation. There is reason to believe that the law was made not merely to preserve decency, but because the heathen were in habit of pursuing a different course as a part of their idolatrous worship. Maimonides says: 'In the books of the idolaters it is commanded that when a man presents himself before the Stars of Venus, he shall wear the colored dress of a woman; and when a woman adores the Stars of Mars, she shall appear in armor.' Pagan idols were frequently represented with the features of one sex and the dress of another, and their worshipers endeavored to be like them. It is not at all unlikely that this custom was as old as the time of Moses, and was a partial reason for the enacting of this law."

Other commentators including Adam Clarke agree with Freeman that Deuteronomy 22:5 appeals to idolatrous worship. He writes, "It certainly cannot mean a simple change in dress, whereby the men might pass for women, and vice versa. This would have been impossible in those countries where the dress of the sexes had but little to distinguish it, and where every man wore a long beard. It is, however a very good general precept understood literally, and applies particularly to those countries where the dress alone distinguishes between the male and the female. The close-shaved gentleman may at any time appear like a woman in the female dress, and the woman appear as a man in the male's attire. Were this to be tolerated in society, it would produce the greatest confusion."

Matthew Henry writes, "The distinction of sexes by the apparel is to be kept up, for the preservation of our own and our neighbour's chastity, v. 5. Nature itself teaches that a difference be made between them in their hair (1 Corinthians 11:14), and by the same rule in their clothes, which therefore ought not to be confounded, either in ordinary wear or occasionally. To befriend a lawful escape or concealment it may be done, but whether for sport or in the acting of plays is justly questionable."

The Apostle Paul wrote, *I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works.* (1 Timothy 2:8-10 ESV)

What is proper for women who profess godliness to wear? Paul doesn't give specifics. What is costly attire? Costly attire for one person may not be costly for another. It seems that maybe Paul was saying that the proper attire for a godly woman is good works. And that a way a godly woman dresses should not draw attention to her, but her good works should draw attention to God.

In Barnes' Notes on the New Testament, Albert Barnes writes, "The true idea here is, that her attention to her appearance should be such that she will be offensive to no class of persons; such as to show that her mind is supremely fixed on higher and more important things, and such as to interfere with no duty which she owes, and no good which she can do, either by spending her time needlessly in personal adorning, or by lavishing that money for dress which might do good to others, or by neglecting the proprieties of her station, and making herself offensive to others."

Peter concurs with Paul's thought as he writes, *Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.* (1 Peter 3:1-4 ESV)

Peter seems addressing the proper attire for a godly woman in winning her unbelieving husband. Peter encourages Christian women to win their husbands to Christ by living a life of submission to their

husbands as the head of the home. He warns them to not let their beauty and adornment be one of external appearance but internal. The idea is that a godly woman may win her unbelieving husband without a word if she adorns herself with respectful and pure conduct. She will not win him by dressing fancy.

In a sermon series on 1 Peter, John Piper said, “So what I think Peter is doing is giving married women another warning about how not to win their husbands, namely, don't think that you can win him with trendy hairstyles, or a better tan, or delicate jewelry, or clinging robes. You might in this way attract him to the bedroom, but probably not to God.”

Some of these scriptures speak specifically to women, but in many ways can be just as easily transferred to men. It would be just as accurate to say that men should *let their adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit*. It would be just as appropriate for men to *adorn themselves in respectful apparel with modesty and self-control*.

When I ventured to establish a dress code for our worship band years ago our goal was not to wear our clothing in such a way as to draw attention to us. My preference (let me stress *my preference*) in dress for worship leading during regular church services is smart casual, so that was our starting point. We asked the women not to wear blouses or dresses with low necklines which would show cleavage, dresses with very low cut backs or arms or dresses with skirts with slits high up the leg. Dress pants were allowed. As for shoes we asked that they not wear flip-flops or go bare footed. We asked that neither men nor women wear jeans for the regular church services. Those requests seemed reasonable to me but were met with some opposition.

The guys were asked to wear a dress shirt, dress pants with closed toed shoes. We asked that they not wear flip-flops, sandals or go bare footed. Absolutely no slacking was allowed and shirts must be buttoned.

The last thing we wanted was a young man bending over to pick up a guitar cord and his underwear or worse be showing. We also didn't want a young man's chest to be showing half way to his belly button adorned with lots of jewelry. Some of you may think this goes without saying, but I have seen both of these scenarios on Sunday mornings. I do feel strongly that the lines should be drawn on these two issues. Trust me when I say I am not opposed to fashion, but the main purpose of how we dress should be to glorify God not to make a fashion statement. And especially when we are leading people into the presence of God during the music portions or our worship services.

This dress code may not work in every church setting? Please refer to my qualifying statements above. If I were leading a worship band in the jungles of a third world country I might be forced to modify this dress code drastically to meet the needs of the native people. And it might not even be necessary to have a dress code. Appropriateness is the key and church leadership should determine that for their congregation. I do not wish to be legalistic.

We could spend some time here looking at God's dress code for Aaron and his sons (Exodus 28) when they ministered before the Lord in the tabernacle. There are some symbolisms that can be drawn which would have some spiritual meaning. Others more qualified than I have written extensively on the topic, so I will let you read and study them for yourself. I do, however wish to close with a couple of important scripture texts and ideas for you to ponder. I have written at length on these two areas in my books *The Ingredients of Worship* and *Heaven's Worship*, so I'll just briefly touch on them here.

There are two things in which I believe are essential for all Christians to be clothed; especially those of us who are called to lead worship. The first is righteousness and the second is humility. Psalms 132:8-9 reads, *Arise, O Lord, and go to your resting place, you and the ark of your might. Let your priests be clothed with righteousness, and let your saints shout for joy.* (ESV) Similar words are found in 1 Chronicles 6:41 and were spoken by Solomon who could have been the author of Psalms 132. It reads, *And now arise, O LORD God and go to your resting place, you and the ark of your might. Let your priests, O LORD God, be clothed with salvation, and let your saints rejoice in your might.* (ESV)

The implications here are profound, but let me briefly say that I believe Solomon and/or the psalmist were conveying the thought that the priests should be clothed with true holiness (Psalm 29:2 ESV); sanctified character (1 Thessalonians 4:3 ESV). Only such clothing would make the service they perform acceptable both for them and the people for whom and to whom they serve. And though according to new covenant standards all believers are priests (Revelations 5:10; 1 Peter 2:5-9 ESV), I strongly believe this clothing is paramount for those who lead God's people in worship.

Secondly, 1 Peter 5:5 reads, *Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for God opposes the proud but gives grace to*

the humble. (ESV) I find it very interesting that the apostle coupled submission with humility. The lack of submission is the outworking of pride. God opposes pride, but the humble get grace. Grace is a precious commodity for those who lead worship thus humility is essential.

Also, God dwells where the humble dwell. Isaiah wrote, *For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones.* (Isaiah 57:15)

God calls the place where the humble dwell a high and holy place. Don't we need our worship team members to live in a high and holy place? The reason God gives for dwelling with the humble is to revive their spirit and their heart. Don't we need for those you lead us in worship to have a revived spirit and a revived heart? They must be clothed in humility.

There are probably some areas I have missed on dealing with the subject of appropriate dress for worship leading. I am certainly open to other positions and ideas. But, I hope by bringing attention to the subject you can, if you have not already, take a look at how you should address this issue with your worship ministry. And keep the glory of God first and foremost in your decision.

Worship service etiquette...

This section is titled "Worship Service Etiquette" simply for the reason that I couldn't come up with a better title. There are probably as many ways to conduct a worship service as there are churches. The leadership of each local church is given the responsibility of seeing that God's vision for their church is implemented. However, I do believe that there are certain considerations that should be made in the implementation of a worship service vision.

A few months ago my family and I attended a worship service at a church in our community. The worship was very prophetic and spontaneous in nature and we sensed God's presence in a powerful way. The church leadership allowed a spirit of freedom to worship and many outward expressions of worship were demonstrated. We left that service knowing that we had been in the presence of God. That said, there were some things that happened in the service that I feel could have been a hindrance to some in the congregation.

The sanctuary of the church is somewhat small and the ceiling is only about 12 feet high. During the worship a lady stood in front of the stage waving a large flag that almost reached the ceiling. She stood on the side of the stage where my family was sitting. Because of the size of the flag she was waving we, and I'm sure others, could not see the words to the songs that were displayed on the wall. We didn't know the words to some of the songs and it would have been nice to be able to have read them. I know her intention was good and I'm sure if she had known she was hindering someone she would have moved.

In the planning of a worship service and upon deciding the mediums that will be used we should take into consideration the logistics of the room where we worship. Flags are a great way to express worship. If flags are going to be a part of the worship service then plans should be made to use them in a way that people are not hindered in their worship. The situation in the above mentioned church could have been easily solved by using a smaller flag or by having the flags waved from the back of the sanctuary.

In a separate incident, at a conference we were attending, my wife was struck in the head by a flag being waved by a person standing behind us. She was not injured, but try to worship while wondering if you're going to be hit by a flagpole.

Another thing we noticed at this church was that a young man danced from one side of the room to the other banging a small drum. There were others in the congregation playing tambourines. Maybe it's just the musician in me, but this young man and most of the folks playing the tambourines were not in rhythm with the praise band. The sound was chaotic and made it difficult for even a seasoned musician to stay on beat. I was reminded of what Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *Even things without life, whether flute or harp, when they make a sound, unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played?* (1 Corinthians 14:7)

One Sunday when I was leading worship a well meaning man in our congregation turned five or so children loose with tambourines in our corporate worship service. Not only was it a musician's nightmare, this small congregation became spectators instead of participators. We should teach our children to worship, but there is a time and place for all things. Each congregation should determine what those times

and places are, but my experience has been that corporate worship is not the best place for this type of venture.

The use of the gift of tongues may be the most misused avenue of worship I have witnessed. I realize I am about to put a yoke on someone's sacred cow, but let me emphasize that I fully believe the gift of tongues is valid for the church today. Singing in tongues or singing in the spirit is a wonderful means of expressing worship. The misuse of the gift happens when worship team members and/or members of the congregation sing in tongues out loud with no interpretation following.

Paul taught that if a person speaks in tongues in a corporate setting that the tongue should be interpreted. If there is not an interpreter the person speaking in tongues should keep silent and speak to himself and God. I believe this pertains to singing in tongues as well. Paul goes on to say;

Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding. Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say? For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified.

1 Corinthians 14:13-17

Another misuse of this gift happens when a message or song in tongues is interpreted as a message from God to man. Paul plainly states that a person speaking in tongues is speaking to God not to man. It seems reasonable that if the message in tongues is spoken to God then the interpretation of that tongue should be spoken to God; most likely as prayer or an expression of worship. Prophecy speaks to man, tongues speak to God (1 Corinthians 14:1-5).

I am not opposed to tongues, dancing, playing tambourines or waving flags, however in corporate worship services every effort should be made to ensure that those who desire to enter in worship are not hindered. Paul wrote, *All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being.* (1 Corinthians 10:23-24) This admonition should not be ignored in our corporate worship services.

In no way am I suggesting that we should "water down" our worship to please man, but that we should order our corporate worship so that all who are present have the opportunity to engage in worship, especially those who are less mature.

There are other things that we should take into consideration while planning for corporate worship, such as; making sure that the words to the songs are easily accessible, adjusting the music to a favorable volume, and determining how the members of the worship team should be dressed. These decisions are made easier by knowing the people group that makes up the congregation.

I understand that you can't please everyone, but that is not really the goal. Some folks will be offended at how we worship; so be it. Let's just make sure that we don't get in the way of those who really want to enter God's presence with us. On the other hand there will also be those who don't like any order or rules. We should help these folks to understand the biblical principles of *doing all things decently and in order and in honor giving preference to one another.* (1 Corinthians 14:40 and Romans 12:10-11) We should also note that King David established an "order" of worship that was implemented at the tabernacle of David.

One practical suggestion that might be helpful would be to plan an "anything goes" worship service. Schedule it at a different time from your regular corporate worship service and do it as often as you like. Announce the event to your congregation and let them know exactly what to expect. Let the folks bring their drums, tambourines, flags and dancing shoes. Move the chairs out of the way, crank up the sound, and go for it. And by all means invite me; I'd like to come.

EPILOGUE: CONTEMPORARY OR TRADITIONAL?

Over the years I have received e-mails from pastors who are struggling with the idea of introducing contemporary worship music into their congregations. It seems their biggest fear is that their congregations might become divided by, as one pastor put it, the “ubiquitous worship wars.” Many churches have successfully dealt with this issue by scheduling an additional worship service for those who prefer a more contemporary approach to worship. But, that is not always possible nor necessarily the solution.

One pastor posed these questions to me, “Do you think that it is possible to be in a worshipping congregation that uses only the traditional hymns? Do you think that by God’s grace we might still be capable of worship in spirit and truth?” My personal perception is that you can have spirit and truth worship regardless of what you sing as long as it speaks the heart of the worshiper to the heart of God. The style of music doesn’t determine the worship, but rather the heart or the lifestyle of the worshiper. Though I prefer modern worship music to the exclusive use of traditional hymns, I cannot find in scripture where worshipping in spirit and truth hinges on the style of music that is being used.

All music when first written is contemporary. When King David and others wrote the Psalms they were contemporary. The type of worship David established on Mount Zion had not been done before. Do you think there were some contemporaries of David who balked at what he did? There were some who probably said, “Wait a minute, you’re supposed to have a veil in front of that ark. And the priests are supposed to be the only ones who can see it. And only once a year! With blood! Besides we’ve never had that kind of music in the presence of the ark before. It looks like you guys are just carried away with emotionalism.” I don’t know about you, but I’m sure glad David and his buddies didn’t listen to them. We might not have the book of Psalms today if they had.

When Fanny Crosby wrote *Blessed Assurance* it was a modern song. When H.G. Spafford wrote *It is Well with My Soul* and Martin Luther penned *A Mighty Fortress is Our God* they were contemporary songs. John Newton (*Amazing Grace*) and William Cowper (*There is a Fountain*) published a hymnal of 268 songs to be sung by Newton’s church. That was their contemporary worship music.

I have read that some of the tunes of the old hymns were tunes taken from bar room songs. Do you think some of the traditionalists had a problem with that? Do you think some of Newton’s parishioners complained about the “new” music? Do you think some could have even left the church because of the “new” music? Surely today’s generation of pastors is not the first to be faced with the dilemma of which music to use in their church. Yet, these founding fathers and gifted writers pressed on even in the face of criticism. In doing so, they have left us a legacy of anointed worship music which should not be ignored by this generation.

So Pastor Steve, you might ask, why do you prefer modern worship music to the exclusive use of traditional hymns? I suppose the reason is that the modern songs help me to express my heart to the heart of the Father. I worship to express my gratitude and love for God to God. I want to sing to him and for me the modern worship songs best facilitate that activity. For the most part the modern songs speak the way I speak as opposed to backward sentences and the use of King James English. I much prefer to say, “I love you, Father” as opposed to “I lovest thou thee, O Father.” Now, I don’t have an issue with anyone who wants to sing traditional hymns exclusively if that expresses their heart to God.

Also, I believe revelation is progressive. God is still revealing things about himself to us. In other words, we don’t know everything there is to know about God and how we should respond to him. There are still mysteries in scripture. I certainly don’t understand all of it. Some of the modern worship songs capture some of the “new” things that God reveals about himself. It’s fresh for me. I am not suggesting that God has changed or that scripture or the gospel has changed. But, the way we understand him and how we respond to him is changing all the time. I believe God is still creating. At the least he has gifted people with creativity. The gifts they offer to the church are just as important as the gifts offered by the saints of old and should not be ignored by the older generations.

Often times in the quest for what is best, the church has allowed the world to determine what mediums are used in worship. We should always be careful not to mistake the unholy for what is holy. We must also be careful not to call unholy what is holy. It is equally important that our definition of worship not be relegated to what occurs on Sunday mornings.

Expressing our worship includes activities such as feeding the poor, visiting the sick, taking care of widows and orphans, loving our neighbor as ourselves and being conformed into the image of Christ. My perception is that all of these are acts of worship and coupled with our emotional responses to the Father

comprise the sum of our worship. Our worship is not determined by the style of music we use but by the style of life we live.

I recently read a book by John Piper titled *The Hidden Smile of God*. The book is a reflection on the lives of John Bunyan, William Cowper and David Brainerd. In his conclusion Piper writes, “If the Christian life has become the path of ease in the modern west, then corporate worship is the place of increasing entertainment. The problem is not a battle between contemporary worship music and hymns; the problem is that there aren’t enough martyrs during the week. If no soldiers are perishing, what you want on Sunday is Bob Hope and some pretty girls, not the army chaplain and a surgeon.”

Piper goes to say, “...faith-filled suffering is essential in this world for the most intense, authentic worship. When we are most satisfied with God in suffering, he will be most glorified in us in worship. Our problem is not styles of music. Our problem is styles of life. When we embrace more affliction for the worth of Christ, there will be more fruit in the worship of Christ.”

Piper’s assessments might be best illustrated by in the lives of Paul and Silas. Their abandonment for the cause of Christ landed them in a Philippian jail. Broken and bleeding, when most of us would be licking our wounds, the two preachers began praying and singing hymns in the middle of the night. In response, God caused a massive earthquake so violent it shook the foundation of the prison. The prison doors were opened and all the prisoners were loosed from their chains. As a consequence the jailer and his entire family were saved.

The worship offered by Paul and Silas was authenticated by the affliction they suffered for the worth of Christ. The fruit of that worship was the salvation of souls; the loosing of prisoners.

If we want God to shake our worship services with his manifest presence, if we want to see prisoners loosed from their chains, then we must be willing to lay down our lives for the sake of God’s kingdom. The style of worship music we use is not the stimulus that moves the heart of God. It is our willingness to suffer for the cause of Christ and be obedient to his call on our lives. The question of authentic worship is not, “Do we use contemporary or traditional music?” but rather, “Are we willing to die?”