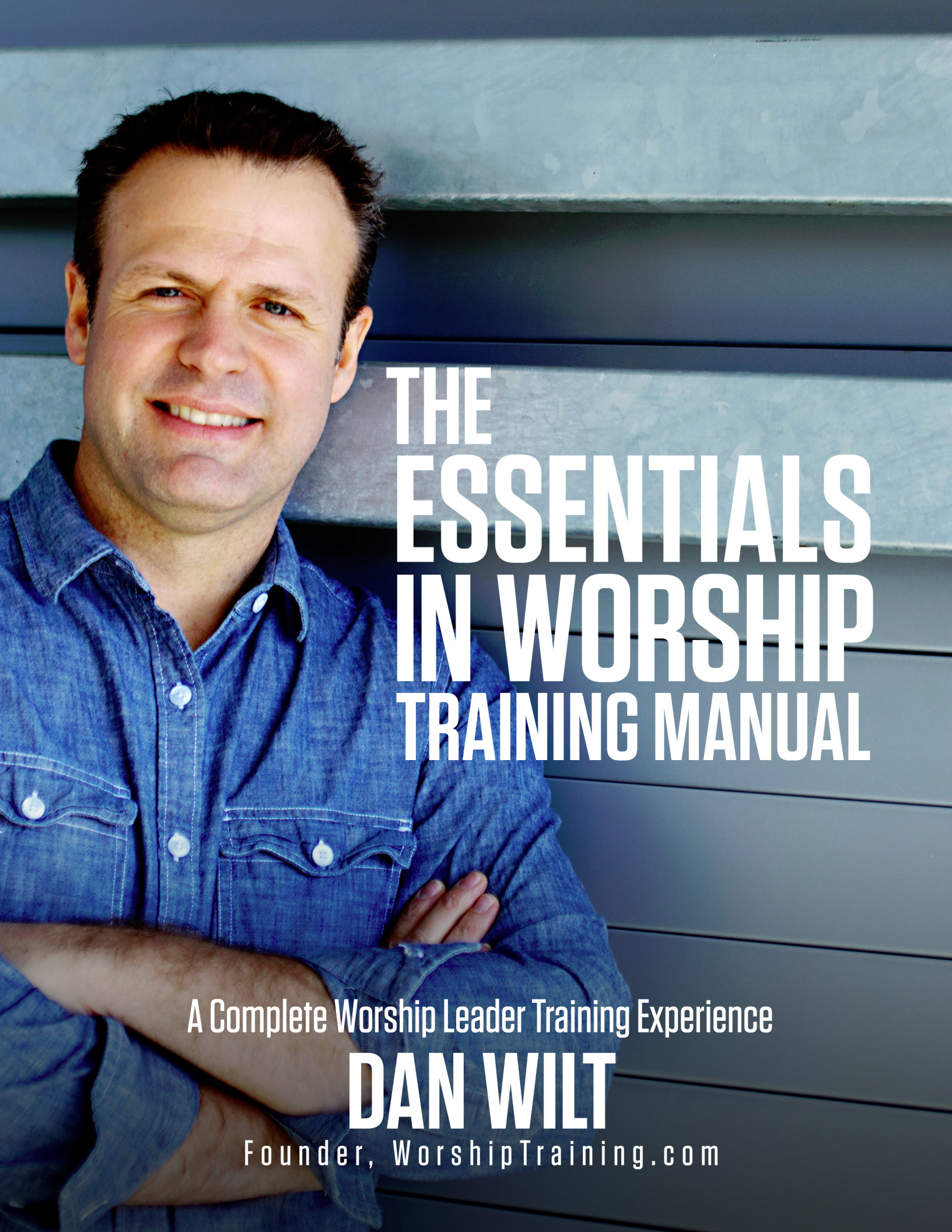


THE ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP TRAINING MANUAL

A Complete Worship Leader Training Experience

DAN WILT

Founder, WorshipTraining.com

Essentials in Worship with Dan Wilt
By Dan Wilt, M.Min.

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Essentials in Worship is dedicated to you,

as an always growing, ever developing

Worship Leader,

Worship Songwriter,

Worship Arts Director, or

Worship Pastor.

You have no idea what a gift you can be to our world, simply by leading worship faithfully.

You are narrating God's Story – through the music you make, the services you craft, the songs you select, the Scriptures you choose, the liturgies you design, the prayers you pray, the words you say, and the spaces you create for worship.

You are leading us all into worship, and you are creating environments – working with the Spirit – that help us turn our deepest desires toward Christ.

Thank you for saying yes to the call.

The call to lead worship.

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A Sending Word From The Author

A WORD FROM THE AUTHOR

***Essentials In Worship* is the result of 25 years of interviews, testing, and interaction with many of the most effective worship leaders active around the world today.**

Essentials in Worship was designed to distill and deliver the best of those insights in the 6 areas of 1) worship leading, 2) worship ministry leadership, 3) worship songwriting, 4) worship values, 5) worship theology, and 6) worship history.

There are now thousands of worship leader training resources that exist in the world today. What makes *Essentials In Worship* special is that it has been read (and watched) by thousands of worship leaders over the past decade – and the feedback on its effectiveness has been overwhelming.

Most of that feedback is focused on how *Essentials* summarizes the big ideas in each of the six vital areas of worship ministry leadership – saving much needed time for busy people.

One "session" in each of the areas can be read in 15 minutes or less. The discussion videos that are part of the full Essentials experience are between 4-12 minutes maximum.

In short, *Essentials* aims to touch a few of the best ideas in each area of ministry in order to deliver just the *essentials* that can help you move forward.

Leaders have also responded strongly to the practical ideas and tools given in *Essentials*. These ideas and tools are intended to make immediate application of the material easy for you the next time you have the opportunity to put them into practice.

In my experience, when a worship leader is positively impacted by an effective resource a church is positively impacted for the long-term.

I'm confident that reading *Essentials in Worship*, and applying its principles, will have that kind of payoff for your church as it has for so many other churches.

THE STORY BEHIND ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

Essentials in Worship was created when, after 20+ years of leading worship and leading worship ministries, I set out to distill the foundational ideas and skills information about worship (practical, philosophical, and theological) I believed every worship leader needed to grasp.

In fact, I needed to better understand many things about the complex world of worship leadership myself.

My story at the time was like that of many worship leaders I knew. I'd been serving for many years as a worship pastor, worship trainer, resource developer, senior pastor, recording songwriter (Vineyard Worship), and worship arts university professor — all the while leading contemporary worship in my local church.

I learned in the school of hard knocks how to, for example, relate to my pastor, build an effective worship set, write a song, craft a special service liturgy, nurture a worship community, audition musicians, mentor new worship leaders, and arrange a band.

I similarly learned about the Old and New Testament visions of worship, Trinitarian worship, the history of worship music, architecture, the Eucharist, corporate prayer, baptism and more on the fly, grabbing what I could at conferences or on Sunday mornings.

At conferences and seminars I was attending I also had the unique opportunity to interview some the most gifted worship leaders and songwriters of our generation. (Much of the material in both *Essentials* and WorshipTraining.com comes from those interviews.)

Hearing voices like Matt Redman and N.T. Wright talk about worship (I had the great privilege of interviewing Wright in his home in Westminster Abbey), I was moved by the practical insights and theological truths flowing freely from the wellspring of their experience and wisdom.

I was reading, too. Voices like the early church fathers and mothers, Celtic Christian writers, spiritual formation authors, the late Robert Webber, Jeremy Begbie, John Wimber, Marva Dawn, Eugene Peterson, Constance Cherry, Jamie Smith, Richard Foster and other thoughtful men and women were helping me forge my philosophical approach to worship leadership and the arts.

Gathering Up The Gold

I often wished those gold nuggets of wisdom I was gathering about worship leading—from the practical skills to the heart behind it — could be forged into a simple, strong training manual that would fuel my local church's worship training.

I had worship leaders and a team to train — and I needed to constantly refresh my own learning as a worship pastor!

As I was struggling to find the right material to train my leaders, I hit a crisis point.

I would have to create a comprehensive, but accessible tool, myself.

I knew that the tool needed to have brief written sections (the attention span of musicians is notoriously short), and supplementary video/audio media to give some helpful teaching beyond the text (for a multimedia, smart phone generation).

Because I was leading a Worship Arts program in a university setting, the material needed to bridge the gap between the "on-the-ground" needs of the local church worship leader, and the more theoretical focus of the academic world.

I gathered up those few decades of insights from so many respected leaders, coupled them with vital ideas from the university world (practical theology, biblical studies, arts, aesthetics, and history), and wove them together into the *Essentials In Worship* material you have in your hands.

A Vision Realized

The plan was to first test the material through a digital enrichment experience aimed at training worship leaders I had come to know through national and international events.

Then, once the material was tested, I would modify it based on the feedback from those who took the early courses. We used Facebook as our classroom, and iTunes U as our video delivery mechanism. Adding in live Webinars and online events, we kept refining the training.

Eventually I founded *WorshipTraining.com* (now over 35K members strong and growing at the time of this writing) to be the mechanism that delivered that material.

Working with Sonreign Media, we made the choice to couple the *Essentials* material (the core training of WorshipTraining.com) with a wide range of popular worship resources from respected leaders across the church spectrum.

The rest is, as they say, history.

Worship leaders and pastors from many streams of the church, working out their worship approaches in both academic and local church settings, began to access the *Essentials* material.

Thousands of Worship Leaders and Teams, Learning Together

Since those early days, literally thousands of worship leaders and musicians have now used *Essentials in Worship* to up their game. Because Essentials is *principle-based,* and has an academic leaning, it does not date quickly in the way that many "how-to" worship leader materials do.

The goal of *Essentials* was straightforward. We wanted to provide an easy to use, accessible, time saving training tool for worship leaders – one that delivered core ideas about worship to their doorstep as they worked in their homes, jobs, and churches.

The last few years have proven that goal has been reached! I get emails every week telling me how *Essentials* is shaping the worship experience of churches Sunday after Sunday, on many continents.

Essentials was simply the kind of tool I needed to train my worship community – and I trust *Essentials* will be a tool that serves you for years to come.

No Church Left Behind

To reach every local church on planet earth (seriously, we want to serve *every church that could use this tool*), the price of *Essentials* has always been kept lower than the cost of sending one person to one conference this year.

As well, a portion of all proceeds from the sale of *Essentials In Worship* goes toward helping children escape poverty. We're committed to expressing holistic worship in the way we care for the poor as we further the reach of these core ideas.

On a personal level, I don't want any church to be without *Essentials* because they can't afford it. For that reason, I've always had a policy that if any church or individual can't afford the sale price, they can email me and we'll find a way to get this tool into their hands.

So, if you know of a church (or churches), or a worship leader (or worship leaders), that could use the tool that is *Essentials in Worship*, please let me know by emailing danwiltresources@gmail.com. We'll make sure they get it.

Essentials is also being translated into Spanish, French, German, and Portuguese, just for starters, so keep your eyes open at DanWilt.com for those versions to be announced.

Let's Keep In Touch

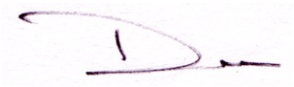
I also want to personally invite you to join me at my worship equipping blog, DanWilt.com, for weekly training tools you can email to your teams and leaders.

It's an added support to *Essentials*, and I expand on ideas from *Essentials* regularly. There are also a few thousand fellow worship leaders there in conversation who can encourage you.

Sign up for the email list for free downloads, and my weekly tools will go right into your inbox. You can then easily forward them on to others you think would benefit from them.

I trust *Essentials in Worship* will encourage you, inspire you, and renew you in your understanding of worship and its leadership in the 21st century.

Cheers to us growing forward as lead worshippers in our generation.



Dan Wilt, M.Min.
Creator, *Essentials In Worship*
Franklin, TN

www.DanWilt.com
www.WorshipTraining.com

HOW TO USE ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

Essentials in Worship is a local church worship training series that targets worship leaders of **every experience level**. It is designed to train you, the worship leader, in core ideas and skills within the philosophy of leading worship.

In addition to this, *Essentials* also provides unique training sections intended to reach your entire team, enriching *everyone* in your worship ministry.

Ultimately, *Essentials in Worship* is less about you being trained and more about putting **tools** in your hands that will stir reflection, start discussion, and deposit life-changing ideas in your worship ministry community.

Accessible "Mini-Studies" Format

Essentials in Worship aims at laying foundations through **quick, accessible mini-studies** that are within the time and energy reach of the local church worship volunteer.

While worship leaders should read all of the material, and everyone can learn something from all the sections, some sections are more particularly tailored to **unique groups** in your worship team like worship leaders, songwriters, musicians, techs, and worship arts overseers. **Pastors** will also find helpful ideas on worship in the values, theology, and history sections.

The list below identifies which sections of this book are best suited to which members of your worship ministry.

Who Should Do Which Essentials Sections?

Essentials in Worship is made up of **6 Sections** in this manual—each with **4-session 'mini-studies'** on a key topic.

Worship leaders can do all of these Sections. However, musicians, techs, pastors, and others can also read some of the Sections as well.

The following sections make up the Essentials experience:

1. **Essentials in Worship Leading**
   Designed for worship leaders in all areas of your church, including those serving in main sessions, youth groups, small groups, men's and women's groups, and children's ministry.

2. **Essentials in Worship Ministry**
   Designed for worship leaders, worship pastors, and worship arts pastors — anyone who oversees a worship leadership ministry in a local church.

3. **Essentials in Worship Songwriting**
   Designed for worship leaders, songwriters, musicians, and congregants — anyone who would like to write a song and learn the basics of the

process.

4. **Essentials in Worship Values**
   Designed for worship leaders, musicians, techs, arts leaders, and pastors — anyone who cares about the primary values that reveal why we lead worship.

5. **Essentials in Worship Theology**
   Designed for worship leaders, musicians, techs, arts leaders, and pastors — anyone who would like to begin to explore big ideas about God, people, and worship.

6. **Essentials in Worship History**
   Designed for worship leaders, musicians, techs, arts leaders, and pastors — anyone interested in exploring how the Church has worshipped across time.

Two Ways To Use Essentials

This study experience is designed to work well either as an **individual** learning guide or for a **group** learning experience.

Essentials is also designed to sit at the core of your "required learning" for *anyone* wanting to be involved in church worship ministry, and/or for the training of new members of your team.

Use Essentials as a personal study.

For individual study, we recommend doing one Section at a time in *Essentials in Worship*. Feel free to spread the Sections out over time and complete them at your pace.

When starting a Section, we encourage you to:

7. **Read** just one session in each Section per day, or spread it out even longer if you wish. (Rushing through without extended time for reflection can limit the return on the training experience).
8. **Watch** the short video for that week.
9. **Write** your answers to the Study Questions at the end of each session as a helpful way to process the ideas. Even find someone with whom you can share your insights over coffee along the way.

Use Essentials as a group study.

Essentials in Worship is also designed to be experienced in a group setting if that is preferable.

When doing one of the Sections:

1. **Gather** your group.
2. **Read** the session for that week (see below).
3. **Watch** the video for that week.
4. **Discuss** the content with the Study Questions for that week.

It's that simple to do a Section and to grow together.

More Thoughts on Doing Essentials as a Group

For the reading part, I would encourage you to have your group pre-read the material before gathering together. This way each of you will have reflected on it a bit before meeting.

Another option is to take turns reading the session for that meeting aloud together, with each person reading a paragraph at a time. This engages both the hearing and reading parts of our brains, and encourages both retention and fresh thoughts about the material as you experience it together.

Viewing the brief video should then follow, which reviews some of the ideas while offering a few added stories and sound bites from my experience.

Feel free to modify the discussion time, including adding in any relevant materials and questions you would like to bring to the learning experience from your own tradition.

A Special Note on the Songwriting Section Group Experience

In the Songwriting section, you'll be sharing songs as a part of your gathering time. The *How to Start a Songwriting Circle* video is designed to help you get started, so plan for more time to meet and have people do their reading and song prep beforehand.

Why Are Words in Bold in the Book?

Essentials in Worship is intended to be a powerful tool for your entire worship ministry to get a handle on some **essential** ideas about worship. For that reason, we often highlight **key words and phrases in bold** we want you to notice, reflect on, and retain.

Highlighting these **words** and **phrases** will go a long way toward helping you, and your leaders and teams, absorb big ideas about worship for years to come.

When we remember words and phrases, hearing them can help the rest of the content or idea they represent come rushing back to us. Use the phrases in bold to talk about worship in your church.

Video Links

The links to the corresponding teaching videos at the beginning of each session are provided for the streaming access of All Access members of WorshipTraining.com (free accounts can only view 30 seconds of content).

For those who purchased by download, the videos are on your hard drive from when you downloaded the course. They can be viewed from there.

Want to Go Even Deeper into an Area?

Essentials in Worship is designed so anyone can give an **hour or two a week** to grow in their worship leader development.

You may want to, however, go deeper still. To further maximize your study, we suggest a supplementary book or media piece that will bring even more fresh ideas to the surface.

Again, this book or media is simply **supplemental**—you will get enough out of the manual if you don't choose to read/view this material.

The recommended "extra book or media" for each section is noted below.

Supplemental Books & Media for Deeper Study

Each of the *Essentials* sections can be **enhanced** by reading another book that will greatly amplify what you get out of the manual.

While many other books (both popular and academic) could be referenced, these books below were chosen to help directly explore some aspect of the *Essentials* material.

Essentials in Worship Leading
Extra Book: *How to Lead Worship without Being a Rock Star* by Dan Wilt

Essentials in Worship Ministry
Extra Book: *To Know You More* by Andy Park

Essentials in Worship Songwriting
Extra DVD: *Worship Songwriting* (10 hr. DVD series) by Brian Doerksen

Essentials in Worship Values
Extra Book: *Perspectives on Worship: Five Views* by various authors

Essentials in Worship Theology
Extra Book: *Surprised By Hope* by N.T. Wright

Essentials in Worship History
Extra Book: *Ancient Future Time* by Robert E. Webber

Want even more training courses, retreat materials, and media? Then see this next item.

WorshipTraining.com is the Gold Mine for Team Skills Resources.

Essentials In Worship is also available in streaming and download formats at WorshipTraining.com.

In addition to *Essentials In Worship*, you can also access *thousands* of other courses, videos, audios, articles, ebooks, and team tools by becoming an All Access Member (individually or with your church).

For example, see the Essentials Toolkit Series for ebook covering many practical aspects of worship leadership. See my Whiteboard Worship Training videos that cover sound, vocal, songwriting and many other topics (over 50 practical topics for teams via whiteboard lessons).

3000+ training tools are right at your fingertips coming from across the body of Christ and from major publishers.

All are online and ready for download.

Visit www.worshiptraining.com for a free membership for all your leaders and team members and to find out more.



Ready, Set, Grow.

No matter how you choose to grow with us, we trust *Essentials In Worship* will encourage you, inspire you, and renew you in your understanding of worship and its leadership in the 21st century.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP LEADING
AN INTRODUCTION

Leading worship is a high calling. Learn foundational principles of worship leadership as you explore the heart attitudes of the effective musical worship leader, and skills such as arranging a band, building a set, rehearsing, and mentoring others.

Videos for This Session:

- Introduction: A Dangerous Mission (2:22)

A Dangerous Mission

Having been a worship leader for over 25 years now, I have spent most of that time continuing to learn and grow by watching others – younger or older – who are especially effective as worship leaders.

I've spent much of that quarter of a century studying the particular **habits** and **skills** that define those men and women as some of the most effective contemporary worship leaders of our generation.

This section is built on those insights, and I pray they help you to become the unique worship leader that God intended you to be.

Who Are We to Lead Worship?

Every week a man or woman steps up behind a microphone in a church service, straps on a guitar on a Wednesday night in a small group, or gets behind a keyboard in a youth gathering – to ***lead*** *people in worship*.

Who are we to lead anyone in worship? If you're like me, I often think to myself, "What am I doing here? If they only knew me, they wouldn't let me lead this congregation anywhere!" But God knows better.

Who are *we* to lead worship?

We are followers of Jesus who are able to sing and/or play an instrument and who have a calling from God to create musical **spaces** in which people can enter into a conversation with the Lord of their lives.

In some cases, we are particularly gifted to fulfill certain functions of that role. We may be natural musicians, or born organizers. In other cases, we need others to gather around us to cover us in our areas of weakness.

And we are not alone in our leadership mandate; our role as worship leaders does not exist in a vacuum. We work in tandem with other leaders that shape the spiritual life of a community, like one harmony weaving among many.

The pastor, children's leader, small group leader, musician, artist, tech, and usher each have a part to play in creating a space in which people can **interact** with the Lord of our worship.

And that is the goal of worship – to narrate God's Story in our community, through the musical expression assigned to us, and to create environments in which the people of God can truly engage with the ever present Spirit of God in intimate communion.

A worshipping church is an empowered church, and we have a humble role to play in seeing our church (and the broader Church) become all she was designed by God to become.

Our Lives Lead the Worship

In a culture that idolizes musicians and elevates emotions, we stand in front of people, behind a microphone and up on a stage, **discipling** the people of God. We are training them with our words, our actions, our musical choices, and our worship sets to *be like Jesus*.

In this environment, we must always remember that our lives sing louder than our musical instruments, and our pastoral leadership in worship shapes people in ways we never before thought possible.

*Excitement and danger—that is the **privilege** of worship leading.*

Becoming an Effective Worship Leader

Serving, loving, and leading in a local church is where the rubber meets the road of leadership. The worship leadership stage is where we learn to be givers in this life instead of takers.

Stages and microphones do funny things to people; we hold our ground and lead worship as **spiritual leaders**, and not just as creative people looking for an opportunity to express our gifting.

As 1 Corinthians 12:7 says, "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." In other words, we are given gifts and callings not for the service of our own personal sense of well-being or fulfillment—we are given the gifts we have *to serve others around us, while experiencing the gift of being energized by that service*.

Welcome then, to the humbling, exciting, transforming, enlightening, shocking, challenging, artful world of worship leading.

Welcome to Essentials in Worship Leading

This section has been designed to help you along in your quest to live your life in the presence of God as a worshipper, to serve your church community with your heart to lead worship, and to grow in the skills that make a *functional song leader* into an *effective lead worshipper*.

We will look at 4 areas of worship leadership as our building blocks for learning how to become more **effective** worship leaders. No matter your level of experience, there is something here for you.

I look forward to the journey with you. Welcome to *Essentials in Worship Leading*.

Session 1: Three Reasons We Lead Worship

Videos for This Session:

- Session 1: Three Reasons We Lead Worship (6:03)

Why do you lead worship? This is a very important question, and many worship leaders never take the time to answer it. Your answer might be, "Because I like it." Your answer might be, "I was asked to do it." You might say it's your job, your passion, your duty, or even your calling.

If you answered in any of the ways above, as I often have, you will find that we both may have missed the point!

All of these answers have to do with us*, as if the reason we lead worship has everything to do with* our *preferences, job, passion, or even calling.*

A Reason Bigger than Us

Worship is much, much bigger than you or I leading a set on a Sunday morning or a Wednesday night. The reason we lead worship, ultimately, is found in 1 John 4:19.

"We love Him, *because He first loved us*."

God has loved us by giving us life and inviting into His Grand Story for the cosmos. Your life and my life are a part of His design to love the world back to Himself. He will do this by forming us through His Story, as told in the Scriptures, and by encountering us with His Spirit time and time again through our lives to form us into Christ.

God loves us, and we **respond**. God loves us, and so we tell His Story again and again, through music, prayer, Scripture reading, and all the activities of worship, until that Story gets inside of us and leads our thinking and feeling.

This is the ultimate **reason** we worship. We are responding to God, time and time again. Worship is a big idea in the heart of God, and it involves everything that happens in life as well as everything that happens in a worship service. Ultimately, however, the **act** of worship has to do with people responding in love to the One who first loved them.

And this is a good starting place for us. A worship leader helps people *respond* to God. We use songs, music, lyrics, bands, sound systems, and visuals — and so much more — to help people respond to the God we worship.

Worship leading is *responsive*. Jesus is the One who invites us to worship by love, and we help people respond as we join in alongside them.

How? We'll get into that in a bit. For now, rest in knowing that being a worship leader is actually a biblical idea that we see in the Psalms.

The great songwriters and worship leaders David, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun are examples of those who facilitated the mechanics of gathered worship. Yet, the kind of

worship leaders we are today, who use **music** as a **primary** tool to engage people with God, is a 20th century phenomenon.

But let's not follow that thread just yet. Why is it so important to understand **why** we lead worship? Why is it so important to understand that worship is primarily a response to God?

Sandwiches, Weddings, and Worship

Pretend that you have been asked by someone to make a sandwich. You have no further direction than to construct that sandwich, giving you no sense of why you are making it. So, you begin to make it for yourself.

Dagwood, step aside.

A wide variety of meats, cheeses, sliced vegetables, breads, and sauces are laid out in front of you. With no further direction, you begin to bring together all of the culinary elements to make your sandwich the most delicious it can be.

Then, just as you are putting the finishing touches on your edible masterpiece, someone stops you. "By the way, the sandwich you were to make isn't for *you*," the person says. "It's for the guy sitting over in the corner."

Someone told you *what* to do, but they never told you *why* to do it. And when we don't know why we're doing what we doing, we tend to make it about – you guessed it – *us*.

Why we do *what* we do is very important. In the sandwich analogy, without being given any context, you and I would tend to make the sandwich above according to our own purposes and tastes. Our own goals and preferences would take priority.

However, the preferences, needs, desires, tastes, and even allergies that we think about when we know *why* we're making the sandwich — in this case, for another person — will guide us to make a very different kind of sandwich than we would make if left to ourselves.

Let's bring this home. If worship is about people responding to God, then worship is about retelling God's Story of love toward humanity, and helping the people who we are leading in worship engage **intimately** with the God who is **present** within that Story.

We are like the Best Man or Maid of Honor at a wedding. We are helping the Bride connect with the Groom who has pursued her to this moment of shared commitment.

How strange it would be to see the Best Man making eyes at the Bride, when his job is to keep her **love** focused and tender toward her Groom!

Songs can be a place to which people go to meet with God, encounter His love, and reaffirm His story in their lives. Worship leaders lead people in those songs, all the while understanding the why behind the what that we do.

And a song doesn't just stay within the four walls of a church. A song is a sonic sanctuary people can take with them, anywhere, finding encouragement and renewal as they learn to use songs as a tool facilitating their worship any time, in any place.

God meeting with His people; this is the simple, clear goal of worship.

Three Reasons We Lead Worship

From 1 John 4:19, where we discover that worship is a response to God because He first loved us, we find three vital reasons that answer why we worship and why we lead others in worship.

1. God Invites Us to Worship, so We Respond to Him

I used to believe that when people gathered to worship, I was the one inviting them. I led the band, I called the meeting, and I set the stage. I was the host. I rehearsed to make it happen; I did the planning and showed up to deliver.

But that is actually not how it happens at all. It's not right, true, or accurate to think that you and I as worship leaders are the ones who have invited this group to worship.

The true **Host** of any worship gathering is Jesus. We respond to his invitation to intimacy by turning our hearts toward worship, and by creating a **space** in which others can worship. The lead worshipper then, of every gathering, is Christ. We, empowered by his Spirit within and following his invitation, then respond to God rightly in worship.

2. God Has Made a Vow to Us, so We Renew Our Vows

Again, to lead worship is to play the part of the Best Man or the Maid of Honor in a wedding. In a wedding, the Bride and Groom are sharing vows — words of mutual devotion and commitment that will help them to always **remember** their surrender to the love of the other.

Songs are filled with lyrics that put words of commitment, thanksgiving, **loyalty**, love, mutual **surrender**, and honor in the mouths of the worshippers. When we as worship leaders are transparent, seeking to get out of the way while making bridges through music, we are at our best.

3. God Has Pursued Us, so We Remember His Story

Remember grammar class in school? The *subject* of a sentence acts out of the *verb* of a sentence toward the *object* of a sentence.

Who is the subject of the worship sentence? Us? God? Who is the one doing the action that is the verb?

According to the whole counsel of the Scriptures, and according to 1 John 4:19, *God* is the **subject** of the worship sentence.

He acts out the verb of love toward us, the **object** of His pursuit, care, healing,

transformation, discipline, and power.

When we put ourselves at the beginning of the worship sentence (and some worship leaders and church environments do), then *we* do the work of worship and we believe that God is primarily responding to what *we* do.

This creates hype in worship, various forms of religious gymnastics, and congregations that think their hard worship work will somehow impress God.

We don't want that disconnection with God's loving heart. When we lead worship, we are helping people to remember the proper biblical ordering of worship, and to remember that worship is first about God's loving pursuit of each one of us.

Like a good Father, God is only impressed, truly impressed, when we **respond to His extravagant love** for us. "Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for Him" (Romans 12:1, *The Message*).

When we turn all of life into a simple response to the love of God (1 John 4:19), we are truly becoming the worshippers for whom the Father is searching (John 4:24). God is pursuing us, and we respond.

This is the fundamental premise of worship, and worship leadership, in all of its forms.

The *Why* Comes before the *How* and the *What*

Like building a skyscraper, if we don't get the foundation right, straight, deep, firm, and stable, we don't get *anything* right.

Being an effective worship leader necessitates that we understand why we do what we do.

If we ever get confused, and start to think that worship leading is about the stage, or about our opportunity to express our ministry gifts, or about gaining a stepping stone in our musical worship/rock-star career – then we should either get out from behind the microphone or get on our faces until our hearts are right.

So let's raise the bar. Worship leading can be a tough gig, but with the calling of God at our back, we can step into this **privileged role** and by the grace and mercy of God serve those to whom He calls us.

In a living room or in an arena, *why* we worship *matters*.

Okay I'll Do It Again

Hear these profound words about worship leadership that came from a conversation with good friend Brian Doerksen, the writer of *Come, Now Is the Time to Worship*.

Read this slowly, and allow it to give you words for **renewing** your commitment to lead God's people in worship:

Again there is this element — how do you present a God who is beyond presentation? How do you explain a God who is beyond explanation? How do you sing, how do you pick a song that best describes either who God is or even how we feel?

It's always just slightly beyond us, and so there is always that feeling in the pit of my stomach saying, "What did I do? How did I get talked into this?"

And then I remember, "Oh yeah, God, you called me to do this. Okay, I'll do it again."[1]

Session 1 Study Questions

First, if you are doing this with a group, take some time to write your answers to the following questions before you gather. Highlight page numbers, key quotes, and ideas that moved you.

Make sure you write in the margins, circle words, or jot down anything that will help you interact with the material and remember core ideas.

1. What ideas moved you the most from this section?

Talk about the ideas related to worship that particularly moved you from the book or from the video.

How might the ideas that moved you help all of us to understand what worship leadershjp is really about?

2. Why do we lead worship?

In your own words, write out the reasons that a worship leader exists in a local church, and what our primary role is when we step up to lead worship in any setting.

Session 2: Character & Skills of the Worship Leader

Videos for This Session:

- Session 2: The Character & Skills of the Worship Leader (5:27)

When we are committed to being worship leaders for the right reason – that of helping people respond to God's love – we have a context for the practical tasks we must do to be effective at our craft.

*When our **motivation** for leading is fixed and clear before God, then learning parts from recordings, preparing set lists, rehearsing mid-week for a few hours, getting up early on a Sunday morning to set up gear and to sound check, choosing to love in relationships between volunteers, and playing for two or three services a week takes on eternal meaning.*

The Role of the Worship Leader: A Space Creator

In a beautiful way, the reality that we are leading people to respond to God's generous love can make all the hard work seem to be a grand **privilege** (this feeling is not always present at 6:00 am on a Sunday morning, mind you).

We are in the role we are in, as lead worshippers, to make a way for people to meet with God and to create a **space** where simple songs can give wings to the prayers of those who have gathered to worship.

We **usher** people gently to a place where they can respond to the love of God — it's as simple as that.

Again, *the worship leader is called to create a space in which God's people can respond to the love of God*. Keep repeating this truth until you lead your very last worship set in this lifetime.

The Role of the Songs We Lead: Affection and Truth

In the same conversation mentioned in the last session, friend Brian Doerksen proposed this question as we talked about the role of the songs we lead in worship:

> *Why do we sing songs in the first place? We do it because it is something that we can do* together. *There are probably other things that we could do to express our love and our worship to God that would be, in one sense, just as valid, but they're not easy for us to do together.*
>
> *Yet we can get ten people, or a hundred people, or a thousand, or a hundred thousand — whatever number we choose — and we can all get together and sing a song. That song reflects what is going on in our hearts and our minds, together.*
>
> *There is truth that we're affirming, but there's also affection that we're expressing. That's why I think that singing as an expression of worship has stood the test of time.*

In other words, when we use the power of poetic lyrics, blended with the power of music, we are literally creating a *place* where God can meet with people and where people can meet with God.

Songs Are a Place We Go

Songs are indeed a *place we go*. They are a mysterious encountering ground where our prayers take flight on the wings of words and melodies, and unseen doorways of the heart can open – revealing that God has been present to us all along.

As a worship team, when we select, practice, prepare, and perform songs in the tapestry that we call *a worship set*, we are literally creating a place for people to **encounter** God.

A personal story illustrates the compelling power of music as a tool of worship. Someone very dear to me was an aid worker in Northern Kenya. In the night, Somalian terrorists broke into the hotel room where he was staying, abducting him and two other workers. Threatened with torture and death, laid out in the hot desert sun, and deprived of sufficient food and water for months, this person and the others endured a living hell.

By the grace of God, he and his fellow captives were eventually set free. When I asked him how he got through it, and if worship played any role, he said something that profoundly affected me as a worship leader.

"Dan," he said, "do you know Rita Springer?" It just so happens that Rita is a dear friend of mine. He told me that he would sing her songs over and over again in his mind, finding strength to face the next hours that lay before him.

No angels sang. No heavens opened. But he found a **place of meeting** with God in simple songs of faith and worship, and a sonic **sanctuary** was created for him in "the valley of the shadow of death" (Psalm 23).

When Can I Go and Meet with God?

Every time the people in your church gather for worship, you can know this: They are, on a regular basis, facing their own daily "valley of the shadow of death." We as worship leaders gather them together, having all been **invited** there by our living Lord Jesus, to engage with the music and **liturgies** of worship we've prepared.

But we're not the only ones who did some work to prepare for that time. The congregation is coming to collaborate, to add their longing and passion to the mix (though you may be thinking, "I don't see much longing and passion in the eyes of my congregation!").

People come to a time of worship saying in the quiet of their hearts what the psalmist said in Psalm 42:3, "When can I go and meet with God?" The worship leader responds, "How about here? How about now?" and leads them to that place of meeting. We don't need them to be expressive, demonstrative, and outward with their worship.

We have a job to do, and we simply do it.

We take our place as a **leader** of worship.

What Is Your Loudest Instrument?

Many times I have had both the privilege and the challenge of sharing with worship leaders on the topics of integrity and godly character as primary hallmarks of an effective worship leader. I often prompt the discussion by asking a leading question, such as "What is the strongest, and most powerful instrument you lead with as a worship leader?"

The responses are as varied as the musical preferences in the room. "My voice." "My guitar." "My keyboard." Someone inevitably speaks up, in a commonly shy manner, and gives the answer behind the answers: "My **life**." All heads in the room nod in agreement as we strike a profound spiritual chord together.

Biblically and experientially, we understand that a powerful life is the most permeating, inspiring, transforming, and impacting leadership instrument the Lord wields in His hand. Put another way, your life and mine are God's "worship leading instruments" of choice, especially when they make a sound that is pleasing to Him.

What Are the Character Traits of the Effective Worship Leader?

In a worship leader, a pastor should be primarily looking for a disciple of Jesus who is strong in character – and not simply full of gifting (or full of themselves!). In other words, *who a person is* in the secret place of their hearts must be infinitely more important to us than *how they play* their instrument, sing, or function in front of a crowd.

Having said that, it is also true that we must value the power of beautiful and well-played worship music – but only if it flows from hearts of people who are content to give Jesus, and others, the place of prominence.

A worship leader is a spiritual leader who pastors the congregation every time they step up to lead worship. For that reason, all the **qualities** that we look for in any spiritual **leader** in the Church — be they a pastor, elder, small group leader, or worship leader — are similar.

Questions Leaders Must Ask About a Worship Leader

- *Are they humble?*
- *Do they have a vibrant secret life with God?*
- *Are they able to take direction or correction?*
- *Are the accolades and affirmations of people too important to them?*
- *Are they doing what they do to serve or to gain respect?*
- *Are they good husbands or wives, parents and family members?*

- *Are they willing to train others to take over for them?*
- *Are they skilled at what they do?*
- *Are they teachable and eager to learn?*
- *Are they willing to quietly care for the poor as much as they are willing to stand on a stage?*
- *Are they loving, gentle and generous with all those around them?*
- *Do they have a substantial interior life with God that reflects itself in their outward lifestyle?*

Additionally, as the late John Wimber put it (a worship leader and mentor of thousands of worship leaders and songwriters around the world today), we must value *character* above *gifting*.

We want our worship leaders, in his words:

- *to be passionate pursuers of God*
- *to love the Scriptures and to know them well*
- *to seek unity in the whole Church*
- *to live with compassion and mercy toward all people*
- *to mentor and equip others beyond themselves*
- *to relationally care for the people around them*
- *to live generous lives that are outward in focus*
- *to value simple and authentic ways of living, praying, and worshipping*
- *to be risk-takers who are willing to go where God seems to be going*

The Skills of the Worship Leader

Now we're ready to begin talking about the **skills** of the worship leader.

I'll assume a few things. You probably either play the guitar or the keyboard. Most worship leaders lead from one of these two instruments. Why? The guitar and the keyboard are common to contemporary music, they are harmonic, accompaniment instruments, and they can be used to musically and rhythmically guide a band.

If you play another instrument, good on you! I often lead worship from my hammered dulcimer, modified by some basic effects. If you play no instrument, you probably lead alongside a keyboardist or a guitar player. If you play the tuba, there will be more for you in our next book, *Leading Worship from Instruments That Are Downright Painful to Lift*.

Let's assume you know how to play your instrument; we can now begin to unpack what it takes to lead worship *well*.

Learn by Doing

When I first became a worship leader, I was thrown in headfirst and without a life jacket. So were many of the worship leaders I spoke to years later who were leading in those days. We weren't being trained or training each other — our role models were few, seminars were almost non-existent, and we were all giving everything we had to our local churches.

In fact, I started leading worship in my small United Methodist church in Pennsylvania, USA, before I even knew what worship leading was! My three-piece band and I would do concerts for churches and youth groups in our area by combining chords and lyrics we found in songbooks with our own melodies and grooves!

People were responding to God during these precious times in packed rooms, and before we knew it, something was happening that was way beyond the music we were playing. God was revealing His loving heart to many in our small town, and we were along for the bumpy ride.

By the time I was put in front of a band of professional musicians to **arrange** the instruments, **plan** a set, create **flow**, **organize** a team, and do everything else a worship leader does, I was so unsure of myself that I would literally change my set 10–15 times before I landed on my final song list!

Veteran worship leader Andy Park (*In the Secret*) says this to encourage worship leaders:

> *So don't be afraid to learn by doing, even though the earliest steps are sometimes slow and awkward. You'll never get anywhere unless you start at square one.*[2]

Whether you are leading worship in a living room or in front of hundreds, **diving in** is the best way to cut your teeth as a worship leader. Even if you've been doing this for years, continue to look for new environments to lead in. *We learn by leading – and we learn more by leading more in unique settings.*

Northern Irish worship leader Kathryn Scott (*Hungry*) described her journey into worship leading this way:

> *I started off leading a bit of worship in college but I was really, really dreadful at it, and was encouraged never to do it again! At the same time, some of my other friends said, "You've got something in there." I felt so insecure that I just thought I'd never do it again. But when I moved to Glasgow after college to get married, a guy there asked if I would become the worship leader in his church. I felt a nudge from the Holy Spirit that this was something He had in mind for me to do. So, in fear and trepidation, I decided I would give it a go, and the Lord showed up. It was great!*[3]

Worship Leading Is an Art and a Science

Worship leadership is both an art and a science, *and we can learn to do it better and better*.

Worship leading is an art in that it takes musical intuition and a honed natural gift to lead well. Worship leading is a science (though not rocket science) because there are practical, logical, **best-practice** approaches to the task that can make you better over time.

Worship leadership is a sacred, strange, profound concoction of:

- Effective musical skill
- Organization and preparation
- Experience
- Practice
- Leadership ability
- Relational ability
- Calling
- Character
- Intuition
- Natural gifting
- God's grace

I am constantly amazed at how practical ministry skill development really is, and how cultivating good devotional, musical, and pastoral habits can increase one's joy in the worship experience and the worship leading experience.

You Are a Lead Worshipper

When considering the skills of the worship leader, it is vital we understand that as a worship leader you are effectively a **lead worshipper –** leading the way in using music and songs as fluid tools for your own worship expression.

This mindset helps a worship leader to flow smoothly from song to song, not jarring or scaring the worshippers with rough transitions. When people sense that you are worshipping with the songs, and that your instrument is a fluid **tool** in your hands to that end, then they are able to comfortably go with you to that place of exchange with God.

The Three Core Skills of the Effective Worship Leader

A few tips will help reinforce some of these points. I've spent time over the years both watching and interacting with many people I would call "lead worshippers" (I could list many of them here, and you'd immediately recognize their names; others are those I've encountered over the years who are only famous in their local church).

There are three **core skills** that I've seen them, and others like them, practice and refine over the years. These skills become the breeding ground for increasingly more effective

worship leadership.

1. The Skill of Secret-Placing

These leaders love their secret life with God. Cultivate your own heart as a worshipper – alone. The biblical David's public life was built on his secret-place habits, and the songs and leadership that marked his story were built on a cultivated intimacy with God that enabled him to "become even more undignified than this" (1 Sam. 6:22) before God and people. Leave the stage behind. Linger in your secret place with your instrument before God. Pray with the music. Let it become a part of you and your relationship with God.

2. The Skill of Set-Building

Set-building leaders build simple sets around the character of God and the Story of our faith. Worship leaders are narrating God's story, along with the others called to design the worship experiences of a community. Songs about who God is, connected simply and smoothly together, consistently move souls toward the greater Story that underlies our lives. Songs about how we feel about God, or even how He feels about us, may season a set well and are indeed biblically represented. But be careful – sets built entirely of songs referencing feelings can make for a sappy experience of worship. The skill of building an effective worship set is covered in the next session.

3. The Skill of Set-Leading

These leaders care more about their congregation engaging than their musical platform, yet their musicianship is tight, their pastoral care is strong, and a well-rehearsed band is a non-negotiable for them whenever possible. They do whatever it takes to create a seamless, well-formed set that amplifies passion, celebrates redemption, minimizes distraction, and works to tell a story over a 20-40 minute time slot.

With these character traits and leadership skills of the worship leader in mind, we are now ready to get very practical with building sets and leading bands.

Session 2 Study Questions

First, if you are doing this with a group, take some time to write down your answers to the following questions before you gather. Highlight page numbers, key quotes and ideas that moved you. Make sure you write in the margins, circle words, or jot down anything that will help you interact with the material and remember core ideas.

1. What ideas moved you the most from this section?

Talk about the ideas related to worship that particularly moved you from the book or from the video.

How might the ideas that moved you help all of us to understand what worship is really about?

2. In what ways do you believe your character needs to grow as a worship leader?

Review the lists in this session. What areas in your own life do you believe are already strong, and which need to be strengthened in your character before you move into more worship leading activity?

3. What new core skills did this session make you begin to think about acquiring?

Three core worship leading skills were discussed in this session. What arenas of growth can you see being the most important to you right now?

Session 3: Building Sets & Leading Bands

Videos for This Session:

- Session 3: Building Sets & Leading Bands (6:55)

I remember the first time I built a set with a more seasoned worship leader. He asked me to submit to him the list of songs I felt were appropriate for our 30-minute co-led set. He asked for three songs—I handed him five songs. Then, he wanted the keys noted on each one. I took them back, noted the keys, and returned them. Then he did something I didn't expect.

He said, "I'll take these away, bring my songs to the table, and then form these into a flowing set. I'll work with the song feel, key, beginnings and endings, and form the list. I'll shape it so that I'll lead the first half of the set, and you'll lead the second half. It never works to intersperse songs—you then me then you then me. At rehearsal, we'll divide the time accordingly, rehearse the band on our individual songs (will you send them your mp3s and correct, exact charts?), and then mutually work out the flow between the songs. By the way, if you can sing harmony with me, sing. If not, don't."

Sets Are like Symphonies

I was a young worship leader, and I simply didn't expect so much **attention** to detail over exactly how we would formulate a co-led worship set. However, 25 years later and with a whole lot of worship leading under my belt, I completely get what he was doing.

He was seeing the worship set as one body of work, like a symphony with many movements. I had been used to stringing together song after song. He, however, understood that the set needed a beginning to gather people. He knew that a time of celebration and focus on God would be a vital movement in the set. Finally, he was seasoned and aware that without a time of response to God in the set, with songs of prayer and gratefulness, we might miss out on the best **moments** of the set.

The Strung-Together Set

Here is the reality: Songs about who God is, strung simply together, will consistently move souls toward the greater Story that underlies our lives. Songs about how we feel about God, or even how He feels about us, will season a set well (but make for sappy sets when strung all together, all in a row, all of the time).

We can follow this set-building technique and lead an effective worship set: *Sing a song, finish it, sing another song, finish it, sing another song, finish it*. People have come to worship, so lead them without **meandering** around musically. If we sing the songs sensitively and well and get out of the way, we can lead **effective** worship sets.

However, the most experienced worship leaders I know build sets with a bit more intention, prayer, and structure. That structure can change, but the principles behind it remain the same.

A Three-Phrase Approach to Building Effective Worship Sets

Note that this hidden format can bend and morph easily. I have built 2–3 hour sets based on the following structure, repeating the pattern.

1. Gathering
Invite the community to worship with an opening prayer, reading, or Scripture, and then a song (or songs) that "**gathers** us and reminds us what we are here for." "Come, Now Is the Time to Worship*"* is a contemporary example of an invocation song that works well.

2. Celebration
In this section, we focus on "God Songs" as we celebrate the nature of God, His unchanging character, His attributes and His Story that is alive among us. Our attention is not on our changing feelings and responses particularly, but rather on God's unchanging **character** and actions. This is the core of our time of musical worship involving appreciation and thankfulness. "How Great Is Our God*"* is a contemporary example of this kind of song.

3. Response
This final section is the point where we respond to God's self-revealing with songs of surrender, prayer, intimacy, and choice. We've sung about God's nature and now we **offer** ourselves with love and allegiance to Him and His purposes. "Here I Am To Worship*"* is a contemporary example of this kind of song.

If you're stumbling along in planning small group, large group, or conference sets, this helpful template has enabled many to overcome the "Stumbling Set Blues." I'd encourage you to experiment it as you plan your next few sets to see how it works for you. In longer sets, apply this template cyclically over the time.

The 3/3 Approach

When I'm looking at my song usage over the course of a year, I follow what might be called *The 3/3 Approach*.

What I mean by this is that, over the course of one year, I will generally look to use 1/3 **contemporary** songs, 1/3 **historical** and traditional songs, and 1/3 **indigenous** songs that our church's songwriters have written and honed for our community.

In each set I prepare, according to how many songs I am doing, I work to maintain this balance to a greater or lesser degree. Over a year, I want our steady worship diet as a community to cover the following types of worship songs:

- 1/3 of the songs I use are contemporary worship songs that are well-respected, known and fitting to our community. *This is the c*ontemporary *part of the set.*
- 1/3 of the songs I use are historic and traditional, even ethnic, connecting us with the Church throughout the ages. *This is the* ancient-future *part of the set.*
- 1/3 of the songs I use are written in our community, by those with a primary calling as seasoned (and growing) songwriters. For us, the bar is high in this area, and these writers are writing songs based on our pastor's messages and the God is speaking about to our local church community. *This is the* community *part of the set.*

The final category, of course, depends on the level of songwriting skill and natural ability honed by the songwriters in your congregation. More on this will be covered in the *Essentials in Worship Songwriting* section.

More Tips for Set Building and Execution

Once we've built our set, a few more big tips come into play as we practice and prepare to play with our band.

- **Play the Songs with the Tightness of One Who Is Recording.**

  This is a tough one for today's worship leaders to grasp. Granted, raw music, unrefined and spontaneous, can breed beautiful worship experiences. However, without intentional development, many worship leaders play like they did when they were younger and were playing in a **garage** band. Without taking care that every strum is full and exact and every picking pattern is solid and clean, worship leaders begin to strum and pick away without thought to the tightness of their shared **performance**. Digital or physical metronomes are your friend.

  Performance is not a bad word if the heart is engaged with God and the people. The recording studio makes demands on musicians—**timing** problems, buzzing strings, erratic picking, clunky and busy playing, tuning, and vocal issues all rear their heads in the naked sound of the studio. In the studio there is no crowd energy to hide the fact that we're unrehearsed and are not sure what we're doing! Studio musicians *must* play well or else the track is bad and unusable. Period. Good music usually facilitates worship expression; bad music usually hinders it. It's that simple. Aim for musical perfection. Go for it!

- **Have a Theme and Plan Your Set Accordingly.**

  Whether it's a church year season your pastor's sermon notes, or your own heart leading as you pray about the worship time you are about to lead, do your best to keep **shaping** your set according to a **theme**, and lead people on a journey through a few songs.

  In a recent gathering, I led a song with New Testament roots, a song with early Church roots, a song with Reformation roots, a spiritual, and a contemporary worship song. The theme of the set was to engage us with the riches of worship history. Every song didn't say the same thing, but they all elevated the character of God and the essential Story of the Kingdom of God inaugurated by Jesus.

- **First: Plan. Second: Go with the Plan. Third: Be Spontaneous.**

  If you start out always trying to do something **spontaneous** and Spirit-led, your worship leading and set-building will become sloppy and ineffective. Conversely, if you always over-plan, your expression may become rigid and formal.

  Plan a set well, then plan the structure of each song (e.g., intro, verse, chorus, verse, chorus, chorus, end). Rehearse and lead it that way. Know that when a chorus is begging to be repeated, you can do that. Plan well first, then follow the plan, then be free to lightly season the set with some spontaneity.

Arranging a Band

Arranging a band is a challenge, but a welcome one. While an entire book could be written on this topic alone, a few core ideas will get you going on the path to effective arranging and band rehearsal. (See my *Whiteboard Worship Training* videos on "Arranging a Large Band," "A Small Band," and "Acoustic Ensemble" for more insights.)

Here are a few tips to keep your band growing and working well together musically:

- **Use the phrase "downbeat time."**

  When calling your band to show up for a rehearsal, use the language of "downbeat time" for that rehearsal. In other words, "Downbeat time is 6 pm," which means that everyone's gear should be set up, and ready to hit the downbeat on rehearsal at 6 pm. So, if the electric guitar player knows they have gear to set up, they come at 5:30 pm in order to be ready for the first downbeat on the rehearsal at 6 pm. Sound people come earlier to get ready for the band to plug in; this eases everyone's stress level.

This simple language of **downbeat** time instead of **rehearsal** time has helped hundreds of teams communicate more clearly and get in full and effective rehearsals with their band.

- **Obey the "fraction principle" in band arranging.**

  This is, perhaps, the most important band-arranging idea in order for the music to sound good. Brian Doerksen, well-known worship leader and songwriter, emphasizes the reality that the sound of every band should equal "1." In other words, if there are 7 people playing in the band, each band member only plays 1/7 of what they could play if they were on their own.

  What this means is that the keyboard player is no longer needed to pound out bass lines with his or her left hand since the bass player is already covering that part. The electric player, while he could play every Jimmy Hendrix lick he knows, pulls way back and creates space for the other guitars, keyboards, mandolins, and other instruments. Everyone is playing a **fraction** of what they could play.

- **Create a culture of listening to, and tightly mimicking, mp3s.**

  I can't emphasize enough how learning parts to a recording is vital to a band learning how to play well together. Use dynamics, create musical space, and **listen** to each other.

  Getting your band to learn that particular song on an mp3 is like sending them all to a lesson with a **professional** musician. When they learn their parts, over time the local church musician gains greater musical sensitivity and a larger arsenal of music tools from which they can draw.

- **Learn flow by listening, watching, and "top and tailing" your set.**

  Here's the reality: I learned how to flow between songs to create a dynamic experience by **watching others** do it. I took good notes and on went from there. Listen to live recordings and watch videos to get started on learning flow.

  Then, "top and tail" your set. In other words, play the beginning of a song (top), and then stop a few bars in. Then, play the ending of the song the way you would like to do it (the tail). Then, do the top of the next song flowing from it. Does it work? Is it the same groove? Is it the same key or a completely different one? Will you need to put a capo on? Do the songs feel like they'll go together once the band is playing them with the intros and exits you've chosen?

These are intuitive questions, but they matter to a set feeling like it works song after song. Top and tail your entire set, shaping intros and exits until it sounds like it flows together. Know when you'll stop one song and start another, and know when you'll ask the keyboard player to bridge the gap with music (because you're changing your capo if you play guitar).

- **Memorize your music if you're the leader.**

  Most worship leaders despise this moment. A band and a congregation that is led by a worship leader who knows his/her music is more confident in joining in.

  You've probably never seen your favorite band using music. Nor have you seen many well-known worship leaders doing it. That doesn't mean you can't—it's hard having all those songs in our brains. What it does mean is that you should take note and work toward having your songs **memorized because** it makes all the difference in the world in the engagement of the congregation.

- **Allow time for band members to work out their parts for a particular song.**

  In rehearsal, it's important for a musician to feel like he or she is contributing their best. Aid this by giving your team the songs you'll be leading earlier in the week so they can work out their parts, and allow them to fine tune their part during a rehearsal.

These are just some of the big ideas you can employ in building worship sets and arranging/rehearsing bands that many have found to be just what the doctor ordered.

Session 3 Study Questions:

First, if you are doing this with a group, take some time to write down your answers to the following questions before you gather. Highlight page numbers, key quotes and ideas that moved you. Make sure you write in the margins, circle words, or jot down anything that will help you interact with the material and remember core ideas.

1. What ideas moved you the most from this section?

Talk about the ideas related to worship that particularly moved you from the book or from the video.

How might the ideas that moved you help all of us to understand what worship is really about?

2. How do you believe you could become more effective at building worship sets?

How have you gone about building your worship sets to date? What did you learn from the set-building section of this last session that you think would help you reshape your set planning?

3. Why is it so important that a band member get a great feel for a song before rehearsal takes place? How could the fraction principle apply to your setting?

What ideas related to arranging and rehearsing your band struck you as beneficial to you and your team?

Session 4: Great Worship Leaders

Videos for This Session:

- Session 4: Great Worship Leaders (6:12)

We never fully arrive as worship leaders, but we can press on toward greatness at what we do. For over 25 years, I've had the privilege of working with some of the world's most effective worship leaders. Some of them are famous and others are famous only in their church.

Some people, it has become clear to me, are vocationally called to this type of ministry in the Church. It is clear that the hand of God is on them to effectively and authoritatively lead worship. Others are being faithful; they may be called to many things and worship leading is just one of them.

Am I Called to Lead Worship?

We either are called to do something or we are not. However, our gifting to lead worship will fall somewhere along a spectrum. Embrace and pursue understanding as to where you are on this spectrum and be **faithful**. With the right skills, many people can effectively rise to the **calling** to lead worship. You are one of them, no matter where you fall on the calling scale.

Listen closely to God and to the counsel of others regarding your call to lead. Then, serve in whatever way you can, without insecurity or fighting for something that God isn't giving. A servant with a role is a servant. A servant without a role…is still a servant.

What Is Greatness as a Worship Leader?

Achieving greatness in worship leadership is not about being the best musician or the most perfect worship leader who ever lived. It is certainly not about being the best imitator of another worship leader or having a full-time role or song royalties to prove you know what you're doing!

Achieving greatness as a worship leader is about developing our character, our team leadership skills, our arranging and rehearsal effectiveness, our ability to work with diverse volunteer bands, and our skill of leading a worship set consistently well in any given setting or circumstance. You may be called to lead worship in a small group, on a large stage before thousands, or primarily for weddings and funerals.

We're called to a ministry that is a combination of spiritual calling and musical, devotional, and ministerial leadership skills.

We can grow toward greatness that is defined by creating effective worship environments for our communities.

The Skills of Great Worship Leaders

Respected worship leader David Ruis ("You Are Worthy of My Praise") says this:

> *Whatever your creative expression is, whether you're a wordsmith, or a painter, a dancer or a songwriter, make it a significant and central part of how you communicate with God on your own.*
>
> *Real life will come to you from that place, though we sometimes separate our devotional experience from that creative aspect of who we are, because we haven't been taught how to marry them together.*

Make your personal expression your devotional experience.[4]

The old maxim states, "If you don't have a **target**, you're sure to hit it." It does help our progress when we have a solid goal in mind. The following thoughts on what makes a good worship leader into a great worship leader will aid you in setting goals for your **development**.

Great worship leaders…are consistent.

Anyone can lead a great worship moment every once in a while. The strongest worship leaders have a knack for consistently leading worship in small groups, large groups, conferences, etc. in an effective and meaningful way.

> *Great worship leaders have learned how to build a worship set* in a consistent and systematic way, without feeling like they're quenching the Spirit of God if they prepare for spontaneity.
>
> *Great worship leaders are not afraid* to do six or seven songs over a half an hour, instead of stretching out four or five. In other words, they know how to start and finish songs with confidence and how to linger if the moment calls for it.
>
> *Great worship leaders know how to make the lion's share of a set* out of songs that are fresh yet **familiar**, God-centered and easily sung by all age groups.
>
> *Great worship leaders know how to finish a song without feeling a need to meander* and know how to start another song with confidence.
>
> *Great worship leaders know how to gracefully transition* between songs in a set without jarring the congregation musically. Flow is important to them, and each song should prepare, in some way, to engage with the next.
>
> *Great worship leaders know how to let the songs lead worship* and give the worshipper language for worship. They feel no **pressure** to say a lot or pray a lot to keep energy flowing.
>
> *Great worship leaders know how to execute a set* without being too sensitive to, or influenced by, the faces or dispositions they see in the congregation.
>
> *Great worship leaders know how to choose the right song* when asked to play for an offering, a funeral, or to end a conference with a time of celebration. They have a

large, diverse catalog of worship songs in their **memory** bank, not just in their song binder. They are not staring at music; they are leading (usually) from memory.

Great worship leaders…are equippers.

The most appreciated worship leaders have a streak of a trainer and a mentor running through them. They are not content to have the platform all to themselves over a few years. They are always looking for those they can train, mentor, and release, either inside or outside of that local congregation. They are secure in the gift they offer and in the face of the gifts that others offer.

Great worship leaders know how to enjoy the process of building lifelong friendships with developing worship leaders, particularly those who value their input and share like-mindedness on key levels.

Great worship leaders know how to co-lead with someone and how to pre-brief and de-brief while all the while sustaining a confident atmosphere for the developing worship leader.

*Great worship leaders know how to **mentor** over time* without feeling any pressure to release people to lead worship before they are developed musically, emotionally, or skillfully.

Great worship leaders are not afraid to address the pride that comes with both youth and a musical platform.

Great worship leaders are capable of listening to, and learning from, a younger leader.

Great worship leaders know how to invite a young worship leader to fall in love with the community they lead, and to call them to either love the church they lead or to step away from the microphone.

Great worship leaders know how to vulnerably share their story as a worship leader and how to **encourage** younger leaders to learn from their mistakes.

Great worship leaders know how to become older brothers and sisters in worship leading and not simply protect themselves in the "always-leading" worship leadership role. They share, even give away, the **platform**.

Great worship leaders…are pastoral.

These worship leaders have a wider skill-set than just playing an instrument, leading worship, and leading a band. Most churches cannot afford such a limited capability in a new staff member. Most pastors and leaders I know are looking for worship leaders stirred by Kingdom passion, and motivated by **pastoral** love for the church.

Great worship leaders are flexible. They can lead worship in a home group, lead the devotional time, or speak before the church on Sunday morning if asked.

Great worship leaders know their Scriptures and know how to sensitively pray for a cancer patient in a hospital and for a congregation in the midst of a building program.

Great worship leaders actually care for and **shepherd** their worship teams.

Great worship leaders pastor the congregation as they lead worship. It is clear to the church that the worship leader is not primarily in front to express his or her musical preferences in worship. There is a keen sense that the worship leader is there for *them* to have a meaningful connection with God.

Great worship leaders know when to ask someone to join a team because their hearts are right and how to ask someone to take a **break** because their hearts are askew from the central mandate of the team, which is to serve.

Great worship leaders read the Scriptures, history, theology, and classic Church writers in order to understand what makes and breaks the people of God. That learning finds its way into everything from the prayers uttered between songs to the songs selected each set.

Great worship leaders…are proficient.

Worship leaders who play their instrument well have a much longer sustainability factor within a changing congregation than do those who are weak technically and cannot handle a diversity of demographic or need in a local community.

Great worship leaders are able on their instrument. They are not always the most proficient musician on the team; in fact, they are sometimes the least! However, they can lead the band **confidently** with what they do know.

Great worship leaders have just enough arranging ability to take a rag tag team, intuitively know what songs they can pull off smoothly and what songs they simply cannot, and how to make them sound sweet together in **simple** arrangements.

Great worship leaders practice privately and keep their own chops up personally or with lessons. They listen to fresh songs impacting the church, integrate them when possible, and learn musical ideas from them.

Great worship leaders love the old and the new and seek to integrate the riches of the hymns of history with the jewels of contemporary worship music. They see the whole of church worship music throughout the ages as one body of work to be drawn on in appropriate occasions.

Great worship leaders have hundreds of songs in their mental arsenal, having led them over the course of many years. In a multi-church event, a spontaneous moment, or a ministry time, they can draw on a song that will fit the bill for the whole community.

Great worship leaders…understand authority.

These worship leaders understand what mutual submission is all about. They recognize the mantle that the lead pastor carries for the congregation, and they do all they can to defer to, and **support**, that leader.

> *Great worship leaders know how to honor* time limits, ask **teachable** questions, and share the pastor's vision for the church in song selection and event preparation.
>
> *Great worship leaders do not push their way* into worship leading or other roles. They offer their gifts, and then allow God to make a place for them to lead. They are not pushy or forceful; they are centered and trust fully in God to make a place for their leadership.
>
> *Great worship leaders graciously receive input* and even pursue it, especially from the lead pastor and worshippers in the congregation.

Great worship leaders…are passionate.

The passionate will always lead, no matter the sphere or situation. **Inspiring** worship leaders carry a blend of passion and restraint in their toolbox. The leader's hunger for God, evidenced in an honest and **vulnerable** worship leading style, is irreplaceable and evident to all. Many dispassionate worship leaders are hired because their musical skill level can cover up for a lack of personal passion as a worshipper.

At the same time, that passionate worship is the hallmark of their leadership. Great worship leaders are very keen in knowing when to push the envelope in worship and when to **hold** back, even when their own emotions are running high.

> *Great worship leaders are exuberant* without becoming **cheerleaders**. In other words, they approach the moment of worship with enthusiasm, yet that enthusiasm is tempered with gentleness and a lack of needing to generate **outward** emotion to feel that they've done their job.
>
> *Great worship leaders can separate their personal emotional state* from what the moment calls for in the group they are leading. (I don't know that this art is learned by any other mode than **longevity** of worship leading experience.)
>
> *Great worship leaders love the secret place.* These worship leaders will never let go of their personal, private times of worship before God. They understand that their authority as a worship leader is built on this ongoing integrity as a worshipper.

Great worship leaders…are committed to the community.

In other words, great worship leaders are intent on creating an **effective** space for people to meet with God through the medium of music, symbols (communion, etc.), and

other means. Great worship leaders do not expect the congregation to be their captive audience for their own musical exploits.

> *Great worship leaders know that they are there for the community*; the community is not just there for them.
>
> *Great worship leaders know how to discern the difference* between a song that is a corporate worship song and one that is an artist's expression. They are after the widest community encounter with God possible.
>
> *Great worship leaders can pull out* a children's song, a celebrative song, or an intimate ballad based on the congregation's need.

While this is a short list of the key qualities to be sought after as we develop into the most effective lead worshippers we can be, there are many other qualities we need that may come to mind as well. Think of some of these, and talk about them with other worship leaders.

Make it your vision to become the most effective and consistent worship leader you know, making it easy for the heart cry of the community of God to find its way out of their hearts and before the One they love.

Then, **train** others around you to be great in this same high calling.

Session 4 Study Questions

First, if you are doing this with a group, take some time to write down your answers to the following questions before you gather. Highlight page numbers, key quotes and ideas that moved you. Make sure you write in the margins, circle words, or jot down anything that will help you interact with the material and remember core ideas.

1. What ideas moved you the most from this section?

Talk about the ideas related to worship that particularly moved you from the book or from the video.

How might the ideas that moved you help all of us to understand what worship is really about?

2. In what ways do you believe you are already a great worship leader? In what areas do you need help growing into greatness? Be honest with both questions.

Greatness in worship leadership is acquired over time and with much experience. Where do you honestly evaluate yourself to be as a worship leader, in your mind, when you read this session?

3. What choices could you make, even this year, to become a better worship leader?

Think about the suggestions made for becoming more effective at what you do as a worship leader. Where are your growth areas? What decisions can you make right now to move ahead one little step in each of the areas mentioned in this section?

Conclusion: A Blessing to Lead Worship

Videos for this Session:

- Conclusion: A Blessing to Lead Worship (2:35)
- Tool: How to Start a Worship Circle (4:38)

As a worship leader of a few decades, I have found it to be true that as we move forward as worship leaders, God and all of heaven will be behind us as we join the ranks of those who have chosen to honor God and serve His people by our willingness to lead worship. If we couple our willingness with ongoing skill development, leadership maturation, and devotional commitment, we are going to grow—it's inevitable.

A Few Thoughts on Your Worship Leading Future

I want to encourage you to lead worship from the passion within your heart and to lead with skill, integrity, honesty and humility.

Learn from your mistakes along the way, be teachable and humble, and expect God to deepen you as a person as He strengthens you as a lead worshipper.

Watch effective worship leaders and **analyze** what they do, how they do it, and most importantly *why* they do it. What is motivating them? What is their story as a worship leader?

Lead worship knowing that every person you lead, whether in a living room or in a stadium, was designed for the high **privilege** of worshipping the living God with their entire life. We can nurture that expression of life worship by leading well in our gathered worship settings.

The Worship Leader's Creed

A number of years ago, after leading a particularly tiring series of worship sets (it must have been the Easter season!), I wrote the following "Worship Leader's Creed" to root myself as to why I lead worship. I hope these words encourage you on your journey.

> *I believe that when I lead living worship passionately, artfully, and thoughtfully from a position of authenticity, innocence, and transparency, God will use my yielded heart to further His fame in the hearts of others.*
>
> *I believe that when I offer my ego and dreams to the purposes of Christ, I will find His character more fully formed in me and His dreams more fully realized through me.*
>
> *I believe that when I tend to the details in the lives of those given to my care, beginning with my spouse and family, the Father will take care of the details of my own life.*

I believe that a life of worship is the most meaningful activity in which a human can participate, and I embrace my role as an encourager of this activity in any gathered worship setting into which the Spirit invites me.

I believe that every act of creativity and each effort to express that creativity beautifully with the goal of worship in mind, will end in fruitful transformation in the lives of those I lead.

I believe that Jesus is leading us all home to Himself and that the privilege of leading worship is to inspire hope, courage, joy, and mission in each soul on that ultimate journey.

Blessings as you rise to the **privilege** of leading worship in the beautiful part of the historic Body of Christ that is your community. Bless as you continue the **lifelong** journey of rediscovering *Essentials in Worship Leading*.

TOOL: HOW TO START A WORSHIP CIRCLE

In this video, you'll learn how to start and maintain what I call a *worship circle*.

This is an evening where musicians of every skill level join together and, in a specifically designed worship experience, grow in their intuition as leaders, musicianship as players, and friendship as worshippers.

If you've never done one, check this video out.

Try it once—you'll be glad you did.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP MINISTRY
AN INTRODUCTION

Overseeing a worship ministry is a challenging leadership task that requires insight and skill. Grow in your leadership as you look at the ministry tasks of pastoring a team, scheduling bands, working with your pastor, and creating systems that *work*.

Videos For This Session:

- Introduction: The Challenges of Leading a Worship Ministry (2:08)

The Challenges of Leading a Worship Ministry

I was sitting on the edge of this poor worship leader's desk. He was bent over in his chair behind his desk weeping real tears and sobbing like a baby. This young worship leader had a husky, strong, military presence.

His heart for service and his passion for worship leadership had led him to become the worship pastor of a growing church. Now, he was at the end of himself, only a few months into his job.

I didn't know whether to laugh or cry at what he said next. "Dan, I was in a hard-core military unit. And it's not as hard as this!" I couldn't hold it in; I burst out laughing, and he joined me. He was so frustrated; a good laugh is just what we both needed.

Leading a Worship Ministry Is Different than Leading Worship

Leading your worship ministry may not feel as difficult as it did for my friend, but if you've been doing this for any length of time, you will know that those leading a worship ministry face great challenges unique to their role.

There are leadership and skill **challenges** that come with simply and effectively leading your congregation in worship.

Then there are band and technical challenges that come with working with everyone from volunteer musicians, to worship arts leaders, to sound and visual techs. We haven't even mentioned working with your pastor, other church staff, and…the congregation!

If you've ever had someone come up to you, as I have, and say, "You're not my favorite worship leader, and I really don't like the songs you pick or how you lead them," you'll know that leading a worship ministry can be a thankless task!

We need all the help we can get oiling the gears of the worship ministry we lead, reducing stress in areas that we can **reduce stress** in (administratively and relationally), and refining our systems so that our musicians, techs, and others feel **valued** and cared for as we do the hard work of ministry together.

Welcome to Essentials in Worship Ministry

This section has been designed to help you in your work of leading an effective, growing, legacy worship ministry.

Each of the four areas of worship ministry leadership has been chosen to give you principles that you can apply, no matter the size of your congregation or the nature of the team(s) that you lead.

I look forward to the journey with you. Welcome to *Essentials in Worship Ministry*.

Session 1: The 4 Relationships That Make or Break Us

Videos in This Session:

- Session 1: The 4 Relationships That Make or Break Us (8:40)

If you're like me, you'll know that this is true: our relationships in this life can take us to the heights of joy and to the depths of despair! When we're in a worship leader or worship pastor role, there are core relationships that either make or break a person's ability to function well in their role.

Many years ago, I was serving as a worship pastor, running a worship ministry in my local church of about 500. Like many staff worship pastors (if a church can even afford to hire one), I was needed in many different corners of church life. I was delivering furniture to the poor in our community, doing premarital counseling with couples, overseeing small groups, and keeping a thriving worship ministry of about 20 people—worship leaders, musicians, songwriters, sound techs, visuals techs, and artists—on track.

I walked in the door after a long day and was preoccupied; I was looking right through the people most dear to me. My wife took my face in her hands and said, "Dan, I don't need a worship leader; I need a husband. Your children don't need a worship pastor. Your children need a daddy." I got it, and I've never looked back.

The 4 Relationships That Keep a Worship Ministry Leader on Track

The following four relationships, while they are not the only **relationships** in our life, demand our attention if we are to succeed in the task of building an effective worship ministry.

1. Our Relationship with God

While this may seem to be a given for worship leaders, it is my experience (both personally and in talking with hundreds of other worship leaders) that one of the first relationships to be neglected when the worries and cares of ministry life grow full and taxing is our relationship with God.

In 2 Samuel 6:12–23, we find the story of David dancing before the Ark of the Covenant as it is brought back into Jerusalem after years of captivity. David is half-clothed, passionately expressing in public a devotion that we know from the Psalms was characteristic of his private life with God.

Michal, daughter of Saul and the wife of David, is disgusted. She mocks him for dancing half-clad in front of slave girls and the host of the people of Israel. David's response comes right from his secret life.

David said to Michal, "It was before the Lord, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the Lord's people Israel—

I will celebrate before the Lord. I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honor."

David's commitment to worship was not because he had a stage, or because he knew that his people needed to see some devotion in their king. David's public life was an **overflow** of his **secret life**. He was not willing to compromise his cultivated intimacy with God for anyone.

Never compromise your secret life with God or confuse it with your public ministry activity. Your physical health, your emotional well-being, and your authority as a spiritual leader will hinge on your capacity to cultivate your interior life with Jesus.

Get on your instrument, when there is no crowd to impress or lead, and worship before the Lord. Not only will you taste and see the goodness of the Lord in those precious daily encounters, but you will also see your **effectiveness** as a worship leader grow.

Do a *Daily Examen* (a list of evening questions from Ignatian spirituality), dig into God's Word, sing your daily prayers at your instrument and let your soul breathe before God. It will influence every one of your other relationships.

Spend time with God each day, and never compromise this part of your schedule.

2. Our Relationship with Our Family

Our **first church**, to which we must attend, is our family. Being a good husband, wife, son, daughter, father, mother, or even friend is central to being a good worship leader and overseer of a worship ministry. In vocational ministry, there is both a beautiful, and potentially toxic, mix.

Our faith is connected to our ministry, and our ministry is connected to our livelihood (if you're a paid staff member). I have watched many worship pastors neglect their first church—their spouses and children—because someone told them that serving their second church (their faith community) was more important.

I have a theological word for that: *hogwash!*

How many shattered marriages and families will the Body of Christ need to see before we realize that our sometimes hyper-spiritual emphasis on endlessly serving the organizational church is unhealthy and ultimately grinds people up? I have been there and done that, both as a senior pastor and as a worship leader, and it simply doesn't work to put all our eggs in the basket of the services we facilitate for the community. Of course, we want to be the best and most **devoted** worship leaders and ministry overseers that we can be, and we need to rise to the hard work it takes to be "on" at many different times of the day and days of the week.

However, every worship leader, hopefully in tandem with their pastor or ministry overseer, must develop a **plan** that enables them to both meet the requirements of their worship ministry leadership and continue to deeply cultivate their family life.

Your pastor, your small group, and especially your spouse (if you have one) are your barometer for how you are doing in this area of your life. Even if it hurts, ask your pastor how they see your family leadership. With some honest input, you'll learn how to create a plan to make sure your family is getting enough of you and you are getting enough of them.

3. Our Relationship with Our Pastor

One of the most **vital** relationships in a local church is often one of the most neglected—the relationship between the worship leader and the pastor of the church.

In my estimation, our soul's **enemy** aims at this relationship, seeks to stir up bickering, misunderstanding, and tension, in order to diminish leadership **credibility** in the eyes of the congregation.

Pastors and worship leaders must fight for love, being careful not to offend and learning how to listen more than they speak. I have actually had worship leaders look me in the eye and say, "My pastor is always giving me direction about the musical worship section of the service. I'm the musician. I'm the one called to do this; I wish he'd just back off!"

I lovingly look them in the eye, and say, "Who stays awake at night with the concern of pastoring this flock into full **maturity** in Christ? Who knows far too much about what is going on in most of the lives in this congregation, often because people look to the pastor to fill needs that only Christ can fill in their hearts?

"Who must make sure that whatever happens in each service is true to the ethos of the church, who God has called that community to be, and how discipleship is to happen in every life within and beyond the worship service?"

In many cases, a worship leader doesn't realize that he or she is in front of the congregation, in a primary leadership role behind a microphone, as much time or even more, as the pastor. It only stands to reason that the pastor needs **free access** to speak into the worship experience of their local church.

As someone who has served both as a senior pastor and as a worship leader, I know that both worlds carry something very different related to the community and must work hard to come together to serve the followers of Jesus who have gathered to your faith family.

On the other side, every pastor must learn that **smothering** their worship leader or worship pastor with input will ultimately stifle, and even extinguish, the fire that burns in the heart of every worship leader. There is a give and take that

must happen—a mutual trust as each leader fulfills their division of labor in the spiritual leadership of the church.

A **humble** spirit in a worship leader, teachable and willing to take both praise and correction, can go a long way toward cultivating a sweet working relationship.

An encouraging spirit in a pastor (remember, creative personalities need about 347 times more words of affirmation and encouragement than most others!) can go a long way toward cultivating a trusting and mutually supportive leadership relationship.

Cultivate friendship as best as you can outside of the task of ministry. Worship leader, listen to the vision and heart of your pastor for the community. Pastor, hear the hopes and dreams of the worship leader and guide them toward success both within your services and within their home.

Love covers over a multitude of sins. Keep short accounts, lavish each other with encouragement, and carefully bring correction as the exception (rather than the rule) in your daily communications.

While I won't mention here our relationships with fellow ministry leaders (staff or volunteers), many of the same principles of cultivating **friendship**, as well as bringing lavish encouragement and occasional correction, apply here.

4. Our Relationship with Our Extended Team Members

In my 20+ years of experience as a worship leader, I have found that it's not hard to keep people committed if they feel as though they are *loved* and *valued*. We can become, by raw learning or by nature, effective **encouragers** of people.

In Hebrews 3:13, we are told to "Encourage one another, as long as it's called 'Today,' so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." This is a powerful leadership Scripture.

Our ability to maintain friction-free friendships among our **volunteer** musicians, techs, arts leaders, and fellow worship leader relationships depends on our ability to lavishly encourage those who look to us for leadership.

We can find ourselves caught up in criticism, backbiting, and unspoken **competition** in our teams, and be shocked that it's occurring or we can do something about it.

Pray more than you say for core members of your team. Be honest and loving at the same time. Know when a team member is over-extended and needs a break before they have to ask for one. Honor those who serve the most with extra perks and encouraging responses.

Encourage your team members to be difficult to offend, easy to encourage, caring in the way they handle one another, and caring in the way they handle you.

It is also vital that I mention here that relationships between members of the opposite sex must always be kept above board, with people keeping and respecting **appropriate** intimacy boundaries both in public and private. No married man or woman should be sharing intimate feelings with one another that they are not sharing with their spouse.

In the worship dynamic, in the midst of creating beautiful music, there is a wonderful release of emotion that occurs. People on the team can get caught up in those moments, feeling "more understood" by someone on the team than they do by their own spouse. Appropriate boundaries, and **honest** discussions both as a team and in private, can keep us all in healthy, long-term relationships as a team.

Finally, laugh much in these relationships. Plato once said that we learn more about someone in an hour of play than in a lifetime of work. Make only some of your retreats and gatherings "spiritual," and the others pure fun. Eat, laugh, and tell stories. This goes a long way toward creating a **culture** where your team is connected and mutually supportive for the long haul.

Caring for these four relationships is no guarantee of ministry success, but it is a guarantee for life success. Welcome Jesus into each one of these relationships, and ask for daily insight as to how to cultivate each unique one.

Session 1 Study Questions

First, if you are doing this with a group, take some time to write in your answers to the following questions before you gather. Highlight page numbers, key quotes and ideas that moved you. Make sure you write in the margins, circle words, or jot down anything that will help you interact with the material and remember core ideas.

1. What ideas moved you the most from this section?

Talk about the ideas related to worship that particularly moved you from the book or from the media or supplementary book, if you used those.

How might the ideas that moved you help all of us to understand what worship is really about?

2. How is your relationship with God?

Is there anything missing in your relationship with your Father God that you would like to see renewed? What one step forward can you take?

3. How are your other relationships?

Leading a worship ministry can rise or fall based on just one relational area of strength or weakness Where are yours (strong and weak) right now?

Session 2: The 9 Roles of the Worship Pastor

Videos in This Session:

- Session 2: The 9 Roles of the Worship Pastor (5:42)

Leading a worship ministry of any type demands that the worship leader acquire a variety of skills sets that enable him or her to fulfill a variety of roles that "come with the turf" of overseeing a 21st century worship ministry. Each of these roles reflects a principle related to the practical and pastoral leadership of the worship pastor—principles that I, and many others, have discovered are central to keeping our church's worship ministry thriving over time.

The Worship Leader and the Worship Pastor

Let's first clarify our terms, worship *leader* and worship *pastor*. These terms are **interchangeable** for me in some cases, and you may seem me jumping back and forth between the two. Yet I am aware that some churches make clear **designations** about the terms that designate everything from leadership maturity, to experience level and skill set, to volunteer or paid status, and beyond.

In most churches I have observed and in which I have been involved, the title of Worship Pastor is reserved for someone functioning in a full-time role overseeing the worship (and possibly arts) function of the local church and has some greater degree of pastoral care responsibility in the congregation. I understand this, yet I encourage every worship leader to see oneself functioning in a **pastoral manner**.

In other words, in this context, I want to use the term a bit more loosely, pointing primarily to a **function** of someone's leadership rather than to an employment **status**. I choose the term *worship pastor* for this section not because every worship leader is called to be a more full-time, dedicated, focused pastor of the worship arts in their community. I choose the term because every worship leader, on some level, must have their sights set on being *pastoral* in their approach to what they do.

If being pastoral in our worship leadership of our congregation, our team, our tech leaders, and more is not part of our vision of what it means to be a worship leader, than we are filling a job at best, or being a mercenary at worst. Anyone who leads worship must have the goal of getting beyond themselves (something **rock stars** often never do), to the task of forming disciples of Jesus through the kinds of worship sets and environments they create.

The 9 Roles of the Worship Pastor

Let's look at each of these 9 roles and pull out a **principle** of worship ministry leadership that will keep our worship ministry growing deep and strong over a lifetime:

1. The Worship Pastor as Priest. *We help to bridge peoples' connections with God.*

The word *priest* may conjure up images of flowing robes, clerical colors, or even ephods and glistening headdresses. If that's what came to your mind, you may (respectfully) toss those mental images to the side for now.

A priest, in the purest and most benevolent sense of the term, is a **bridge-builder**. You may prefer to think of it as a pastoral role in your church community and worship ministry, but with a different twist.

Someone evidencing a priestly quality in their ministry leadership is always looking for ways to connect people with God. That connection will often happen for the congregation when we lead worship, if we lead it in a more priestly, calling-people-home-to-the-heart-of-Jesus way.

In our teams, the music may be part of the way we outwork this role, but we are also acting in that role when one of our team members has a crisis, and we find every possible way to point them Jesus. Even when we point to Jesus, we do the extra work of building bridges to God when the person can't seem to bring themselves to connect with God on their own. We teach people how to worship in daily life.

Of course, God is the One who is always pursuing us. But the effective worship pastor knows that we have a part to play in helping people respond to His pursuit. See yourself as the pastor, the priest, of your ministry, and lead with tender pastoral care.

2. The Worship Pastor as Prophet. *We challenge the church to follow Jesus and actually be disciples.*

The word *prophet* may, similarly to the word *priest* above, conjure up an image of a bearded figure with justice in his heart and sharp words in his mouth. Or, you may think of someone who (if you're in more charismatic circles) regularly offers what they believe God is speaking to them for the congregation or those in their influence.

In this case, I'm going to go right back to the Hebrew roots that mean "to prophesy." At its foundation, to prophesy means to speak, or sing, by inspiration. In that sense, we are always seeking to speak as those speaking the very words of God to people (1 Pet. 4:11).

We challenge the church to not just play a worship game, honoring God with their lips while their hearts are far from Him (Matt. 15:8). We **call** them to hope, to repentance, and to a future vision of the Kingdom that has implications for the present.

We are committed to speak to our team members with grace, encouragement, and with incisive words that cut through attitudes and outer appearance and speak to the disciple's heart within each team member.

I have often told my team that as a leader I would not only be their greatest encourager, but I would be looking out for their souls and for the pitfalls that can trap us in habits and attitudes that would drain the spiritual life from them. Over time, many of my team members thought something was wrong if all I ever did was encourage them, without addressing things I saw needing the touch of Jesus in their lives.

Call your team members to be like Jesus, to embody the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5), to do justice and love mercy in their daily life (Mic. 6:8), to walk humbly with God and let their attitudes be the same as those of Christ (Phil. 2).

If they feel loved by you as a pastor, they'll hang in there through your prophetic call to them to emulate Jesus rather than their favorite stage musician.

3. The Worship Pastor as Teacher. *We educate the church about worship and what it means to be a worshipping Christian.*

Many worship leaders I know don't want to be a teacher. They have a preconceived notion of what it means to be up front and communicating to a group of people. Becoming an effective **communicator** about worship may not be as hard as it looks.

Consider using what I call *worship teaching bombs* —a two or three sentence mini-teaching about worship, spoken at the beginning, middle, or end of a set, that is planned beforehand (at least until they become spontaneous).

Each is short and sweet (10–20 seconds maximum), and communicates one big idea about worship. These bombs are now always in my arsenal as I head into a worship set with a desire to make every moment count.

Here are just a few of the **worship teaching bombs** I drop. Drop these sparingly, in your own words, using just one or two per set. Then, stand back and watch the fires of worship grow in your community over time.

> "As we enter into this next song, let's remember that songs are a place we go to meet with God. Songs are more than melodies and words; they are places where we speak to God, and God speaks to us." (Teaching: Songs are a place we go to meet with God; they enhance our relationship with God.)
>
> "As we gather to worship, let's remember that we don't come to worship to escape reality, but rather to enter into God's greater reality—a reality that we are affirming in these songs." (Teaching: Worship is the opposite of escape.)
>
> "As we sing this next song, we are remembering who God is and who we are in the light of His love. God first loved us, 1 John 4:19 tells us, and our worship is simply our response. Let love win your heart once again as we sing." (Teaching: Gathered worship is a response to the love of God, not primarily our initiative.)

Begin taking down notes and ideas about worship for your community via an app or other tool on your computer. Learn how to give a great 10-minute talk, or 20-minute talk, on worship. Then say yes when you are asked to say something about worship.

4. The Worship Pastor as Storyteller. *We retell and give momentum to the stories of God's activity in our midst.*

Being a storyteller simply means that at every opportunity, we reinforce the values of our faith community by retelling the stories of people and situations that capture one or more of your church's values.

Let's say, for example, your church places a high value on caring for the poor in your city. Your role, as one of the up-front leaders in the church, is to talk about (whenever the context is right) people in your congregation who are actively living out that value in their daily lives.

I did this many times as a worship pastor in my community, for whom this value was central to our local church ethos. I'd **mention a story** about someone caring for the poor at a worship rehearsal. I'd thank someone publicly who was leading us admirably in risking their sense of comfort by working with the poor. At times, I would take the worship team out on food distribution runs or furniture deliveries.

Caring for the poor began to get in our bloodstream, and it shaped our worship ministry (and wider community) as the value began to go viral.

When you see a marriage healing, or a life transformed by Jesus, appropriately talk about what God is doing, celebrate it, and make a big deal out of it.

There is no such thing as a small miracle. The great Augustine, when he functioned as the Bishop of Hippo, would chide the pastors under his care for not talking enough about the miracles God was doing in the flock in their care.

Become the kind of ministry leader who is always *actively looking* for what God is doing and **affirming** it in front of your team.

5. The Worship Pastor as Evangelist. *We make an easy way for non-Christians to meet Jesus, even in the ways we build sets.*

Not everyone is called to "cold call" people to faith in Jesus. All of us, however, are called to create gateways for people who are not yet following Jesus to follow him. It's important that, even as we lead people in worship on a Sunday morning, we're not the kind of ministry leader whose entire life is locked up in the Christian **subculture**.

A worship ministry leader must **recognize** that there are people in our congregations, at any given time, who are at very different places in their spiritual journey. That recognition should shape the way we say the faith, pray the faith, and display the faith in worship.

For example, be explanatory to the congregation. Statements like "We're going to do this now, because…" give people permission and a sense of ease that they know what's going on. When we don't explain things, we jerk people around assuming they know the in-house rules (unless your church likes it that way). In my experience, this distances them in worship, rather than bringing them near. As worship **ushers**, our job is to bring them near.

As a ministry leader, the ability to **speak** to people who are at different places in their faith journey builds bridges every time we get behind a microphone. People who are pre-faith in their hearts sense that your community must be an inviting and safe environment simply because the words that come from your mouth seem to be accessible and understandable to them.

Remember the last time you led worship when there was a child dedication? A baptism?

A wedding? Did knowing that there were family visitors who may or may not be followers of Jesus affect the song set you selected? Would a hymn like "Amazing Grace" have made them feel like God might be within their reach rather than those same songs you always do that were completely new and foreign to them?

We should always remember, as ministry leaders, that on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, the new languages that came from the mouths of the disciples with the Spirit's outpouring were not strange to those gathering for the feast in Jerusalem; they were *accessible* words to them as they heard the praises of God in their own language. Worship and ministry leaders can take a clue from this. Speaking accessibly to everyone in the congregation about worship, and what it means, is a Spirit-guided activity.

When people come in, with some semblance of faith in their hearts, they need to have it fanned into flame without encountering a strange set of secret handshakes and unintelligible words that Christians are using all around them. We are in front of them as worship leaders; let's use the microphone well to **communicate** the Good News of Jesus' presence.

Let's do the work of an evangelist, as Paul told Timothy (2 Tim. 4:5), even as a worship leader. Ask God to give you words to help non-Christians or pre-Christians understand why your community is so devoted to God in worship.

6. The Worship Pastor as Pastor. *We care for our community as shepherds, recognizing the lines of leadership.*

I remember the moment one of my worship band members pulled me aside at a rehearsal. They were clearly disturbed, at the point of tears, and visibly shaking. It seemed that something difficult had happened that day at work, and this person couldn't find their way out of the fear and isolation that came with the incident.

Something fell in my own heart, but it wasn't because of their plight. I had a rehearsal to run. We had a task to complete. Practice time was limited, and there was a special service coming up that weekend. I knew what I had to do, but I was wrestling with doing it.

I called my band and techs together in a circle. "Listen guys," I said, "we have a lot to cover tonight, and I know we'll go a bit later than usual and we're not as ready for Sunday as we could be. But we need to do something." I proceeded to share this person's struggle (with permission and speaking in generalities), and invited the group to **pray**.

I was amazed by the results. We spent about 20 minutes huddled around our friend and offering prayers, compassion, Scriptures, and encouragement. By the time we were done there wasn't a dry eye in the circle. The team had **served** one another and bonded. The rehearsal time seemed, almost magically, expedited. We moved through our songs, stayed a little late, and left closer than ever.

While I wouldn't always take the same path (I am rarely task-driven except when it comes to music), this moment served as an example to me. If we take time for prayer, if we make time to care, then God steps in and helps us in ways we would never plan. Over

the course of the months that followed, it seemed that there was a new climate of caring for one another that enabled us to hit our tasks hard, while still praying for one another at break times or after rehearsals.

Shepherding the people in a worship ministry takes patience, but God seems to back the effort over time with a grace and strength that grows in the team. Read 2 Timothy chapter 2 and study the pastoral encouragements Paul gave to his young mentoree. Find it in your heart to lead, but to lead as a pastor.

It's not hard to keep volunteers committed if they feel loved and **valued** as they contribute.

7. The Worship Pastor as Administrator. *We order resources and steward people's energy to achieve lasting results.*

The gift of administration doesn't often come up on many worship leaders' spiritual gift tests. When it does, I always admire the worship pastor who has created systems that bring peace and order to the worship ministry **functioning** of their volunteer force.

However, I have encountered both extremes of the spectrum. I've been in local churches where the worship pastor was weak and lacking in administrative skills, but worship rose passionately and beautifully Sunday after Sunday in their congregation. I've also been in churches where the worship ministry was so efficiently organized that it seemed like the maintenance of the system was more important than actually meeting with God on a Sunday morning. Yet, we need effective **systems** for the ministry to run well.

In both cases, there is stress on the leader (and on the volunteers) that can be remedied. A lack of organization of people, music, rehearsals, and schedules will sap the life out of volunteers over time. Conversely, administrative gifting in a leader will seek by nature to dominate, order, control, and bring **efficiency** to a system, which, if left unchecked, can drain passion and the necessary messiness that comes with advancing as an increasingly spiritually vibrant community.

Find administrative tools that work uniquely for you.

- **A Scheduling Tool**
  I use WorshipTeam.com for my planning, many of my friends use Planning Center Online, and many others I know use a combination of other tools. Ask **questions** on Facebook, and experiment until you find your best solution.

- **A Set Planning Tool**
  Again, my resource above covers building sets, creating chord charts, scheduling my band, and more. Others use other online or software tools that do the trick for them. I know worship leaders who schedule solely through email or solely through an Excel **spreadsheet**. Find what works for you and be consistent. Over-communication of schedules, I have found, is better than erratic or insufficient **communication**. Assume your team **forgets** everything, and you'll be better off in the long run.

- **A Community Building Tool**
  Facebook and other community-oriented tools are very helpful in this regard. Sharing **reminders**, prayer requests, messages, and more can be done beyond email (in my experience, people don't read my long emails; frustrating but true).

- **An Assistant**
  "But I don't have a budget for an assistant," you say. My response? "Interns! Friends! People who are seeing you freak out with busy-ness and feel compassion (or pity) for you!" Some worship ministry leaders are afraid to **ask** for help. They feel as though people are giving enough. In my experience, if I am continually investing in people with encouragement and if they have a sense of **safety** with me (they believe I'm ultimately concerned with their well-being), then they see opportunities to serve as a gift from God rather than a duty to me.

  That may sound Pollyanna-ish, but I don't think it is. Begin to pray for the right person to assist you. I'm very sensitive to how I work with the opposite sex in those relationships and what responsibilities different leaders of mine carry. But if you're tending to things with integrity, an assistant or assistants can bring much-needed burden-lifting to your life. Aim to give **responsibility** in areas of someone's passions. Administrators love to organize things and people. I let them. Party people love to throw…parties. I let them. **Appoint** people to tasks, but do so slowly and with wisdom.

  It's always easier to appoint than to disappoint.

8. The Worship Pastor as Intercessor. *We pray more than we say, and this dominates our leadership style.*

As a worship pastor, I resolved that I would become the kind of leader who would pray more than I say. In other words, when a situation that feels difficult arises, a relationship seems to be going south or a ministry challenge (such as multiple services) is presented, my mantra has become *pray more than you say*.

In other words, there is no replacement for a praying disciple who actually trusts God to act rather then frets on their knees. I have seen more results from **invested** prayer than from anything I've ever said out loud and done to fix a situation.

Sometimes we must act quickly, and in those moments, a prayerful life *responds to a situatio*n rather than *reacts to a crisis*. Cultivate a life of ongoing **conversation** with God as you lead the worship ministry. His answers to those prayers often reveal themselves when we find that God has gone ahead of us in a situation and made a way for the next right thing to happen.

Many leaders I have seen oversee worship ministries, especially in larger churches, are doers. In a crisis, they act. They get something done. They spin the wheels until they get traction. There is only one problem with that mode: if it's not **grounded** in a life of prayer you will burn out. I promise you. I've watched it happen a hundred times.

Learn to quiet your heart and pray. Worship until the worry is absorbed into the presence of God. It will transform your worship ministry.

9. The Worship Pastor as Mentor. *We are always looking for the person to fill our shoes, and to fill the needs for exemplary worship leaders in our community.*

Many years ago I was taught by a good friend about what I have come to call "The **Mentoring Progression**." Here it is:

1. I do it.
2. You watch me do it.
3. I teach you to do it.
4. You do it with me.
5. I do it with you.
6. You do it on your own.
7. You mentor others.

For over 25 years I have followed that progression in mentoring other worship leaders, songwriters, and musicians. We don't need to be at the top of stairs to guide another; we just need to reach behind us as well as ahead.

- **Co-Lead with Them**
  When we co-lead with a worship leader in front of our community, we give them credibility before the congregation. This ongoing experience enables you to prepare, lead and de-brief together in real time. Give them songs familiar to the community to lead for six months to a year, just one or two a set, so the congregation learns to trust them. Allow them to catch your values through shared experience.

- **Spend Time with Them**
  When the leader is of the same sex, spend time with them doing spiritually important activities like watching a movie, eating food, laughing hard, and listening well. If they are the opposite sex, involve others, and do the same kinds of things. Today, I have the great privilege of seeing good friends, male and female, in whose journey as a creative leader I have participated. They are artists and worship leaders in a wide range of roles, and they are leading and mentoring others as they remain faithful to their calling. Time well spent together resulted in a lasting **friendship** and a model they could follow. Today, I reap the fruit as much as they, and we love one another deeply.

- **Take Your Time with Them**
  There is no rush. As C.S. Lewis suggested, it is not that difficult circumstances give us character, but rather, they reveal the character that is already present. Give a worship leader a little bit of leading room over a long period of time. The issues of pride and identity are dealt with as you take the slow and **steady** route with a new worship leader, and in the end, they will be grateful for your pace.

- **Share Input with Them**
  When you lead together, help them to choose songs, and show them how you organize the set. Assume that you actually know something about worship leading, and give confident guidance to their unique style. In dialogue, **hammer** out the nuances of a set without leaving them to chance. They need some direction from your experience. Then, give them room to **experiment** as time goes on.

- **Share Friends with Them**
  Expose them to your mentors via meals, seminars, concerts, or media. Set up times for others, like the pastor, to comment on their heart, style, and skill growth. When you can, introduce them to leaders who have influenced you, either in person or via other means. When your friends become theirs, mentoring becomes a **community** process that accomplishes more than you could on your own.

- **Give Gifts to Them**
  Take a year, and put generosity into your budget. When you have it in your power, buy gear or music items for the creative leader you are mentoring—gifts that remind them of their personal **importance** to you and the investment you're willing to make in their long-haul leadership journey. When you can, send them for theological, creative, and leadership development. You won't regret deepening both the thinking and feeling of your charge. In fact, it will **deepen** you and your community in the process.

- **Give Hope to Them**
  Celebrate the hard process of growth and maturation with the new worship leader. Honestly, but lovingly, point them toward faithfulness above today's multi-colored versions of success. It is hardly possible to overdo encouragement if it is **authentic** and honest.

  It is, however, possible to underdo encouragement. When you put deposits into their emotional account, it is much easier when you need to make a withdrawal in time, energy, or relationship.

Remember that it is easy for a new/young worship leader to become disheartened. Give heart to the one holding your hand, temper proud hearts with loving and clear honesty without letting go, and then entrust the worship leader's development to God in regular, committed prayer.

Make Way for Experience

The reality is that time, experience, and years of skill-building may be what it takes to make some of your strengths powerful leadership gifts and some of your weaknesses strong enough to not trip you up.

Here are a few closing tips:

- Gather a private, email prayer team for yourself and clue them in.
- Focus on building your strengths, and address weaknesses on the back stroke.
- Be humble, teachable, and open to input from those you respect and those who may have a different perspective than you.

Keep each of these nine roles in front of you, and ask Jesus to build you in each.

Session 2 Study Questions

First, if you are doing this with a group, take some time to write down your answers to the following questions before you gather. Highlight page numbers, key quotes and ideas that moved you. Make sure you write in the margins, circle words, or jot down anything that will help you interact with the material and remember core ideas.

1. What ideas moved you the most from this section?

Talk about the ideas related to worship that particularly moved you from the book or from the video.

How might the ideas that moved you help all of us to understand what worship is really about?

2. Which three of the nine roles mentioned in this session are your areas of strength?

What roles do you find come more easily to you than others? Do others, even those who don't think like you, affirm these same areas in you?

3. Which three of the nine roles mentioned in this session are your areas of challenge?

What roles do you find come more slowly to you than others? Are there tools that others have suggested that might help you grow in one or more of these areas?

Session 3: The Daily Running of a Worship Ministry

Videos in This Session:

- Session 3: The Daily Running of a Worship Ministry (7:10)

Is running a worship ministry, on a daily basis, more like being a coach of a team or more like being the leader of a tribe? Let's look at a few differences that can help us think more clearly about the daily responsibilities of running a worship ministry.

Team Coach or Tribe Leader?

A team simply has a **task** to fulfill. A basketball team is set to the task of winning. A hockey team, soccer team (football to my international friends), baseball team, or rugby team is set to the task of winning. Yet, on that team, there may be many personalities that are highly individualistic, self-concerned, and oblivious to the felt needs of their teammates. The goal is winning, and you don't have to like (or love) people to win.

A tribe, however, is different. A tribe is not simply set to the task of winning. A tribe shares a common story, a common **legacy** they are seeking to live out, and a common bond in the work it takes to see tasks completed. A tribe works, in our metaphor, to actually like and love one another because we are Christians, but also because that's what it takes to win. A great worship set, for a tribe, is the fruit of the goal being reached, not the goal itself.

A worship team weighs its success on how a Sunday morning went. A worship tribe measures success by how deeply our shared **values** are catching hold in the community, how similar our congregants are to Jesus, and how well we are creating spaces in which people can meet with God on a regular basis.

I love a worship ministry that works as a team, but I love worship teams with the heart of a *tribe* even more.

Develop the Heart as You Develop the Skills

Running a worship ministry is like being the leader of a **tribe**. You have a community of people, with tasks to fulfill, and the goal is to keep the tribe unified as you fulfill those tasks. The relationships are vital to the richness of the worship experience, both internally to the worship ministry and externally as the church community experiences the leadership of the team.

Our goal, as a worship team with the heart of a tribe, is to develop the heart, as well as the skills, of those in our worship ministry. We have the task before us of leading worship effectively for our community at our worship gatherings, but that task is always intermingled with our unique tribal need for unity of purpose, mutual faith, spiritual encouragement, and shared story.

The Goals of a Worship Ministry

Like a body, there are many, many parts to a worship ministry. Just as a toothache can affect the entire body (it's amazing how something so small can dominate when pain is involved). Likewise, small things need to be looked after, on a regular basis, to reach our daily Kingdom goals of:

1. **Nurturing** an encouraged and joyful worship ministry community
2. **Creating** effective, consistent, and beautiful worship environments
3. **Establishing** longevity in your volunteer force of musicians, techs, and leaders

Many of my favorite worship leaders happen to be ones I have watched at work, behind the scenes and in rehearsals, cultivating these three goals for our team.

I learned from them the **Art of the Touch**, and I'd like to explain it as a way of thinking about what is necessary for you to do, day to day, to keep your worship ministry running smoothly.

The Art of the Touch

On a daily basis, neither you nor I can grab a hold of every person, every task, that needs our attention. If you run a larger worship ministry, you'll realize this all the more. However, it is amazing just how far a touch can go. A touch is a momentary, complete focus of your attention on just one thing you can do to further that area of the worship ministry.

For example, you are overwhelmed at the need for new speakers in your sanctuary. The sound techs are whining, but because they are followers of Jesus first and whiners second, their whining comes out more like an honest and humble, "We think we need this to change if we can find the resource and do the research." Every Sunday you feel the need, but by Monday or Tuesday your plate is full again.

Here is where the touch comes in. This week, just do ***the next right thing***, instead of feeling a need to completely fix the issue. You make one phone call to a worship leader friend who just purchased new speakers for their similarly shaped gathering space. You ask for advice. Or, you message them on Facebook. Or, you assign it to a loyal sound person who knows their stuff and has your budget interests at heart. Or, you pray for God to bring you the right solution.

Whatever that touch means for you, find a way to just do the next right thing in the areas of greatest stress for you each week. There are tools to help you **discern** what is simply urgent (needing attention now) from that which is important (needing attention at some point).

In nurturing our team, I have found a tool that has been priceless for me over the years. It's called *email*. What? Email? Yes. The difference in the way I use it, however, is the

key. Instead of waiting for a reason to email your bass player, **create a reason** each week to email-touch three to four people involved in the worship ministry.

Your email-touch can be as simple as, "Hey—you're awesome." It can be as complex as, "When no one else was looking, I saw you riding the faders on the sound board while we were in the middle of a beautiful moment in worship. Thanks for being active, being engaged, and serving us and the community by being present to your part of the experience." Name the people, put the list in front of you, and touch a few people each week this way.

Again, in my experience and from watching others effectively lead larger worship ministries, simple touches on a regular basis can **dissolve** future crises that often occur when a ministry leader is neglecting any one of the three goals of a worship ministry noted above.

The Daily Tasks of Running a Worship Ministry

Let's look at a few of the daily tasks of running a worship ministry and gather a few tips from worship leaders I've seen handle these things well.

1. **The Task of Scheduling Bands**
   Some worship ministries run on the Team Model. In other words, they involve many people, rotating between different leaders, creating different bands each worship service. Musicians get to know each other and get diversity in their experience.

   Other worship ministries run on the Band Model. In other words, they have rotating bands that have a set schedule. Each unique band plays together all the time, and builds musical rapport.

   The strengths of the **Team Model** are that many people get to participate, and your team members get to know one another. More pastoral leaders often love this model, because it affords many in the community participating. The weaknesses of this model are that bands never really develop the musical affinity that comes with playing together all the time, many musicians are developed less deeply, and more rehearsal time is required as it's always a new band playing.

   The strengths of the **Band Model** are that band members get to know each other musically, fewer musicians are developed more deeply (music often grows tighter and more beautiful), and band members get to know the songs, one another, and their worship leader's style. The weaknesses of this model are that some are excluded from joining the worship band by the very nature of the model, weaker musicians don't grow if they're not paired with better musicians in their band, and your volunteer force is more "on call" than they might like to be.

I prefer a **hybrid** of these models—creating bands, but having them on for a set increment of time (in one church, we had a different band and leader each month; in another, a band would lead for three months, then be off for six months).

You may have found a model that follows with the **ethos** of your community. I have seen the great benefits of both. In both models, I employ auditions for the team in order to create quality music in either case. I approach the musical part of our worship as a combined calling and skill set, rather than a volunteer force that will accept anyone.

Many worship leaders I know request rehearsal and service dates that people will be away a few months in advance, so they can schedule around them. In the Band Model, often the decision is made six months to a year **in advance** around a band's **participation**, so people can do their best to schedule around those times.

Still, **replacements** for various Sundays are always necessary in both models. Keep a running list of people who are more than happy to fill in. Remember: a Sunday morning is a great time to cross-pollinate with other churches by sharing musicians and serving one another.

Scheduling can be done in one of the **Planners** mentioned earlier, or via email or Excel spreadsheet. Find a tool that 1) works for you, and 2) is in the communication habits and patterns of your team (i.e., don't post schedules to a private group in **Facebook** if most of your team doesn't check that group regularly).

Keep high communication going on, and use many communication channels to say the same things. Low communication eventually breeds stress in everyone.

Let me include here a note on working with **sound techs** and **visual techs**. Many worship leaders make the mistake of not being as attentive to their sound techs and visual techs as they need to be. Treat them as part of the team, and give them as much notice to prep as you would a musician.

In my experience, breakdowns can occur with sound techs who feel like they're being used by the musicians with demands in rehearsals flying here, there, and everywhere. Visual techs can experience the same thing with last minute lyrics,

requests, and sloppy communication wearing on them over time. Give extra **attention** to your Tech Leaders. Without them, it all falls apart.

2. **The Task of Pastoring Your Team Members**
   Be **proactive** in your pastoral care for your team members. In my experience, this keeps damaging fires to a minimum and encouraging flames at a maximum! The Scripture calls us to **encourage** one another, as long as it's called today (Heb. 3:3), and it is so important that we are always looking for opportunities to encourage our team members.

   Send texts, emails, and words of support on a consistent basis. This creates a sense of a caring community for team members, and eases the way when new stresses are introduced into the team (an added service, the death of a family member, asking someone to show up on time to rehearsal, challenging a musician on a pastoral issue in their life).

   Finally, take the time to ask team members who seem to be carrying a heavy burden what you can do to support them specifically in prayer or in scheduling. Each time you send a text, give positive encouragement, or strengthen a weak heart that wants to give up, you are creating a **culture of encouragement** in your team.

   The goal of your pastoral care is to get your team giving care to one another as needed.

3. **The Task of Meeting with Your Pastor**
   Finding a regular time to meet with your pastor is one of the cornerstones for running an effective worship ministry.

   There are two levels of meeting. The first level is the vision meeting. This kind of meeting can happen just a few times a year. In these moments you are primarily there to listen, absorbing a sense of the **vision** your pastoral leader has for the church as a whole. I plan in quarterly meetings with pastors on this regard, unless that communication is happening already on a regular basis.

   The second level of meeting is the service meeting. This can happen live or via email (or some other means). This is a meeting where we talk about the sermon series coming up, the theme of a particular Sunday, or a conference event that needs some overarching direction.

   As best as possible, cultivate a communicative friendship with the primary pastoral leader at the gatherings for which you lead worship. Recognize their busy factor and set your expectations reasonably so that you can both succeed at **supporting** one another.

4. **The Task of Budgeting and Paying for Resources**
   There are administrative tasks that will always need daily attention. Keep up on paid resources such as your online planner (if you use an online planning tool), sound/tech needs (mics, cables), training needs (worship training and/or events with guests), orchestrations (praise charts or other tools), etc.

   Automate billing whenever you can, and keep an eye on your budget so there are no surprises when it comes time to do something on which you planned.

   Be attentive to these tasks, and find an assistant if it feels like any of them are starting to get away from you. The ability to delegate is a necessary skill for the effective worship ministry leader.

   If you are also in charge of sound gear and **purchases** beyond the basics, I highly encourage you to either delegate the tasks to someone you trust, or to get a consultant before you make major purchases. Unnecessary sound gear is a huge budget drain, and unless that's your thing, find someone who can nail good decisions and then present you with some best case choices.

   (Note: I am a huge fan of a worship ministry having a Bose stick system hanging around, making quick work of sound needs in small venues—in the church, on retreats, or in conference workshops. If not a Bose, find a great, portable solution that is always on hand. If not, you or someone you delegate will be hauling far too much gear around, and setting it up, because the people using it won't know how to set it up or turn it on. A Bose or other simple system is plug-and-play, easy to teach, and well worth the cost. (This was NOT a paid commercial advertisement. I just have seen these systems work to fix issues.)

5. **The Task of Planning Music for the Week and Year**
   Many of the most effective worship ministry leaders I know are always sifting through the most fresh and appreciated songs coming out on the radio, at events, and via other means in order to find the ones that are uniquely for their church.

   There are tens of thousands of beautiful songs out there; God does not desire for you to do every one! **Listen** to many, **select** few, and **learn** fewer still. Your church has songs that are designed to serve their unique needs. Be attentive to this in prayer. Know that not every song that moves you is for your congregation. In fact, some songs that don't move you may be for your congregation. Be attentive as you listen to the songs moving people in your church, denomination, or the church at large.

   Plan ahead for major services (and seasons) such as Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost. Select songs early, and get your band(s) learning them. When a worship ministry team feels prepared for what is coming

up, there is often a sense of ease when it comes time to rehearsing, staging, and more. Feeling **prepared** lifts the stress off of an otherwise busy season.

6. **The Task of Sharing in the Wider Pastoral Work of the Church**
   In my earliest job as a worship pastor, I was in charge of leading worship for two services each Sunday, participating in furniture distribution to the poor in our area, doing pre-marital counseling, overseeing a section of our small groups, overseeing staging, keeping our audio and visual gear in working order, and sharing some of the counseling load with our other pastors!

   When I came up for air, there was always another task waiting for me. In my experience, you just need to set a time, and be **done**. If not, you will live your life in the vortex of "I just need to finish this…." It will be there when you get back. We don't want to lose you, or your strength, because you can't say "Stop," or "No," or "Not now." Sometimes you have to say, "I can't help you now, so I can help you later."

   First, remember that a need doesn't necessitate a call for you to meet that need. There will always be need, and you don't want to rob someone of his or her calling to meet that need by burning yourself out, fulfilling every need you see. Get counsel from others on this if you are prone to rescue everyone in need, and are slowly burning yourself out.

   Secondly, let your other pastors and leaders know the time slots in which you can do other tasks and the time slots in which you are otherwise occupied. Build steel walls around your planned time slots until everyone **understands** you're very, very serious about keeping your time **ordered**. Then, everyone can manage their expectations of you. Don't make constant exceptions too early, or the tasks of ministry will eat you alive!

   Thirdly, ask God to send you the people who can cover as many parts of your job for you as possible, particularly the ones for which you have little passion. This alone will keep your heart **energized**, and give you grace and space to carry the have-to responsibilities that seem to get in the way of your get-to privileges.

7. **The Task of Honing Your Musical and Leadership Skills**
   Sharpening your musical skills is a **necessary** and vital part of growing in your worship ministry leadership calling.

   I was never called to be the best musician in the entire team. However, I was called to **lead** that team. Honing my musicianship enabled me to write songs, create better arrangements, lift songs from recordings, and gain credibility with team members who I also asked to continually be honing their own skills.

   If your musical skills remain stagnant, don't be surprised if those of the

musicians on your team do as well.

Our leadership skills are always in need of **refining**. While new experiences (and new challenges) can shape our character and call strengths out of us, learning good leadership skills from those who are older and wiser (and some younger and wiser) can save us tripping over unnecessary hurdles along the way.

These are just a few of the daily tasks to which a worship ministry leader must attend. There are others as well, and it's important to name the ones that are a part of your daily work, get them in your schedule, and find a way to be proactive in either getting them done or delegating them to someone else.

Session 3 Study Questions

First, if you are doing this with a group, take some time to write down your answers to the following questions before you gather. Highlight page numbers, key quotes and ideas that moved you. Make sure you write in the margins, circle words, or jot down anything that will help you interact with the material and remember core ideas.

1. What ideas moved you the most from this section?

Talk about the ideas related to worship that particularly moved you from the book or from the video.

How might the ideas that moved you help all of us to understand what worship is really about?

2. Are there other tasks that are part of your daily or weekly ministry work?

Review the tasks noted in this session, and add any others that you think were missed. What ways of dealing with these tasks have you found to be helpful?

3. In what ways could seeing your team as your tribe help you in knowing what to do with your time?

Seeing our worship leadership community as a tribe can push us to thinking about cultivating values, our shared story, and pastoral care in a different way. What ideas does this metaphor trigger in you?

Session 4: Building a Legacy Worship Ministry

Videos in This Session:

- Session 4: Building a Legacy Worship Ministry (5:50)

How do we go about building the kind of worship ministry that stands, and grows even stronger, after we leave? We all know of situations where the person who led and built a particular ministry must leave that role for various reasons.

Many of these ministries struggle under new leadership or are weakened as they seek to maintain the values once held dear by the previous leader.

In some cases, the challenges that will be faced once God calls you to a different role, or ministry, or locale can be mitigated if we think well about developing a legacy or a legacy worship ministry that has strength beyond our own leadership.

Ministries Can Last or Languish, Prosper or Pine Away

Many years ago, I learned that simply because a ministry was highly **invested** in, by myself or another, certain winds of change could cause it to almost fall apart seemingly overnight.

No matter how excellent our band was, how rich our worship experiences were, how developed our scheduling system was, or how nurturing our pastoral care was, things change.

People **change**. Leaders change. Roles change. Facilities change. Even the music and the kinds of leaders/musicians required to make it will change.

Again, I like to say, "When people feel loved, when they feel like they're **valued**, it's not hard to keep them committed."

Over the years, as I've developed worship ministries and then left them for various reasons, I've seen that one of the great determining factors in how strong that ministry becomes after I leave resides in how the team members **felt** about the change.

Love can be a balm in a season of change, and a sense of value in a team member can last for a long time.

I have the privilege of having, in my own story, a track record of always leaving a church or worship ministry because of an extended call to something else, a move, or another positive reason for the change.

I was able to leverage my new-adventure spirit to inspire the team to embrace the new adventure in front of them.

It's not easy to make those turns, either for the leader leaving, the team staying, or the new ministry leader taking over, but it can be done with grace and **anticipation**.

Strengthening a Worship Ministry for the Long Haul

One of the first principles in creating a legacy worship ministry is in nurturing an atmosphere in which the team **rises and falls together**. I have met, in just a few settings, worship leaders who act as if the team exists to make them look good. They speak to musicians, techs, or others as if the whole ministry rises or falls on their leadership. Again, I've seen this in very few cases, but it's worth noting.

We can't treat our team members like supports to "our ministry" and expect that anything will last beyond "our ministry." I have found that treating my team members with honor, and **abundant** thanks, creates a worship ministry culture that feels valued even after I'm gone.

Create a Culture of Mentoring

I have been amazed by how some musicians and team members are still involved in the local church worship ministries I have left even 20 years later! Some have stepped away because the music changed or other elements shifted for the church or them personally. Yet some, because they **felt** valued and continued to be valued by people I mentored or who came in and knew the culture we had created, have stayed at the helm.

I would note this, though: I have always sought to create a worship ministry culture in which no one had a permanent role in the worship ministry. When a high value is placed on mentoring, giving the stage away (with a good development plan in place to make sure the congregation, band, and leader are ready for the change), and discipling the next generation, people begin to look for others to **replace** them.

I would always address if I felt someone was **clinging** too tightly to "their ministry"—getting their **identity** from their ministry role rather than from Christ. Again, if people feel loved and valued, you can address hard things as time goes on.

Use the Analogy of Deposit and Withdrawal

I like to think, as I work with people, about the analogy of banking deposits and withdrawals. If I am putting in three times as many **deposits** in my people (encouragement, support, time off) as I am taking withdrawals (need more time, need to confront something, need to switch them out of the band), that feels like the right ratio for maximum oil on the ministry team wheel.

Friction is reduced and encouraged people are more ready to stay stable in change rather than those who feel like withdrawals are always being taken from their lives.

People who feel valued willingly give hours and energy to go the extra mile. A leader who neglects this basic rule, that three times the amount of deposits

creates grace for every one time we must request a **withdrawal**, will find friction both while they lead, and when they pass the ministry on to a new leader.

People have the back of a leader who shows them grace, acceptance, and appreciation. Some of that same vibrancy will resonate from the team to a new leader, especially if they have been mentored in the same (or a similar) environment.

Do yourself a favor, and everyone who leads after you: love your team. It's not about us looking good; it's about our team *being* good.

Wait at Least 5 Years to Evaluate Impact

I've worked with many young worship leaders who expect to see the results of their leadership in the team and the congregation within three months, six months, or one year. A glazed look comes over their eyes when I say, "Don't **measure** your impact on your worship ministry team or your congregation for at least five years. You may not see the results of your faithfulness, of your tenacity, for that long.

Like rain falling on the ground, it takes some time for every little droplet to begin to soak into the soil, making it ready for new shoots and plants to begin to crop up.

Unless there is a clearly defined, short-term plan for your ministry leadership, settle in for the long haul. Make a **five-year plan** for how discipleship of your team members, musical growth, and congregational worship development will happen.

Whatever you do, don't get discouraged if you are always depositing, and never seeming to get grace from others for the withdrawals you must make along the way. Keep depositing in their hearts and lives, and one day you'll discover that it wasn't lost on everyone.

I remember one moment when a worship leader in which I had invested came to me with a very painful confession. It was the kind of confession that meant we had some long-haul discipling work to do, some relational shrapnel to clean up, and some decisions to make about when they could stand on a stage again as a role model in our community. Adding insult to injury, our congregation was just not seeming to grasp the unique **direction** I was taking us, in accord with our senior pastor's vision for the church.

It was tough. I felt like I was just spinning my wheels. I was not getting anywhere fast. By the grace of God, a sensitive member of my band met me at my office door one day. He said to me, "Dan, don't you dare **evaluate** your leadership until you've been here for a few more years. We'll get it. We'll get it." A few more years passed. He was right. They were getting it, and so was I. Some things just take time and deliberate effort.

If a worship leader is moving on from place to place leading worship (this sometimes happens at the college age or with twenty-somethings), there is usually not enough time for them to be deeply formed by their community or for their community to be formed by them.

In this case, I simply encourage worship leaders to root in a community for as long as they can, and serve there with the principles in this section until it's time to leave.

We need all the practice we can get, and we always want to leave people with a positive and **servant**-seasoned memory about our involvement.

Keep Excellence up Front to Keep Excellence Coming In

Excellence in the musicality and the administration of the worship ministry will keep like abilities **attracted** and coming to your community.

I have actually heard worship leaders say, "It shouldn't matter how good the music sounds, people shouldn't be that shallow about worship to care about those things." I laugh, because in the next moment they say something like, "Boy, I wish we had a better bass player."

It is indeed important not to deify excellence and compromise discipleship and creating rich experiences in worship. However, to build a legacy worship ministry, it is vital that you and I are aware that like people are attracted to like things.

In other words, if your electric guitar player is tasteful, likes a certain band, has good gear, and handles volume well, I can almost **guarantee** you that one day one of his friends (or appreciative peers) will become a part of the church and want to participate.

We identify with certain characteristics of a worship ministry as well. If the administration of the worship ministry is well-executed, people who have an affinity for systems will throw in their lot to keep it going. Again, this is a general observation, and your situation may be different.

However, again, give it time to see who is drawn to the worship ministry culture you've created. Remember, be **patient** in your wait for musicians, techs, and artists.

Quality musicians are more likely to leave our churches if they see a large number of weaker musicians playing on the stage. They are more prone to stay if they see fewer, more skilled musicians, on the stage.

Build for the Long Haul, Not the Short Fix

People want to be inspired by a leader and to feel like they are on a winning team. **Build** a worship ministry that lasts by looking into the years ahead and making plans that reach into the future with vision and faith.

If we're constantly focused on finding a drummer for Saturday night or a visual tech for Sunday morning, we'll find ourselves on a grand adventure in missing the point.

Look beyond the daily duties and build for the future.

Build Accountability and Prayer into the Leadership System

Having strong accountability systems in place as you continue to grow in leadership is absolutely essential. The more visible your leadership role, the more accountabilities you need in your life.

This is a non-negotiable. In some church philosophies, the more elevated or influential the leadership position, the less **accountability** that leader needs. This is an unhelpful, and usually **harmful**, approach to leadership philosophy.

In actual fact, the more visible a leader, the more the enemy paints a target on their back.

Why? If the enemy can take out a highly respected leader, the enemy can confuse and disorient many people in the church all at once.

If you're meeting with the opposite sex, meet with the person in a public or group environment. Make sure your **heart** is kept clear with your spouse, and have at least two others of the same sex with whom you can share your struggles, while welcoming prayer and counsel.

Since you are in front of people, develop a **core prayer team** for support in times of stress. For me, these faithful prayer friends are often family or people who know me and love me outside of our immediate congregation. Tell them only enough so that they can pray for you effectively.

Once you've invited someone to be a part of your core prayer team and they say yes, then you no longer need to feel like you are bothering someone with your prayer requests. Go for it (being sensitive to honor others by being general in the way you offer prayer requests).

Display the Fruits of the Spirit

Galatians 5 has much to teach about spiritual leadership and the primary evidences that the Holy Spirit is indeed at work in us as a leader.

Eagerly seek to demonstrate (knowing the Spirit will be behind you bearing the fruit) love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

The fruits of the Spirit are not personality traits, but evidences that you are letting God work in you. Your team should see these **fruits** in your life on an increasing basis as the years go on.

Keep Yourself Creatively Inspired

Keep yourself creatively **inspired**. Inspiration is like the wind in the sails of a boat. If you keep your sails up, you'll catch the refreshing winds that God is sending your way. If not, even the gifts He sends will be lost to you.

Many leaders burn out because they don't care for their emotional needs as they serve in ministry. See good **concerts**. Take **date nights** with your spouse. Save up for that **new** instrument. Attend events with worship leaders who inspire you.

Keep your sail up.

Take Time to Retreat

If you let your soul get weak, everything starts to fall apart. Take **care** of your soul. I like to think in terms of two retreats that I (ideally) plan in every year to help me move forward in Christ.

First, have a yearly private retreat to renew your personal **mission statement**, make important decisions, and to get your bearings.

Secondly, have a yearly fun retreat to get away with your spouse or friends and blow off some steam. This can take the form of a vacation, but doesn't need to. Fun is vital to our long-haul **emotional** health.

Develop substance in your life by caring for your soul through retreats.

All of these ideas can help you toward building a legacy worship ministry that has the strength to be passed on to another. Not only will the new leader appreciate it, but the resonating impact of your life and ministry will be felt by others who work with you serving your church in worship for decades to come.

Session 4 Study Questions

First, if you are doing this with a group, take some time to write down your answers to the following questions before you gather. Highlight page numbers, key quotes and ideas that moved you. Make sure you write in the margins, circle words, or jot down anything that will help you interact with the material and remember core ideas.

1. What ideas moved you the most from this section?

Talk about the ideas related to worship that particularly moved you from the book or from the video.

How might the ideas that moved you help all of us to understand what worship is really about?

2. What ideas in this session surprised you about building a legacy worship ministry?

Were there any unexpected ideas that you found particularly helpful? Were there any you would add to this list?

3. Think about your current involvement; is there anything you could do this week to strengthen your worship ministry for the long haul?

What themes in this session could you begin to apply immediately? Are there any that you already see at work in the worship ministry of which you are a part? Identify them, and talk about them.

Conclusion: Pursuing Growth vs. Perfection

Videos in This Session:

- Conclusion: Pursuing Growth vs. Perfection (2:00)
- Tool: How to Use the Worship Leader Evaluation Tool (2:04)

A pilot I heard once said that an airplane is off course about 90% of the time. The reason an airplane will reach its destination is not because there was perfection in the trajectory. The airplane will reach its goal because it is built to navigate the winds, the currents of change, and to stay on course.

Love and faith, in Jesus primarily and in those who give themselves to serve with you in the worship ministry of your church, will enable you to navigate the rough patches in your journey as the leader of a worship ministry.

Surround Yourself with Respected Worship Ministry Leaders

Take the time to identify people, near or far, who seem to be caring for their four core relationships, their nine roles in worship ministry, and the daily duties of the worship pastoral leader. Note the legacy worship ministries that you see thriving, not just in impact, but also in keeping their worship ministry team strong and encouraged.

Ask questions of those you admire, be humble, ask pastoral leaders in your church how you're doing, and then take those answers to Jesus as you lead the worship ministry that God has entrusted to you.

A Final Word about Strengths and Weaknesses

If we spend all of our time just doing what we love and are good at, we'll lose in the long-run of worship ministry building. On the other side, if all we do is spend our time looking down on ourselves and tending to our weaknesses, trying to be someone we're not, we'll lose in the long-run as we lead out of a **false self**.

Here's a good remedy I heard once from a great man who influenced many young worship leaders in his day. Imagine yourself in a swimming pool, swimming freestyle. Nurture your **strengths** on the forestroke, with your primary time and energy. Then, always be working on your **weaknesses** on the backstroke.

Finally, guard your relationships, get dangerous enough at each of your nine roles to make this thing work, and care for the daily duties and attitudes that will build a lasting worship ministry.

Jesus loves our worship. Just lead people to worship Jesus; He will have your back.

Blessings as you continue the journey of *Essentials in Worship Ministry*.

TOOL: HOW TO USE THE WORSHIP LEADER EVALUATION TOOL

The *Worship Leader Evaluation Tool* is designed to serve you and those who oversee you as a worship leader, as you honestly evaluate your strengths, weaknesses, and growth areas in your leadership.

This tool is not meant to replace Meyers-Briggs tests or other scientific evaluation tools that enable you to see both bright spots and blind spots you may not otherwise have seen.

Rather it's a practical, on-the-ground tool to help you discuss areas that are to be celebrated or that need some attention.

You fill out the first two forms, and your pastor/overseer fills out the same two forms.

Then, you share them, give some time for reflection, and discuss them together.

Print the next pages, front and back, for your use.

THE WORSHIP LEADER'S ROLES – PERSONAL EVALUATION

Name: _____ **Title**: _____

Priestly Role:
How am I doing at building bridges for people to connect with God?

_____

_____

Teaching Role:
How am I doing at communicating what worship is all about outside of the musical context?

_____

_____

Storytelling Role:
How am I doing at retelling the story of the Kingdom of God in music, readings, etc. (gathered worship)?

_____

_____

Evangelism Role:
How am I doing at creating environments that lead people to a place of both challenge and commitment?

_____

_____

Pastoral Role:
How am I doing at relationally nurturing our teams and communities?

_____

_____

Prophetic Role:
How am I doing at challenging followers of Jesus to go to new edges in their faith?

_____

_____

Administrative Role:
How am I doing at organizing worship, planning events, and ordering details?

_____

_____

Intercessory Role:
How am I doing at actually praying for those I lead/lead with?

_____

_____

Mentoring Role:
How am I doing at equipping and training others to lead worship in our community?

_____

_____

THE WORSHIP LEADER'S ACTIONS – PERSONAL EVALUATION

Name: _____ **Title**: _____

Honest Communication:
How am I doing at this with my team(s) and its members (circle)? With my pastor(s) (square)?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Submission To Another's Leadership:
How am I doing at this with my team(s) and its members (circle)? With my pastor(s) (square)?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Musical Strength and Leadership:
How am I doing at this with my team(s) and its members (circle)? In my pastor's eyes (square)?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Pastorally Supporting Others:
How am I doing at this with my team(s) and its members (circle)? With my fellow leader(s) (square)?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Conflict Resolution:
How am I doing at this with my team(s) and its members (circle)? With my pastor(s) (square)?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Being A Team Player:
How am I doing at this with my team(s) and its members (circle)? With my pastor(s) (square)?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Supporting Another's Vision:
How am I doing at this with my team(s) and its members (circle)? With my pastor(s) (square)?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Easy To Get Along With (Likeability):
How am I doing at this with my team(s) and its members (circle)? In my pastor's eyes (square)?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Mentoring Others:
How am I doing at this with my team(s) and its members (circle)? In my pastor's eyes (square)?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Technical Leadership:
How am I doing at this with my sound/visual team(s) (circle)? In my pastor's eyes (square)?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Marriage And Family (if applicable):
How am I doing at caring for my spouse and children (circle)? In my pastor's eyes (square)?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Discipleship:
How am I doing at responding to God's work in areas of my life (circle)? In my pastor's eyes (square)?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

THE WORSHIP LEADER'S ROLES – PASTOR/OVERSEER EVALUATION

Name: _____ **Title**: _____

Priestly Role:
How am I doing at building bridges for people to connect with God?

_____

_____

Teaching Role:
How am I doing at communicating what worship is all about outside of the musical context?

_____

_____

Storytelling Role:
How am I doing at retelling the story of the Kingdom of God in music, readings, etc. (gathered worship)?

_____

_____

Evangelism Role:
How am I doing at creating environments that lead people to a place of both challenge and commitment?

_____

_____

Pastoral Role:
How am I doing at relationally nurturing our teams and communities?

_____

_____

Prophetic Role:
How am I doing at challenging followers of Jesus to go to new edges in their faith?

_____

_____

Administrative Role:
How am I doing at organizing worship, planning events, and ordering details?

_____

_____

Intercessory Role:
How am I doing at actually praying for those I lead/lead with?

_____

_____

Mentoring Role:
How am I doing at equipping and training others to lead worship in our community?

_____

_____

THE WORSHIP LEADER'S ACTIONS – PASTOR/OVERSEER EVALUATION

Name: _____ **Title**: _____

Honest Communication:
How am I doing at this with my team(s) and its members (circle)? With my pastor(s) (square)?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Submission To Another's Leadership:
How am I doing at this with my team(s) and its members (circle)? With my pastor(s) (square)?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Musical Strength and Leadership:
How am I doing at this with my team(s) and its members (circle)? In my pastor's eyes (square)?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Pastorally Supporting Others:
How am I doing at this with my team(s) and its members (circle)? With my fellow leader(s) (square)?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Conflict Resolution:
How am I doing at this with my team(s) and its members (circle)? With my pastor(s) (square)?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Being A Team Player:
How am I doing at this with my team(s) and its members (circle)? With my pastor(s) (square)?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Supporting Another's Vision:
How am I doing at this with my team(s) and its members (circle)? With my pastor(s) (square)?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Easy To Get Along With (Likeability):
How am I doing at this with my team(s) and its members (circle)? In my pastor's eyes (square)?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Mentoring Others:
How am I doing at this with my team(s) and its members (circle)? In my pastor's eyes (square)?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Technical Leadership:
How am I doing at this with my sound/visual team(s) (circle)? In my pastor's eyes (square)?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Marriage And Family (if applicable):
How am I doing at caring for my spouse and children (circle)? In my pastor's eyes (square)?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Discipleship:
How am I doing at responding to God's work in areas of my life (circle)? In my pastor's eyes (square)?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP SONGWRITING
AN INTRODUCTION

Let's put aside the need to write the next big worship song that will change the planet. Instead, we'll focus here on the core skills of worship songwriting, aimed at serving our local church, small group, or personal devotional life.

Videos in This Session:

- Introduction: Songs Are a Place We Go (4:16)

Songs Are a Place We Go

A number of years ago, someone very close to me had the horrible experience of being taken hostage by Somali terrorists invading their hotel room in Northern Kenya.

My friend was serving as an aide when they were kidnapped, and along with two others, he was held captive for months.

As he recounted his experience, he told me that he and the two other prisoners were laid on a thin mat on the hard desert ground, side by side, for most of the hours of the day.

Their best meal, over months, was a bowl of half-rotten rice. Aside from the occasional singing of a passing bird, the experience felt hellish.

Their lives were constantly threatened, family members were called to demand ransom, and —surrounded by weapons—the sense of their impending death was in the air.

At a gathering, I pulled my friend aside and asked, "What role did worship music play in keeping you centered in your relationship with God during that time?"

My friend began to recount songs and songwriters that had put a song in his heart for those troubled hours.

Though no heavens opened and no immediate angelic rescues came, the songs were like a "place" that he would go, singing them in his mind, to keep his sanity in the struggle.

Worship Songwriting is a Tool For Meeting With God

Almost everyone has a favorite song.

It may be a new song or it may be an old song. When the music is played, it almost transports you to another space—a **place** created by the sound, groove, melody, and lyrics of that song.

Worship songwriting is just one tool of the historic worshipping Church that has been used to fasten our faith to Jesus, renew the weary heart, and put a new song in the mouth of those whose job it is to praise God in every generation.

If you begin to think through your own journey related to worship songs, you'll begin to be able to identify songs that have opened the door to a revelation from God to you,

opened your mind to a fresh idea from the Gospel, or carried you through an intense season of challenge in your life.

This is the gift of music, and a well-crafted song does not just appear overnight.

Some of the best worship songs over the generations have taken an extended time to create (in some cases, years), and often our favorite songs today involved much time and more than one songwriter to finish.

If you're like me, writing songs sounds like fun until you're actually in the process of doing it! It takes years of hard work, practice, learning the craft of songwriting, lyric writing, and arranging, and honing one's skills in order to get good at it.

Even then, some of the most experienced songwriters of our time **labor** over a song as the initial idea takes time to shape into something useable, and then demands hard work to craft it to perfection. Many less experienced songwriters think this idea is silly – that a song should just come from God and we scribble it down.

But that's not the usual way a fully formed song comes – just ask any seriously published songwriter who has given their life to writing songs the church is using. God gives the idea as we worship, and then we participate in the hard work of bringing that song to fruition.

Prepare to Write a Song

The best way to go about learning to write songs is to do it! Begin to create an initial song idea that you would like to work on during this section of study.

If you're doing this section on your own, then find one to three people who will listen to your initial song with the *Worship Song Evaluation Form* provided for feedback (see the end of this section). Then, as you go through the rewriting phases, share your song's growth with them for ongoing feedback.

If you're doing this section with a group, that's all the better. During your initial meeting, you're going to share your initial song ideas, and then walk through the rewriting phases with encouragement from one another.

The tools at the end of this Section will enable you to be the best songwriting **companion** you can be. The *Songwriter's Toolkit* has three tools in it, and you should make sure you have enough copies of each item for you to have on hand at all times.

Welcome to Essentials in Worship Songwriting

This section has been designed to help you learn the basics of the craft of writing songs for worship. The content of this section has been gleaned from over 25 years of talking with songwriters, particularly respected worship songwriters, who have honed what it means to write songs for the worshipping Body of Christ in our generation.

While learning how to write **effective** songs is a lifelong process of honing natural gifting, gaining and applying skills, becoming **comfortable** with criticism, rewriting,

and trial and error, it still is a skill that can be learned to serve our personal, small group, or church's devotional life.

Get your pen ready and your instrument in hand. Dig in and make this a **season** of writing a song along with this section.

I look forward to the journey with you. Welcome to *Essentials in Worship Songwriting*.

Session 1: The Qualities of a Great Worship Song

Videos in This Session:

- Session 1: The Qualities of a Great Worship Song (4:00)

Take a moment and be silent. Think of one song that has deeply moved you, particularly in worship, which had some impact in shaping your life with God. Got it?

Now, without analyzing the words or music of the song, try to put into words how it makes you feel or maybe what it brings to mind when you hear it.

Songs have an incredible capacity, like art in general, to bypass the critical faculties and filters of mind, coming around the back door and reaching right into our hearts. Before we know it, a sound, a lyric, a melody, a texture, is moving us within and taking us somewhere. In the genre of worship songs, this is true as well.

Songs are powerful tools; God knows it, and so do we. Yet many people don't understand the long, arduous process it takes to write a great and effective corporate worship song.

5 Qualities of a Great Worship Song

Now, let's pick a worship song, maybe the same one as you did above, and get it in your mind. Begin to hum it or sing it out loud in order to get its shape, its lyric, its features, and its tone in your mind. Let **memories** of the first time you sang the song, and the connection with what you needed to say to God, come flooding in.

There are five qualities many of the most powerful worship songs of history have in common, which have given them **enduring** power. See which ones of the following qualities apply to the song that you have in your mind.

- **Memorable: The Song Stays with You**

  The best worship songs of history have an **elusive** quality about them that makes them stick in your mind. As a friend who used to write radio commercials would tell me, "A song that doesn't stick in the mind of a 14-year-old girl needs more work."

  A great worship song employs the use of what are called **hooks** that anchor the song in the psyche of the listener. There are melodic, rhythmic, and lyrical hooks, each of which forms a powerful connection with the listener.

  Here we ask questions like: Can I sing the song without hearing it on a radio or other device? Do the lyrics and melody quickly come to mind? Is there a rhythmic feel that I can hear in my head? Do people of diverse age groups find this song memorable?

Example: "Come, Now Is the Time to Worship"

- **Musical: The Song Is Beautiful**

  There is something about the overall experience one has when singing the song that strikes a chord with many who hear it. What makes a song beautiful to us is different person to person, but when songs catch on it typically means that many people are having a similar response.

  When the right combination is in play, a song with a strong **melody**, strong **lyrics**, a strong feel, and quality writing and **rewriting** behind it will impact many people as "beautiful." The song then takes on a life of its own.

  Here we ask questions like: Does this song **move** me? If so, to what degree? Does the song say one thing very well, and does it take me a very particular place in my feeling and thinking?

  Example: "Revelation Song"

- **Theological: The Song Is Theologically Rich**

  Perhaps nothing sets a worship song apart more from other genres of songs than the lyrics, and the focus of those lyrics. Many of our most beloved worship songs focus us on God and fix our gaze on Jesus as our Lord, King, and Savior.

  However, not all songs that point this way (i.e. are written to convey a theological truth) are actually well-written songs. In some cases, some songs are not helpful theological guides for a person's **discipleship** life.

- In many cases, however, the songwriter is reflective about their theology (theology is how we think about God), and their reading, discussing, and **intentionality** about their thinking related to God shows in their song.

  Here we ask questions like: Does this song say things that I believe to be **true** about who God is? Does it say things that are true about who I am in God's sight and who others are in God's sight? Does the song **focus** too much on a me-centered spirituality, rather than a Jesus-centered spirituality?

  Example: "How Great Is Our God"

- **Biblical: The Song Resonates with Biblical Truth**

  While this may seem to be the same idea as above, it's quite different. In this case, many great worship songs either directly use Scripture passages or resonate so closely with **Scripture** one feels as though they are singing Scripture.

  Most respected worship songwriters are lovers of the Word of God, and they find their primary source of inspiration in the pages of the Old and New Testaments. When a song is well-crafted and **resonates** with both theological and biblical truths, it is can be like spiritual dynamite in the Church.

  Here we ask questions like: Is this song true to the Scriptures? Does my understanding of the Bible resonate in this song? Could I find helpful ideas about following Jesus in this song if I read the lyrics instead of singing them?

  Example: "In Christ Alone"

- **Accessible: The Song Reaches a Group of People Deeply**

  One of the most **compelling** factors we see in songs that have stood the test of time is that they are accessible to a wide age range, not only in their generation, but even across generations. This is one of the most interesting characteristics of many hymns.

  While accessibility can be over-stated (there are many songs that are less-accessible to one generation of listeners but very **accessible** to another), it is a quality that most cross-denominational worship songs have in common. Accessibility can occur in the melody, groove, chords, and lyrics of a song.

  I want to say that I do not believe all songs must be accessible across a wide demographic. Different people groups need different kinds of songs. However, if your song is not widely accessible, know that, and use it accordingly.

  Here we ask questions like: Is this song in a vocal range that most people in the congregation can sing it in? Do people in their twenties and people in their fifties have some resonance with this song? Is this song stylistically accessible to most who hear it, or is it locked in a style that takes you to a narrow time and place (i.e. like a song you can tell is from the 1970s)? Is the song taking on life without me leading it?

  Example: "Come Thou Fount"

Become a Song Analyzer

For the extent of this section, begin to **analyze** every song you hear. Particularly, listen to the kinds of songs that are finding their way into wide use among a particular group of worshipping people.

While wide use doesn't necessarily mean the song is well written or is perfect, it does usually mean that there is something about the song that is giving it legs (i.e., the song is getting itself around, rather than someone always pushing it).

Using the Worship Song Evaluation Worksheet (see below) listen for these elements, and begin to get quick at identifying certain qualities in the songs you hear.

Get to Know the Songwriter's Toolkit

The *Songwriters Toolkit* (all sheets are located at the end of this section) is made up of a number of tools that will aid you in your journey of songwriting.

Print the pages located at the end of this section so that everyone has a few on hand at all times.

Before you do anything, watch this brief video:

- Tool: How to Use the Songwriter's Toolkit (1:45)

Included in your Songwriting Toolkit (at the end of this section) is:

1. How to Start a Songwriting Circle

This tells you how to go about gathering a few people that can help each other to write more effective songs for worship or for artist applications.

- Tool: How to Start a Songwriting Circle (3:05)

2. How to Evaluate Someone's Song

This sheet is what will enable you to give and receive feedback well from others in your local church setting. It teaches you to 1) encourage the writer first, 2) affirm the qualities of the song that you like, and 3) suggest areas that you think the songwriter should consider working on in the song.

- Tool: How to Evaluate Someone's Song (2:35)

3. Worship Song Evaluation Worksheet

This asks fundamental questions about the song you've written. Don't use this until after you've played with the song and written your first draft.

4. Song Vision Clustering Example

Using the timeless, writing class tool of clustering, you place your big idea in the middle of a page. Then, you add sub ideas around each one of those. This is a great way to develop your lyrics and song vision.

5. Song Vision Clustering Worksheet

This is your tool for honing your song vision. Don't be afraid to scrap what you've done, and start again. Also, don't let your clustering paper go too broad. Be specific—God as Father or God as Savior—which idea are you going to emphasize? These are two very different ideas, and the best songs give us a snapshot of just one or two of them.

6. A Sample Chord Chart

A sample chord chart is included so you can see how to present your song to a friend or to a Songwriting Circle. It is so important that you present a new chord and lyric chart every time you make a change to the song.

Your helper or group needs to see what changes have occurred, and to always be looking at the most recent rewrite of the song.

You can learn to write an effective, strong worship song. It's strength will depend on how much time you're willing to put into it, your application of the skills noted in this section, and what your ultimate calling is as a songwriter for corporate worship (there are many different kinds of songwriters).

Take the leap and let's begin to write.

Session 1 Study Questions

First, if you are doing this with a group, take some time to write down your answers to the following questions before you gather. Highlight page numbers, key quotes and ideas that moved you. Make sure you write in the margins, circle words, or jot down anything that will help you interact with the material and remember core ideas.

1. What ideas moved you the most from this section?

Talk about the ideas related to worship that particularly moved you from the book or from the video.

How might the ideas that moved you help all of us to understand what worship is really about?

2. Choose a popular worship song to analyze. Using the Worship Song Evaluation Worksheet, take some notes about the song you've chosen (or discuss it in the group).

Ask questions like, "What about this song makes it work?" and "What is the song vision of this song?" Also examine where the hooks are—lyrical hooks, melodic hooks, and rhythmic hooks.

3. Share your notes from the previous question with another worship leader or in the group in which you are doing this section.

What can we learn about our own songwriting for corporate worship from this analysis? What did you discover about your normal way of songwriting that you'd like to tweak given what you learned during this song analysis?

Session 2: Getting Started with Your Song Vision

Videos in This Session:

- Session 2: Getting Started with Your Song Vision (5:48)

Getting Your Song Idea

We're going to start into our songwriting work with one very important command:

"Stop trying to write songs."

Now that I've put you in shock wondering, "Why am I doing this training with this guy?" Let me explain. Paul Baloche, writer of many popular worship songs including "Open the Eyes of My Heart" and "The Same God," confirms something that I've seen to be very true over the years.

Paul suggests that the songwriting process, in the worship genre, may not typically begin with sitting down, deciding to write a song, and writing. This is a very important practice, mind you, and professional songwriters do it all the time. If Easter or Christmas is coming up, get the ideas in your heart and then begin to **write** a song. That is an excellent way to write.

However, because many songwriters start with their "**internal editor**" kicking in, analyzing every idea that comes out, they cut ideas off before they really see the light of day. There is another way, especially when it comes to worship music.

Stop trying to write a song, and turn your prayers and worship into a melody with a few chords moving in the background.

Turn Your Prayers into Music

Sit down with your instrument. Open up your Bible. Have your journal handy. Now, begin to play a few chords that feel appropriate to the moment you are having with God.

Instead of saying your prayers, begin to sing them over top of the chord progression you are playing (if you don't play an instrument, I encourage you to either learn some basic chord progressions on a guitar or a keyboard pad or record someone playing a chord progression and use that in your **devotional** time to sing your prayers over).

As you sing, don't pay any attention to your voice, to the words you choose, to the melody, to your rhythm. Just play the chords, and sing your prayers. Do that for at least 10–20 minutes.

You're going to find that it takes some time for you to **settle** in, get songwriting out of your head, and worship flowing from your heart. Let it be sloppy. Don't try to tame it too quickly.

Some people like to start their time worshipping with a song they already know and love. This gives you a chord to being with, a groove, and a mood to set the direction of what will happen as you sing your own **prayers**.

Begin to change the chords after using a familiar song. Then, sing your prayers from your heart. Let the words spill out without caring for the **meter** or **rhyme**. Just be before God and sing.

Let the Scriptures Inform Your Sung Prayers

You may have your Bible open to a meaningful passage during this process, or you may find a passage coming to mind as you sing your prayers. A phrase may start to bear repeating with a melody and a few words that seem to matter when you sing them.

This may bring a Scripture to mind. If not, there are riches everywhere in the word of God. Turn to a passage and begin to sing it just as you did your prayers, interweaving simple phrases and words from the passage into your prayers to God.

Don't attempt to be exact to the wording of the translation you are using. This can get stiff and completely change the dynamic. Use the passage as a **springboard**, and let the heart of the Scripture penetrate your own as you worship with these random words and phrases.

A theme, a melody, a piece of a song (small as it may be) may begin to **emerge**. If not, try again tomorrow. The process, in this case, is truly as sweet as arriving at the destination!

Document Your Idea

As an idea emerges, you can begin to **document** it. Many people use their smart phone to record their ideas, so they can come back to them at some point. Others write words and chords in their journal, and that is enough to trigger their memory.

Still others get a groove going (a rhythm to which they can play), and they document a recording of their idea along with a groove in the background.

Whatever you do, *document it*. There are thousands of wonderful, powerful songs that no one will ever hear because a growing songwriter said, "If God wants me to, I'll remember it."

After 25 years of songwriting and talking to other songwriters, I can confidently tell you, "No, you probably won't!"

Document ideas, but if stopping to document your idea is getting in the way of a beautiful time of worship, I say, "Choose to stay in the mode of worship." You can't lose that way.

Other Ways Ideas Come

A common time for me to get an idea for a song is in a car, while I'm driving. A chorus melody will come to mind with words attached to it. Usually, the words aren't formulated, but the general melody and feel of the chord progression is strong.

What do I do?

I pull over to the side of the road. I take out my smart phone and click the **voice memos** application. Then, I sing my idea. I capture it until I'm satisfied. I then save the idea and name it something like "New Song: He Is Risen Easter Idea."

That way, when it gets put into my system, I can always search "new song" and find all my ideas.

Sometimes, I call my home **answering machine**. My wife particularly loves this way of me documenting a song. "Honey," I'll hear when I get home, "there's a strange sound of mumbled words and meandering humming waiting for you on the answering machine." We always laugh, and then I take my smart phone over to the answering machine.

With my voice memo app, I get a scratchy recording of what I left on the answering machine. Use your phone. Use your answering machine. **Write** down your lyric ideas. Keep a **journal**. Do whatever it takes to document your roughest ideas.

Blue Sky Mining

It is so important, and I can't emphasize this enough, that you not cut off the creative process by applying the Worship Song Evaluation Worksheet to your song too early on in the process.

Many years ago I heard this term applied in a songwriting seminar and it has been one of the most useful ideas I've heard. *Blue Sky Mining* means you take the time to experiment, try different ideas, and allow the song to begin to emerge from an extended creative process.

Once you feel as though you have done this, and a song idea is beginning to bloom, you are ready to begin honing your song vision.

The Song Vision: Starting with the End in Mind

The song vision is the one central theme to which your song will continually return. It is home-base for your song, and every lyric, every musical motif, should lead back to your **song vision**.

A song vision has your song's end in mind. The song vision is where the song begins and ends—the specific idea the song is attempting to communicate.

A common mistake that many young (and experienced) songwriters make is attempting to write "the God song." In other words, drawing on every idea about God they can think of, they write a song that covers many attributes of God, names of God, ideas about salvation, trust, etc.

Sometimes this songwriting sloppiness comes from the fact that we are somewhat of a spiritually ADD (attention deficit disorder) generation. We think a lot about many ideas, but not very deeply about any one idea (hence, *Essentials in Worship Theology*).

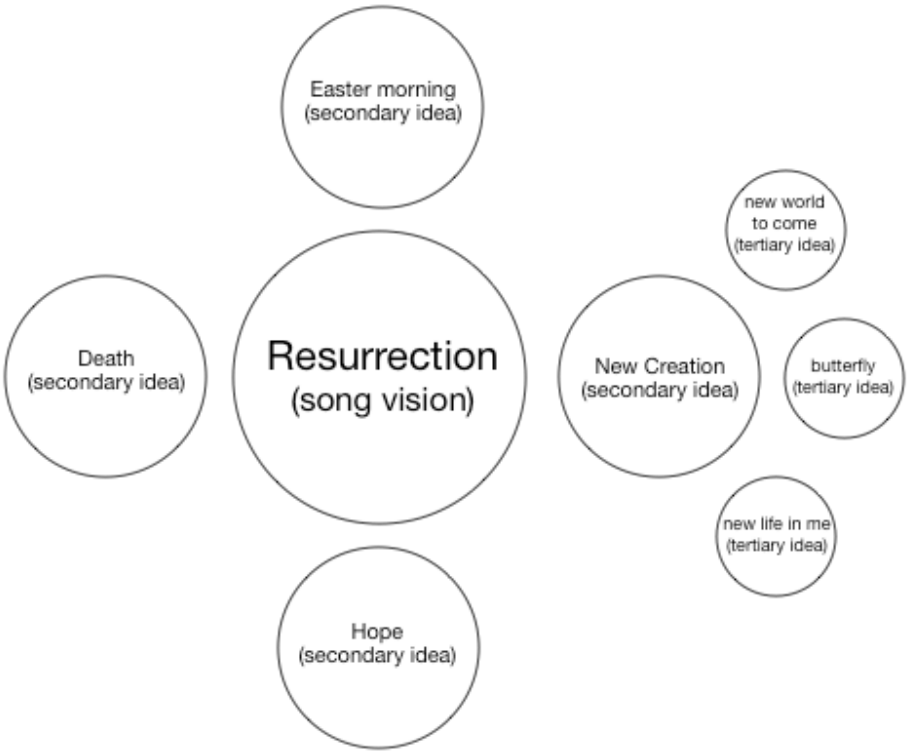
If we try to capture too many ideas in our song, it weakens the song. If we return to our song vision, we can eliminate ideas that don't match the song vision.

Use the Clustering Tool

The Clustering Tool is an excellent way, once you've arrived at a song idea, to get started on honing your song vision. Put the main theme in the middle circle on the paper.

Song Vision Clustering Example

Look at the following clustering diagram, and I'll explain it below.



"Clustering" is a technique that will help you think through your song vision and begin to get some possible lyric ideas.

In the diagram above, I began by writing the word *resurrection* in the middle of the page. This is an Easter song, and I wanted to write a song around this topic. Drawing a circle near it, I wrote down *hope* as a secondary idea. Then *death*, *Easter morning*, and *new creation* came to mind.

When I looked at the new creation idea, I began to think of tertiary ideas around that topic, such as *new world to come*, *butterfly*, and *new life in me*.

Jot down all of these things that come to mind. You never know what you'll use. Brainstorm with the Song Vision Clustering Worksheet located at the end of this section in front of you, and don't let your internal editor begin to kick in and stop you.

Push your way through it, and get down as many ideas as you can around each larger idea. Write down Scripture verse snippets or references or even ideas you gained from a book you read.

With many of these conceptual, biblical, and lyrical ideas scratched down on my sheet, I'm ready to begin writing my song. I may refer to this scratch sheet many times as I write the song, drawing on phrases, **metaphors**, and more. You can also use the Song Vision Clustering Sheet to break up writer's block if you get stuck on one part of the song.

Sharing Your Song Idea

Now that you've come up with an amazing song idea, you begin to share it with everyone you know, right? Wrong. There are few good reasons to keep the circle of those who will give you feedback on the idea small and on the same writing road that you are on.

- Sharing an idea too early invites unhelpful feedback. We change things before the idea has simmered in us simply based on another's input.

- Sharing an idea with someone not versed in the songwriting process may welcome unhelpful criticism that will shut us down as the song emerges.

- Sharing an idea too freely invites those who don't know songwriting to start informally co-writing with you, as they give you lyrical and musical ideas for which you didn't ask.

- Sharing an idea with a few trusted, fellow songwriters gives them opportunity to give you feedback based on the principles in the How to Evaluate Someone's Song Sheet (located at the end of this section).

- Sharing an idea with a few trusted, fellow songwriters gives you an opportunity to get great feedback on your song, along with encouragement to keep hammering away at it.

Yes, you want to **share** it with your friends, spouse, pastor and anyone who may listen and approve. The problem comes in if your short idea doesn't translate in the way you present it or in the way the final song will translate.

People rarely lose their first impressions once they hear your rough idea. Hold your song idea back for a time, with only specific people giving you input.

Now, Begin to Write

You've spent time **lingering** in the presence of God. You've documented many different ideas. You've chosen one idea on which to focus. You've learned how to use the Songwriting Toolkit.

If you are songwriting in a Songwriter's Circle, then review all the pages in the Songwriter's Toolkit and watch the videos noted in order to get in the right frame of mind for group success.

Now, you're ready to start writing your song. Ready, steady, *go*!

Session 2 Study Questions

First, if you are doing this with a group, take some time to write down your answers to the following questions before you gather. Highlight page numbers, key quotes and ideas that moved you. Make sure you write in the margins, circle words, or jot down anything that will help you interact with the material and remember core ideas.

1. What ideas moved you the most from this section?

Talk about the ideas related to worship that particularly moved you from the book or from the video.

How might the ideas that moved you help all of us to understand what worship is really about?

2. Play through your song idea (privately or in your group). What elements on the Worship Song Evaluation Worksheet are already there? What elements are not?

Begin to address things like grammar, the biblical and theological strength of the idea, etc. Note moments where you change person, i.e., switch from "you" to "me" or "we." Make your idea consistent in voice the whole way through, unless you are coming up with a Bridge. That will be covered in the next session.

3. Reflect on what you've learned about songwriting for corporate worship in sessions 1 and 2. Is there any area that feels like a particular weakness for you?

Talk about the area of your songwriting that needs some strength. If you're doing this in a group, get some feedback from others on how you can strengthen that area.

Make sure you are kind, but honest with each other. A songwriter does not grow with only smiles and "attaboys" for everything they write. The best songwriters in the world know how to invite criticism, process it, and make better decisions because of the objective response to their work.

Session 3: The Rewriting Phase & Song Forms

Videos in This Session:

- Session 3: The Rewriting Phase & Song Forms (4:22)

The best metaphor I've ever heard for songwriting is that of a hoist in a mechanic's garage. For the time you are writing your song, it is "up on the hoist." In other words, there's no use pulling a car down from the hoist and using it until its finished being put together. It just won't work, or it won't work as well as it could. There is no rush unless you've set one.

Songs Can Take a Long Time to Write

Watch an interview with any successful songwriter, read a book about songwriting, or watch a DVD series (Brian Doerksen's *Worship Songwriting* is by far the best DVD series I've seen on the topic), and you'll hear the same thing.

A song can take a day to write, or years. There is no common time frame for how long it should take to write, rewrite, and craft a song to completion. When you feel as though it is finished, and it is the best it can possibly be, then the song is **finished**.

Some of our favorite songs, worship and otherwise, have taken three months, six months, a year, two years, even five **years** to write. Like a fine wine, the song needs to **simmer** in our mind and heart, and small **adjustments** here and there over time can yield a better song.

We are all grateful that Michelangelo didn't **rush** creating the Dome of St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome. Great art takes time. Your song may take longer to write than the length of time you are giving it right now. Then again, it may not.

There is no hard and fast rule.

The Rewriting Phase

The rewriting phase of the song is the real hard work of songwriting. In this phase, we must continually wrestle with melodic, chordal, and lyrical ideas, and sometimes our song will go somewhere we never thought it would.

If we like where it has gone, we stay with the new idea. If we don't, sometimes we may have to make the hard choice to say, "All those hours I put into this just brought me back to my original idea."

In those moments, realize that no time was wasted.

Trying fresh options is a part of the **craft** of songwriting.

Why Rewriting Is so Hard for Us

When we start talking about the rewriting phase, here is where many worship songwriters stop writing. They believe that "the song came **from God**," hook-line-and-sinker, and neither they nor anyone else should touch such a holy gift. As I heard one pastor lovingly say to his stubborn worship leader-songwriter, "If that song came from God, then He's a bad songwriter."

God gives us creative gifts, the seeds of something special, and then we must co-labor with Him and with others, applying good **principles** of songwriting in order to see that work of art come to completion. Let's go back to Michelangelo. His paintings on the Sistine Chapel, I am convinced, started with a whisper from God. But Michelangelo slaved for years to bring human history one of its most breathtaking treasures (I should note here that Michelangelo didn't even like fresco painting; his first love was sculpting).

In other words, settle in for your song to be on the hoist. Keep your identity out of the song as you expose it. Like a baby in your arms, no one likes to hear someone say their baby is ugly. Put it at arm's length, put some elbow grease into **honing** each word, phrase, and section of the song, and see what God does.

Applying Song Forms to Our Song

Virtually all songs (in the Western world) fall into a few rough categories of what are called *song forms*. Song forms help us with *how* we're going to say *what* we want to **say** in the song.

There are many different song forms that you can use to shape your song. In fact, some songs seem to be locked up until we find just the right song form that lets the song out to play. Song forms don't come in when you start writing your song, but rather they help you **shape** and edit your song to completion.

In song form language, we sometimes use letters to represent the different parts of a song. Again, Brian Doerksen says,"Song form gives our creative ideas structure, so that others can take them and use them as their own." In other words, people can access the song because there is a form to it. It's like a **skeletal structure**; it sits behind the music and lyrics and solidifies it. Structure helps us understand what we're hearing.

Here are just a few of the common worship song forms we'll look at:

1. Verse/Chorus

This song form, the most popular in Christian worship music today by far, focuses the music flow on the second part of the song: the chorus. We live in a verse/chorus season of history. There is a proliferation of songs today that use this song form.

In a verse/chorus song, you have a verse that heads into a pre-chorus (the part of the song that follows a verse and leads up to the chorus), then launches us into a big, **unforgettable** rising chorus.

The chorus is the musical climax of the song. A pre-chorus is like the John the Baptist of songwriting, saying, "Here it comes!" about the chorus. The chorus is truly what the songwriter wants to say. Think about the song "How Great Is Our God." This is a classic verse/chorus song that moves you through a verse and into a big chorus.

2. AAA

This song form, like all A-based song forms, focuses on the first part of the song as the focus of the musical flow. It is a one-part song form. Many of the hymns of history are written in this song form.

It is made up of one musical section (A) that rises and falls, and then starts again. Take a moment and think of a hymn that you think is in an AAA form. "Holy, Holy, Holy" or "Silent Night" are examples of hymns written in the AAA form.

3. AABA

This song form is similar to the AAA song form, but adds in one more musical section. We call this a Bridge. The song "Eternity" by Brian Doerksen follows this song form. The A section of the song follows one pattern, but after singing it twice through, a Bridge comes in that is a unique melody and may add a unique perspective to the content of the song.

A Refrain is a short melodic and lyrical section that gets repeated at the end of a song, and like a chant, enables us to repeat a specific idea.

The real question you're asking when you begin to apply a song form to your fledgling song idea is, "Where do I want the weight of this song to be?" You're listening for where the song is wanting to go.

This is a largely intuitive process, and relates to the hooks and other elements in your song.

As you apply song forms to your song, remember that you're still experimenting, and if everything is failing, go back to the drawing board and return to your original song vision (and maybe song form) for perspective.

Go back to where the song **began**.

More on Song Forms and Structure

The song form, or song structure, can help you understand what part of the song needs your attention. Sometimes you have written what you think is a chorus, but really, when others hear it, it feels more like a pre-chorus, an onramp to something bigger.

You may need to switch parts of your song around to make it stronger. Even if it feels like a chorus when you, the songwriter, sing it, it may not feel like a chorus to others.

1. Verse vs. Pre-chorus

The verse of a song is a bit of a settling in period. It covers details; it leads you in. It doesn't rise to something, but simply says something important in a more sedate, passionate way.

The pre-chorus will have a more definite sense of anticipation in it; you feel a pre-chorus telling you that something bigger is coming right after it.

2. Pre-chorus vs. Chorus

To discern the difference between a pre-chorus and a chorus, think of it this way: The pre-chorus is a bit shy, but gets very excited about introducing you to something bigger coming next. This is the John the Baptist of song structure. It says, "Here it comes! Here it comes!"

The chorus, however, is neither shy nor pointing to anything beyond it. A chorus demands your attention and makes you want to sing it over and over again.

3. Bridge vs. Chorus

If you're using a B section in an AABA, the B section will bear little resemblance to the big chorus. Your B section doesn't point to itself; it points back to the A section.

In worship music, you won't often hear Bridges in highly beloved, mass-used worship songs. There are many reasons for this, but the main is most probably that we have a love affair with the verse/chorus experience in the contemporary Church.

That doesn't mean you shouldn't write a Bridge; it just means that it's not as popular of a song form in the current time.

The Hook

The hook of a song is the part of a song that you take away with you. It's the key to a memorable song. They can be subtle or blatant, and they can come in many forms, but they hook into you and cause you to sing the song around the house, in the car, in the shower, and in the store when you thought no one was listening.

There are three different kinds of hooks:

- *The Melodic Hook* is a musical phrase that grabs you and stays with you
- *The Rhythmic Hook* is a rhythm in the song that is addictive
- *The Lyrical Hook* is a phrase that won't let you go.

Melodic Motif

Writing a melody is a very instinctive task. A solid melody can stand on it's own, even without lyrics, and still move you emotionally with its beauty and flow. The melody is the set of wings with which your lyrics will fly.

A *Melodic Motif* is the repetition and development of a certain melody throughout an entire song. There may be repetition of that melody or slight **variations** on its style that connect with the listener and keep the song feeling as though it's one song (as opposed to two songs).

Melodic Growth means that we are, like a story, going somewhere with our melody. We are building something that has a defined starting place and a defined resolve.

Melodic Resolve is the satisfying **landing** place of a melody, where the melody comes to rest and leaves us at a place of fulfillment.

Melodic Range is the distance between the lowest and highest notes in a melody. In worship songwriting, caring for the **range** of the melody means that we are making sure the notes people are singing are not too high or low for a congregation to sing.

Generally, a guideline would be to keep the high notes around a D (or E maximum) and the low notes a little more than an octave beneath that.

Chords

Imagine a picture is hanging on a wall. What happens when you change the color of the paint on the wall behind the picture?

What if you cover the wall with unique **wallpaper**? Chords can completely change the style and feel of your song.

Familiar chords can give a connection with the listener. However, unique chords can bring a sense of joy and release in the song.

Chord patterns, and the speed at which you change chords, can radically change the feel of a song.

Rhythm Tools

Some songwriters, like myself, prefer to write with some kind of shaker or rhythm track behind them. This gives a strong sense of groove to a songwriter who may not naturally hear the band playing in their head as they write.

Another tip here is listening to a song that has a groove you like, then turning the song off. With that groove inside of you, begin to write off the back of the song to which you just listened.

Arrangement

Many less experienced songwriters get lost in band arrangements, which is the sound of the whole band playing a version of the song, and think they are songwriting.

Most great corporate worship songs can work with a lone guitar and voice or with a huge band. Do the chords and the lyrics work with the melody, and is the song structure strong? Does this song move people? These are the questions a songwriter asks. A songwriter doesn't say, "Boy, my distorted guitar sounds awesome playing this song!" until after a solid song has been written.

Arrangement and song crafting are two different things.

Simplicity

Finally, note that one of the hardest things to do is to write a simple song that is beautiful. Simplicity in corporate worship songwriting matters if we care about reaching the widest possible demographic deeply. If that doesn't matter to you, then experiment.

However, you may have a very different audience to which you are writing, like a youth group or a young church, which can handle greater complexity in lyrics, rhythms, sounds, or form.

Write to that audience, but be realistic in your expectations as to how far your song will reach.

The Checkmark Process

The importance of a chord chart (see sample chart located at the end of this section) cannot be overestimated. Each time you play your song for someone, they should be writing on that sheet to give to you later.

When you're feeling like your song is about finished, play through the song with the sheet in front of you. Place checkmarks down the right hand side of the page as you play through the song, noting that all items on that line are perfect as you would like them to be. **Check off** the lines with just chords written as well.

When the whole sheet has a checkmark beside each line, your song is finished.

Session 3 Study Questions

First, if you are doing this with a group, take some time to write down your answers to the following questions before you gather. Highlight page numbers, key quotes and ideas that moved you. Make sure you write in the margins, circle words, or jot down anything that will help you interact with the material and remember core ideas.

1. What ideas moved you the most from this section?

Talk about the ideas related to worship that particularly moved you from the book or from the video.

How might the ideas that moved you help all of us to understand what worship songwriting is really about?

2. Now that your first draft of your song has started to receive some feedback from someone near you or a group, what areas of rewriting in your song will you give attention to?

Think about your song vision, lyrics, melody, hooks, and more. Review your Worship Song Evaluation Worksheet. What will get your focus?

Session 4: Finishing, Using & Testing Your Song

Videos in This Session:

- Session 4: Finishing, Using & Testing Your Song (3:58)

Your song may have gone as far as you can take it. But you're frustrated because it doesn't feel finished. Don't get frustrated—get another songwriter. Co-writing can be one of the most rewarding opportunities you have as a writer of worship songs.

Once you decide to co-write, it's hard to turn back. The song goes up on the hoist again, and this time you are welcoming the co-writer to give their input, direction, and validation to the song vision.

Co-Writing

The strength of co-writing is that you have essentially created a third songwriter: the combination of the two of you. In some **co-writing** relationships there is a natural affinity; one works well in one element and the other works well in another.

In my strongest co-writing relationships, I usually end up in the lyricist role, and my co-writer ends up in the melody and music role.

There are song-starters, song-finishers, and song-editors. Whatever form your way of co-writing takes, allow the song to breathe in the hands of both writers.

As both of you are throwing out ideas, try to relax and let some fresh ideas take the song somewhere new. You can always look at each other and say, "Well that didn't work."

Know your strengths and weaknesses, and play to the **strengths** of your co-writer. Work hard to lay down your preconceived notions of the song and let your co-writer contribute as you collaborate on a possible next direction for the song.

Often the person who has been invited to co-write will approach the song more objectively than the original writer, and this is both a potential strength (they will hear it more as others will) and weakness (they won't carry the song vision as strongly in their heart).

Work together, honor one another, and find ways to work on the song electronically.

I have had four-hour co-writing sessions where my **collaborator** and I felt like we got nowhere. Then, the next time we got together (reluctantly, as we were afraid the next four-hour session would be a bust as well), something had percolated.

We found that a fresh approach had emerged, mainly because we were learning how the other worked and thought. Ideas **triggered** ideas, and within a few hours we had fixed our rough spot.

Who Says When the Song Is Finished?

At the end of the day, if you are the only writer of the song, you get to determine if the song is finished or not. Do this with input from others, but then make a courageous call on it. If needed, you can always **tweak** it later. But don't use the song unless you feel quite sure there are no more tweaks necessary.

In other words, let tweaks be the exception and not the rule. If you use the song in a small group setting, or in a congregation, and then tweak the song, here's what often happens.

"I liked the song the other way; why did you change it? Don't change it." "I really like that new version, but it's different than the other one. What happened?" "I like the new version. Don't change back to the old one. This one was perfect. Of course, last time I was only half listening."

Do you see what happens? People get married to the way a song is quickly. If you change it on them, they'll give responses that may confuse your writing process. Again, focus on feeling great about releasing the song, then play it with **confidence**. Make small tweaks only if necessary, or overhaul the song if the response is weak.

If the song is co-written, both people must be in complete agreement that the song is finished before it gets played. One day I walked in late to church, only to hear my co-writer using a song we hadn't finished writing.

When the part came up that I didn't like, it went over like a lead balloon. We talked about it later, and it was clear that the song shouldn't have been used until we both felt it was ready.

Your Finished Song

All the checkmarks are there, down the right hand side of your chord chart. You've reviewed the Worship Song Evaluation Worksheet and your song feels strong in every respect.

You've played the song for a variety of trusted people who have different responses to the song. Respected voices say "Go for it." If it's a co-write, your co-writer is ready for you to let it fly.

Now what?

The answer to that question is, "What is the best context for this song to be played in?" Is it your bedroom? A small group? Your congregation? A conference? A recording? Not all songs are for all contexts, and pushing too big too fast doesn't set you or the song up for success.

Take your time, and try out the song in smaller, **less risky** settings. Then, as it seems to work well there, consider the possibility that there may be a next step.

Again, be teachable, and welcome trusted **counsel**.

What If People React Negatively?

Again, context matters. You can't expect to play your alternative rock song for a congregation of members who are mostly over 60 and expect them love it. Be reasonable about your expectations.

Songs are like babies—you don't want anyone to say yours is ugly. Songwriters must have a healthy distance between themselves and the song. Some people will love it. Others will hate it. Most will be in between. Don't set yourself up for failure, but rather for success.

Choose a good context that fits the song, rehearse it well by yourself and/or with a band, and give it your very best shot. If you play a great song sloppily, people will have a negative response to the song. Get all the factors right as your song sees the light of day.

The Goal of Our Worship Songwriting

Our goal is our community being blessed, not us becoming church-famous. We want to see Jesus honored and encountered in our song by His people. This is the goal of songwriting. The blessing of it is that we get to enjoy the process of writing.

First, people must sing and, therefore, they will always need songs with which they can respond to God's generous love.

> "But I have trusted in Your faithful love; my heart will rejoice in Your deliverance. I will sing to the Lord because He has treated me generously" (Psalm 13:5-6).

Secondly, the Body of Christ will always need a new song to sing in their generation and in their circumstance. It is God Himself who puts a new song into the mouths of His people.

> "He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the Lord" (Psalm 40:3).
>
> "Sing a new song to the Lord; sing to the Lord, all the earth" (Psalm 96:1).

Use your song in a setting where it can be **tested**, and listen for feedback without timidly trying to get everyone's approval on your work. Not everyone will like the song; I can almost guarantee it.

But if everyone loves the song, consider doing any **fine-tuning** that you think needs to be done with great care.

Don't get me wrong. Sometimes, after you use a song, you may still need to tweak it. The best practice, though, is to avoid this. Why? Because some will fall in love with your first version and will give you negative **feedback** on any change you make.

This is why you should give the song plenty of time on the hoist, and have others use the Worship Song Evaluation Worksheet to give you feedback through the long writing process.

What Do I Do with A Song That Works?

As people you trust are honest with you (you must ask more than your mother or grandmother), and the song feels like it has a place, use it regularly in that setting (small group, church, etc.).

If it has some heat on it, consider **submitting** it to those in charge of the larger gathering. If that's you, just give it a whirl. If the song still has legs and others are requesting it, then consider recording it and getting it out through the channels available to you.

An old songwriting adage states: "Write many songs, use fewer songs, and record still fewer songs." Like a photographer, we take many pictures and select few for use on an ongoing basis.

If you think your song is to have reach beyond your local church, do a great HD recording of you or someone leading in, and put the video on your social media channels. See what happens.

Let your song be what it is, and let God make a way for it. We don't do well when we push too hard for a platform; **let God make a way** for the song.

Session 4 Study Questions

First, if you are doing this with a group, take some time to write down your answers to the following questions before you gather. Highlight page numbers, key quotes and ideas that moved you. Make sure you write in the margins, circle words, or jot down anything that will help you interact with the material and remember core ideas.

1. What ideas moved you the most from this section?

Talk about the ideas related to worship that particularly moved you from the book or from the video.

How might the ideas that moved you help all of us to understand what worship is really about?

2. Have you ever tried to co-write? If so, what was your experience like?

Consider trying to co-write with someone right from the beginning of a song. If you've done this, talk about what worked in the collaboration.

3. If your song is not yet finished, what is your next step?

What steps can you take that will help the song take its next step. Let it simmer? Work on the chorus? Get a co-writer?

Conclusion: Writing to Get Better at the Craft

Videos in This Session:

- Conclusion: Writing to Get Better at the Craft (2:03)
- Tool: How to Use the Songwriter's Toolkit (1:45)
- Tool: How to Evaluate Someone's Song (2:35)
- Tool: How to Start a Songwriting Circle (3:05)

Songs are a place we go, and writing songs for corporate worship is a great privilege. You've come a long way with your song, and now it's time to decide where you'll go next related to songwriting and songwriting for corporate worship.

If you have a Songwriter's Circle, I encourage you to stay with it and keep up the mutual support. You've developed a safe place for development, and those are hard to come by.

What Did You Discover?

You may have discovered over the course of this section that you sense you are vocationally called to write songs for corporate worship. If that is you, you have work to do. Write 100 more songs, watch songwriting videos, read songwriting books, and learn from the masters of your craft in any genre.

You may have discovered that you are called to write songs, but they are more artistic types of songs that are not highly accessible in lyrics, melody, or music in the corporate setting. That is wonderful! Follow that **passion** and learn to write great songs in your genre. Every once in a while, write for a corporate worship setting. It will keep you healthy.

You may have discovered you have a knack for children's songwriting, or hymn writing, or even pop music writing.

Finally, you may have discovered that while this was a good exercise, you don't prefer to continue songwriting. That is just fine. I would encourage you to use the skills you've learned for your own devotional writing and private life with God.

Follow your area of strength and gifting, and let God sort out the rest.

Songwriting: A Skill to Be Learned and Honed

Writing songs is a skill that can be learned. It's also a calling, unique to some people who seem to be designed to write worship songs.

Wherever you see yourself on that spectrum, be encouraged. Writing songs can be an incredible **encouragement** to you, to those near you, and to your community.

Study songwriting videos from respected writers, and read books on songwriting from those skilled in the craft in other genres. Know that you have something unique to bring to the table.

If you get stuck in a songwriting rut, try writing from **another instrument**! When I started writing from the hammered dulcimer rather than the guitar, my songwriting came alive again.

Keep learning and keep going as you hone the skills of the songwriter.

Blessings as you continue the journey of *Essentials in Worship Songwriting*.

THE SONGWRITER'S TOOLKIT

The Songwriters Toolkit is made up of a number of tools that will aid you in your journey of songwriting. Copy the following pages so that everyone has a few on hand at all times throughout the section.

- Watch the Tool: How to Use the Songwriter's Toolkit (1:45)

Included in the following pages are the tools:

1. How to Start a Songwriting Circle

This tells you how to go about gathering a few people, and helping one another to write more effective songs for worship or for artist applications.

- Tool: How to Start a Songwriting Circle (3:05)

2. How to Evaluate Someone's Song

This sheet is what will enable you to give and receive feedback well from others in your local church setting. It teaches you to 1) encourage the writer first, 2) affirm the qualities of the song that you like, and 3) suggest areas that you think the songwriter should consider working on in the song.

- Watch the Tool: How to Evaluate Someone's Song (2:35)

3. Worship Song Evaluation Worksheet

This asks fundamental questions about the song you've written. Don't use this until after you've played with the song and written your first draft.

4. Song Vision Clustering Worksheet

This is your tool for honing your song vision. Don't be afraid to scrap what you've done, and start again. Also, don't let your clustering paper go too broad. Be specific—God as Father, or God as Savior—which idea are you going to emphasize? These are two very different ideas, and the best songs give us a snapshot of just one or two of them.

5. A Sample Chord Chart

TOOL: HOW TO START A SONGWRITING CIRCLE

Writing and evaluating songs together with others desiring to grow is one of the most inspiring experiences you may ever have. The mutual vulnerability that occurs when experienced and inexperienced writers come together, gives a great opportunity for feedback, encouragement, re-thinking of the song, and in many cases, co-writing.

A Relaxed, Quiet Atmosphere Is Important

Find a relaxed, restful location, with good acoustics, good instruments, and a creative, relational atmosphere. Sitting in a circle in the middle of a cold, large sanctuary is NOT ideal. The sound disappears, and people feel more formal in their approach to their songs. A living room, den, or recording studio are the types of environments in which good song-sharing can occur. Have drinks and snacks around, and make the atmosphere as soothing and inspiring as possible.

Every songwriter will feel the most comfortable sharing their songs in an environment where *only those invited to hear their work-in-progress can hear it*—not the neighbors, Aunt Ethel, or the apartment-dwellers next door. There's nothing worse than hearing someone from another room yell, "I like that!" or worse yet, "I don't like that!" when you didn't know they were listening.

Here is a three-step process for running a Songwriting Circle:

1. Keep the group a manageable size.

Three to five people is a great place to start. This enables everyone to share their song-in-process each time you gather, and get some input. Give each person 5–10 minutes to share their song, and then 10—15 minutes for some good feedback based around the Worship Song Evaluation Worksheet. Or, create an artist's group that focuses on far more than the genre of writing songs for worship. Both are a blast!

2. Always bring a chord chart with lyrics with each re-write and copies for all.

Your fellow writers need to be able to 1) see your song and chords written out for each re-write, and 2) have a sheet on which they can write and give you to take back home.

3. Always leave each other with honest feedback and encouragement.

Take the time to make sure that everyone has had some thorough feedback. If you run out of time, make sure you all commit to hear the missed person's song first, next time.

Finally, know that some people have created a **closed Facebook Group** for this purpose. People post their song at different stages, and give each other feedback. This is an excellent way to do a Songwriter's Circle long distance.

TOOL: HOW TO EVALUATE SOMEONE'S SONG

Songwriting is a vulnerable process. We feel like the song is our baby, and we don't quickly want commentary on how others like it! However, just because God may give us the idea for a song, that doesn't mean it is in its finished form any more so than a baby is in its finished form.

A song must be fed, formed, re-written, re-approached, and offered to the humble and gracious input of others. In most cases, while others' opinions can be difficult to hear, when we apply some of the input that comes our way, the song can be become something much stronger than it would have been otherwise.

Give input with grace and kindness, but balance that with honesty and humility. In a songwriter's circle, allow others to speak into your song after hearing it, based on the Worship Song Evaluation Worksheet. Here are some general principles to keep in mind as you evaluate another's song, in text or in a live setting.

1. Encourage the Writer First.

It is always important to encourage the unique, individual voice of everyone who has the courage to attempt to write a song. On many levels, the activity of singing and creating is, in itself, valuable simply for the personal devotional tool it can be. Affirm this; not everyone is called to the same thing.

2. Affirm Qualities of the Song You Like.

In a similar spirit to the above, search for qualities in the song vision, melody, structure, lyrics and hook that you like. Point out what seems to be working well, or is moving you. It is vital that everyone in a live songwriting circle agree to be honest without being mean-spirited. Celebrate only what you can in the song, and care for the person who was vulnerable enough to try.

3. Suggest Areas on Which You Think the Songwriter Should Consider Working.

Using the Worship Song Evaluation Worksheet, point out areas in each category that you would suggest the writer adjust.

Does the song feel disjointed, like it is two songs and not one?

Is the song vision clear to you? Can they say it in one sentence?

Are their lyrics theologically strong?

Is their bridge actually a chorus?

Do they think the song is for the masses, when you think it is just for them?

Be honest, be encouraging, and give the writer good feedback with which to work.

NOTE: Avoid suggesting specific lyric replacements, chords, etc., unless invited. That is co-writing, and co-writes happen by the original writer inviting another to join in the writing. When that happens, then the song goes up on the hoist for some hard work.

WORSHIP SONG EVALUATION WORKSHEET

Song Title: _____Writer: _____

Suggested Application for Song (for whom is this song written? age? style?)

_____

_____

Song Vision

What is the song vision for this song? Can you say it in one sentence?

_____

_____

Is the title the best choice? Could there be another?

_____

_____

Do all roads lead home to the song vision (i.e., do all sections directly or indirectly lead back to the song vision?)

_____

_____

Song Form

What song form is used in this song? (Verse/chorus, AAA, AABA, ABAC?)

_____

Is the song form transparent (i.e., easy to follow and recognizable)?

_____

Hooks

What and where is the hook(s)? (melodic, rhythmic, lyrical?)

_____

Is it memorable, and could you sing it right now? Is there passion in the music and lyrics?

_____

_____

Lyrics

Is there lyrical consistency to the song (is the song consistent with itself in pronouns/ content)?

_____

_____

What lyrical devices are used (metaphor, simile, contrast, rhyme, alliteration)?

_____

_____

If a corporate worship song, is there lyrical integrity (theologically, biblically, experientially)?

_____

_____

_____

Melody

Is there a strong usage of motif (i.e., repeated, developed themes)?

_____

Is there a strong sense of melodic story?

_____

_____

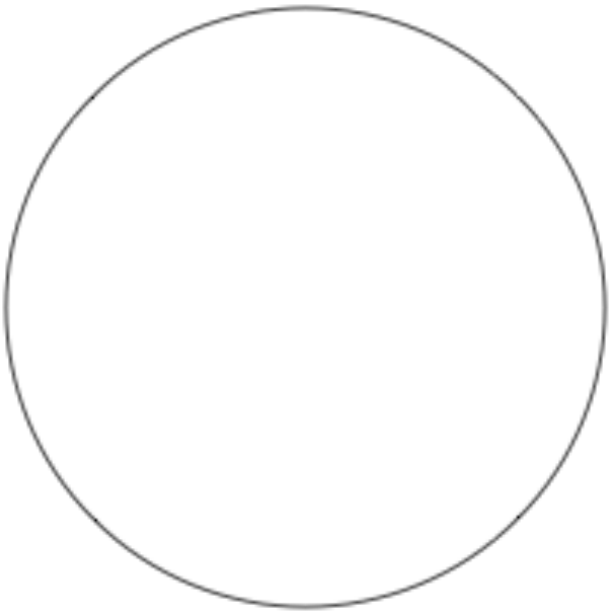
Is the melody memorable?

_____

_____

Notes:

TOOL: SONG VISION CLUSTERING WORKSHEET



TOOL: SAMPLE CHORD CHART

A good chord chart, printed out accurately for each session in which you gather with someone, is a must. A Chord Chart enables you and others to go thoroughly through the song, line by line, to make suggestions, corrections, or check marks.

When a line feels strong and finished, put a check mark beside it to say "this feels finished." ALWAYS create a fresh chord chart, for *every* rewrite, and bring it to the group.



All You Are
Dan Wilt
Key: C

Verse

```
            C/E
All that's good, and
            F
All that's right,
            Am7          G
All that's beautiful in life
            C/E
All that's pure, and
            F
All that's true,
         Am7              G
It all begins and ends in You, and
```

Pre-chorus

```
      Dm7          Am7
Every star in the sky
            F                G
Joins in thanks, and we reply, for
```

Chorus

```
            C
All You are, and
            F
All You've been
       Am7              G
We say thank You once again, for
            C
All You are, and
            F
All You'll be
         Am7             G
We will worship endlessly, for
            C
All You are
```

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ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP VALUES
AN INTRODUCTION

What are the "big stone" values that should guide us as we seek to effectively lead people in worship and to create disciples of Jesus at the same time? How can we anchor our leading in timeless values as we lead worship for our community?

Videos in This Session:

- Introduction: The Metaphor of the Stones (2:37)

A man walks to the front of a room. "I have a large jar in front of me. I have big stones, smaller rocks, pebbles, and sand. I even have a pitcher of water right here. I want to get the most that I can into the jar into the jar without it overflowing. I also want to make sure I get the big stones in. Where do I begin? How can I get the most in this jar?"

A few people yell out their answers, but only one of them is correct. "Yes, you are right," he says to a woman in the third row. "If I want to get the most I can in the jar, I must put the big stones in first. Then, the smaller rocks go in, the pebbles next, the sand next. Finer and finer we get, until the water gets in between them all."

Start with the big stones, which are your values. Get them in place, and then you'll know where the small stuff should go.

The Metaphor of the Stones

Many people rush around, doing their jobs every day, and find that in all of their busyness, they never seem to have time for the *important things in life*. In other words, they miss out on what they truly **value**.

The Metaphor of the Stones tells us that if we want to get the big stones into the jar, in this case our values into our lives, we must put them in *first*. Once they are in, we can fill in the small stuff around them.

What we value in life are our big stones. In our worship leadership in a local church, we as worship leaders and teams, from the people behind the microphone to those running sound and visuals, must understand the main values of our church in worship.

If we just keep rehearsing, building the next worship set or worship environment, and don't stop to talk about our worship values, then we don't know why we're doing what we do. Knowing **why** we do something determines the what and the how of doing it.

We're going to look at five different worship values—big stones—in worship. If we can get these values in place in our local worship gatherings, then the rest of the smaller details will find their place.

What happens if we don't talk about our big stone values in worship? The little stones get first place. The little stuff starts to take over and become the center of our worship

gatherings. In my experience, small stones take on a life of their own, and we get frazzled because we haven't determined why we do what we do.

Each of these values we're going to apply to worship and its leadership. If you are a worship leader, this matters. If you are a drummer, this matters. If you are a painter for corporate worship, this matters. We can all get on the **same team**, with a few core values in place.

Welcome to Essentials in Worship Values

This section has been designed to help you as a worship leader, worship pastor, worship visual technician, or worship musician (or any other role you might play) to hone in on the greater values that guide us in the contemporary worship experience.

The five core values and the one personal value we will look at together, are all areas of worship care for our communities that we never want to see slip behind the small stuff that happens week to week in a worship ministry.

I look forward to the journey with you. Welcome to *Essentials in Worship Values*.

Session 1: The Values of Intimacy & Integrity

Videos in This Session:

- Session 1: The Values of Intimacy & Integrity (7:44)

I still keep the letter in a file. She wrote to me after we had led worship at her church in another part of the world. I remember the night very well. There we were, on a long, grueling journey of night after night of rehearsals, fast meals, worship leading, teaching, prayer ministry and then collapsing into a foreign bed.

The trip was rich with God's touch at every event, experienced by we who were leading and by the diverse Christian community that had gathered.

On this particular night, I remember the moment when we moved from the more exuberant part of the worship set into songs of intimacy and mutual self-disclosure with God. It was an especially sweet time of encounter with the Spirit of God, and then it began.

Sobbing coming from the right section of the sanctuary.

When Young Men Weep

A young man in his late twenties had begun to weep during the worship set. Folks began to gather around him to pray. There were many denominations gathered and not everyone had a grid for someone sobbing during the worship time!

As the leader of that section of the gathering, however, I let the **emotional** display continue. My years as a worship leader and pastor told me that God is usually doing things far beyond what we can see with our eyes in the midst of corporate worship.

I said a few words about focusing on what Jesus was doing in each of us, and we kept playing. I sensed that the weeping was an appropriate response from the man to something God was doing within him.

Clearly, the tears were coming from a deep and hidden place, and God was addressing something at the very core of this man's life. I wanted to see that work accomplished, so we played on and on for him, for those gathered, and ultimately for Jesus.

A letter came in the mail after I had returned to my home in North America. It began with a few thankful comments for the worship service I led that night.

"I brought my son to the evening service…and he was visibly moved," the letter begins. I immediately realized that this woman was the mother of the man who was crying. She continued to write that he was "openly weeping some of the time."

I seem to remember speaking with the woman briefly after the event, but many details escaped me.

The Life Altering Encounter That Is Worship

While this may sound like a typical response to God's presence in many intimate worship settings (according to your tradition), in this case, a profound healing miracle had taken place. Her letter went on to describe what had occurred during that worship set. It has become a reminder to me that what we do in leading worship is vital to the healing of the heart.

Numerous tragic events had occurred in this young man's life. He saw his father drown when he was just a young boy, while he helplessly watched. He had numerous other traumas that followed, and in his pain, medication was the only thing keeping him from taking his life.

During that time of worship, he began to **release** decades of pain to God. His mother went on to say that he slept deeply after that simple night of worship and emotional release. She was very grateful for what God can do in the midst of worship.

The Goal of a Living Encounter

When we approach God in worship, it is vital that we get beyond the music, the practices, and the mechanics of the worship expression. While these can be tremendously beautiful vehicles for moving us forward in our worship expression, great music is not the only, or even the primary, goal.

Our goal is to have an encounter with the God who loves us, remembering His actions in history, **renewing** our commitments to His mission, being renewed by His love, and reflecting the goodness of creation back to Him in splendid acts of adoration and praise.

With the goal of encounter in our heart, we begin to see values emerge that will help us in achieving what the Westminster Confession called "the chief end of man," which is "to glorify God and enjoy Him forever."[5]

We'll begin with the worship values of **intimacy** and **integrity**.

PART 1

The Worship Value of Intimacy

What is intimacy in worship? The God we worship, as Jesus has revealed Him to us, is our **Father**. While we have all had very different father experiences in our lives, in this case, we see throughout the Scriptures that God is interested in a love exchange with each of us as His children.

As a father of three children, I am deeply aware of how much I long for my children to understand my unconditional, cherishing love for them. I am also aware of how disheartened I would be if I found out they were obeying me and responding to me not out of love but out of a sense of duty. "I want children," I would shout, "not servants!"

Intimacy has been popularly said to mean "into-me-see." It is an act of shared vulnerability and trust between two people. It is self-disclosure, within the perceived safety of a relationship.

Many think that the term **intimacy** is a word reserved for relationships in marriage and is most certainly not fitting to describe our relationship with God. But if God is not interested in welcoming us into complete relational vulnerability with Him, why did He so radically **self-disclose** Himself to us in the person of Jesus?

The entire Gospel is a reflection of the wildly passionate, pursuing heart of God toward us, and it is a journey toward intimacy, mutual self-disclosure, and authentic love. Every epic tale we love fastens us to this intimacy-seeking God who is ultimately after both our **allegiance** and our **affections**.

1 John 1:4 tells us that we love God because God first loved (read: expressed affection and value) to us. To worship is to respond to God's intimate pursuit.

What Is Intimacy?

The value of intimacy is built around the biblical notion that the God of the universe has pursued us from a heart full of love for His creation. In doing so, He has not only rescued us from the power of sin and death, but has also made Himself vulnerable in relationship to us by disclosing His personality, affections and dreams to us.

The God of the universe has welcomed us into an intimate friendship, embodied in the life and person of Jesus Christ.

In other words, God is to be revered and held in awe, but is also the God who will not be distant from those He loves, heals and pursues in His covenant commitment to us (see *Essentials in Worship Theology*).

A Posture of Hearts toward One Another

Intimacy, in any relationship, does not just happen when the lights are low and the music soft. Intimacy can be loud and celebrative, or soft and sweet. Intimacy is a **posture**, a positioning, of one heart toward another.

Intimacy happens when one heart chooses to make itself vulnerable to another, choosing self-offering above self-protection; self-disclosure above self-protection.

In the musical expression of worship (and in other expressions of worship), intimacy holds a central place as we are positioning our hearts to respond to God's heart through a song, through the bread, through the cup, through the passing of the peace, and so on.

If people are walking in, reserving themselves from God and withholding worship (which always breeds bitterness), the worship music dynamic can help them to break through their hardness as a song begins to open a **gateway** for them to communicate with God.

To see it through another lens, intimacy is a value that calls the heart to be **open** to God, rather than sealed off and self-protected. Hearts can be closed for many reasons.

Music, and other mediums of worship, can help a person open their heart in a moment of vulnerability to the Spirit.

A Tradition of Intimacy

You'll notice, in many of the songs that we sing, that the lyrics of the songs are speaking directly to God and inviting an exchange with Him. Sometimes they are a prayer, sometimes they are a lament (intercession), and at other times they are the simplest of love songs.

These types of songs take their place in the whole body of songs the Church has sung throughout the ages, and refresh a beautiful element this generation has been longing for—intimate communication with God through simple songs of love. The Song of Solomon is a biblical book that keeps the intimacy tradition of worship alive in the Church. Its pages are filled with intimate references that can be understood, both in human terms and in divine relational terms.

How Does This Value Affect Our Worship Leading?

Under this value of intimacy, here are some ways we as a worship team can raise the chances of our people having an intimate encounter with Jesus:

- We want to minimize musical distraction, so the music we make is not irritating, amateur, or jarring. People focus less on us and more on the presence of God.

- We want to **develop** our worship team to get beyond simply singing a song to the point where we are all engaging with the message held within each song.

- We want to develop teams of musicians, artists, techs, and worship leaders who are passionate worshippers and lovers of God. Serving as role models, a committed body of worshippers will grow in the church over time.

- We want to develop worship leaders and creative leaders who love the secret place of worship more than they love the public platform.

- We want to cultivate atmospheres that don't **rush** people through opportunities to let down their guards but give them space to honestly disclose their deepest love and pain to God.

- We want to create spaces that give people both the **time** and the context that they need to reveal themselves to God in a fresh way and for God to reveal Himself to them in a fresh way.

Other Themes within the Value of Intimacy

Honesty
Vulnerability
Self-disclosure
Healing
Missional response
Personal and corporate freedom
Hearing God
Restoration of broken lives

Do I Value Intimacy?

Am I the kind of person who loves to worship God in secret as much as I love to play in front of a crowd? Is my life with God growing, vibrant, full of expectation, and marked by a sense of His nearness? Am I willing to go deeper with God, before I ever lead anyone else to a deeper place? Do I hunger for more of God? Do I deeply desire to follow the way of Jesus? Am I willing to lead transparently, so the congregation falls more deeply in love with Jesus than with me?

PART 2

The Worship Value of Integrity

How many times have you stopped in the middle of a song, and measured your lifestyle against the words you're singing? Sometimes the songs can change us, and singing about things that don't line up with our lives can start fresh **transformations** happening. At other times, we simply lack integrity in what we're singing. In other words, we lack a strong connectedness between what we sing, what we say, and what we do.

Someone once said that integrity is being the same person in public that you are in private. In other words, integrity means that your life is **connected**. There are no hide-and-seek games going on with God and no secret areas of your life to which you have taken away His keys.

The Call to Value Integrity in Worship

I come from a church movement that cares deeply for the poor in society, and songs about that are an ongoing part of our song catalogue. I can't sing those songs anymore without responding to the call to live them out.

This value will change your church as your realize together that the songs you sing, and the lives that you lead, are meant to be in integrity—in one accord—with one another.

It never fails to surprise me that my capacity to portray something on the outside that is not alive on the inside is still present after all of these years of leadership. What God and the angels know of us is infinitely more important than what men and women think

of us (Horace Mann). Integrity in worship means that we are a consistent people. We don't just sing what we believe—*we sing what we already live*.

The worship value of integrity is the notion that our lives are in accord with the words we sing and we have gotten beyond putting on a show in our gathered worship times.

Integrity means that we are elevating God as the central figure in our worship expression and that we are, as worship leaders, musicians and spiritual influencers, more concerned that God become famous through our platforms and actions than we are that we be regarded because of our visibility and words.

Integrity says that our hidden life is in accord with our outer leadership, and that the words we sing have traction in our daily lives as parents, friends, workers and Christians.

We can look good as a worship ministry, or we can actually *be* **good**. Which would you choose?

What Is Integrity?
Let's begin with the leader. People may not be able to put their finger on it, but they somehow intuitively know if a worship leader, or any leader for that matter, is leading out of the integrity of their secret life with God.

In other words, when people sense that the worship is all about the leader and the musicians and is less about the congregation meeting with God, they can sense a **hollowness** in the corporate worship experience over time. That hollowness is often reflective of the fact that the interior life, or secret life, of the leader is lacking in **substance**, depth, and attention.

We can't sing songs about pursuing God with any integrity if we are not actively pursuing Him in our own lives. We cannot sing songs that move us to care for the poor if, in our own lives, we are not actively questing to care for the poor.

How Does the Value of Integrity Affect Our Corporate Worship?
For worship leaders and teams to effectively build a congregation as a worshipping community over time, that team must value their personal lives with God over and above the opportunity to express their personal musical gift on a stage.

When we lead with integrity, when our lives match up to what we say we believe, we are *giving* to the community and taking our place as a servant. When we lead without integrity, we are *taking* from the community and taking our place as a parasite for the elevation of our gifts and ourselves.

Again, we don't want to just *look* good or *sound* good. We want to actually *be* good. I have met many worship leaders and musicians who embody this integrity in their lives. I've also met many who still had attitudes that smelled like arrogance, pride, self-absorption, and stage-manship. I know the smell of those **attitudes**, because I've had some of them myself!

We want to value integrity, live the songs we sing, and call our congregations to the same.

- We want to **believe** the words we sing and put them into action in our corporate and personal lives.

- We want to **emphasize** themes that call our congregations into a lifestyle of character, congruity, honesty, and devotion.

- We want to **encourage** our communities by the way we lead and do activities as leaders to find a life with God that is substantial and is not simply replaced by an outer veneer of church activity.

- We want to be as **active** about living the Gospel as we are about singing it.

Other Themes within the Value of Integrity

Authenticity
Character
Truthfulness
Honesty
Consistency
Well-paced living
Simplicity

Do I Value Integrity?

When I am in front of people, is it more about what I get from them or what they get from me? Is my life lived in such a way that cares for the poor, prays for the broken one, and is content to be passionate for God when no one is watching? Do I believe the songs that I sing? Are the words of the worship songs I lead meaningful for me personally? Do they say what I want to say to God? Am I the same person when no one is watching as I am when others are watching? Is there anything in me that needs to lead worship for my own sense of self-fulfillment and value?

Session 1 Study Questions

First, if you are doing this with a group, take some time to write down your answers to the following questions before you gather. Highlight page numbers, key quotes and ideas that moved you. Make sure you write in the margins, circle words, or jot down anything that will help you interact with the material and remember core ideas.

1. What ideas moved you the most from this section?

Talk about the ideas related to worship that particularly moved you from the book or from the video.

How might the ideas that moved you help all of us to understand what worship is really about?

2. When you think about the values of intimacy and integrity, how do you think they can play a more prominent role in your own life of worship?

Are there ways you can apply the ideas in this session to your own life? Is God welcoming you into greater intimacy with Himself? Are you responding? In what ways is God welcoming you to greater integrity in your life of worship?

Session 2: The Values of Accessibility & Cultural Connection

Videos in This Session:

- Session 2: The Values of Accessibility & Cultural Connection (5:50)

A dear friend of mine passed away years ago. He was an engineer on bridges and was particularly skilled in determining the soil and materials to be used around the base of a bridge on each side of a chasm. He would often tell me about the importance of the connecting links between two distant points, and how the vital skill of bridge building could help people get to their desired destinations.

Building Bridges

The worship values of *accessibility* and *cultural connection* are what I call the **bridge-building** values. When a wheelchair ramp was built onto the front porch of our friends' home, it was so that their physically handicapped son could be easily wheeled into the house. A bridge was being built that would make the house accessible to someone who would otherwise have trouble getting from here to there.

The value of **accessibility** says, "I want to bring you with me; I want us to go somewhere together." We choose songs and plan in such a way that builds accessible bridges for everyone in the room.

The value of **cultural connection** says you matter to those who are currently outside of your faith community. Let's look at each one in turn.

PART 1

The Worship Value of Accessibility

When a wheelchair ramp appears at the entrance of a corporate building, we immediately know what that organization is trying to do. It is making itself *accessible* to those who may otherwise have trouble entering. Others may already be inside who have found entry to be easy.

The value of accessibility causes us to put significant effort into making entry easy for *everyone*.

A number of years ago, a friend who is a great photographer showed me a photo he took of our congregation during a worship set I had led the previous Sunday morning.

"I thought you'd like to see this shot, Dan," he said, as he showed me the colorful image. There, captured in the picture, was a section of our community encompassing about 30 people in the back two rows of the large gym where we met as a church. Most of those in the image were, in some way or another, visibly caught up in expressive thanks and adoration to God.

The Photo That Wrecked Me

Among them was a truck driver who had come to personality-transforming faith despite a maze of alcohol, drug, and violence addictions. A computer programmer for a local hospital and a classic white-collar worker with 2.5 kids and a station wagon, were also engaged in worship. A single mom, with an abused background, a carpenter, a teen, a twenty-something, grandparents, various ethnic families, and a few dancing children rounded out the picture.

As I looked at the photo, others in our community sprang to mind. Any number of families in our congregation, young and old, with varied histories of joy and suffering, were not in the photo. The folks from a local mentally-handicapped community, and the typical group of pierced folks that called our church their home, were not in the shot.

"These are the people you **lead** in worship," I heard my friend say. His voice was like God's voice resonating within me. "These are the people you lead in worship." I have never forgotten that moment, and decades later it still radically affects the way I posture myself as a worship leader, musician and ministry leader.

I want to make a way for these people to meet with God—their hearts' desire. That is my singular mission as a lead worshipper. That is our mission as a worship ministry.

Creating a Ramp for People to Engage

Our goal is to open doors and build bridges that somehow access the loyalties that exist in the hidden hearts of those gathered to worship. From song choice to guitar volume to pre-set interactions with my fellow worship community members, each quiet decision we make either welcomes someone in to a place of encounter with God or moves them away from that place.

Andy Park, speaking specifically to worship leaders and musicians, says this:

> *We approach the service with the assumption that the average Sunday attendee is already convinced that worshipping God is the right thing to do. That's why they come to church. Remember, the worship leader functions like a midwife who brings people to God and helps give birth to the experience of worship. If people don't get on board with a certain song, don't use it. There are plenty of proven songs that can get the job done. This is a good example of the servant role of the worship leader.*[6]

In this quote, Park is saying that the role of the leaders in any given worship setting is to **facilitate** the communication between human beings and God. In other words, our goal is not to impress those gathered with our hippest and latest creative tricks. Our goal is to open a doorway, create a ramp, create an atmosphere, in which all those who have gathered to worship can be lovingly welcomed to do so.

We have one goal ever before us as a creative team. We are playing and creating so that the congregation might find a clear way to lay down the burdens they walked in with at the feet of Jesus, and to meet with Him in worship through the vehicle of the music that

we make. We want our community to engage with God's story on every level, and to enter intimately into that story as those pursued by a welcoming, accessible God.

In other words, we are poised as a worship team to serve. We are poised to give and not to take. We are there for them; they are not primarily there for us as an audience. We use all of our musical and creative gifting to get out of the way, and to **make a way**, for people to get to that place of encounter.

How Does This Value Affect Our Worship Leading?

Under this value of accessibility, here are some ways we as a worship team can increase the chances of our people finding a bridge over their state of heart to meet with Jesus:

- We want to use songs, creative expressions, and liturgy that draw the human heart to God and that facilitate each worshippers desire to meet with God.

- We want to actively seek to create some opportunity for connection, within any given gathered worship event, through which the widest edges of our demographic (age, occupation, personality, background, economic status, educational background) can find their way to a place of living exchange with God. This may involve sacrificing our own **preferences** in many cases to serve the wider community, often more frequently than we would like, i.e., using children's song, hymns, etc.

- We want to encourage in our instrumentation, arrangements, volume levels, quality of musicianship, and creatively planned **atmospheres** the opening of a life to God.

- We want to others to be able to join in with us in what we're doing and to maximize the sense of inclusivity for all in the room in the ways that we lead the portion of corporate worship assigned to us.

Other Themes within the Value of Accessibility

Simplicity
Multi-generational sensitivity
Vulnerable and accessible leadership
Modeling participation
Hospitality
Cultural sensitivity
Family-orientation and singles awareness
Pastoral awareness on the part of all team members

Do I Value Accessibility?

Am I content to play simple songs of love and choose worship sets based on those who are a part of the community I lead? Am I willing to die to myself to serve my worship team, my pastor and others, toward us *all* encountering Christ in worship?

Am I committed to learn new songs that will access the prayers of people's hearts in our community at the same time that I am willing to play an old song (for the 947th time) in order to do the same?

Am I as willing to lead three people in worship in a living room or 15 children in a Sunday school class as I am to lead a congregation?

Can I get out of the way, to make a way for others?

PART 2

The Worship Value of Cultural Connection

"Aren't you tired of being relevant? I'm sick and tired of being relevant; relevant means someone else got there first and now I'm trying to connect. We need to stop being relevant and start leading the way."[7]

Let's say that I have invited you over for dinner for the first time. I can plan for your arrival one of two ways.

I can decide to make you feel special and at home as soon as possible when you walk in the door, providing hors d'oeuvres, music we both enjoy, and maybe some upgraded clothing on my part.

I might tell my children to put the Nerf guns away or diminish the fact (temporarily) that I just had the worst day of my life.

I may even think about the kinds of foods you like, the language you speak, or some other attributes that you bring to the relational table that may be opportunities for me to affirm you in the way I prepare the evening.

By contrast, I could decide that you should not need such attention, nor my precious energies spent on **hospitality**. If I normally run around my house in my sweat pants, then you should be able to deal with that.

Why should I change anything I do for you or you for me; we want real relationship, don't we? Shouldn't our authenticity be enough of a bridge between us?

The value of cultural connection says, "I'm going to put some effort into reaching out to you, realizing that you may have some apprehensions about being here that I can dissolve."

Just as I would make a few special preparations for your visit, so you feel as though you would like to enter into friendship, we too can be a people of hospitality even in the ways we lead worship.

What Is Cultural Connection?

Cultural connection, in this case, is the art of creating atmospheres that are authentic to our reality, style, age, and goals, and at the same time build a welcoming and engaging bridge for those who may not be able to easily access our habits and traditions.

In my analogy of the dinner party above, **s**ome of us may choose something in between those two pictures to welcome our guest. However, most of us would affirm that if we can remove **unnecessary barriers**, and if we can create an **atmosphere** that inspires connection and a better **shared** reality, then it is appropriate to do so, especially in a broken world where relationships are so central to everything we do.

Let's go right to the music of worship, and you can apply the principles to the rest of the worship ministry leadership in your church. Most of us would also affirm that if we like a certain kind of music, at a certain level, and the person coming over likes that style and volume as well, then it's just fine for us to share in that love of sound and style as one of the bonds between us.

However, if someone doesn't share in that, we must make choices that either serves the whole of those who have gathered or specifically target one group that we would like to attract.

As a church, we don't want to create an unnecessary disconnect between "our little world" and the world the people in our community live in on a day-to-day basis.

Is Your Expression Dated or Upgraded?

We live in a time and in a place in history. As 21st century faith communities, we embrace the sounds, visuals, and musical textures of today (and in some cases, yesterday), choosing to be true to who God has made us each to be and to be true to the communities we are seeking to reach.

This next part will push some buttons, because our musical preferences are deeply important to us.

According to the people our church is called to reach, we want to be careful that our music (among other elements) is not dated in its sound or style (due to nostalgia, a musician's limited abilities, or a leader's preference unless the target group loves the **dated** sound of that music).

Instead, we are current with the kinds of sounds to which today's listeners, and worshippers, easily respond. We may use hymns, chants, or ancient visuals (buildings, images, or symbols), but we seek to use them in a way that is familiar and somehow inspiring to the 21st century person.

Now, if you church has a different target group, then I encourage you to be intentional about how, and why, you do worship the way you do. Don't simply fall into a default; think it through, and determine the sound that is authentic to your community.

I think I know what your next question may be. What if that sound isn't authentic to me, the band, or the church? In considering the value of cultural connection as it relates to worship leadership, we must hold some truths in **tension**. As a worship community,

we don't want to contrive our sound or expressions, making music or creative expressions with which we ourselves are not comfortable, always trying to keep up with popular culture.

In fact, one of the most culturally relevant worship activities that many churches can do is to remain placed in ancient, artful buildings, connecting with age groups and affinities that many popular contemporary churches will never access.

What I Am Saying, and What I Am Not Saying

I am not saying that every worship ministry must be seeker-sensitive, seeker-driven, or primarily guided by non-believers who walk in their doors.

What I am saying is that it is good form to be aware of our neighbors. Building bridges when we can with a word, a prayer, or clarity about what is happening during worship is very much a Jesus kind of thing to do.

In honoring the value of cultural *connection*, we need to make sure we don't slip into cultural *infection*. In other words, we want to avoid blindly embracing the idolatries of our age—an age that elevates musicians on stages and makes a **celebrity** out of a charismatic personality on a platform.

If we can avoid being churchy or lost in our Christian sub-culture, whether that be in our musical styles or way of speaking, we'll be able to speak to the average person on the street. Again, this varies from place to place and church to church according to the target demographic group to which we are seeking to minister.

How Does This Value Affect Our Worship Leading?

Each individual faith community must determine how the value of cultural connection, or authentic bridge-building into the community, applies in the worship setting. Pastoral leadership and guidance is vital in this area.

- We want, in our musical and visual worship expressions, to reflect the demographic of our local community (both inside the church and outside).

- We choose the sounds of today's culture with which to worship (which are very, very diverse), integrated with the familiar music/art of the Church historic (i.e., hymns, etc.). If we choose otherwise, we do so with intention and good reason proactively relating to our demographic and target group as we've defined it.[8]

- We want to keep God and the Kingdom story central in our expressions of gathered worship, yet do so in a way that connects with the realities of 21st century life.

- We want to be low-hype in our approach to worship, expressing honesty and authenticity in all we do.

- We want to make sure our church language is as accessible as our street language, much in the way that the writers of the New Testament did (see Eugene Peterson's "Introduction to the New Testament" in *The Message*).

- We want to lead in gentle pastoral ways and not in showy, glitzy, or personality-centered ways. We're not trying to stir anyone up; we're simply creating an accessible place of worship for people by leading it with the sound of music and style of lyrics that they love and with which they are familiar. If we choose to do high-energy music, we do so out of a heart of humility and a lack of need to show off our talents. If we choose quieter, intimate music, we do so with a desire to meet with God with the rest of the congregation. The entire band and worship ministry is pastoral.

Other Themes within the Value of Cultural Connection

Visionary leadership
Cultural sensitivity
Diversity
Shared community life
Neighbor-love
Multi-sensory worship expression
Stylistic diversity
Ethnic diversity
Denominational values and ethos
Evangelism
Organic church growth

Do I Value Cultural Connection?

Do I come out of a church tradition that creates unnecessary barriers between church culture and the culture around me? Does my style of playing, leading, or singing represent the musical tastes and demographic of the community for which I am being asked to lead? Do I live a life that is seeking to live out the ways of Jesus in the streets, in the marketplace, and in inter-church relationships? Is my motive in wanting to lead less concerned with what the congregation needs and more concerned with my desire to play my instrument? Am I willing to get involved in my community outside of church, to get to know the felt needs of the community of which our church is a part? Do I share my pastor's/group's vision for impacting our community?

Session 2 Study Questions

First, if you are doing this with a group, take some time to write down your answers to the following questions before you gather. Highlight page numbers, key quotes and ideas that moved you. Make sure you write in the margins, circle words, or jot down anything that will help you interact with the material and remember core ideas.

1. What ideas moved you the most from this section?

Talk about the ideas related to worship that particularly moved you from the book or from the video.

How might the ideas that moved you help all of us to understand what worship is really about?

2. In what ways are you bridge building in your life with those around you? Are there lessons that can be learned from your experience that would better your community at bridge building?

Building bridges often means sacrifice in our own lives. Are there areas in your own life that God is welcoming you to build a bridge to someone? Is there a musical sacrifice you make to serve the whole? Have you ever had to step out of the way so that someone else can step in who is better at bridge building to a certain person or group?

Session 3: The Value of Kingdom Expectation

Videos in This Session:

- Session 3: The Value of Kingdom Expectation (7:08)

I had the privilege for many years of leading with respected worship leaders who expected God to act in the midst of their worship sets. You would know many of their names, as they are often the kinds of worship leaders that the Body of Christ corporately appreciates because their songs and their leadership are full of passion and hope.

I began to expect God to act in the midst of the gathered corporate worship setting as well. One evening, when I was first starting out as a worship leader, I had a sense that I should repeat one of the songs we had done earlier in the set. The pastor was in agreement, and we reprised the song more sweetly, more intimately, than we had before. After a repeat of the chorus, I still felt as though we weren't to finish, but I looked at my pastor to see if the reigns were slack, or if they were being pulled tight for me to finish!

With a knowing look, he circled his index finger in the air and cued me to keep going. We played instrumentally, and soon the entire night had transformed into an evening of praying for those in need of physical healing. It was a beautiful and profound evening of watching God touch people through the prayers of others gathered around them.

From that time on, I've never looked back. Expecting God to act is a vital value for us when it comes to our worship leadership.

The Worship Value of Kingdom Expectation

First, to understand the nature of the value of "Kingdom expectation," we should have a brief primer on the nature of the Kingdom of which we speak, and then on the word *expectation*. An entire session is devoted to this, because I believe it is a worship value that more and more worship ministries must reclaim and keep near the center of their work together.

In church history, and across many denominations and churches of our generation, the value of Kingdom expectation is expressed and viewed differently. Run the following thoughts through the filter of your community that you are involved in worship within, and apply this value to the values of your immediate spiritual family.

What Is the Kingdom of God?

Biblically, the primary language that Jesus used to speak of God's rule and reign being present in the world (and among the Jews) was embodied in the phrases, "**Kingdom of God**" or "Kingdom of heaven." These terms appear over 100 times in the New Testament and form the basis for Jesus' teaching about God's work in the past, God's work in the present, and God's ultimate work in the future.

Hear how New Testament scholar Peter Davids, Ph.D., summarizes the Kingdom in his excellent article "What Is the Kingdom of God?"

> *The expression "kingdom of God" refers to God's rule on earth, usually his rule expressed through an agent, his regent or king. In the Christian metanarrative, it refers to God's rule as announced, demonstrated, and exercised by his regent, Jesus of Nazareth, who is presently the resurrected sovereign ruler of the world and who will eventually openly rule on this earth, completing God's creational purpose.*[9]

He goes on to say,

> *In the Hebrew Scriptures, God's kingship is referred to repeatedly, especially in the Psalms (Ps 10:6; 24:8,10; 29:10; 44:4; 47:2, 6, 7,8; 68:24; 74:12; 84:3; 93:1; 95:3; 96:10; 97:1; 98:6; 99:1; 145:1).*
>
> *We see three aspects of God's rule:*
>
> *1. God rules over creation, for he is the creator and the sustainer;*
>
> *2. God rules over the nations, and he will/does bring them to judgment; and*
>
> *3. God rules over Israel, usually through the person of his king.*

Finally, we see Jesus come on the scene, inaugurating and declaring the rule of God in the midst of human history—a rule that lays claim to every human heart.

> *However, Jesus acts with sovereign authority, and, as the gospel narrative continues, we discover that Jesus is indeed that regent (e.g., Mark 8:29, 14:61–62). He is, according to the gospels, David's son, who is God's son. So we have in Jesus both God's rule, and the person through whom he exercises his rule.*
>
> *For the early members of the Jesus movement (i.e., the early church), Jesus' resurrection and ascension established him as God's exalted ruler. He already rules over those people who have submitted to his rule, and he will eventually impose his rule on everyone in the world. Thus we have a tension between the already and the not yet. The good news is the call to all people to turn from all previous allegiances and to submit to God's rule in Jesus.*[10]

What Is Kingdom Expectation?

Expectation can be understood to mean "**hope in action**." It is the gathering of our energies to hope in such a way that our desires and actions become involved.

In this case, we long for hope to be manifest among us. We expect God to reveal Himself and the realities associated with Him. What are these realities that accompany the presence of Jesus in the Gospels?

Hearts are filled with courage, bodies are healed, relationships are restored, the fearful take courage, the proud are humbled, the hungry are fed, the demonized are delivered, the children are accepted and embraced, the mentally ill are restored to their right minds, swords are beaten into plowshares, and the lion lies down with the lamb. Shall we go on?

To expect that someone will act on our behalf seems to us to be a bit audacious. After all, to expect people to do things for us feels somehow criminal; aren't we the ones who should be doing things for others?

However, what if someone told you, "**Expect** me to do show up whenever you ask me to. If you don't expect me to, if I don't see that you *want* me to do what I have offered, then it is difficult for me to give to you what I've promised. Ask, and I'll do it. Ask me to show up, and I will." That puts a different spin on the expectation. In this case, to not expect the person to show up is an affront to what they have offered.

The Kingdom of God Is Breaking In

As worship is all about drawing disciples of Jesus toward intimacy with their Lord, this understanding of the Kingdom of God, and the Kingdom expectation that comes with it, is vital for every member of the worship ministry.

Let's replace the words *Kingdom of God* with *God's rule and reign* to make this clearer. To acknowledge that God rules and reigns among us, in us, and with us, is to acknowledge that God acts among us, in us, and with us.

A worship team that understands this will **shape** their prayers, music, and leadership around Kingdom expectation. God is the one who ministers to people. Not us. We create the space for God to act and to show his loving rule and reign in the midst of His people who have gathered.

Many denominations will understand what this means quite differently, but all of us would agree that God speaks to human hearts to heal, deliver, and restore. In my experience, if I expect God to heal, deliver, and restore when we are singing songs of praise and adoration, then I am laying the ground for people to **encounter** God's Kingdom.

What the leaders expect, is often what the community begins to expect. Posture your heart for the Kingdom of God to break into peoples' lives as the Spirit teaches you the sensitivity it takes to facilitate such encounters with the King.

Expect God to Act

I hope you realize by now that I am not talking about every song being repeated, every service being extended, or even changing the normal flow of your service liturgy *at all*.

Valuing Kingdom expectation is a posture of the heart and applies to every member of a worship ministry. It is about cultivating a growing awareness that God is *actually doing something* among us as we worship. With that value stirring the silent prayers of every team member, we lead as a unit with an expectant heart.

If we don't expect that God will speak, move, heal, and deliver as we come together to offer thanks and reciprocate love, then why would we expect the community to expect that God will act among us? It seems clear that, to some large degree, the expectation of those leading a time of gathered worship before God precipitates others' expectations.

After all, why would we expect God to respond to the indifferent heart, the soul that is going through the motions of preparation without any evident hunger in their spirit?

While we make the music, execute the movements, rehearse the visuals, and prepare the spaces, we must do so as those intent on welcoming God's response to our efforts offered as a gift of love from us to Him, because He is offering us His gift of love (John 4:19).

God meets us in many places, and He often meets in the place of humble expectation.

Living Faith, Dead Religion, and Revitalizing Worship

When it comes to gathered worship and our expressions of worship as a people, we are invited to expect of God that He will show up in simple, complex, beautiful, or shocking ways. We are invited, by God, to enter into an experience of intimacy that goes beyond the songs we choose, the music we rehearse, the dance we planned, or the liturgy we designed.

All of these things are vital to our gathered worship and should *never* be completely tossed out for some dark idea that only spontaneous and unplanned expressions of worship are to be valued. We must do what we do well. No two ways about it.

However, if all we do is tighten up a finely oiled set of songs, liturgies, or creative expressions of worship and never expect the Spirit of God to *actually do something transforming* in the lives of those who gather, then we may be unwitting participants in the deadest of dead religion.

There will always be, I believe, occasions on which our plan must change in response to the Spirit's leading. **Agreement** with other leaders is vital in that process, and the humble worship leader/worship team member knows that God is never put off by our missing the mark a few times. He's bigger than that.

Honor Your Own Church, Denomination, or Movement

My particular movement, the Vineyard, had its worship expression born in a living room, where a few people were gathered to engage in the simple act of adoring worship.

As they sang songs to God, and not just about Him (this is important as well), they made room for His Spirit to move among them. God's Kingdom began to break in and touch the group in powerful and miraculous ways.

The simple songs seemed to be doorways to fresh connection with God and His Kingdom. In their simple and culturally connected music and lyrics, they expressed their honest desire for God to speak, move, restore, and transform.

I connect with that as a worship leader, and it has formed how I expect God to act in any given worship setting. Know your own church family, and allow God to work within the borders of that unique immediate family in which God has placed you.

So…What Can We Expect God to Do?

When we gather to worship, we can expect every time that each individual, as well as our corporate community, will have an intimate exchange with the transcendent God. We can expect God's Kingdom to break in at any and every moment as He **heals**, delivers, and transforms us as broken people.

We can expect that people will leave a time of gathered worship transformed by an encounter with the living God, His Word, and His Presence. We also expect that the routine reading of the Scriptures, leading of the songs, praying together, sharing in communion, hearing the expounding of Jesus' teaching, and more will be a part of God's Kingdom transformation of lives.

In that spirit of expectation, I encourage you as a worship ministry to occasionally create worship settings that have plenty of **space**, both musically and spiritually, for God to interact with His people and vice-versa.

For us, worship is not about a shining worship leader and a killer band. It's about serving God and people by making a way for us all to meet with our living God. We may need to create different contexts in which different things can happen, to serve this mandate.

How Does This Value Affect Our Worship Leading?

This value of Kingdom expectation will look different in every church community. Keep it in front of you, talk about it, and think about some of these team worship ideas that may help:

- We **prepare** our worship sets, liturgies, and services with a view to welcome transformation, and not simply to communicate information.

- We, as leaders, musicians and other creative participants in the worship life of our church, actively **pray** for God to act in the midst of our corporate worship times.

- We **learn**, no matter our role, to pray for transformation before each event, to pray for the sick on any given occasion, to hear God's voice, to value times when God's agenda in worship seems to supersede our own.

- We **believe** that God will use our humble playing and preparations for the sake of elevating His name as He restores those in our community. We pray for transformation as we serve our communities in worship, as we play our instruments, as we prepare for a rehearsal, as we pray for the **sensitivity** of our leaders to be heightened to meet God's agenda in any given gathering.[11]

- We want to learn to get **out** of the way musically (and lyrically) by not building a hollow sense of emotional **hype** through our musical worship expressions, nor by attempting to show off our spiritual gifting or musical/creative prowess. We deliberately dial down the emotions that can run high in expressive worship settings, and we look for God to authentically act in the lives of those who we are leading.

- We **create** musical space and simplicity (even silence or musical interludes) in our worship band arranging and leadership. We create this kind of space between songs, before or after our set, so that those worshipping can get their attention fixed on God without constant distraction. For people to let their guards down before God, and to get honest, is one of the goals of the worship setting.

- We **do not fill** the set (or the service) with constant sound, lyrics, or visual stimulation, nor with constant attention-seeking tactics. Rather, we desire to create a space for worship, sustain it, step in and out of it as needed, and then to **entrust** that time to God for His further work in the lives of those who are a part of our community.

Other Values under Kingdom Expectation

Prayerfulness
Flexibility
Learning to hear the voice of God
Learning to pray for others
Trust
Hope
Expectant leadership
Creativity and sacred space in worship settings

Do I Value Kingdom Expectation?

Am I more of a song leader/song musician or a worship leader/worship musician? Could the term *lead worshipper* be applied to me? Am I able to defer to the leader of the meeting when they sense we need to either stop worship or keep going? Am I willing to create a musical space that leads people into an interaction with God, even if it means playing a G chord for 30 minutes or doing something routine over and over again? Am I able to lead worship with "one ear to earth and one ear to heaven?" Am I able to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit without derailing a well-led worship set? Do I want God to be present and transform people as we gather to worship, and are my prayers to that end?

Session 3 Study Questions

First, if you are doing this with a group, take some time to write down your answers to the following questions before you gather. Highlight page numbers, key quotes and ideas that moved you. Make sure you write in the margins, circle words, or jot down anything that will help you interact with the material and remember core ideas.

1. What ideas moved you the most from this section?

Talk about the ideas related to worship that particularly moved you from the book or from the video.

How might the ideas that moved you help all of us to understand what worship is really about?

2. Do you personally expect God to act in your own life, or the lives of others, when you are in the midst of gathered worship?

Expectation seems to be a very key word in the way the Bible speaks about faith. Trusting Him and expecting God to act can take on many different forms in a corporate worship gathering. Ask yourself, "Do I expect that the Spirit of God will transform lives as we come together to worship?" or "Am I really just singing songs?"

Session 4: The Value of Personal Discipleship

Videos in This Session:

- Session 4: The Value of Personal Discipleship (6:58)

I had been asked to lead worship for a local church that was three times the size of anywhere I had led worship to date. The congregation was used to great musicianship, beautiful worship sets, and meaningful leadership from their worship pastor. I attended the church, but had only been there a few months and had never led worship. The worship leader was on vacation, and they needed someone to fill in.

I learned their most beloved songs (what I then saw as simple, sappy, and non-theologically rich songs), and humbled myself to lead with music I appreciated, but lyrics that were boring and love-centered.

I welcomed the congregation, the drummer counted in, and we were off. People were enjoying the time, and I was grateful I was being seen as a guy who "knows what he's doing" in front of them.

Then, something unexpected happened.

You Are Leading Disciples, Not an Audience

We were part way into the third song, a simple song called "You Are My King" that was loved by the church at the time, and I was **just singing** the words as we had practiced. When I got to the chorus, though, I can only describe what happened as my heart breaking open and the pain of all the people in the room flooding in. The chorus words were unabashedly simple—*And I love you, love you, Jesus, yes I love you, love you, Jesus, my King*—but this time I felt like I was on the receiving end of a theological and spiritual fire hose.

I tried to sing, but tears welled up in me and choked out my voice. It was as if a spotlight began to shine on individual people in our church. I, maybe for the first time, saw the former crack addict who was learning to follow Jesus as he came out of years of addiction one day at a time. I saw the tireless, patient parents of the beautiful young girl with Down's syndrome; I saw the truck driver desperate for a safe place to express his lavish affection to his Lord after months living in truck stops rife with sexual perversion. I saw the parents who had lost a child just months earlier, the woman who gave her life week after to week to lead us in caring for the city's poor, the man who lived on the streets outside of the high school where our church met, and my own wife—all completely giving themselves to God through a simple song of love to their healer: Jesus.

I was changed, in that moment, as a leader of worship. I realized that everything going on in that room had to do with one thing and one thing only: giving people musical

vocabulary for them to express their praise, prayers, hopes, and affections as Jesus responded by making them devoted **disciples**.

The Worship Value of Personal Discipleship

When I look out on our congregation now (a different one), I see young shoots, like a budding field of wheat, stumbling and bumbling over each other on their way to becoming like Jesus. Each is carrying their own burdens, their own journey, their own financial, relational, and emotional stresses into that **sanctuary**. My job as a worship leader, our job as a worship team, is to lead them to a place of meeting with Christ.

For the earliest disciples, it was an ongoing encounter with Christ that made them want to be like him, and to carrying his life into their world. Neither you, nor I, nor anyone in the congregation I described earlier would be willing to die for a church service, a worship set, a specific liturgical form, or a 30-minute sermon.

We would all, my guess is, be willing to die for Jesus. We want our relationship with Him to last and deepen above all others.

The people you and I lead in worship are there (in most cases) because something in them has said, "There is something about Jesus I can't escape, and I need to be here to learn how to be close to him."

What Is Personal Discipleship?

Personal discipleship is, at its roots, about an individual Christian deciding that they will become like Jesus and will do what it takes to get to that singular **destination**.

Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commands" (John 14:15).

Dallas Willard, one of the great authors and spiritual formation thinkers of our generation, identified that one of the greatest challenges to the Church of our generation is the fact that many people who sit in our congregations around the world who declare themselves to be believing Christians have never actually *decided* to **follow** Jesus.

While we could spend much time on this, I want to immediately apply this question to us as worship leaders, band members, techs, artists, and worship ministry members.

Have you actually decided that your life's highest pursuit is to be exactly like Jesus? Have you decided that the mess that comes when he turns over the tables of **idolatry** in your heart and speaks into your hidden areas of greatest fear and bondage, is *worth the price of following him*?

Jesus did pay for your life and mine on the cross, but the work of the Christian is to walk out the implications of that new life, empowered by the Spirit of God on a moment-by-moment basis. Our every-moment yes to Christ—when a fellow worship team member offends us and we **choose** to be gracious and forgiving instead of holding a silent grudge, or when we choose to step down from the worship team because another person is ready to get their chance to grow—is the hallmark of a true disciple.

Our Attitudes Should Be the Same as That of Christ Jesus

We can't catch Jesus' vision for the discipleship of our congregation, or even our pastor's vision for it, until we ourselves have made the **discipleship** choice. In my experience, many musicians and artists bring the world's values about their art form right into the church community, never bothering to check those attitudes at the door.

Having lived on the border between Canada and the United States for much of my adult life, I have sometimes envisioned a custom's station at the entrance to a church, running everyone's **baggage** through a spiritual detector as we come through!

We may never hear, "Sorry, you must go back; you can't bring that in here," but it would good for us to hear, "People carrying attitudes like this may come in, but will meet over in the Free Trade room, where you will work on exchanging those old attitudes you brought in for the attitude of Christ Jesus noted in Philippians 2:5–11."

Four Elements of the Spiritual Life

For over 20 years I have had the privilege of walking side by side in ministry with fellow worship leaders, artists, and creative influencers around the world. Over the course of these decades, I have watched many leaders' souls expand to a place of great spiritual depth and breadth. Others, however, have seemed to shrink in spirit, barely maintaining a semblance of spiritual vitality as they grow older.

Spiritual formation is about allowing Christ to develop our whole person, our interior and exterior life, as he shapes us into his likeness through the unique stories of our lifetime. It is our approach to spiritual formation that determines how we will age as a disciple, expanding in spiritual **richness** or shrinking in spiritual stagnation.

We will look at four unique elements in the spiritual life, using creational imagery in the best traditions of ancient Celtic Christian spirituality. Each element is intended to be a lens through which we can evaluate our overall spiritual progress toward the likeness of Christ and a robust devotional future.

Earth: A Grounded Life

"While it was still night, way before dawn, he got up and went out to a secluded spot and prayed. Simon and those with him went looking for him." Mark 1:35–37a (*The Message*)

When I was a young boy growing up in a small town in Pennsylvania, I first learned the lesson of gravity.

I jumped off the very top of a set of monkey bars like a superhero launching from a skyscraper, all to impress a little neighbor girl.

When I landed on my chest with a horrid thud, wheezing and crying for Lois Lane's help, I understood the unyielding nature of the earth.

Earth speaks of the grounded life. This is a life deeply rooted in nurturing, stabilizing values that do not change—values like faith, family, and character.

Earth speaks of life elements like faith, and a spirituality fueled by the regular study of the Scriptures and habitual conversation with God in prayer.

Earth speaks of life elements like family, and our need to tend to our immediate flesh and blood relationships with generosity in attentiveness, time, and tenderness.

Earth speaks of life elements like character, and welcoming the **blossoming** of our soul through events that evoke integrity, honesty, perseverance, courage, faithfulness, goodness, and love.

Are you living in the element of Earth, tending to those arenas of life that ground you?

Wind: An Inspired Life

"… Jesus intervened: 'Let the children alone; don't prevent them from coming to me. God's kingdom is made up of people like these.'" Matthew 19:13–14 (*The Message*)

One of my most treasured mentors and friends, the late Bob Horvath, was passionate about sailing. I would watch him thrust the thick canvas sail of his beloved boat into the sky to catch the slightest breezes God might send his way.

Through years of working with his equipment, Bob knew just how to maneuver his sails to go in exactly the direction he wanted to go.

Wind speaks of the inspired life. This is a life that raises its sails with the sole intent of catching every joyful wind sent our way.

Wind speaks of life elements like finding heroes and allowing them to call us forward in skill, in passion, and in faith to stimulate our desire to be better at what we do than we already are.

Wind speaks of life elements, like dreams, and giving ample room for the hopes and desires within us to be tested, matured, and reshaped along our life journey.

Wind speaks of life elements like art and beauty, gardening, concerts, inspiring books, good food, energizing conversations, and passionate vocational (or avocational) work.

Are you living in the element of Wind, tending to those arenas of life that inspire you?

Fire: An Empowered Life

"Jesus' refusal was curt: 'Beat it, Satan!' He backed his rebuke with a third quotation from Deuteronomy: 'Worship the Lord your God, and only him. Serve him with absolute single-heartedness.'" Matthew 4:8–10 (*The Message*)

I have interacted with many friends around the world who, like me, have endured lifelong battles with severe depression. On occasion I have had the privilege of watching some lives, in a season of prayer, mission, or encouragement, come back from the dead.

They have burst through their next **chrysalis** to embrace a colorful, resurrected life on the other side.

Fire speaks of the empowered life. This is a life that is spiritually motivated, prayerfully covered, and actively engaged with God's new creation mission in the world he so loves.

Fire speaks of life elements like ongoing personal development in areas of our passion and skills. It speaks of study, risk, and placing ourselves in situations where a wild adventure with God is our only option.

Fire speaks of life elements like a prayer circle of committed friends who we have asked to pray for us with consistency and a burning desire for our highest impact to be felt in the world.

Fire speaks of life elements like missional community activities that put us in a position to be someone's humble hero, someone's louder voice, or someone's undying supporter.

Are you living in the element of Fire, tending to those arenas of life that empower you?

Water: A Communal Life

"You are my friends when you do the things I command you. I'm no longer calling you servants because servants don't understand what their master is thinking and planning. No, I've named you friends because I've let you in on everything I've heard from the Father." John 15:11 (*The Message*)

I love fly-fishing. One of my favorite summer pastimes is to stand in a river with a friend far downstream, casting my line into placid pools where fish are resting. In the river and its pools, one sees the playful nature of water. This unruly combination of hydrogen and oxygen not only hydrates and cools, but it also runs to the lowest places in need of its revitalizing touch.

Water speaks of the communal life. This is a life that is invested in authentic friendships, accountable communities, and key life-to-life mentoring partnerships.

Water speaks of life elements like connecting with others in intentional, mutually encouraging, interdependent community gatherings.

Water speaks of life elements like spiritual friendships, painstakingly maintained over the course of decades and nurtured on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis.

Water speaks of life elements like mutual service, in which we share the labor in the lives of those around us, running to their lowest places in times of need and allowing them to run to the lowest places in ours.

Are you living in the element of Water, tending to those arenas of life that establish you in community?

Moving in the Elements

Walking with Christ as grounded, inspired, empowered, and communal people, we begin to find ourselves living in our element, serving the common good of others from the center of who God so artfully designed us to be (1 Cor. 12:7).

Move in the elements with grace, and know that He will complete the new creation work He began in you.

We live in a time of great cultural and spiritual transition, a time when many Christians are growing weary of a faith that is shaped by culture and the practices of the world. Many are searching the past to find ways of spiritual formation that have deeply affected the spiritual lives of many generations.

Use tools such as a *Daily Examen* (a series of pre-bedtime questions from Ignatian spirituality that turn us to thankfulness), a Scripture-reading plan, and a journal to keep you oriented to true north as the elements of life swirl around you.

How Does This Value Affect Our Worship Leading?

This value of personal discipleship will keep us on track as worship bands and ministries, always placing the discipleship of people above our need to express ourselves musically:

- We prepare our worship sets, liturgies, and services with a view to call people to interact with, and become like, the Lord Jesus.

- We, as leaders, musicians, and other creative participants in the worship life of our church, are not there to present a strange spiritual social club entertainment experience. We are there to **lead** them in faith declarations, through music, that will anchor them in the storms of life.

- We choose to lower our value for perfection in the music, arts, tech, or production, so it sits just below the discipleship of our community.

- We choose to establish our own life in intentional spiritual habits, such as **Scripture reading**, prayer for loved ones and beyond, **accountable** relationship building, and being a regular, integral, and consistent part of a Christian faith community.

- We want to begin to see songs not just as musical devotional moments, but as discipleship tools that are shaping the thoughts and attitudes of your congregation as they walk into their worlds in the coming week. Some will face death, job loss, financial struggle, and relational breakdowns. Equip them to walk with Jesus through their trials as a member of the worship ministry. Do your part in creating a life-giving worship environment for every person who walks through that door.

Other Values under Personal Discipleship

Personal Scripture reading
Personal prayer
Accountable friendships
Song analysis and selection
The pastor and worship leader relationship
Creativity in presentation
Vision
Shared vision with other leaders
Excellence in public and private devotional life

Do I Value Personal Discipleship?

Am I personally committed to becoming like Jesus? Is there anything about my participation in the worship ministry that is currently more valuable to me than my own development as a disciple of Jesus? Am I aiding the discipleship of others in my community, or am I getting in the way by pointing too much to me and my gifts? Is there anything I can do to strengthen my own love of the Scriptures, personal prayer life, or connection with others in accountable relationships? Do I have a strong sense of my pastor's vision for the discipleship life of our church no matter what my part is in the worship ministry?

Session 4 Study Questions

First, if you are doing this with a group, take some time to write down your answers to the following questions before you gather. Highlight page numbers, key quotes and ideas that moved you. Make sure you write in the margins, circle words, or jot down anything that will help you interact with the material and remember core ideas.

1. What ideas moved you the most from this section?

Talk about the ideas related to worship that particularly moved you from the book or from the video.

How might the ideas that moved you help all of us to understand what worship is really all about?

2. Do you see caring for your own discipleship life as a vital value when it comes to corporate worship? Why or why not?

Leaders are quick to realize that their own lives before God have corporate impact over time, especially when the leader is very visible or active in the faith community. But how does your discipleship, your life of following Jesus, impact our corporate worship experience?

3. Do you see caring for your congregation's discipleship life as a vital value when it comes to corporate worship? Why or why not?

It may be unusual for a worship team member or visual tech to think deeply about the discipleship life of their church. However, given what we've studied, do you have a fresh perspective on your role in seeing your community grow in Christ through the worship experience they share in each week?

Conclusion: Transforming Your Community through Worship

Videos in This Session:

- Conclusion: Transforming Your Community through Worship (1:18)

With the big stones in the jar, we're now ready to lead worship in a context and for a reason with hope in our heart and expectation in our spirit. Why? The values we have lingered in over this section are big ideas under which many other secondary values find their place.

If we get the small stuff in its proper place in what we do, and conform our attitudes to succeed in the big stuff, then hope once again has a chance to rise in us for our worship leading ministry.

The Right Values Will Last Forever

Good friend Brenton Brown ("Everlasting God") says the following about how lasting our values in worship truly will be:

> *The one thing I would say to anybody who would be getting into worship leading, or to anybody who is a worship leader right now, is that the job of leading worship—your job of leading worship and my job of leading worship—one day will probably end.*
>
> *It is possible, but it is unlikely, that at 90 years of age I am going to be in an old-age home strumming on my guitar leading people in worship. Who I am before God however, does not end. That truth has eternal quality to it, and one day I am going to be standing before Him, and I won't be standing behind a microphone with a guitar on my back.*
>
> *It is just going to be me and Him.*[12]

On The Importance of Worship Values

Worship is the most vital activity of the human spirit.

I mean it. I'm not overstating it so you and I feel good. Nowhere else do we reclaim our story, sing our prayers, harmonize our beliefs, embrace our diversity, make space for healing, lift a voice in hope, and raise our own spirits before God in the way we do in corporate worship.

We are made to, *designed* to, engage in a loving worship relationship with our Creator. When we consider the values that guide us in this journey of approaching God, either privately or in our corporate settings, we should do so with care, time, energy and extended conversation. It's worth it, or else we end up building our worship life on misguided foundations.

The sound of your band, the vibe of your songs, and even the emotions evoked by powerful music are meant to be **amplifiers** of a story that is carried on the wings of the values that we have explored.

Let's recall the values at which we've looked:

> First, *the Values of Intimacy and Integrity* remind us that drawing near to God, and living out what we sing and say, are pivotal themes in our gathered worship life.
>
> Secondly, *the Values of Accessibility and Cultural Connection* remind us that worship is an inclusive experience that all are welcome and that building bridges to the world around us is a high calling of the worship community.
>
> Thirdly, the *Value of Kingdom Expectation* sets our hearts toward inviting God in our gathered worship expressions to do more than we may have planned. This value reminds us that God has an agenda for what happens when we gather to acclaim Him and to embrace His Story once again.
>
> Finally, the *Value of Personal Discipleship* reminds us that we lead not only from the instruments we play, or via the creative means given to us, but more prominently from the secret life we live before God. Our character has a sound and a voice all its own, and is the primary accompaniment to every song we sing.
>
> We also place the discipleship needs of our congregation above our song, style, and platform preferences. They are not the primary **focal** point of what we do.

Keep Your Worship Values in Front of You

Let's say it one more way:

- If we value intimacy and integrity, then worship ministry is about an **encounter**.
- If we value accessibility and cultural relevance, then worship ministry is about **bridge-building**.
- If we value Kingdom expectation, then worship ministry is about **new life** in the now.
- If we value personal discipleship, then worship ministry is a **life overflow**.

Keep these values in front of you as you continue to lead God's people into worship.

Bless you as you continue your journey in *Essentials in Worship Values*.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP THEOLOGY
AN INTRODUCTION

What big ideas about God, people, and worship both anchor us in the Scriptures and help us understand what it means to worship in our generation? In this section, we dig deep into the heart of God for worship.

Videos in This Session:

- Introduction: Worship Is Out of the Box (2:00)

Introduction: Worship Is Out of the Box

"Worship is all about God." If I've said it once, I've said it a thousand times. But then, after I've made that statement in conferences and seminars for years, I've followed up with a phrase I no longer believe to be biblically accurate.

"Therefore," I would say, "worship is not about us." One time when I said this in front of a group of about 500, I pounded on the plexiglass podium for emphasis. A large glass of cold water spilled from the inner shelf of the podium as I did it, and tipped right onto my pants. From my belt to my toes, my pants looked like I had wet myself!

Years later, I've come to think that moment may have been a result of God's quirky sense of humor. Yes, worship is about God. But to say without conditions, "It's not about us," does not ring biblically true. Worship is indeed for God alone and not for us, but we have both something to do with worship happening, and something that matters in the heart of God when He sees we are engaged with Him in life-to-life exchange that is the activity of worship.

Worship is all about God, and yet God makes it also about us.

Theology Takes God Out of the Box

Sometimes we make worship in our own image. In other words, we attempt to put it in a box and keep it there so it doesn't surprise us. However, when we attempt to get worship in a box, we are attempting to put God in a **box**. In a strange twist of Genesis 2, we tend to make God in our own image, taming the one who Mr. Beaver in the *Chronicles of Narnia* series suggested was not "safe," but was "good." In the same way, worship **theology** may not be safe, but it is good.

My Way or the Highway

Churches are deeply married to their theology of worship, and what they think happens or should happen in worship. I was once told, at a church in another country, that I wasn't leading worship "right." They then proceeded to show me what "**right**" was and I got out of there as fast as I could.

Sometimes we justify everything we do in worship as the most biblically and theologically right way to do it. There is only one problem. Estimates tell us there are somewhere between 20,000–30,000 denominations in the world that all worship differently! So, who's right?

We might come to the conclusion that everyone is right, or everyone except you and I are wrong (I like that one). There is probably, however, middle ground there somewhere. I think the diversity of practical and theological approaches to worship just means that we should speak with some humility when we talk about who we understand God to be, as revealed in Jesus (the One we worship), who human beings are (the worshippers), and what worship (the activity) is all about.

We all know that God doesn't stay in our little, "God thinks just like us" boxes very long, if He ever even visits them in the first place!

Why Every Worship Ministry Member Should Care about Worship Theology

Let's take the time to get honest as we start this section. Many worship leaders, musicians, and creative artists I have spoken to throughout the years have asked me a hard question:

> *Dan, why should I even care about theology? My theology is Jesus. Don't I know enough about God and what He has done through Jesus to get me through a lifetime? Why invest my time in it? I can just play songs that are about Jesus, the church loves it, and I'm all good.*

My answer is usually simple and straightforward, and it surprises them. "You shouldn't," I say. "I shouldn't care about theology?" they say, quizzically. "No," I say, "you shouldn't care about theology if you don't care about your **congregation** becoming like Jesus." They respond, "Of course I care about that!" "Then," I say, "you had better care about the theology that people are carrying around with them every day."

Everybody has a **theology** they carry around with them, and it's either killing them or making them more like Jesus every day. You and I have a part to play in helping our congregation become more like Jesus.

I then go on a rant:

> *What if you knew that studying theology could make you more full of **wonder** at who God is? What if you knew He would blow the doors off of who you have known Him to be, as He **revealed** to you new aspects of Who He truly is? What if you, in your own small world of sermons and conferences, what your Grandma told you, and your personal lens when you read the Bible, have actually put God in an invisible box of your own making and you don't even know it?*
>
> *What if, when you pray on a Sunday morning, it lacks depth because you are really only mashing Christian **clichés** about God together (like "God, we just really, really love you, God, and, well, we just really do; You are the Trinity, and we really, really love you")? What if people are coming in to your church with "bad" theology, thinking*

> *God is **disappointed** with me, moved by anger rather than **grace** and love, or is making all the bad things in their lives happen to them? What if they are primarily seeing God through the lens of their earthly **father**? What if you are training everyone else to see God in a limited way, because you're not willing to push the limits on your own way of seeing and talking about God?*
>
> *What if the people in your congregation are getting more of their understanding about God, and His world, from the songs you lead than from any **sermon** they hear? What if what you're feeding them is not enough to help them filter the more glitzy and **romanticized** views of God they see in movies, hear in music, and even need to believe so they can justify their actions? What if they can't talk about God well at work with their atheist or Buddhist friend because we're not helping them understand what they believe?*

I'm not finished yet. I come up for air. They step backwards.

> *What if you are one of the head theologians in your church, and whatever you plan for them each Sunday is possibly the real theological meal they are eating while the sermon is dessert?*
>
> *Are you feeding them your best thoughts, full of wonder, beauty, and **mystery**, thoughts that can help them understand just how and why God deals with them the way He does, or are you just giving them what you feel like giving them?*
>
> *What if, just if, your desire to avoid theology is not because it seems dry and boring or you just want to focus on God's love but because you're being spiritually **lazy** as a leader of God's people?*

Theology, Mystery, Beauty, and Wonder

At this point, I hope I haven't lost *you* already too! Some of the reasons mentioned above are why worship theology is so important for everyone involved in worship.

Theology is about **expanding** our sense of **beauty**, **mystery**, and **wonder** at the Person of **God, and** not about dry information!

Theology is about helping people live in a world full of **Grace** because a God of love is at the center of the universe, who Self-revealed His heart for us in Christ Jesus. Many people live, even believers, in a world full of self-hatred, self-criticism, fear, cynicism, and pride because they imagine God to be someone who mainly gets angry when they screw up.

Theology is about making our hearts and minds **dance** with the complexity and majesty of a God who threw the supernovas into space, breathed the atom into being, put the innocence into a baby's eyes, and loves each one of us back to life.

Put on Your Safari Hat

We're about to go on a journey of discovery. Everybody brings their theology to the table when they come into an encounter with Jesus. Everybody. For now, let's just be open to fresh discoveries and new insights into the heart of God related to worship.

To that end, the Bible will be our guide, and our constant companion. Worship is a celebration of the God who makes all things new, and is an **invitation** to discover the wonders of this mystery with a name—the **Father** of Creation, the living Son of God, our Lord **Jesus**, and the Holy **Spirit** of God.

Welcome to Essentials in Worship Theology

This section has been designed to help you begin to think theologically about worship. Our goal in each session will be to expand our vision of who God is, who human beings are, and then, ultimately, what worship is all about.

I look forward to the journey with you. Welcome to *Essentials in Worship Theology*.

Session 1: You Have a Theology of Worship

Videos in This Session:

- Session 1: You Have a Theology of Worship (6:00)

"Gradually … we discover that the voice whose echoes we began to listen for … becomes recognizable, as we reflect on the creator God who longs to put his world to rights; on the human being called Jesus who announced God's kingdom, died on a cross, and rose again; and on the Spirit, who blows like a powerful wind through the world and through human lives."[13]

Lifting the Veil on Theology

Let's talk about theology. The word comes from *Theos*, the Greek word for God, and -*logy,* the Greek suffix meaning "the study of." It has been defined as "faith seeking understanding," which is a beautiful way to think about why learning expands the joy and wonder of our faith.

Yet, theology is a mystery to most Christians, and there is often a question that underlies that mystery: "What does theology have to do with my everyday life?"

The short answer is this: "It has **everything** to do with our everyday life."

You've Chosen a Noble Task

Proverbs 25:2 says, "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings." In other words, discovery is a sacred **privilege**, and those who seek, often find.

Worship, in many ways, is a quest to comprehend with the soul the Sound behind the sound of music, the Rhythm behind the beating heart, the Vision behind physical sight, the Colors behind our spectrum, and the Life behind all forms of life. Such discoveries are those which the best of science could only ever dream of attaining.

How the Arts Carry Theology

When Jodie Foster's character was propelled into the stunning beauties of space in the lovely 1997 movie *Contact*, she stuttered, "They should have sent a poet." In other words, and more to the point related to gathered musical expressions of worship, often an expression of art (such as a song) can convey **meanings** in sounds, words or phrases that simple verbal descriptions from a pulpit cannot.[14]

Our gathered worship experiences, whether we lead them primarily though music, or involving liturgy, visuals, sound, and other arts, are so important in teaching the average Christian about the nature of God and their place in His story.

The God Who Self-Reveals

The Bible is our guide to the nature of God, the nature of human beings made "in His image," and the nature of worship.

To our great benefit, and in contrast to what the voices of the new atheism may say, Christians believe in a God who has not remained hidden.

He doesn't play games with humanity, thrusting us into this strange, undulating universe, and then throwing away any description of why we might be here.

He has revealed Himself, and He has revealed Himself in **Christ** (Heb. 1:3; John 1:1, 14, 8:28, 14:9, 15:5–6).

We aren't left to our own opinions. In Colossians 3:18–19 we read,

> *And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.…*

Jesus is the revelation of God to us, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the God of every human being who has ever lived. We are not left alone to our own concoctions; it is not every man for himself when it comes to who God is!

God has made Himself **known**, and this is the greatest act of love one can show.

And this idea, that we are not in charge of what God is like, is *terrifying* to the person who has not yet encountered His confounding grace and irrepressible love.

The God we worship as Christians is a God who, in love, self-reveals. He invites us into revelation and **meaning** by not remaining hidden, not remaining distant. This is a God who suffers with, suffers for, and suffers among His children.

This is a God who takes on flesh and blood, and who incarnates to make His point.

This is **Jesus**, the self-revealing of God.

The Scriptures Guide Us to Who God Is

We are given a guide, the Scriptures, to lead us forward as Christian communities welcoming the Spirit's leadership.

Despite our diverse understandings of the Bible's authoritative letters, histories, songs, prophecies, and stories, we are rooted by the Bible in a vision of God offered across time through a single tribe in our ancient human family—the **Jews**.

If we have enough imagination to recognize that this is indeed what God has done to self-reveal—He has particularly selected a tribe through which to speak His Story into the world—then we are ready to start unpacking our theology about God and His world.

Our Categories for Talking about Worship Theology

Here are our three categories of discovery, which form a trinity of ideas that tumble over one another and bring us back again and again to the Scriptures.

These will help us to form our worship theology together.

1. Our theology of worship should first tell us who we believe that God has revealed Himself to be.

In this session we will look at:

1. God as Creator (the God who creates)
2. God as King (the God who reigns)
3. God as Trinity (the God who relates)
4. God as Savior (the God who saves)

2. Our theology of worship should then tell us who we believe that human beings are revealed to be.

In this session we will look at:

1. Human beings as Sub-Creators (people who make and share)
2. Human beings as Image Bearers (people who reign and steward)
3. Human beings as Community Builders (people who relate and reveal)
4. Human beings as Salvation Storytellers (people who act and tell)

3. Our theology of worship should then tell us what worship is, given that God is the subject of worship and people are the object of God's affection.

In this session we will look at:

1. Worship as a Creative Act (to worship is to make and to share the gifts of that making)
2. Worship as a Royal Act (to worship is to benevolently reign within, and to steward, creation)
3. Worship as a Relational Act (to worship is to relate rightly to God, ourselves, other people, and the creation (including the whole community of living and non-living things)
4. Worship as a Narrative Act (to worship is to tell and retell a story that provides the optimal context for the universe, and to act in accord with that story)

Good Theology and Bad Theology

We said earlier that every person you will ever meet, including yourself, has a theology. In other words, they have ideas about who God is (or who God is not), and they will live out those beliefs whether they want to or not.

Theology *shows itself* over time in the way we live, the way we relate, the way we communicate, and *in the way we worship*. Some theology we might see as "good." Other theology we might see as "bad."

Have you ever been in a church worship gathering, and something felt very right or very wrong? Our theology shows up, often when we least expect it. We simply feel something when we experience someone else's theology guiding a worship gathering.

Let's look at some examples of **bad** and **good** theology for moment.

1. Bad Theology

We begin to understand that theology is important when we see the results of *bad* theology. In Waco, Texas USA, many years ago, 76 people (including 21 pregnant women and children) died in a fire after a standoff with a government agency over their stockpile of firearms. Led by David Koresh, the "Branch Davidians" had a theology to which they held tightly. In the aftermath of this tragedy, many in popular culture began to ask the question, "Is this really what the Bible says about God?" How could a group of people believe such strange things about God—using the Bible—that would lead to the death of innocent children?"

Most of us would say, "Now that's an **extreme** example of some seriously bad theology. We don't have anything like that going on in 'normal' churches today." Maybe. But there are some churches in which I have led worship that view God as a divine judge wanting people to get it right all of the time and who brings judgment if someone steps even a bit out of line.

How do I know this? Not because they told me (in most cases), "This is our theology." Rather, I know it because I see the way the worship leader exhaustingly cheerleads us through a series of religious gymnastics and hyped-up songs about only happy things, and a negative view of the human person seems to ooze out of the **messages** from the pastor.

As another example, how about the theology, or view of God, that regards God's primary mission as being completely focused on my personal life and happiness, to the exclusion of others?

In many brands of western Christianity, this view of God shows itself in the self-actualizing and **consumeristic** messages of many churches on a Sunday morning.

"If you just give your life to Jesus, then his job is to fulfill your dreams." It may be a god of someone's choosing on their spiritual iPod, but it is not the God of the cosmos that we see depicted in the pages of the Old and New Testaments.

2. Good Theology

Now, on the one hand, the stories mentioned above may seem to be a cartoon, a caricature, of what really happens out there. Don't most groups have it somewhat right? Why would so many people be involved in something if its theology was bad? I learned something about crowds from a friend many years ago. He said, "Just because an idea is embraced by a large group of people, does not mean it is either healthy or right." Following this logic, New York City is one of the most "right" cities on the planet, and we all know that can't be true!"

Large crowds, great music, and persuasive personalities do not baptize theology and make it right. We must be, as the apostle Paul admonished his listeners, like the Bereans who searched the Word of God to see if what Paul was saying was indeed true.

True to what? *True to Jesus' teaching.* "If you love me," Jesus said, "Keep my commands" (John 14:15).

We might say that good theology would be theology that ***enlarges our view*** *of God and his interaction with humanity*, rather than shrinks our view of God.

Someone else might suggest that *good theology is* ***biblical,*** i.e., there is strong Scriptural support for the way that we view God, how He interacts with humanity and how we interact with Him. This is true, but we must again remember that 20,000–30,000 protestant denominations apparently see the Scriptures supporting some very different ideas!

Good theology may mean for us, *"Any way of viewing God that leads us to recognize that His love is unfailing, His truth is enduring, and His actions are always just."*

For our purposes, let's bring all of these ideas together to say,

"Good theology is that which draws us near to the God of the Scriptures (James 4:8), strengthens love in our hearts for Him and the people of this world (John 3:16), and equips us to live the Jesus life as those who obey his loving commands (John 14:15)."

Embedded Theology and Deliberative Theology

It was Anselm of Canterbury (the Archbishop of Rome in the 1000s) who said, "Theology is faith seeking understanding." In other words, we can know what the Bible *says*, but theology is about what the Bible *means*. Theology is about the questions that we have about the **Scriptures** and our faith.

Who is God?

What is He like?

Why are alive and on planet earth?

Who is Jesus?

What is worship all about?

Who am I?

All of these are questions that theology seeks to put real answers toward and are questions (and answers) that are expressed in our worship leadership and creative influence without us even thinking about them.

In their excellent and simple book, *How to Think Theologically*, Howard Stone and James Duke suggest that there are two types of theology at work in the world.[15]

1. Embedded Theology: "I Grew Up Believing This"

One is called *embedded theology*. I like to call this *folk theology*. This is the theology, or way of viewing God and the world, that you learned from your family, from your church (or non-church) upbringing, from the music you listen to, from your interpretation of the Bible, etc.. It is the simple theology that most of us live out every day. A variety of **emotions**, beliefs, feelings, experiences, values, hopes, and dreams make up that theology, and most people are pretty sure they are right.

My own grandmother used to say, "Well, if it happens, it's God's will." I loved my grandma, but I've come to understand that this simple phrase topples 94% of the entire **biblical** view of sin, human choice and the mission of the Church! Embedded theology, Stone and Duke say, is what "rushes to the frontline in every battle over the moral and social issues of the day."[16]

Some of our embedded theology may be good, and some of it may be bad, often according to our upbringing. Just as I suggested there is good theology and bad theology in the world, so too, there is good theology and bad theology in *us*.

In most of the hymns, contemporary worship **songs,** and Christian music we lead, listen to, and participate in today (and all forms of music) there is some degree of helpful biblical theology, usually mixed with some degree of unhelpful biblical theology.

Oh, what are we to do?

2. Deliberative Theology: "I've Reflected and I Choose to Believe This"

Deliberative theology is "the understanding of faith that emerges from a process of carefully reflecting upon **embedded** theological convictions…. Deliberative theological reflection also carries us forward when our embedded theology proves inadequate."[17]

The word *deliberate* meaning "by choice" is in the word above. In this case, we are intentionally choosing to reflect on our beliefs, the story they describe, and their general helpfulness on the journey of following God. In many ways, choosing to read this piece is an act of **deliberative** theology.

> We are made to be people on a quest, on a journey, with God. Because a true quest often involves questions coming to the front of the line, many Christians shy away from it. Historically, this was not true of the Church in most of its lifetime. Rather than shying away from challenging questions, that might even change some of their embedded and **popular** theologies, early Christians ran head first into the most difficult **questions** of their age.

God as the Subject of the Sentence

One final thought before we move one. Go back to your school grammar classes with me for a moment. Remember subjects, verbs, and objects in sentence structure?

It is God who is the Subject of the worship sentence. We are the Objects of the worship sentence. If our worship theology begins with God, acting on us in love, then we are the Objects of that love. According to 1 John 4:19, we then "love Him," because "He first loved us." Worship is our response to God's actions of love toward us. We are the pursued; God is the primary **Pursuer**.

Our worship theology will get off to a shaky start if we believe that *we* are the Subject of the worship sentence, acting on God with our worship activity, and God is simply the recipient. This simple mix-up in worship theology may cause more damage in the Body of Christ then you and I will ever know.

Amos 5:23, the famous passage where God calls music "noise" because it isn't flowing from a heart of love and justice reminds us that if we are the focus of the worship experience we will always, always go wrong.

Embrace the journey of becoming an "in the trenches" theologian, and expect God to expand your horizons as you being to look for people's theology at work everywhere.

Session 1 Study Questions

First, if you are doing this with a group, take some time to write down your answers to the following questions before you gather. Highlight page numbers, key quotes and ideas that moved you. Make sure you write in the margins, circle words, or jot down anything that will help you interact with the material and remember core ideas.

1. What ideas moved you the most from this section?

Talk about the ideas related to worship that particularly moved you from the book or from the video.

How might the ideas that moved you help all of us to understand what worship is really about?

2. In what ways have you seen God be the "subject of the sentence" or the "object of the sentence" in your own worshipping life?

In other words, as worshippers we forget that the Story in which we find ourselves is one in which God is active in our lives and is the ultimate pursuer of the heart. When have you seen in your own life that worship became more about you and your pursuit than about God and His?

3. In what ways have you seen embedded theology at work in your own life? In what ways have you chosen to do deliberative theology, and what experience(s) triggered that choice?

We are all a mix of where we came from, and where we want to be. At times, we simply live the worshipping life out of ideas about God, ourselves, and the world around us that we were taught, and embraced. Yet, during a crisis moment, good or bad, we make choices about the way we'll see God. Can you think of a moment you moved from an embedded theology to a deliberative theology about God?

Session 2: Who Is the God We Worship?

Videos in This Session:

- Session 2: Who Is the God We Worship? (10:33)

Before we can talk about what worship is all about, we have to start with who God is. God is the focus of our worship, but sometimes we only give quick attention to His person and actions through our lyrics and don't dig deep enough to realize who we're really dealing with.

While libraries about the nature of God have been written, and the whole of the Scriptures gives us an ongoing window into the heart of God, we'll take this session to explore just a few core areas that help us connect our theology with our worship.

God Bursts Out of the Maze

"But suppose that God, if there is a God, were to come bursting out of the center of the maze on his own initiative?"[18]

From the flashes of God's personality revealed in the micro and macro cosmos (God as Creator); to the biblical declaration of God's sovereign rule over all time, space, and matter (God as King); to the historical and experiential evidence of God's manifest presence as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (God as Trinity); to salvation history's culminating celebration that God is one who rights the world (God as Savior); we as believers worship the God who *reveals* Himself.

"We become like what we worship," someone has wisely said. If our view of God is small, we will be small.

If our view of God is passionate, joyful, **expansive,** and creative, we will tend to be the same.

Here these words from John, rendered by Eugene Peterson in *The Message*:

"The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.
We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory,
like Father, like Son, generous inside and out,
true from start to finish."

John 1:14 (*The Message*)

What we love in Jesus, is what we love in God.

Let's look at these four different ways the Father God has **self-revealed** Himself to the world.

God as Creator (the God who creates)

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."

Genesis 1:1

The book of Genesis, in its very first verse, clearly communicates about the nature of God.

From the outset, this verb-based language describes in vivid, unfolding detail the nature of God as a Person who *makes*. In the first verse of the first book on the first moments of cosmic infancy, God is depicted as Maker, Creator, Lead Artist, and wildly Imaginative Engineer of the cosmos.

Anyone who can think up over 500 species of snail, with various slime colors, has got to be **creative**.

At the beginning of time, the macro world and the micro world spill forth from the imagination and administration, the art and the science, the mathematics and the music, rumbling in the Person of God.

In other words, God designed a cosmos of astounding complexity, beauty, immensity and intricacy and invited us to go **exploring**.

Many times, Christians seem to believe that the best answers in the world are the simple answers, and indeed, this may sometimes be the case. However, we see in the glory of the atom (which, as particles ever smaller are discovered and documented in their activity, may turn out to be made completely of light, i.e., light being the possible building block of all matter[19]), and the vastness of the space beyond our atmosphere (billions of stars, solar systems, galaxies, nebula, and other celestial wall hangings in the divine studio) that God delights in **complexity**.

The implications of beginning to understand God as the Originator of light, time, matter, energy, stars, galaxies, mathematics, microorganisms, sound, narwhals, rock strata, quarks, flies, and Venus flytraps are immeasurable.

When we add to this list the mysteries of the universe within us—the human body, the human soul, and the gifts of love, joy, friendship, and laughter—we should be left with nothing less than our mouths wide open and our hearts ravished with wonder that such a Being would invite us to play within this stunning universe.

God as King (the God who reigns)

"God has set His throne in heaven; He rules over us all. He's the King."

Psalm 103:19 (*The Message*)

The central, guiding metaphor that God self-reveals to us about both His Personality and His role in the universe, is that of *King*. Throughout the pages of Scripture, God both refers to Himself, and seems to welcome others to refer to Him, as **Sovereign** over the universe.

For the early Church, worship was a political act. The declaration "Jesus is Lord" was a direct affront to the common phrase of the day, "Caesar is Lord."

At one point I stood on the spot where, now almost two thousand years before me, Christians would have stood before screaming crowds in preface to a sporting event and been challenged as to their **political** allegiance, which was primarily to Jesus as their Lord. Looking deeply into the eyes of their inquisitors, they would have said what young Cassie Bernall, victim of the 1999 Columbine High School shooting, was said to have spoken to her assailant: "Yes, I believe in God."[20]

While the concept of kingship is a difficult one for those who live in North America, it is a more familiar idea in many other parts of the world. Kingship speaks of sovereign, governmental **authority**. Related to the idea that God is King is the idea that human beings are subject, ultimately, to live their lives according to the **will** of another.

Not only are the laws of time, space, and matter subject to this King, but all individuals, rulers, powers, and authorities will ultimately answer to the One who reigns over the universal order.

To recognize God as **King** is to recognize that by His rule He has claim on every life that is under His benevolent care.

God as Trinity (the God who relates)

"Hear O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is One."

Deuteronomy 6:4

The biblical doctrine of the Trinity is based on the recognition that God has revealed Himself to humankind as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The great "Three in One," is the God of the Jews, the great "I Am" of history (Ex. 3:14), and has been revealed to us by the Spirit of God through the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

In N.T. Wright's collection of worship sermons, *For All God's Worth*, he suggests that the doctrine of the Trinity expressed in the Scriptures[21] in the Christian understanding of God, was never meant to be a math equation confining our understanding of God, but rather a way of God expressing that He is **beyond** the confines of our wildest perceptions.

To understand God as One Person standing at the center of the cosmos expressing Himself in three ways as Father, Son, and Spirit can be mind-boggling. The early Christians, in face of their revelation of Jesus as God, came to the doctrine of the Trinity as their best way of talking about such holy mysteries.

Scholar Jeremy Begbie of Duke University has suggested that we use an analogy from the world of music to comprehend the Trinity—three of one, all existing and acting at the same time. A **chord** is made up of three notes. They are individual frequencies, each with their own part to play, but together the chord is sounded by all of them at once. To take away one note, is to take away the chord. The three are one.

The late Robert Webber, one of our generation's most dedicated scholars in both ancient and contemporary worship, challenged worship leaders to think this way when leading Trinitarian worship:

> *Rediscover the Trinitarian nature of worship (We worship the Father in the language of mystery; the Son in the language of story; the Spirit in the language of symbol).*[22]

God as Savior (the God who saves)

"You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." Matthew 1:21

How many times have you heard another Christian, or even yourself, say "I'm saved"? We should probably ask the question, "From what are we saved?" Evil? Immorality? Ourselves? A fiery pit of hell? Our fears?

Another question should then follow this one—a question that seems to be far more important to the Story woven throughout the Old and New Testaments. According the scriptures, we should not only ask ourselves *from* what have we been saved, but we should also ask *to* what have we been saved?

If the God of the Bible is anything, He is the God who is not distant. When things go wrong in His creation, He is a God who both *acts and **rescues***.

It is very difficult to read the first five pages of the Bible without seeing at least two things:

> 1. We should immediately see that there is a God who has deeply and passionately **loved** the human race. We all know the Story. God speaks a word and creates. God creates human beings to steward that creation, at least on earth. Humankind is **special**, made in God's image. Community and intimacy, the threads weaving together all of the created world, are in perfect and radiant condition.
>
> 2. Upon our reading of those first few pages, we should see that there is a severe problem that rears its head. That problem, conveniently known to us as a little three-letter word, is **sin**.
>
> Sin is a word that causes the modern person to recoil. Biblically, it means that we've "missed the mark." We've somehow fallen short of our vocation (our calling), our mission (our co-labor with God), and our identity (our relationship to God, one another, and the world).
>
> How the Story began is the way it was, and is, meant to end. We began in the pristine beauty of the Garden of Eden, destined to live forever in community with God and each other. Instead, we chose to eat the fruit from one of the forbidden trees in that sanctuary, thereby **shattering** the glorious intimacy we once shared with our Maker and with all the created order.
>
> Sin is the problem and God is the kind of Person who will not step away from the brokenness in His own **work of art**.

The Cross and Atonement

To restore humanity, **fix** the sin issue, and bring new creation life (2 Cor. 5:17), Christ 1) lived among us, 2) suffered on the cross, and then 3) rose again from the dead.

The word *atonement*, or Christ's relationship-restoring act on the cross to bring "at-one-ment" between God and humanity again, is a profound and deep theological reflection. We won't have time to completely unpack this here.

However, we'll use it as a category for breaking down the very specific ways the death of Jesus on the cross worked the rescue of God for a disconnected and sin-chained humanity.

1. The Cross Reveals the Love of God

"God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." Romans 5:8

In the suffering of Jesus on the cross, we see the love of the Father manifest in the most stunning and profound of ways—the complete self-giving of His only Son. If you only write one song or create one expression related to the work of the cross, focus on this reality: that God *so loved*, that God *gave*, and *gave* and *gave* of Himself.

Helpful References: 2 Corinthians 5:19; Romans 8:3; Romans 8:32; Galatians 2:20; 2 Corinthians 5:14; Ephesians 5:25

2. The Cross Is Sacrificial

"Sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh."

Romans 8:3

The apostle Paul described Christ's death as a "fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." Reflecting on the ancient practice of offering a lamb's blood in sacrifice[23] for the sins of the people Israel, Jesus becomes that "life for a life" exchange.

Helpful References: Romans 3:25; Ephesians 5:2; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Corinthians 5:7; Romans 5:9; Ephesians 1:7; Ephesians 2:13; Colossians 1:20; John 19:34

3. The Cross Is a Vicarious Act

"While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8

This term *vicarious* is used to depict the fact that Jesus did not die just for you, or just for me, or just as an historical event. Jesus died, according to the scriptures, "for us," i.e., in our place.

Helpful References: 1 Thessalonians 5:9; Romans 8:32; Ephesians 5:2; Mark 10:45

4. The Cross Is Substitutionary

"For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died." 2 Corinthians 5:14

Another way to see Christ's death is to see it as substitutionary. In other words, Christ died in our stead, in our place, and therefore we *all* have died. In submitting to God's judgment, he delivered us from our judgment.

Now, identifying with the death of Jesus, we are able to identify with his rising from the dead to new creation and new life.

Helpful References: 2 Corinthians 5:21; 2 Corinthians 5:14; 1 Timothy 2:6; 2 Corinthians 5:15; Galatians 3:13; Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 6:1

5**. The Cross Is Propitiatory**

"…and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished." Romans 3:24–25

What in the world does the word *propitiation* mean? Great question. "The death of Christ has to do not only with human beings and their sin; it also looks Godward, and as such is propitiatory."[24]

Propitiation literally means to "render us favorable" before someone we have offended. In this way, the offering of Jesus' life on the cross renders us favorable to God.

Helpful References: Romans 1:18; Romans 1:32; Romans 2:12; Romans 6:23; 1 Thessalonians 5:9; Hebrews 9:5; Romans 3:25; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15; Philippians 2:5ff

6. The Cross Is Redemptive

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Mark 10:45

Redemption literally means "to buy, or to purchase." It speaks of words like *ransom* and *freedom*. The words used for redemption in the New Testament spring from themes common to the period. Redemption had to do with ransoming prisoners of war or buying back slaves for the purpose of freedom.[25]

We were slaves to sin, disobedience, self-preservation, and independence from God. We are now rescued, saved, to a new Master. We no longer obey the old.

Helpful References: Titus 2:14; 1 Timothy 2:6; Romans 3:24; Ephesians 1:7; Romans 8:23; Ephesians 4:30; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 1 Corinthians 6:19–20; 1 Corinthians 7:22–23; Galatians 3:13; Galatians 4:4

7**. The Cross Is Triumphant**

"And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." Colossians 2:15

The achievement of Christ on the cross, no matter what some of our contemporary worship songs say, was not *just* for you, or even just for me! Jesus' death on the cross did indeed fix the sin issue for you and me, but not *solely* for you and me.

A great, spectacular *cosmic* triumph occurred in those dark hours on Calvary's hill. Every ruler, authority, and power in Paul's conception of a spiritual realm was to be destroyed and rendered powerless by Christ's work on the cross. He will reign until he has put every enemy under his feet (1 Cor. 15:24–25).

Helpful References: 1 Corinthians 15:24-25; Ephesians 2:2–8; Ephesians 3:10

Resurrection and New Creation

Like a song rushing toward its conclusion, we see that the work on the cross of the Saving God was not the **culmination** of the New Life Story.

Early one morning, according to Matt. 28:1—10, a stone was rolled away, a tomb was found empty, and the disciples of Jesus were propelled into the world with such joyful force that even the most unbelieving scholar of our day are confounded by what exactly happened on that first **Easter** Sunday.

According to New Testament scholar N.T. Wright, the resurrection is a guarantee of the age to come. Jesus is the firstborn from among the dead (Col. 1:18) and his followers will follow suit (1 Thess. 4:16). New creation is presently at work in us (2 Cor. 5:17) and is in the cards for the whole created order (Rev. 21:5).

A restoration is at hand. Can you feel it all around you? Can you taste it on the breeze, sense it in your soul? Can you sing it, play it, and creatively express it to your congregation?

That restoration is a personal restoration, but it is also a community restoration, a heaven-and-earth restoration, and ultimately a cosmic **restoration**.

God's Kingdom is breaking into the world by the Spirit of God through the way opened by Christ, and we as his followers are participating in bringing healing and wholeness to the world through Jesus.

Empowered by the Spirit of God, we bring God's pervasive, all-consuming peace (found in the Hebrew word for peace, *shalom*) to the situations that God has given us to influence (Matt. 5:9). Peace of mind, peace of heart, peace of circumstance, peace of government, peace of society, peace of relationships—in all of these arenas we are Christ's ambassadors.

We Live in Resurrection Light

For the early church, every Sunday was a mini-Easter celebration focusing on the resurrection of Jesus and the New Life at work in us. The *Eucharist*, called "The Great Thanksgiving" (what we call *Communion*) celebrated the resurrection life.

As Christ's ambassadors, every act of forgiveness, reconciliation, and hope-giving is now a new creation act—an act of *shalom*-making or peace-making. We anticipate the age to come every time we make a choice to act in love, in shalom peace, and not in hatred or bitterness. We are Easter people. We live in Resurrection Light. Hope lives in us.

Jesus did not come to make bad people good. He came to make *dead* people *live*.

Our Creator, King, Trinity, and Savior

While we can't do justice in this short study to all that God's character means to us and the world, we can see that our theology of worship depends on understanding **Who** we worship.

We become like that which we worship. To become like Christ is the goal of all Christian worship.

We conclude with Colossians 1:15–20, one of the great early worship hymns that scholars believe was sung in the early Church in some form:

> *"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*
>
> *And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.*
>
> *For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."*
>
> Col. 1:15–20

Session 2 Study Questions

Again, if you are doing this with a group, take some time to write down your answers to the following questions before you gather. Highlight page numbers, key quotes and ideas that moved you. Make sure you write in the margins, circle words, or jot down anything that will help you interact with the material and remember core ideas.

1. What ideas moved you the most from this section?

Talk about the ideas related to worship that particularly moved you from the book or from the video.

How might the ideas that moved you help all of us to understand what worship is really about?

2. When you were reading about the nature of the God we worship, which aspect of His character most draws you to worship?

We talked about God as Creator, King, Trinity, and Savior. Of course, all of these aspects of who God has shown Himself to be are vital to all of us. However, sometimes we are drawn, in very unique ways, into the loving circular dance that is worship. Which aspects of God's character have you always found the most fascinating? Which aspect of God's character do you believe their needs to be a fresh "retelling" of in our generation?

3. The suffering and resurrection of Jesus are the most powerful hinge points for worship we have in the Scriptures. How does what you read make you think differently about why Christ came, what his resurrection is all about, or what our eternal destiny is?

These big theological ideas, the cross, resurrection, heaven, earth, the Kingdom, and the New Creation have been important themes for Christians related to worship for millennia. What areas caught you by surprise as you read? Was there anything you found yourself joyfully agreeing with, or strongly disagreeing with? Why?

Session 3: What is a Worshipper?

Videos in This Session:

- Session 3: What Is a Worshipper? (8:40)

In the previous section, we looked at the nature of God through four lenses: God as Creator (the God who creates), God as King (the God who reigns), God as Trinity (the God who relates), and God as Savior (the God who acts). If the words of Genesis 1:26–27 are correct, then we who are made in the imago Dei*, the image of God, will reflect the heart of God into the creation.*

How Does God See Us?

The very first chapters of the Bible reveal to us a very intimate picture of the creation. God speaks, and heaven and earth come into being. God's Spirit is hovering over the surface of the waters, shaping earth and sky as we know it.

Then, something remarkable takes the work of creation to a whole new level. God breathes into simple dust—the elements of the earth—and the flower and crown of the created order (N.T. Wright) rises. **Human** beings walk the earth.

*"God spoke: 'Let us make human beings in our **image**, make them reflecting our nature so they can be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle, and, yes, Earth itself, and every animal that moves on the face of Earth.' God created human beings; he created them godlike, reflecting God's nature. He created them male and female. God blessed them: 'Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth! Take charge! Be responsible for fish in the sea and birds in the air, for every living thing that moves on the face of Earth.'"*

Gen. 1:26-27 (*The Message*)

*"At the time God made Earth and Heaven, before any grasses or shrubs had sprouted from the ground—God hadn't yet sent rain on Earth, nor was there anyone around to work the ground (the whole Earth was watered by underground springs)—God formed Man out of dirt from the ground and blew into his nostrils the **breath** of life.*
The Man came alive—a living soul!"

Genesis 2:7 (*The Message*)

What Do *We* Have to Do with Worship?

Understanding the nature of human beings is an essential part of understanding what worship is all about. After all, we are the ones who worship, not God.

I once saw a poster, hanging in a dorm room that said, "The two most important facts of the universe are: 1. There is a God. 2. You are not Him."

The poster was meant, and rightly so, to put arrogant human beings in their place. At the same time, there is a **magnificence** about what it means to be human that must never be overlooked.

The heavens declare the glory of God, the Scriptures say. The trees of the fields clap their hands, the pages of the Psalms profess. The new colts kick, and the harvest moves in the wind. The stars shimmer and dance in celebration of the One who names them, and microscopic organisms respond according to their way and their wiring as participants in the symphony that is worship.

And here we are, in the midst of this resplendent glory. What is our job? What is our place? Why are we not the same thing as a rock, an octopus, or a star in the night sky? Is there something special about us?

According to Genesis, there is something very special about us. Our job is to reflect God's glory into His good world and then gather up the praises of creation to offer to God in articulate speech,[26] declarations of thanks, praise, adoration, and acclaim.

Does that sound familiar? Human beings were designed to take their place as the **lead worshippers** of the created order. When we stepped out of that role in the fall from Eden, attempting to become gods ourselves (Gen. 3:5), we broke the circle of worship we were intended to complete.

For What Is a Human Being Here?

In Genesis 1:26-27, the Hebrew word for "image" is the word *tselem*. It's a Hebrew word with very limited usage in the Old Testament. The word is used to speak of children and their similarity in personhood to a parent.

While scholars debate the exact meaning of this word in its context, most perspectives on what it means to be made in the *imago Dei*, or the "image of God," come down to two ideas: **nature** and **vocation**.

Nature and Vocation

The nature perspective purports that our creativity, force of will, moral nature, and capacity to love and give, all stem from the fact that we are somehow made in the spiritual nature of God. There is some merit to this understanding of the image of God in human beings, yet scholars differ on what it means.

The vocation (or role) perspective suggests that we are made in God's image, i.e., we are His Image Bearers and vice-regents, His stewards and caretakers, according to the ancient near eastern tradition of Kings setting exact replicas of their image in distant lands in order to declare their dominion over those lands.

For the purposes of this session, we will mingle both ideas together, though both perspectives in isolation have strong merits in terms of biblical scholarship.

In each of the following sections, reflect on the possibility that God has both formed us after His Personality and that He has given us a mission to be His **vice-regents** and caretakers of this good planet and all facets of its life.

1. Human Beings as Sub-Creators

If God is the Creator, then we are Sub-Creators.

The doctrine of creation tells us that God creates *ex nihilo*; He creates something out of nothing.

We, on the other hand, create *something* out of *something*. The Sub-Creators of God walk in the cool of the garden. With the "stuff of life," including light, fabric, voices, metal, elements, mathematics, materials, food, drink, sounds, and by means including our mental capacities, physical handiwork, and human sexuality, we express both glory and story through acts of *sub-creation*—creation after the order of the original Creator.

We Make with What We Have

Our wildest creations as human beings, with all due respect to the great scientists of the world, have always begun with something that God *already created*.

We have yet to make our own dust out of which to make a human being. We have yet to create a new color, a new air to breathe, or a new building block of life. We work with what *is*, and we manipulate what is in order to discover, explore and rejoice in the world for which we are made.

When we lose perspective on our utter dependence on God to be the source and goal of our creative outflow, we become lost in our creations. The unyielding creative pride of a scientist, artist, thespian, or even Christian leader must bow its knee before the One from whom and for whom such vibrant creativity flows.

We create from a palette placed into our hands by God. The hues are of His ultimate making.

Creativity Is a Gift of Both Joy and Necessity

This impulse to make and create expresses our personality, but also is a primal function within our psyche that God has given us to invent, innovate, and supply for ourselves. Our creativity may be called out by **necessity** (in times of suffering, there is often tremendous creativity expressed in caring for the needs of the many) or by **play** (when space is created for self-expression or community expression, e.g., a jam session).

In other words, creativity is a gift given to human beings to support us in a continually adapting, changing world. Studies in the strengths of both the right

and left hemispheres of the brain tell us that there are both right and left-brained forms of creativity, and every person on the planet exhibits some form of one, the other, or both.

Whether we are designing an Excel spreadsheet, creatively parenting a child, music-making, or star-studying, human beings are at their essence creative.

2. Human Beings as Image Bearers

If God is the King, then we are Image Bearers.

Again, Scripture informs us that human beings have come onto the stage of terra firma with a calling, a co-mission, and a **vocation**. We have something to do.

If God is the King of the universe, then we who have his breath are of royal origin. We too, have the capacity to lead and order great systems, and to reflect love, goodness, and wisdom into that which we lead.

Icons in the Ancient World

In the ancient world, it was not uncommon for ancient Kings and Queens to declare their authority over conquered lands by setting up images, or *ikonos* (icons), of themselves in those lands. When a subject would look at the image, they knew that they were under both the authority, and the protection, of that ruler.

Imagine now, that God breathes into dust, placing images of Himself all over planet earth, in every color, shape, and size of person. Dark skin and tribal rhythm populate some corners of the world, while golden skin and desert strength populate others.

Image Bearers are now everywhere—every human being declaring by their sheer presence, "God rules in this place. God's goodness, love, mercy, kindness, and grace are your shield and protection. Offer your **allegiance** to this benevolent Sovereign who will rule us with mutual joy!" Even when we don't believe it, we're still designed to be God's Image Bearers.

Righteousness and Right-Relating

In this understanding of vocation, Image Bearers are called to live in righteousness—literally, "right-relatedness"—in four key relationships:

1. We are called to live in right-relatedness to God.

2. We are called to live in right-relatedness with each other.

3. We are called to live in right-relatedness with ourselves.

4. We are called to live in right-relatedness with creation (i.e., all animate and inanimate creation).

In so doing, we honor God and take our place as the stewards of this good world that He created. No longer do we embrace or afford any credibility to dualistic ideas that separate the physical world from the spiritual world, but rather we look forward to days of new creation by tending to what is before us with love, goodness, wisdom, and creativity—all to the end of learning to rule and reign with the living Christ.

3. Human Beings as Community Builders

If God is the Trinity, then we are Community Builders.

All this talk of "right-relating" and eternally living with others sounds tiring. For those of us who are introverts, the joys of community have their limitations.

However, no matter our background, virtually every human being who has ever lived has recognized their deep need for some form of relationship with other human beings, and has sought to find a way to build on this natural impulse within.

Made for One Another

Hear these profound words from Dietrich Bonheoffer, the courageous Lutheran pastor who formed the Confessing Church (spiritual leaders who disagreed with Hitler's tactics in Nazi Germany), and who died in a concentration camp within a day of the Allied forces securing victory.

> *Not what a man is in himself as a Christian, his spirituality and piety, constitutes the basis of our community. What determines our brotherhood is what the man is by reason of Christ. Our community with one another consists solely in what Christ has done to both of us. This is not true merely at the beginning, and though in the course of time something else were to be added to our community; it remains so for all the future and to all eternity.*[27]
> Dietrich Bonheoffer, from *Life Together*

We know it. We're built for **community**. Give any one of us enough time alone, and we'll begin to understand that a level of mental health begins to deteriorate as we long for the company of another.

In the movie, *Castaway*, Tom Hanks plays a man lost on a lonely island, without companionship. A small soccer ball he calls Wilson becomes the only form of companionship he can find. Though it's a sad image, the hunger for relationship and the desire to not be left *completely* alone is common to the human family.

Wired to Gather Community

Human beings who believe in God's covenant pursuing activity, now step into the world as Community Builders, who are ideally wired to be the ones who re-gather the scattered human family under the banner of God's good leadership

and the fullness of **unconditional** love. The kinds of communities that we are taught to build by Jesus in the New Testament, idealistic as it sounds, are those kinds of communities where **love** and grace is felt in the air and warms the chilled soul in need of thaw.

Think of the moment where the prostitute caught in adultery felt the forgiveness of God after her accusers were sent away (right and law abiding as they were!). Imagine the feelings of euphoria in Peter when, after denying Jesus in the courtyard before his death, he experiences the grace and forgiveness of Jesus for his cosmically criminal actions.

Imagine the thriving Body of the early Church welcoming into their ranks those distressed and overburdened by the unjust financial systems of their day, as the Church infiltrated the Roman Empire by caring for its widows and orphans as **family**.

The community of Christ is designed and called to be marked by a love that bears with the most tremendous of sorrows and even internal conflicts within itself.

Christians, as healthy Community Builders, are called to become the supreme re-humanizers of every age, purging human hearts of the toxic effects of the dehumanizing atmospheres in which we live with the power of love. Whether we are Community Builders in our homes, on our streets, in our cities or in our churches, we are acting in accord with our nature as human beings and in accord with the heart of God when we bring people **together**.

4. Human Beings as Salvation Storytellers

If God is the Savior, then we are Salvation Storytellers.

A number of years ago, a writer came out with a book that hit the Christian shelves called *The God-Chasers*. Maybe you read it, and it was a powerful turning point for your life. If so, you would find no one more excited than me that God had met you profoundly through someone's faithful writing. However, I just could not get past the title *God-Chasers*.

Who Is Chasing Whom?

As far as I know, no faithful Jew, at any point of history, would ever have dreamed of making such a brash claim before God or their fellow Jews.

If the story of the people Israel (which literally means "he wrestles with God") tells us anything about the game of chase going on throughout all time, it tells us that the Pursuer in this relationship has rarely ever been known to be an ordinary human. In covenant after covenant, pursuit after pursuit, God showed the Jews that they were not God-chasers, rather they were the ***God-chased***.

Salvation history paints a picture of a God who will not allow His creation, His work of art, to see corruption and decay. "At the fullness of time," the scripture

says, "Christ came" (Gal. 4:4). Our theology of God as Savior demands that we recognize the expansive nature of God's pursuit of humankind.

The Story of an Age to Come

Christians tell the story of an age to come, of a present and future move of God that is righting all that is wrong in this world. We tell the story of a day when the world will be put to rights, when justice will be done, when the human family will understand how dear and priceless we are to one another.

The creation/redemption project, the history of God's covenantal pursuit of humankind, provides our lyrics, themes, textures, and contrasts. Each of those poetic pieces mark the Story of Hope—the Story of a new creation and a bright Day of Awakening to come.

We, as creative leaders in this wayward and forgetful human family, are asked a profound question as we stand before our human family:

"Will you be the narrator of the Story for us? Will you tell us in a thousand ways and in a thousand churches, homes and venues, the Story of God that makes sense of our lives?"

And God says,

"Yes, will you narrate My Story?"

Session 3 Study Questions

Again, if you are doing this with a group, take some time to write down your answers to the following questions before you gather. Highlight page numbers, key quotes and ideas that moved you. Make sure you write in the margins, circle words, or jot down anything that will help you interact with the material and remember core ideas.

1. What ideas moved you the most from this section?

Talk about the ideas related to worship that particularly moved you from the book or from the video.

How might the ideas that moved you help all of us to understand what worship is really about?

2. When you think about who a human being is, who a worshipper actually is, how does it make you feel about how you view the other people all around you?

What it means for human beings to be made in the image of God is an important theological idea related to worship that has been the center of worship conversations since the beginning of time. How does seeing people around you as those made in the image and likeness of God affect you? In what ways does it change the way you understand what is happening when we worship in gathered settings, and what is happening when we worship God with our daily lives?

3. What do you think it means to "narrate the Story of God" with our lives? How should our gathered worship experiences narrate that Story to those that gather and to the world around us?

Now we're into the big "How does this apply to my life" question. Some have said that you and I are the only letter from God that many people will ever read in their lifetimes. If that is true, how should our daily lives, as Sub-Creators, Image Bearers, Community Builders, and Salvation Storytellers show the heart of God to people around us? Give examples.

Session 4: What Is Worship?

Videos in This Session:

- Session 4: What Is Worship? (7:25)

Lifting the Veil on Worship

I often begin conferences and seminars by saying "How many of you have come here to learn more about worship?" Many people raise their hands. Then I say, "How many of you are hoping I might have something to say about worship that might be new, or interesting?" More people raise their hands.

Then I say, "I have a confession to make. The more I dig into the meaning of worship, the mystery of what it means to engage in this privileged relationship with God, the less I feel I have to say about worship."

Like David, talking about worship is talking about things "too wonderful for me" (Psalm 139:6). Yet, here we are, leaders of worship, participants in worship, and those who live out what it means on a daily basis.

What Does it Mean to Be a Living Sacrifice?

Worship is a mystery, a **wonder**, a gift of intimate **exchange** between our Creator and us. At the same time, scripture above quite clearly about what worship is. Let's take a brief look at what it means to have our worship be a **living sacrifice** before God.

When Paul speaks about the living sacrifice and self-offering in Romans 12:1–2, he knew exactly what he was doing. He was speaking to a culture familiar with the idea of sacrifice.

They knew one thing about a sacrifice: it was *dead*. When Paul begins speaking about a living sacrifice, he is saying to them, "As dead as a dead sacrifice is, that is how living your sacrifice is to be."

Hear the retelling of this passage by Eugene Peterson:

> *"So here's what I want you to do, God helping you:*
> *Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering.*
>
> *Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for Him.*
> *Don't become so well adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking.*
> *Instead, fix your attention on God.*
>
> *You'll be changed from the inside out."*
>
> Romans 12:1–2 (*The Message*)

What Is Worship?

In other words, worship is an **activity** that encompasses all of our lives offered to Jesus in complete and utter surrender. Whether we are singing songs on a Sunday morning, handing clothes to someone who needs them on Wednesday, or choosing how we'll spend our work paycheck on Friday, every act of life has the potential to be an offering of worship.

The early Church father Irenaeus of Lyons put it this way, "The glory of God is a human being, **fully alive**." When Romans 12:1–2 defines worship, it describes worship as a "living sacrifice" on the part of the worshipper. In other words, we put God at the beginning, middle, and end of our every thought, choice and action.

When we turn all of life into a simple ***response*** to the love of God (1John 4:19), we are truly becoming the worshippers for whom the Father is searching (John 4:24).

The Melody and Harmonies of Worship

When Jesus speaks to the woman at the well in John 4:21–24, he says that God is seeking a certain kind of worship, and it's not the kind of worship that is based on services, locations, and doing things right.

It is based on a life living out its relationship with God, "in spirit and in truth." It flows from the heart in the midst of life, like a melody flows in and around the notes and accompaniment telling a beautiful story.

In our generation, we sometimes confuse the melody of worship with the harmonies that are meant to support it, beautify it, and reveal it. First, Jesus is after our hearts, our lives. Music won't cut it. Liturgies won't replace it. The Arts will never displace it.

Life Worship is the **melody** God is after in John 4:21–24.

Gathered worship is a harmony meant to support this melody. It is what we do when we make music, break bread, share fellowship, and experience art.

Family worship is also harmony and is gathered worship in our homes.

Finally, personal worship elevates and energizes the other forms of worship and ultimately lifts the melody of life worship to its height.

1) Life Worship (the melody),

2) Gathered Worship (the accompaniment),

3) Family Worship (the accompaniment), and

4) Personal Worship (the accompaniment).

So now we ask, for our worship theology, *why* do we worship?

Why We Worship

Why this complete giving over of our life worship to an unseen God?

"Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

1 Peter 1:7–9

Our hearts have been captured by a Story. It is the story of a Creator King, an Intervening Savior, who penetrated into the darkest tombs of humanity and emerged the Life Victor.

It is the Story that invites us, moves us, and **draws** into relationship with a God who is unseen. Even with our belief in Jesus, who John said walked and moved among us, we today must remain the worshippers of a God who does not choose to make Himself in flesh and bone before our eyes. We "… love him … and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy" Peter states above.

The Story moves us, and the Person within the Story encounters us, and we respond. Our completely surrendered life is the only offering that is fitting when one truly begins to understand the Story in which we find ourselves. God has taken the initiative in a relationship to reveal Himself intimately to us and to passionately pursue us. In the light of this reality, we begin to discover why we worship. This biblical perspective is found in a simple passage in 1 John 4:19.

"We love him because he first loved us."

1 John 4:19

From this passage, we understand that a healthy theological approach to worship suggests that worship is primarily a *response* to the already, and all-consuming, love of God.

What Does Music Have to Do with It?

If worship is a **whole life** response to the love of God, then what does **music** have to do with worship?

Brian Doerksen, respected contemporary worship leader and songwriter, explains it this way:

> *Why do we sing songs in the first place? We do it because it is something that we can do* together. *There are probably other things that we could do to express our love and our worship to God that would be, in one sense, just as valid, but they're not easy for us to do* ***together***.
>
> *Yet we can get ten people, or a hundred people, or a thousand, or a hundred thousand —whatever number we choose—and we can all get together and sing a song. That song reflects what is going on in our hearts and our minds, together. There is truth that we're affirming, but there's also affection that we're expressing. That's why I think that singing as an expression of worship has stood the test of time.*[7]

In other words, when we use the power of poetic lyrics, blended with the power of music, we are literally creating a ***place*** where God can meet with people, and people can meet with God.

Songs are indeed a *place*. They are an **encountering ground** where our prayers can take flight on the wings of words and melodies. As a worship team, when we select, practice, prepare, and perform songs in the tapestry that we call a "worship set," we are literally creating a place for people to encounter God.

People come to a time of worship saying in the quiet of their hearts what the psalmist said, "Where and when can I go and meet with God?" The worship leader responds, "How about here? How about now?" and leads them to that place of **meeting**.

What Is the Role of Those Who Lead Worship?

Suddenly learning parts from a CD, preparing set lists, rehearsing mid-week for a few hours, getting up early on a Sunday morning to set up gear and to sound check, choosing to love in relationships and playing for two or three services a week takes on a *context*.

We are serving the people of God, with the gifts and passions that energize us, by creating a place for us all to encounter God.

In some beautiful way, this reality makes all the hard work seem to be a grand **privilege** to be able to enjoy our love for music in such a way that leads others to a more beautiful place with God than they had been before.

Worship leading, as Brian Doerksen put it, is most like the role of the best man or maid of honor at a wedding. We are leading the Bride and Groom to intimately share in acts of love and **commitment** between one another. How horrible it would be to think of the best man in a wedding drawing away the attention of the Bride to Himself, or of the maid of honor drawing the Groom's attention to herself![8]

We are in the role we are in, as lead worshippers, to make a way for people to meet with God, and to create a space where simple songs can put wings to the prayers of those who have gathered to worship. We usher people gently to a place where they can respond to the love of God. It's as simple as that.

Four Ways We Can Look at Worship

Let's wrap this up with some good worship theology.

Remember our definition of "good theology" from the first session? Here it is again to remind us, and let's keep it in mind as we continue.

Good theology is that which draws us near to the God of the Scriptures (James 4:8), strengthens love in our hearts for Him and the people of this world (John 3:16), and equips us to live the Jesus life as those who obey his loving commands (John 14:15).

With Romans 12:1–2 as our pivot point, we reflect on key theological ideas related to worship that have been supported both biblically and traditionally by the Church.

If worship's focus is 1) A God who is Creator, King, Trinity, and Savior, and is then participated in by 2) Human beings who are Sub-Creators, Image Bearers, Community Builders, and Salvation Storytellers, then Worship is 3) A **Creative** activity, A **Royal** activity, A **Relational** activity, and a **Narrative** activity.

1. Worship Is a Creative Act.

If God is Creator and we are Sub-Creators, then worship is a Creative activity.

The expressions of worship call to us from the pages of biblical history and church history. Multi-colored, multi-media, multi-ethnic, multi-sensory, and multi-disciplined expressions of worship have pulsed throughout the whole of the record of Christian worship. Engaging what biologists today tell us may be at least 32 senses active in the human body, we are free to engage all of the media this life affords us to express our adoration and self-surrender to God.

In Exodus 35–36, two artists named Bezalel and Oholiab are brought onto the stage of the Old Testament. They are "skilled in their craft," and they apply that craft, along with a rich community of other artisans in metal, fabric, color, and more (we see the first "yarn art" in this passage) to the **ornamentation** of the amazing Tabernacle of Moses. In Genesis 4:21, Jubal, the father of all who play the harp and flute, is recounted to our remembrance. Jubal's name, speaking powerfully and vocationally to all musicians of any age, means "stream or river." Like a river into which we never step twice, due to its constantly moving waters, creative leaders have the capacity to **reinvent** old ideas in new and stunning ways.

In Revelation 4–5, we see a visual and sonic (sight and sound) display that must boggle even the most over-imaginative mind. Creativity is at the center of the lavish display of honor and affection that is worship.

2. Worship Is a Royal Act.

If God is King and we are Image Bearers, then worship is a Royal activity.

If human beings are indeed the Image Bearers of God according to Genesis 1:6–7, then worship becomes a supremely royal and vice-regently act. This is the essence of Peter's words on worship in 1 Peter 2:9 (NIV):

"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

In other words, we *are* a royal priesthood, *so that* we may declare praise. It is precisely because we are those images of the true Deity, set up in regions over which He has rule and dominion, and upon which He sets His **protection**, that we are able to offer the accumulated praise of the created order back to God. We

are royal subjects of the Great King, so that we may give voice to creation's praise.

3. Worship Is a Relational Act.

If God is Trinity and we are Community Builders, then worship is a Relational activity.

A dark moment occurred between David and his wife, Michal, in 2 Samuel 6. Michal (daughter of the previous king) mocked David upon his return to Jerusalem with the Ark of the Covenant, as he led the dancing throngs in worship with himself clad only in a small loincloth.

"'How wonderfully the king has distinguished himself today—exposing himself to the eyes of the servants' maids like some burlesque street dancer!' David replied to Michal, 'In God's presence I'll dance all I want! He chose me over your father and the rest of our family and made me prince over God's people, over Israel. Oh yes, I'll dance to God's glory—more recklessly even than this. And as far as I'm concerned, I'll gladly look like a fool ... but among these maids you're so worried about, I'll be honored no end.'"

2 Samuel 6:4-5

David found connection with the people of God, with those whose hearts were like-passioned with his own. It is vital that we understand the corporate nature of worship, and that it overshadow the more individualistic visions of worship we have today. David could dance because the presence of God, and the joyful faces of his people, gave him the gumption to do so.

Building a community of like-hearted worshippers is vital in worship.

4. Worship Is a Narrative Act.

If God is Savior and we are Salvation Storytellers, then worship is a Narrative activity.

The Salvation Storytellers, the followers of the God who is Savior, have a narrative to tell.

From the hanging of phylacteries (small vessels containing various scriptures) on the forehead by the Jews, to the call for them to retell the stories of their deliverance from the hands of their oppressors, to the acts of worship that have continually propelled the people of God into the world inflamed with a Story that speaks to slavery, poverty, and government, worship is a narrative act.

Worship expression is not simply the romantic emoting of an individual or a community before God. Worship is the act of **retelling** the **Kingdom** Story in many, many ways.

> When we put fresh lyrics into the mouths of God's people, they find fresh ways of talking about what God is doing in their lives through the week. As worship leaders and teams, we are helping people to narrate their own lives with God with language of hope, joy, and confidence.

The Whispers of Worship in Our Ears

Every time you think about worship now, I'd like to encourage you to hear whispers of Romans 12:1–2, 1 John 4:19, the Psalms, Genesis, the Epistles, and Revelation. I would encourage you to see life worship as the melody we are calling everyone to sing. Our gathered worship, family worship, and personal worship experiences are meant to harmonize with that melody and lift it to its proper place.

See the life worship you lead as your loudest instrument, and see gathered worship as a creative, royal, relational, and narrative activity vital to strengthening your community of disciples.

Above all, embrace that worship is a response to the love of God. We'll finish with a quote from Evelyn Underhill, from her important work, simply entitled, *Worship*, written in 1937.

> *"Worship, in all its grades and kinds, is the response of the creature to the Eternal."*[28]

Let's respond, with all we are, to the love of our Creator, King, Trinitarian God, and Savior.

Session 4 Study Questions

Again, if you are doing this with a group, take some time to write down your answers to the following questions before you gather. Highlight page numbers, key quotes and ideas that moved you. Make sure you write in the margins, circle words, or jot down anything that will help you interact with the material and remember core ideas.

1. What ideas moved you the most from this section?

Talk about the ideas related to worship that particularly moved you from the book or from the video.

How might the ideas that moved you help all of us to understand what worship is really about?

2. What does the word* worship *mean to you after reading this section? Try to describe it in one to three sentences.

This is your chance to write a small "Worship Statement" here that captures some of the ideas about worship you've been reflecting on during this study. Write it out, maybe on another piece of paper or in a blog, edit it, then place your final statement here to read to others.

3. If worship is a creative, royal, relational, and narrative activity, how does that change your perspective on what happens when we gather together to worship?

Remembering all of our ideas about God, human beings, and worship that we've studied, what do you think is important to see happening when we gather together to worship? What is the part each person plays in their own heart when we draw near to Jesus to remember, to be renewed, and to rejoice?

Conclusion: Becoming a Lifelong Discoverer

Videos in This Session:

- Conclusion: Becoming a Lifelong Discoverer (2:37)

Worship is as big as God is. To discover His mysteries is a lifelong call, and it will change the way we lead worship, write songs, pray, teach, and disciple others in what it means to be God's worshippers.

Take the rest of your life to explore worship theology. Read books from different traditions, and make sure that what you love in life has deep roots in Scripture and is empowered by a grace-filled relationship with your Lord.

On God, Humans, and Worship

We now come to the end of this journey in worship theology together; may many other journeys be ahead of you!

We have, over the course of a few weeks, reflected on a wide range of foundational theological and worldview topics vital to understanding the contemporary worship experience. We have explored:

God as Creator: the God who creates
God as King: the God who reigns
God as Trinity: the God who relates
God as Savior: the God who saves

Flowing from this grand vision of the Eternal One, cascades our vision of human beings, central to understanding our theology and activity of worship:

Human beings as Sub-Creators: made to create
Human beings as Image Bearers: made to reflect
Human beings as Community Builders: made to relate
Human beings as Salvation Storytellers: made to share a story

If worship is indeed an activity for which human beings are hard-wired, and if we bear the image of God within us, then the activity of worship should bear some resemblance both to the character of God and the nature of human beings who He has made.

Worship is a Creative Act: we respond to our Creator from our role as creative beings
Worship is a Royal Act: we respond to our King from our position as vice-regents
Worship is a Relational Act: we respond to the Trinity in building right-relationships
Worship is a Narrative Act: we respond to our Savior by retelling God's great Story

You Are Officially a Worship Theologian

If you did this section in a group, you've probably had some of the best discussions you've had in a long time. That's a good thing, because you are now officially one of the Church's **theologians** in worship!

Bring these threads together from this section, and begin to find ways to nurture and discuss a strong theology of worship and worship leadership in your community and among those you influence.

Do it all from a vibrant, passionate, living relationship with your Lord Jesus, and cultivate that same kind of relationship in your congregation through the worship experiences you lead.

Blessings as you continue the journey of *Essentials in Worship Theology*.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP HISTORY
AN INTRODUCTION

For over 2000 years, the Body of Christ has been about the activity of worship, but what exactly does that mean? Has everyone just been singing all that time, or have there been more ways the Church has chosen to express our devotion to Christ?

In this section, we'll explore the **languages of worship** that Christians have embraced in gathered worship settings to nurture our relationship with Jesus over millennia.

Videos in This Session:

- Introduction: Why Does Worship History Matter? (3:18)

Introduction: Why Does Worship History Matter?

The grass softly bent beneath our feet as we walked among the ruins. We were a class of Masters students, pilgrims if you will, on a physical journey with a spiritual destination. Studying the roots of the Christian faith had led us to this ancient amphitheater, now a jumble of large stones jutting up through a field.

Encircled by crumbling stone seats where screaming masses would have cheered on the games a few millennia before us, we walked where gladiators, horses, attendants…and martyrs would have walked.

Coming to a particular spot on the grounds, our guide spoke a somber word. "Where you are standing," he said, "would have been approximately where martyrs would have given their lives in front of cheering crowds." I looked down at my feet as a mixture of embarrassment, pride, and fear swept through my body in a wave of sudden emotion.

I felt embarrassed by my own devotional commitments to God in the face of the ghosts of such commitment evidenced here. My chest swelled with pride that I was part of a family of Hope-Givers in the world, so committed to the reconciliation of all things that we could stand with forgiveness and hope before those who would take our lives without remorse.

Finally, I felt a final wave of fear move in my gut; what would I do if I had stood where they once had? Would I acknowledge Jesus as the only Lord before my accusers? What about my wife and children? How real was my worship?

Now, my eyes began to focus through the welling tears. There, nestled around my walking shoes and bursting through the grass all around the large stones were poppies—brilliant, red poppies numbering in the hundreds. As the great architectures of humankind decayed and crumbled about us, nature was taking over once again, and the bright red poppies seemed to be the herald of a time long gone, and a time to come.

The blood of the martyrs that had soaked this soil millennia before was speaking to us now, calling us to worship, to embrace Jesus with everything we had, to devote ourselves anew to following our Lord into the unknown, to recognize only one Sovereign in the universe and defy the false gods of our age.

Mining the Worship Past for the Worship Present

History is the work of listening closely to our **past** to gain insight into the **present** and **future**. The history of worship expression, and those who have creatively led that expression across time and across the streams of the Church is rich with wisdom for our current worship experience.

We will explore some of the essential ideas in Christian worship history, specifically related to how Christians over the past **2000 years** have used the languages of time (holidays, gatherings, and services), space (architecture and environment), communal prayer, the public reading of Scripture, baptism, the Eucharist, rites of passage (birthdays, weddings, confirmations, and funerals), art and music to further the acts of living worship and **mission** in the Church.

The Languages of Worship throughout History

When we talk about worship today, there are several languages of worship that we speak. For non-liturgical churches, the worship language of music plays a big part in the way we express worship. In specific, we use a primary language of contemporary worship music, often blended with some more historic songs. On occasion, we may take communion or have a baptism service.

In liturgical churches, the languages are different still (at least in emphasis), drawing much more on historic ways the Church has worshipped.

In this section, we'll look at several worship languages that run throughout the history of worship in the Church.

> First, *the languages of **time** and **space*** have been used throughout Christian history to create both patterns and locations in which focused acts of worship can occur.
>
> Secondly, *the languages of **prayer** and **Scripture** reading* have featured prominently in worship history as a means to both commune with God and to be invested with His truth.
>
> Thirdly, the *language of **sacramental actions**, most notably those of **baptism** and the **Eucharist** (communion),* have been used in the activity of Christian worship since the time of Jesus.
>
> Finally, for this brief foray into worship history, *the worship languages of **art** and **music*** have played a vital role in giving wings to the worship of the saints before God and in opening up a threshold space through which God can speak to us.

Welcome to Essentials in Worship History

This section has been designed to give you a brief experience studying the ways the Body of Christ has worshipped for thousands of years.

We'll look at just a few areas that will hopefully inspire some fresh insights as to how you and your community could mine the worship riches of the past for your worship today.

I look forward to the journey with you. Welcome to *Essentials in Worship History*.

Session 1: Worship Languages of Time & Space

Videos in This Session:

- Session 1: Worship Languages of Time & Space (7:24)

Christians have used the worship languages of time and space to help them keep their desires focused on Jesus and His Kingdom. "Time" and "space" are not just factors in physics, or warps from a Star Trek episode. They are languages through which the Church has worshipped for thousands of years. Christians have used the rhythms of time to help them recall and reclaim the story of God for millennia. Christians have used space to create beautiful, and useful, areas in which the activity of worship can occur.

The Worship Language of Time

Two quotes will help us better understand the worship languages of time and space in the worship life of the Church.

> "The Christian practice of time is one of the most powerful means of ancient spirituality, and it is currently being **rediscovered** by the Church."[29]
>
> "The centrality of time in Christian worship tells us a great deal both about Christianity itself and about Christian worship…History is where God is made known. Without time, there is no knowledge of the Christian God. For it is through actual events happening in historical time that this God is revealed.
>
> God chooses to make His divine nature and will known by events that take place within the same calendar that measures the **daily** lives of ordinary women and men … Christianity talks not of salvation in general but of salvation accomplished by **specific** actions by God at **definite** times and places."[30]

Early Christian Usage of Time

For the early Church, their sense of time was rooted in their very real world experience with Jesus. Jesus did certain things at certain times and places. Israel is a real place, and the first century A.D. was a real time in which many world-altering events were happening.

"But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son."

Galatians 4:4

The God who is beyond time and space, moved **within** time and space, to reach out to us. Jesus came to us at a time, in a place. Worship happens at times, in places. The Body of Christ has used the gifts of time to enhance and **order** their worship activity for thousands of years.

Four Uses of Time

There are four kinds of time that have served to order the Church's worship across history: 1) daily time, 2) weekly time, 3) yearly time, and 4) life time. Let's look at each in turn.

1. Daily Time (the hours of prayer, meal prayers, waking prayers, bedtime prayers)

The early Church was primarily made up of Jews who used the hours of daily prayer in their worship.

The Jews prayed at three set times through the day as per the practices noted in the Psalms (Psalm 55), and had seven daily times of praise (Psalm 119:64). Some of these patterns are indicated in the prayer life of Daniel.

Christians, who were primarily Jews in Jesus' time, followed similar **patterns** as well. Prayer and fasting daily were often intermingled, and eventually Christians set their own days of prayer and fasting on two days of the week that were different than their Jewish patterns, in order to set themselves apart.

2. Weekly Time (days of prayer and fasting; Eucharist the first day of the week)

The first day of creation is the day when God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. Evening came and morning came the first day (Gen. 1:3–5). All four gospels say that Jesus rose again on the morning of the first day of the week—the day when light and darkness were separated at the beginning of time.

A regular pattern developed early in the New Testament experience, as well as in the earliest centuries of the Church, that Christians would gather to worship on **Sunday**, the **first day** of the week. From these days to the present, Christians have largely regarded Sunday as a time to gather to celebrate the gifts of God's work among us.

For these Christians, Sunday was a **mini-Easter**, another opportunity to celebrate the fullness of creation coming to its climactic conclusion in the age to come—the **eschaton**.

"Every Sunday witnesses to the risen Lord. It is the Lord's Day, the day of the sun risen from darkness, the start of the new creation … Each Sunday testifies to the resurrection. Every Sunday is a weekly little Easter or rather every Easter is a yearly great Sunday. The primacy of Sunday and the resurrection is clear."[31]

Throughout church history, certain Sundays began to take on **special meaning** related to the acts of God in the world, and these gave rise to the holidays that we celebrate today.

3. Yearly Time (holidays and physical seasons)

The Christian year is one way that Christians have, for millennia, revisited the life of Christ and ordered their worship focus on a yearly basis. The Christian year, or what I

like to call the Worship Year, officially begins with Advent, and ends with the celebration of the Holy Spirit's coming at Pentecost. Let's just say a few words about the meanings and stories focused on during each of these seasons of the Worship year.

Advent

Advent is celebrated over the four Sundays before Christmas day and is a season of anticipation reenacting the Jews long wait for a Messiah. The tune, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" is an advent hymn, meant to create this **anticipation** for the celebration of Christmas. Advent means "the Coming," and anticipates the Christ event (incarnation) by calling us to long for the coming of the One as the Jews did throughout history.

Christmas (Dec. 25th–Jan. 5th)

Christmas is the celebration of the **Incarnation**—that God does not remain distant from the creation He loves, but rather acts in time, space, and matter to rescue, restore, heal, and deliver us from the broken nature of the world in which we live. Christmas is meant to be a celebration of God's intervention, and by focusing on the Incarnation, a remembering that God is a God who deals in the media of human hearts as He creates His great work of redemptive art.

Epiphany (Jan. 6th)

Epiphany is a celebration of Jesus' **manifestation** to the world as Savior. The journey of the magi is often a focal point of epiphany, as is Jesus' baptism. Epiphany speaks of the "unveiling" of Christ to the world, both to the Jews and beyond to the Gentiles.

After Epiphany (after Jan. 6th–beginning of Lent)

Post-Epiphany is a time to celebrate Jesus revealing himself as the Son of God through signs and wonders in the world. It focuses on the saving deeds of Jesus, and the power of **transformation** that alters human beings spiritually and rehumanizes us in the way of Jesus.

Lent (spring: begins Ash Wednesday six and a half weeks before Easter)

Lent is a season that spans from Ash Wednesday all the way through the Thursday of Holy Week, or the week that culminates in the first day of the week that is Easter Sunday. We move with Jesus through the crowds as he heals and delivers, and faces terrible opposition from those he loves.

Lent is a season of personal **evaluation**, a time to mourn our brokenness and to seek to know ourselves as God knows us. We open ourselves to vulnerable

prayer, confession, and action, welcoming God to right our hearts just as He is righting the world toward the culmination of New Creation to come.

The Great Triduum (Thursday, Friday, and Saturday of Holy Week)

The Great Triduum represents the final days of the Lent season, often celebrated by fasting and prayer that lead us through to the ultimate act of love that is the crucifixion. On these days, we consider Jesus' choice to take the cup of the Father, to break the power of death, and to offer atonement for the sins of humankind.

On these days, we focus on the deep humanity of Jesus (the greatest stumbling block to the world throughout all of church history), our own **dedication** to him as Lord, and the curtain he is about to ultimately open between us and the Father in the story that will unfold into Easter.

Easter

Easter is the great day of triumph. It is the ultimate yearly **Resurrection Celebration** of the Church. It affirms the saving event of Christ in the world, breaking the chains of sin and death and inviting us into the new creation, resurrection life of the age to come.

Easter goes on for fifty days (approximately six total Sundays) and includes Ascension Day and the culminating joy of Pentecost. Easter is the central celebration of the Christian year and is the greatest storytelling Sunday of them all.

After Pentecost

Pentecost, rooted in the ancient Jewish celebration of the five (*penta*) books of the Law, is the birthday of the Church. A welcoming of the Holy Spirit is remembered, and the spread of the good news through a divinely empowered Church becomes the center of attention. This season leads us with the theme of the Spirit's great **inspiration** through the remainder of the year, until Advent begins the cycle over again.

4. Life Time (birth, adolescence, weddings, funerals)

A final stage of thinking about how Christians have used the language of time to celebrate the Story of God at work in their lives is to consider the **rites of passage** that have marked the human experience since the beginning of recorded history.

Birthdays, adolescent transitions, weddings, and funerals have been, in whole or in part, celebrations enrobed in worship expression throughout Church history.

Birthdays

When infants are born, they are often either **dedicated** or baptized in many traditions. A new life entering the world is a glorious thing, and Christians throughout the seasons of history have seen this as an opportunity to worship and to re-dedicate themselves and the infant to God's care. For Celtic Christians, the midwife would place three drops of water on the child's head immediately after birth.

Though this practice had its roots in Celtic culture, Christians decided it was a powerful symbol celebrating the Trinity, God's protection of this child, and an act of Trinitarian worship on behalf of the parents.

Adolescent Transitions

Many cultures, including the Jews, have had worshipful ways of welcoming daughters and sons into womanhood and manhood. **Proclamations** of **identity**, **destiny**, support, and faith all find their way into these worship events. In our own family tradition, a large celebration marking this turn into the teen years is filled with family and friends worshipping God together and praying for the child who is "coming of age" and entering into a new phase of maturity and responsibility.

Weddings

It may surprise us to know that the worship celebration that is a wedding did not originate with the church, but was rather a common human **custom** throughout history. Even in the early church, though we see the wedding feast at Cana and other wedding elements/analogies in the New Testament, marriage was a custom that usually took place outside of the church proper.

It was not until the 12th century that the blend of worship and legal actions that is the wedding service begin to move primarily into churches. Weddings can be times to celebrate the most powerful worship **analogy** available to us in the New Testament: Christ's union with his Church. These should be celebrated with great festivity, joy, and **investment**.

Funerals

Many pastors I know have been like me—we are drawn to the **spiritual atmosphere** of funerals. Now, to clarify, we do not like when people die! I have personally had the excruciating duty of singing worship songs and speaking at the funerals of young children, old grandparents, and even dear family and friends. However, a funeral provides a **place of reflection** few others can create. A human life has passed from this experience of animated life, and many questions and wonderings accompany that passage among the living. We ask

questions, we desire comfort, we look to family and friends to carry us in our grief.

In the early church years, Romans performed funerals dressed in black. Christians, realizing that a resurrection is to come, began to wear white as a faith statement through **clothing**, and to sing songs of thankfulness, adoration, and joy during these **events**. Funerals, as a lifetime act of worship, should never be overlooked.

The Worship Language of Space

Churches always seem to find their way to creating, buying, building, or using physical spaces to worship within. Why? We're physical creatures, and we need to control our heat and light and fulfill our needs for protection from the elements. We also love to **beautify** our spaces and create spaces for special purposes. Think of your church building. How is the space designed to serve worship activities?

Four Uses of Space

Four types of space have been used for different forms of worship across church history: 1) liturgical space, 2) gathering space, 3) musical and visual space, and 4) sacramental space. We'll take a quick look at each kind.

1. Liturgical Space

In this case, *liturgical space* means the same thing as "worship space." In the early Church, homes and larger gathering spaces had to be adequate for the persecuted Church. When Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, artists with a deep love for God and a commission from an imperial or spiritual leader would **build** massive works of architectural art to express their faith—like the writing of a beautiful song. These **cathedrals** still dot the European landscape and cover vast expanses of time in their building. Like St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome or the Sistine Chapel painted by Michelangelo, buildings can have a profound effect on one's view of God and His world.

2. Gathering Space

Not only have Christians needed to worship in various ways, but they have also needed to gather for **fellowship**, such as for meals, festivals, or other events. Many churches create fellowship halls to fulfill this need in the Church.

In addition to this, training children and adults in the ways of the faith has also precipitated a need for educational space. This kind of space for **training** in the ways of Jesus is as central to the worshipping life as the space mentioned above for specific worship activity.

3. Musical and Visual Space

For contemporary churches and ancient churches, space for singers, bands, choirs, orchestras, and other musicians to sing, rehearse, perform and lead have been necessary. Churches across church history sought to **accommodate** the vital arts of worship that demand more physical space than others. Stained glass and other elements would teach, and spaces would be created to **optimize** the sound of the human voice and music throughout.

4. Sacramental Space

Historically, special space has often been set aside for the **sacramental acts** of worship that we call baptism, Eucharist, and what are called "sacramental actions."

Using the Worship Languages of Time and Space Today

The language of time, and its application throughout the history of worship, is often fascinating to many contemporary Christians. To order our spirituality according to the rhythms of time is a very human thing to do. We can learn much from how the Church has traditionally ordered time Christocentrically (with Christ as the focal point) to keep us focusing on the most important aspects of our faith year round.

The language of space reminds us that God is a God of the physical world, and He does not seem to run from it, biblically or historically, in order to keep us "fixed on the unseen."

Rather, whether we are in a prison cell or in the most magnificent building built today, the space which houses us can become a lens, or a catalyst, to living acts of worship flowing among us.

Session 1 Study Questions

First, if you are doing this with a group, take some time to write down your answers to the following questions before you gather. Highlight page numbers, key quotes and ideas that moved you. Make sure you write in the margins, circle words, or jot down anything that will help you interact with the material and remember core ideas.

1. What ideas moved you the most from this section?

Talk about the ideas related to worship that particularly moved you from the book or from the video.

How might the ideas that moved you help all of us to understand what worship is really about?

2. In what ways have been impacted by time and space in your own worship experience?

Can you remember key times and places you had a significant encounter with God, and His Story, in a worship setting? What happened? What did the time in your life and the space in which you were have to do with that experience?

Session 2: Worship Languages of Prayer & Scripture

Videos in This Session:

- Session 2: Worship Languages of Prayer & Scripture (5:10)

I remember it well, sitting in my little United Methodist church growing up, walking out as an acolyte declaring it was time to begin worship. The readings of the Scriptures would pound with passion from the pulpit as different members from our little congregation would read. The corporate prayers of the people would resound as we recited ancient prayers that felt more powerful and beautiful than anything I could make up on my own.

What's more, we stood for the Gospel reading. We bowed for the "prayers of the people," where we would say the names of those for whom we wanted prayer out loud.

The worship languages of corporate prayer and public Scripture reading formed me, even as a child.

The Worship Language of Prayer

"Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances,
for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

1 Thess. 5:17

Prayer is a form of singing without music. We **listen**, we care, we respond, we **intercede**, and we create series of **words and phrases** to express our heart cries all before a God who seems to invite human beings into the equation of seeing His will be done in the world.

Many people pray. Whether they believe in one God, or many gods, there is a hunger in the human soul to communicate with a transcendent reality. We ask for help, we ask for good things to happen, we may even ask for God's will to be done. No matter the faith, people are drawn to involving prayer in their worship experience.

The Worship Language of Prayer

From the beginning of the Church's experience in the world, gathering together to pray has been a primary way that engagement with God has occurred both **personally and corporately**. The fervor with which God's people have devoted themselves to prayer, historically, can be overwhelming to us in our day of relative prayerlessness.

And yet prayer has always been a powerful worship media through which we have worshipped privately and publicly as the historic Church. "Pray **continually**," 1 Thess. 5:17 encourages us. With that exhortation in their hearts, that is just what the early Church decided to do.

Early Christian Usage of Prayer

Earlier in our discussion of the language of time, we focused on the patterns that developed early on in the Christian prayer experience. The earliest Christians rode on the back of their Jewish heritage when it came to prayer. They were already praying at least **three times per day** (as per Daniel), having seven times of praise per day (as per Psalm 155), and having regular meal time prayers. We know from early Christian writings that **fasting** often accompanied these times of prayer during the week.

We don't have an indication that every day was filled with corporate singing, but we do have an indication that every day held some form of corporate prayer in the worship life of the earliest followers of Jesus.

By the time the Church was fully birthed after the resurrection and upper room filling with the Holy Spirit, Christians were seeing their prayer times as needing some degree of separation from their Jewish patterns. Instead of fasting on the same two days per week as the Jews, the Christians switched their times to two other days. Their prayers were **directed** to Jesus and to the Father and the Spirit.

The *Didache* (a brief, early Christian treatise) encouraged Christians to pray the **Lord's Prayer** at least three times per day, and Christians were eager to gather for prayer in light of persecution.

Prayer throughout Worship History

"Offices" or specific times for prayer, began to embed themselves into the fabric of both Jewish and Gentile Christian worship activity. **Short times** to gather for prayer became common: to **accommodate** the work life of the average citizen, and to keep church gatherings under the imperial radar. For the early Church, prayer was open to all believers, of all ages, at all **available** times. Homes were sanctuaries filled with petitions, singing, meals, and the teaching of Scripture.

The practice of prayer on a daily basis, as led by those who were lay people, began to be challenged after Constantine's conversion. Monks fleeing to the desert began to become the special prayer warriors, while new **formalities** in Christian worship life in the empire eventually gave the "work" of prayer to trained **clergy**. Increasingly, professionals were called upon to do the work of prayer and singing, diminishing the role of the average person in local church worship activity.

Praying together has always been a part of the worship language of the church.

The Worship Language of Scripture Reading

And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things (from Justin Martyr's *First Apology*, circa 197 A.D.).

Again, Christians of the earliest years of the Church were Jews, and therefore had a very strong frame of reference for using the Old Testament in all of their worship practice. There is evidence that the **responsorial psalms** of Jewish worship tradition were an integral part of the early Christian's life of worship.

We also see a strong devotion in all of the early Church writings to the public reading of Scripture at all gatherings of the faithful. The persecuted Church took great encouragement from the words of faith, hope, and love packing the pages of the apostolic letters, and their Hebrew Bibles.

In reading Scripture publicly, they were reclaiming Judaism's recognition that without the Story of God **soaking deeply** into our souls by regular and careful repetition, we become lost and **unfaithful** to the God of our fathers and mothers.

"You shall therefore love the LORD your God, and always keep His charge, His statutes, His ordinances, and His commandments.

You shall therefore impress these words of mine on your heart and on your soul; and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontals on your forehead.

You shall teach them to your sons, talking of them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road and when you lie down and when you rise up.

You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your sons may be multiplied on the land which the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, as long as the heavens remain above the earth."

Deuteronomy 11:18–21

The Jews would literally bind key Scripture passages to their foreheads, arms, and hands in the form of ***tefillin***, or **phylacteries** (the Greek word). Tefillin are small leather vessels that hold small, written passages of Scripture. In this way, through their mealtime and daily prayer remembrances, the Word of God would never be far from their minds and physical bodies.

The books of the New Testament, however, were largely documents and letters being shared around by the early Church. The Church had a deep need for encouragement and training on how to live the life Jesus modeled, and they also wanted to tell and retell the life of Jesus in their midst. The validity of letters as being from the apostles were agreed upon by a growing consensus in the earliest years of the Church, and its 27 books were gradually agreed upon over the first few centuries of life together.

Early Christian Usage of Scripture

Aside from the public reading of Scripture at all worship gatherings, we see the words and phrases of the New Testament beginning to take on **creedal** significance in the Church. Phrases such as "Jesus is Lord," "Abba, Father," and "Maranatha" were becoming common worship phrases marking the life of the Church in the world.

The constant repetition of the stories of Jesus, often packed into **meaningful** symbols, images, and phrases such as these, began to form the life of the early Christians. They

could not escape Jesus' teaching; they were reading it week after week after week. Nor could they ignore the Jews **history** with God. It was an integral part of their ongoing worship experience.

Scripture in Worship through History

The vitality of **publicly reading** Scripture began to take on stronger and stronger life as the Church saw its need to **remember** the works of God in their midst.

Eventually, across the span of centuries, formal plans for how to read through the entirety of both Hebrew and New Testament Scriptures began to be formed. The goal has always been the same: **repeat** these stories and ideas often enough, allow the Word of God to be living and active in your soul, and you will become like the One who is worshipped throughout the pages of holy writ.

Today, what we call the ***lectionary*** is a pattern of publicly reading the whole of Scripture in more liturgical traditions across the span of three years. Each Sunday, a portion from the Old Testament, Psalms, and New Testament is read, and over three years (marked Year A, B, and C), those believers are immersed in the biblical narrative.

Though the Church has gone through many seasons in its history, a strong recognition of our need to read Scripture has rarely been far from us. The Reformation was largely about putting the understandable stories of Scripture and the responsibility for spiritual growth squarely back into the hands of the average disciple of Jesus.

Scripture throughout Church History

Through patterns, repetition, public, and private reading, we have always given a prominent place to the reading of Scripture.

In some movements, historically and today, churches that give a greater emphasis to more **prophetic** activities of the spontaneous hearing God's voice have often de-emphasized the need for public Scripture reading. We may need to recognize that we are the richer for hungering after God's present word to us, but poorer for abandoning the public reading of Scripture in our gatherings.

In many contemporary churches, the passage of Scripture that may get read is a small portion, story, or snippet that will form the basis of the message being spoken. We may also sing a song that references a passage or story in a more poetic way. Church history would tell us that we may be missing out on a vital language of worship for the deepening of our faith—our own and that of generations to come—by marginalizing the **extended** public reading of the Scriptures.

Using the Worship Languages of Prayer and Scripture Reading Today

While many contemporary churches would be reticent to begin to use the *Revised Common Lectionary* (the "old and dry" church worship experience is still the antagonist

in many of our worship stories), there may be a place for us to once again integrate the public reading of larger portions of Scripture into our worship or special services.

Often this is done at both Christmas and Easter, the grandest of Sundays in the Church Year, but we may be able to find some creative means of both speaking and hearing the Scripture in a more **intentional** way over a span of time.

In fact, singing Scripture has seemed to be the natural progression for creative leaders over the ages. Metrical psalmody, for a long period of time, put the Psalms to music and rhythm for the people to regularly sing. (Isaac Watts hated the sound of these "wooden" renderings, and thus began to write what he thought of as some "good" hymns to replace them.) Perhaps we have some contemporary **voicings** of Scripture in music that can be accessed today.

With the loss of the traditional Sunday school in our generation, children are often missing in their worship discipleship the component that is the ongoing reading of Scripture.

We may need to prayerfully consider creative ways of re-integrating time for the reading of the Old and New Testaments within our worship music times to support the whole of the worship service.

Regarding prayer, engaging in corporate prayer falls under the ethos and direction of today's church. Many churches do it because it is a part of their regular liturgy or service order. Others choose to set aside special times for corporate congregational prayer. Still other churches avoid public, congregational prayer in their desire to make visitors feel welcome.

Session 2 Study Questions

First, if you are doing this with a group, take some time to write down your answers to the following questions before you gather. Highlight page numbers, key quotes and ideas that moved you. Make sure you write in the margins, circle words, or jot down anything that will help you interact with the material and remember core ideas.

1. What ideas moved you the most from this section?

Talk about the ideas related to worship that particularly moved you from the book or from the video.

How might the ideas that moved you help all of us to understand what worship is really about?

2. How have you personally been influenced in worship settings where corporate prayer or the public reading of Scripture occurred?

How have people gathered to pray figured into your worship journey? Have you been in many settings where the Scriptures were read aloud publicly, or regularly, and how has that impacted you positively or negatively?

Session 3: Worship Languages of Baptism & Eucharist

Videos in This Session:

- Session 3: Worship Languages of Baptism & Eucharist (10:20)

Sacred actions, or what the church has often called sacraments*, have been a part of the worship life of the church for millennia.*

A **sacrament** *might best be defined as "An outward sign that conveys an inward grace." It is literally a "sacred action," an activity that declares an inward reality, reclaims a pivotal act or idea and invites the participant into the saving power of a past event through reenactment. The word sacrament comes from the Latin* sacramentum*, which means "a consecrating." History has closely linked the word sacrament with the Greek word* mysterion*, or* ***mystery****.*

In church history, the worship language of symbolic actions has typically been spoken of in the category of a number of physical worship ***reenactments*** *that have been known as the sacraments.*

The Worship Language of Baptism

Baptism, in Christian worship usage, is the reenacting of the **death and resurrection** of Jesus by the offering of oneself to a **symbolic burial** in water and a **physical rising** from the grave with Christ in victory. It is a symbol of transformation, community sharing, and washing by the Spirit of God.

Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. This event is recorded in the four gospels. In Acts 19:1–7, we see baptism being a central component of Paul's work in leading Gentiles to conversion and to the infilling of the Holy Spirit. For Christians, baptism has a variety of worship meanings that should continually nuance our understanding of what happens in this important symbolic moment of worship.

The worship language of baptism declares:

- *We are now in* ***union with Christ*** *(newness of life; Romans 6:3)*
- *We are* ***incorporated into His body, the Church*** *(family for the common good; 1 Cor. 12:13)*
- *We have received* ***the gift of the Holy Spirit*** *(a Spirit-filled life and community; Acts 2:38)*
- *We have the* ***forgiveness of sins*** *(inward cleansing of good conscience; 1 Pet. 3:21; Heb. 10:22)*
- *We have been given* ***new birth*** *(tomb and womb, image of chrysalis; John 3:5; Titus 3:5)*

Early Church Usage of Baptism

For the earliest Christians, baptism was a primary act of initiation into the Christian faith. After the time of the apostles, bishops would typically baptize new converts after an extended time of examination as to their "ethical and creedal commitment" to the faith.[32]

Those being initiated into the faith would undergo seasons of intense preparation, sometimes lasting up to three years, and would be specifically attended to in the Lenten season leading up to their Easter baptism.

Early Christians were baptized naked, and according to the early church document the *Didache*, were baptized in running, cold water.[33] Men would be baptized separately from women (for obvious reasons), and the men would pray for the initiate to be filled with the Holy Spirit. For women, the practice was similar, only the woman would be surrounded by other women behind a curtain, and the bishop would perform the same ceremony.

Baptism in Worship throughout Church History

Because such powerful connections are made in the New Testament between baptism and salvation, baptism has been at the center of worship challenges and controversies for many millennia. Again, for the early Church, the desire for uniformity (a welcomed sign of Church unity) was continually challenged by the ethnic and practical diversity of the growing community of the faithful.

The earliest Christian writings indicate that **adults** were typically the ones being baptized, but indications that children were undergoing baptism begin to spring up a few centuries after the New Testament period. Under Constantine's imperial Christianity, children were baptized regularly and within eight days of birth by the time of the late Middle Ages.[34]

When the **Reformation** flourished in the 1500s, the process by which one was baptized came back again to simply requiring the definitive faith statement of the one being baptized. By this time, baptism had remained an initiation rite into the Church community through which the **new creation life** is reclaimed in the life of the believer. However, how baptism was accomplished, and to what end, began to take on different patterns and meanings in different places.

Mennonites practiced "**anabaptism**," which means "to baptize again," and were often killed for what was seen as the heretical practice of only baptizing adults (other factors played an important role in persecution as well, including their pacifistic stance on war).

Groups such as the Quakers (the most radical end of the Reformation) gave virtually no value to baptism, being adamant that symbolic actions were a significant **distraction** from true spirituality.

Today, tens of thousands of Protestant denominations practice the definitive worship act of baptism in myriad ways, and yet the key themes of baptism remain in most streams of the Church.

The Worship Language of Eucharist

We have perhaps some of the most vibrant language related to worship in the New Testament surrounding what we call the Lord's Supper. For thousands of years, the **Eucharist**, which means "The Great Thanksgiving," was the primary act of worship for the Body of Christ.

For Christians throughout time, the New Testament themes of the Lord's Supper still resonate among us.

The Eucharist (Communion):

- ***Commemorates*** *that God has acted as Savior to penetrate of all of human history from creation through the life, death, and the resurrection of Jesus, through our present and on to the final consummation of history (Acts 2:46–47)*
- ***Reminds*** *us that we are part of the communion of saints in the family of God (1 Cor. 10:16)*
- ***Persuades*** *us that a sacrifice has occurred to right the world (John 1:29)*
- ***Speaks*** *of the presence of Christ among us (John 6:51–58)*
- ***Welcomes*** *us to experience the work of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13)*
- ***Looks forward*** *to the age to come—the eschaton (1 Cor. 11:26)*

Early Church Usage of the Eucharist

For the Jews, the concept of **table fellowship** was an important cultural idea. One did not eat with those whose lifestyle one did not endorse. One did not sit to eat with enemies, nor with those who had disgraced one's family name.

Jesus, however, literally turned the table on table fellowship. Eating and drinking with tax collectors, prostitutes, drunkards, and run-of-the-mill sinners was a theological **statement** embodied in his physical actions.

"The God who eats with these people is the God who embraces all of humanity in its beauty and brokenness," his mealtime habits would proclaim. "God recognizes that all have sinned, and He draws near to bring new humanity to those who seem to be the worst off in society." This is what Jesus' simple act of eating with the high and low of society would declare.

This new paradigm of table fellowship led to some of the early Church's most powerful statements of community. Imagine an incident, whispered among those who were watching the loving actions of the Christian community. Not only had a wealthy woman of tremendously differing social strata baptized a former prostitute, now they were also declaring their essential "family" relationship by **eating** and drinking together at meals!

What had brought them to this table of thanksgiving, this table of reconciliation and shared hope? Can you hear the gossip? Gossip that would end in realizing that only the God of reconciliation can bring such people together.

Jesus had brought them together, and their meal was a declaration that, just as God had caused the angel of death to pass over His people Israel in Egypt, so too death would now pass them by destroyed by the power of His resurrection life at work within.

Early Christians would share meals together enlisting singing, the sharing of the apostles' letters, prayer, and mutual support as essentials at their table of worship. The Eucharist was originally known as the **agape feast**, or a meal that signified **unconditional love** between God and humankind, and humankind and one another.

This meal was a central, defining act of worship for the earliest Christians, a commemoration of the Passover meal that Jesus shared with his disciples before stepping toward his final hours this side of the tomb.

The Eucharist is an Easter Event

This **commemoration** looked deep into the past of the Jews, remembering that God would **provide** the sacrificial Lamb that would "take away the sins of the world." For the earliest believers, every gathering around this table was a celebration of resurrection life andthat the true light had come into the world and darkness had not overcome it. The agape feast looked **toward the age to come**, where no more tears would be shed as they were in this dark world and all would enjoy unblemished fellowship with God and with one another.

In other words, for the early Church, the Eucharist was built around a celebration of **resurrection**, not primarily a revisiting of the **death** of Jesus. This is a later development in the approach to communion. Early believers reclaimed, every first day of the week, the Easter story. Their meal together, remembering Jesus' words, was their **primary act** of resurrection remembrance.

The "Great Thanksgiving," for the early Christians was a time of thanks and gratefulness.

They were thanking God for, and **commemorating,** Jesus' life, teaching, death, and resurrection. The Eucharist aided them in **reminding** themselves of God's mighty acts through human history, being persuaded that a final sacrifice had been made for the world, **speaking** of the presence of Christ as they ate, **welcoming** the Holy Spirit in their midst, and **looking forward** to the Kingdom coming in all of its fullness on earth.

The Eucharist in Worship throughout Church History

Given communion's centrality to the worship of the church across the ages, one can only imagine the myriad permutations that the actual act has taken as the Church has kept the breaking of bread and the taking of the cup a **central expression** of its worship life.

"It is only as we are energized as baptized people and equipped as Eucharistic people that we are able then to go calmly and confidently into the arena of the struggle, whatever it may be —to campaign for justice in the world, to work for ecology, and so on.

Because we are new exodus people, it is through the sacramental life of the Church that we are enabled to do those things. Sacraments do not displace the Word, but rather the higher the sacrament, the more it brings the Story to life. They declare that God has promised not to abandon the world—but to heal it."[35]

The Meal Takes on Liturgical Significance

Beginning as an early church meal, the Eucharist took on more liturgical (and possibly smaller and shorter) forms in the centuries of the persecuted Church. With Constantinian Christianity, the Eucharist gained massive buildings and public displays to **accent** its mystery and beauty.

This brought with it, throughout the medieval era, many ideas being placed on the elements by clergy. The wine could not be spilled as it had actually become the blood of Jesus, and the crumbs from the bread could not fall to the ground as they had literally become the flesh of Christ through the priest's blessing.

The Reformation challenged many of these extremes with its emphasis on the priesthood of the believer, the centrality of Scripture, and justification by faith.

When the Reformation came to fruition, there remained deep **disagreement** between many of the Reformers as to the exact nature of what happens in the Eucharist (a disagreement that pitted **Luther** and **Zwingli** against one another). For Luther, the elements were invested with the spiritual substance of the body and blood of Christ, i.e., the body and blood of Christ were in, through, and under the substance of the elements, though not changing them physically (**consubstantiation**).

For Zwingli, that was a silly idea. The term ***transubstantiation***—the view that the elements actually transformed into the body and blood of Christ—was the Roman Catholic view and was established as a sacramental idea in the 12th century. From here, various reformers rejected transubstantiation, embraced consubstantiation, or, like the Quakers, **rejected** all these ideas altogether.

By the time of Luther, Christians had been used to centuries of the Eucharist primarily resting in the **domain** of the clergy's altar, and therefore the common person would only take communion a few times per year (maybe four times at the major festivals). While Zwingli kept this the pattern, Luther pushed for a **weekly communion** given his sense of its vital importance to worship. Under Luther, some Eucharist services could last up to three or four hours.[36]

The Eucharist Today

Following from the Reformation, the Church has taken the last 500 years to further process what actually happens during communion, with what frequency it should be taken, and what types of elements are acceptable.

In many contemporary Christian worshipping communities in the West, communion is often largely forgotten as a central language of worship for the Church. In Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, and other more **liturgical** traditions, it retains its historical centrality as the primary act of corporate worship.

Using the Worship Languages of Baptism and Eucharist Today

> *"Christian sacraments all have a strong eschatological flavor. Even marriage is a foretaste of the Kingdom, symbolized in Orthodox churches by the act of crowing the couple, as rulers of a new kingdom, the family.*
>
> *Baptism may be the most eschatological of all; it introduces one into a new community where the first fruits of the Kingdom are found.*
>
> *One rises from the watery grave of baptism in a new body, the Church, where the Holy Spirit dwells. One lives born again, having been cleansed of sin in passing through the waters. Baptism is initiation into God's new Kingdom of which the Church is a colony on earth.*
>
> *The Eucharist is a lifelong renewal of baptism's initial foretaste of God's Kingdom."*[37]

Our worship story is one filled with reasons to rejoice and celebrate and at least as many reasons to cringe. Human beings seem to be very adept at coming up with powerful worship ideas in response to a **revelation** from God – then confusjng the **activity** of the worship busy-ness with the One to whom they point.

This possibility for both blessing and overemphasis is clearly seen throughout church history in the application of the languages of worship that we call the **sacraments**.

However, both Baptism and the celebration of the Great Thanksgiving, the Eucharist, keep us fixed on the redemptive, resurrecting work of Jesus in a life given to worship.

Session 3 Study Questions

First, if you are doing this with a group, take some time to write down your answers to the following questions before you gather. Highlight page numbers, key quotes and ideas that moved you. Make sure you write in the margins, circle words, or jot down anything that will help you interact with the material and remember core ideas.

1. What ideas moved you the most from this section?

Talk about the ideas related to worship that particularly moved you from the book or from the video.

How might the ideas that moved you help all of us to understand what worship is really about?

2. In what ways did your own Baptism (if you've been baptized), or a moment during the celebration of the Eucharist/Communion, influence your journey of faith?

Draw on your memories of your own, or another's, baptism. Was there something that happened there that felt more powerful than simple words could express? Consider the last time you took communion. What was going on in your heart in that physical action that went beyond words?

Were there other sacramental actions, or even symbolic moments (such as foot washing or the giving of a ring in a marriage ceremony) that impacted you in a way that was lasting in your worship journey?

Session 4: Worship Languages of Art & Music

Videos in This Session:

- Session 4: Worship Languages of Art & Music (6:45)

It was the most profound encounter I have ever had with a work of art. Our group was meandering its way through St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome, Italy, led by our guide. It just so happened that our tour leader was the administrator of the Vatican. This meant that we could go into places in the buildings that others were not able to enter for various reasons.

We turned a corner during our unique and privileged journey, and there it was: The Sistine Chapel. I had seen pictures of the Sistine Chapel, especially in books ***showing*** *the "before and after" of the new cleanings that had taken place over the past few years. The physical space itself was much smaller than I had imagined. It was, after all, a chapel. However, I was not prepared for the visual wonderland that confronted me on entering the room.*

Michelangelo's "labor of love or duty" was spread lavishly across the walls and ceiling of this sanctuary. Sibyls, saints, angels, demons, cherubim, seraphim (and even the face of one of Michelangelo's enemies—a cardinal—in a judgment scene!) filled the room with the bright ***colors*** *of the fresco style of painting. I began to cry as my neck bent far back to take in the full view of the ceiling.*

My loving wife looked at me and said, "You're reacting strongly to this, aren't you?" "Yes," I responded. "He's speaking my ***language****."*

The Worship Languages of Art and Music

I like to say that human beings have unique "soul languages" through which they interact with the world. One person is **moved** by the rhythmic dance music of a street fair, another by the strains of orchestral majesty filling of a large hall.

Some are moved by the most modern and abstract of visual art, and some are moved by the soft brush strokes of impressionism. The stark movements of Celtic dance forms move one person, and another prefers the graceful movements of ballet.

Today, with the dawn of recording technologies, environmental projection, and other fresh ways of expressing our faith in art, we are riding on the wings of the millennia-old work of the Church as we find our way to worship through art and music.

The Worship Language of Art

Art has the capacity to bypass the **critical faculties** of the mind and to speak directly into the soul of the observer. Art has the ability to stand on the borderlands, inviting one person into one new territory and another into a wholly new perspective. A painting may mean nothing to one and almost everything to another.

Human beings are creatures who speak in many languages in order to both communicate and to experience fresh visions of the world. The following are some of the basic forms of art through which we as human beings have communicated across history. The following list of "**expressive disciplines**" is not complete, and its categories vary from time to place, but the ideas are helpful.

Add your own to these lists below. (The truth is, artisanal work of virtually any kind could find a sacred place in the world of worship and faith – whether it is done within the walls of a church or outside in the world as we know it.)

Fine Arts

Drawing Arts, Architectural Arts, Painting Arts, Conceptual Arts, Sculptural Arts, Literary and Language Arts, Film Arts, Glass Arts, Masonry Arts, Textile Arts

Performing Arts

Musical Arts, Dramatic Arts, Movement Arts, Voice Arts, Dance Arts

Technical Arts

Design Arts, Decorative Arts, Calligraphic Arts, Floral Arts, Fashion Arts, Culinary Arts, Hospitality Arts, Projection Arts, Sound Arts, Liturgical Arts

For Christians, the wide realm of art has held particular **value** across the worship story of the ages. At various times and various places, art has meant the difference between justice being done and social ill increasing. In some cases, works of art have bridged linguistic and cultural gaps in understanding that could not be bridged by mere words.

All of the above art forms have found their way into Christian **worship expression**. One can view the *Pieta* by Michelangelo, a majestic sculpture of Mary with the adult Jesus in her arms, and find a piece of the incarnation story weaving its way into their heart.

Rembrandt's *Return of the Prodigal Son* welcomes us into a fresh vision of the father's reception of his wayward son and amplifies a story that words do not seem to tell as mightily.

One can attend a choral concert based on works by Beethoven or Bach, or an orchestral concert featuring ancient Jewish or Greek music, and be moved from one devotional place to another.

Art can **heal**, art can restore. Art can also **inflame** and enrage. Art moves us. The Celtic *Book of Kells* is a mixture of illumination (visual) and calligraphic arts, seemingly lifting the synoptic gospels off of the page. Likewise, modern retellings of the Jesus story in film, literature, and dance have had tremendous impact on the culture as a whole.

Early Christian Usage of Art

For the earliest Christians, they were surrounded by two primary **cultural inheritances** in art, and many secondary influences.

The **art of Judaism**, in the expressions of temple (architecture), music, dance, and psalmody, had tremendous impact on the artistic worship vision of the early disciples.

Likewise, the eclectic art of the **Greco-Roman** world was always at their doorstep, purveying its ideological wares through the gates of their eyes, ears, and other senses.

On some levels, the very sexual and overtly **pagan nature** of the Greek art of the early Christian centuries pushed the Church away from fresh Kingdom visions of sculpture and other visual arts.

Largely, the art of the early Church seemed to be vocational (Lydia and her purple cloth, Paul and his homemade tents), and devotionally symbolic (fish, crosses, and meaningful symbols).

As time progressed through the first few centuries and the Church extended its reach into the ethnically diverse Roman world, we can imagine the art of Christian faith began to uniquely flourish, expressed in songs inspired by, but unlike in form and content, their Jewish experience.

Other ethnic groups and nations began to embrace Christianity (Armenia considers themselves the first Christian nation, connecting themselves with the evangelism of the apostle Phillip), bringing their own artistic forms to expressing the faith.

The writers begin to write, and we see the early signs of Christian "interior **designers**" preparing homes for services and acts of worship.

A Wrestling Match with the Roman World

The Church had a great wrestling match with the Roman world in that myriad forms of art were intentionally **utilized** to further the ideology of the ruling elite. One can see in Egypt and other nations conquered by Rome an integration of Greek art with Egyptian and local cultural art.

The goal for the Romans was simple: **integrate** all art forms in society with Roman art, and the visual experience of their cities alone would "Hellenize" (or Romanize) the masses.

Christians understood this, and the wide array of pagan art would have surrounded them every day from the time of their waking to the time of their sleeping—every normal day of Roman Empire life.

A war of art was being waged, and the Romans were telling their **story** powerfully through the mediums of their day.

Art in Worship throughout Church History

A very cursory glance at art across the Church age tells us that Christians were not afraid to embrace artistic expression as a primary means of **articulating** the story of Jesus and **inspiring** a response to the Good News he proclaimed.

Again, when Constantine converted to Christianity, the art of faith flourished with resource and imperial blessing giving it strength. Tapestries, the crafting of vessels, architectural structures, music, and more began to gain strength as expressions of Christian worship.

Stained glass would tell the stories of faith to the **illiterate** masses. Paintings and sculptures would encourage the believer to embrace particular faith themes in churches and basilicas.

In the Middle Ages, paintings were very two-dimensional (unlike ancient Greek sculpture). The Renaissance age (precipitated by the Reformation's view on the importance of human beings, some suggest) brought a fresh three-dimensionality to painting.

One can literally see the art change over time. Music took a turn into what we call Gregorian chant, and eventually polyphony began to enter into the singing of the biblical texts.

All along the way, the architecture of the **cathedrals** was seeking to not only be a work of art in itself, but also to create the perfect place for "heaven and earth to meet," as a celestial art gallery.

Movement and Literature

The arts of movement and dance had a wide variety of applications across worship history, and the rich historical roots of Christianity in the dancing spirituality of Judaism fed this welcoming of movement into the worship equation. For the Church, **processions** were a rich form of movement art, and spaces were built to accommodate these worship arts.

Literary arts also flourished as Christian writers attempted to document the story of Christianity in the most beautiful ways possible. **Letter-writing** was still the primary mode of distance communication, and it is important that we not underestimate the role of letter writing in discipleship throughout the Middle Ages. Luther himself, during the Reformation, spent considerable time pastorally encouraging families and friends in need through letters.

One might suggest that the **culinary arts**, an undergirding art form in the arts of hospitality, had a prominent place in the Agape Feasts (love feasts) of the early Church. Culinary gifts have always had a place in worship expressions. Even monks throughout the medieval era were known for their abilities to make beer, grow fruits and vegetables, and make breads.

Art throughout Church History

There are myriad examples of a wide range of art forms being integral to the worship practice of local faith communities historically. There is also great historical evidence to support the fact that significant time and **financial** resource has been poured into the worship arts by the Church.

While art always has the capacity to block the view of the participant with its grandeur or **message**, it also has the stunning capacity to magnify both a message and the Message Maker within its gift.

The arts may have a larger part to play in speaking the truth of the gospels in the early 21st century than we realize. Adding the riches of Reformation spirituality with the riches of the historic arts of faith may be the key to deeply **reaching** the cultures in which we live over the next 50, 100, or 500 years.

The Worship Language of Music

"Handel set to work composing on August 22 in his little house on Brook Street in London. He grew so absorbed in the work that he rarely left his room, hardly stopping to eat. … Handel never left his house for those three weeks. A friend who visited him as he composed found him sobbing with intense emotion. Later, as Handel groped for words to describe what he had experienced, he quoted St. Paul, saying, 'Whether I was in the body or out of my body when I wrote it I know not.'

Messiah premiered on April 13, 1742, as a charitable benefit, raising 400 pounds and freeing 142 men from debtors' prison."[38]

The Worship Language of Music: "Amazing Grace" as an Example

Imagine the scene with me. It is the middle of a stormy night on March 9th, 1748. A young captain on a slave ship is awakened by cries of, "The ship is sinking; the ship is sinking!" Recalling words from a book he is reading called *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a Kempis, the young man begins a process of conversion that takes years to culminate.

Finally, moved by the merciful act of God in extending grace to the worst of sinners, he, a slave ship officer, John Newton devotes his life fully to the service of Christ. A new song is born in his heart, and then into the world. The opening words become a fresh **anthem** for his day:

"Amazing Grace! How sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see."

The simple song takes on a surge of life in congregations through England and feeds both an evangelical revival and the abolition of the slave trade throughout the nation.[39]

The Power of a Song

"Amazing Grace" is just one example of the power of a simple song to radically influence both Church culture and the wider human culture around us. John Newton experienced a radical conversion, and his life song became a worship anthem for the Body of Christ of his day and ours.

Why Sing?

Why do we sing songs in the first place? We do it because it is something that we can do *together*. The Scripture makes it clear that we will always have a new song in our mouths, and every generation will express that new song differently.

"Sing a new song to Him; play skillfully on the strings, with a joyful shout"

Psalm 33:3

"He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the Lord"

Psalm 40:3

From the world's great symphonies to modern worship anthems, the music of Christian worship has played a prominent role in bringing people to God across the ages. In our generation the music of worship continues to blossom with **innovative** new sounds and lyrics, carrying biblical truth that continue to shape the people of God.

Today, worship music should continue to play a pivotal, if not central, role in our worship expression. However, the wisdom of worship history calls us to consider the myriad other worship languages through which the Church has worshipped, and defined its relationship with God.

With all of the languages of worship in place, the new song that God has given our generation will have its sound through us.

Like "Amazing Grace," may the songs we sing, write, and lead **renew** generations to come as they join them with the **new song** that God has put on their lips.

A Charge from the Late Robert Webber

Our music should elevate ideas offered to us by the late Robert Webber, one of our generation's luminary voices on the topic of ancient-future worship.

> "Rediscover the Trinitarian nature of worship (We worship the Father in the language of mystery; the Son in the language of story; the Spirit in the language of symbol).
>
> Rediscover the theological themes of Transcendence, Creation, Immanence, Incarnation, Death, Resurrection, Ascension, and Eschaton.

> Rediscover how God acts through the sacred signs of water, bread and wine, oil, and laying on of hands.
>
> Rediscover the central nature of the table of the Lord in the Lord's Supper, breaking of bread, communion, and Eucharist.
>
> Rediscover how congregational spirituality is formed through the Christian celebration of time in Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, and Pentecost.
>
> Rediscover the work of worship in evangelism, discipleship, and spiritual formation.
>
> What the church needs now is committed, passionate, hard-working talent. We need musicians. Yes. But also thinkers, preachers, artists, researchers, teachers, and visionaries."[40]

Recovering the Arts in Worship

Christians today, especially in streams of the Church that diminish fine arts and relegate their crafting to a secular world, must recover the **power of the arts** to speak deeply and forcefully into a 21st century world.

The sooner that Christians move beyond arguing over the cost of carpets and lighting and into the worlds of creating remarkable beauty that evokes worship but that also alarms, teaches, arrests, and enlightens the worshipper (or pre-Christian), the sooner we will move forward in reaching the world of human beings that live in our time.

Session 4 Study Questions

First, if you are doing this with a group, take some time to write down your answers to the following questions before you gather. Highlight page numbers, key quotes and ideas that moved you. Make sure you write in the margins, circle words, or jot down anything that will help you interact with the material and remember core ideas.

1. What ideas moved you the most from this section?

Talk about the ideas related to worship that particularly moved you from the book or from the video.

How might the ideas that moved you help all of us to understand what worship is really about?

2. In what ways did a work of art, a building, a musical piece, or a performance shape your own worship life?

Is there a favorite song, or a favorite painting, that has had some significant influence in your life as a worshipper? What is it about that song or work of art that moves you?

3. In what way do you see our contemporary expressions of worship in music differently in light of all you have studied here?

Our contemporary worship music now has a context in which to find itself. Do you have any different perspectives now on how we use worship music after doing this study?

Conclusion: Drawing from the Wells of Worship

Videos in This Session:

- Conclusion: Drawing From the Wells of Worship (3:10)

My father recently wrote his memoirs. My children are discovering things not only about him, but also about themselves as they read through the pages in his story. They're even asking their Grandpa for wisdom, something they had never asked for before.

*Why? When we reconnect with the story of our past, even if it is not directly our own, we start to realize that there are gifts there for the receiving if we will only **invest** the time it takes to find them.*

Reaching Deep into Our Worship Story

Like drawing water from a deep, fresh water well, we can reach into the story of the Church's worship across the ages and find treasures that will help us with our current worship needs.

I believe there is great wisdom in our worship past, and if we look for it, we'll find it strengthening the worship and discipleship life of our churches today.

Our Journey into Worship History

We have, over a short time, reflected on a wide range of foundational historic worship languages that are vital to our understanding the contemporary worship experience. We have explored:

The Worship Languages of Time and Space,

The Worship Languages of Prayer and Scripture,

The Worship Languages of Baptism and Eucharist, and

The Worship Languages of Art and Music.

Our goal was very simple. By uncovering the **riches** of the past, we hoped to infuse the passion of our current worship expressions with fresh theology, creativity, and practice.

You may want to begin applying some fresh ideas in your own church's worship gatherings.

By infusing our contemporary worship understandings with insights from the past, we may have caught a glance of what worship could be, and possibly should be, in the Church's bright worship future.

Implications for Worship Leadership

Bringing our threads together, we have a job to do. We recognize from our study that worship is not only about creating a space for people to encounter God within, but it is also a teaching tool, in all its forms, for passing on the faith to future generations.

Realize the power of our languages of worship, and use them to serve your community for generations to come.

Work with your pastors and other leaders, always with humility, to consider ways you can integrate some of the riches we've discovered together in our worship past and present.

Blessings as you continue the journey of *Essentials in Worship History*.

A SENDING WORD FROM THE AUTHOR

If you have completed reading and reflecting on all the material in *Essentials in Worship*, then you have truly laid a good foundation for your worship leadership in the years to come.

I trust that it has been a rewarding experience for you. There is so much to learn about worship leading in each generation, and this material has been all about providing you with a good foundation in a relatively brief amount of time – a launch pad if you will – for your further growth.

Of course, there is nothing like experience to teach us how to be more effective at leading worship – but some good training can save us a lot of headaches along the way!

Would You Help Me Get the Word Out About Essentials?

I'd like to ask one favor at the conclusion of this experience for you.

If *Essentials* has been an encouragement to you at all, would you consider sharing it with a few worship leader/pastor friends in your reach?

Here is a sample email, tweet, or Facebook post you could edit to make your own:

> "Essentials in Worship has been so helpful to me as a worship leader. I highly recommend it. Check it out at www.Danwilt.com."

I'd be grateful for anything you can do.

Also, remember that www.WorshipTraining.com is a *gold mine* of worship resources. You can get a free membership there, and keep yourself growing through the great tools available to you and your worship ministry team.

And please don't forget to join my email list at www.DanWilt.com. I'd like to stay in touch, and would love to continue to encourage you in your journey as a leader of worship.

I'll be praying for you as you lead God's people into His presence. It is only there that people – including us – are truly transformed into the likeness of Christ.

It's a high calling that we have.

Grace and Peace, and sharing the journey with you,

Dan

[1] Personal Interview

[2] Personal Interview

[3] Personal Interview

[4] Personal Interview

[5] From the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

[6] Andy Park, "The Values and Priorities of Worship in the Vineyard," in *Thoughts on Worship*, 27–28.

[7] Erwin McManus, Mosaic Church.

[8] Numerous studies have shown that most of us prefer the type of music that was popular for us between the ages of 15 and 30. In a local church setting, this means that there will be a wide range of preferences according to the diversity of the group. For this reason, a lot of popular worship music tends to be melodic, easily arranged in different styles, and in a fairly narrow range of musical and lyrical complexity.

[9] Peter Davids, "What Is the Kingdom of God?" 2012.

[10] Ibid.

[11] None of us should be so presumptuous as to think that we know what God is doing, or wanting to do, in any given gathering. However, we should be listening with the rest of those leading in our gatherings, not simply hiding behind our part in the service. Often God will speak more to us than we need if we will allow Him to in these kinds of settings.

[12] Brenton Brown, Personal Interview, Fall 2002.

[13] N.T. Wright, *Simply Christian* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 58.

[14] This is also true of all common historic languages of gathered worship art, such as symbols, architecture, liturgy, scripture reading, prayer renderings, sculpture, dance, and more. For more on this, see Cambridge and Duke scholar Jeremy Begbie's work at *Duke Initiatives: Theology and the Arts* (www.divinity.duke.edu/programs/dita).

[15] Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke. *How to Think Theologically* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 11–24.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] N.T. Wright, *Simply Christian* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 58.

[19] "Then God said, 'Let there be light' and there was light'" (Genesis 1:3).

[20] According to the book *She Said Yes*, Cassie Bernall was a young, teenage girl killed in the Columbine High School massacre in Jefferson County, Colorado, USA, in 1999. While it is unconfirmed, the story is that an armed gunman, a fellow student, asked her if she believed in God. Cassie responded in the affirmative. She was shot on the spot. *She Said Yes* is the book her mother wrote after she was killed, based on the new and living faith her daughter had found in the years leading up to the attack.

[21] It is important to note that the term *Trinity* is not a biblical term. Rather, it is a word that comes to us from the 3rd century, as the Church wrestled with their understanding of God being the Father, and being Jesus, and being the Holy Spirit.

[22] Robert Webber, "Wanted: Ancient-Future Talent," in *Worship Leader Magazine* (May/June 2004), 10.

[23] It is helpful to note here that our modern conceptions of what sacrifice might mean, especially in the West, may get in the way of our understanding of Christ's sacrificial death for us. In the earliest findings related to sacrifice being done by human beings as an offering to God or gods, it is clear that this is simply another way of saying, "I'm offering the food which I have hunted" to God or the gods of the person. We see the meaning of sacrifice deepened and enriched throughout the biblical story, but it is important that we understand that the idea of sacrifice is not just a messy, strange ritual. It was another way of offering what was hunted, and would be used for sustenance, to the deity.

[24] Ibid., 470.

[25] Ibid., p. 474.

[26] N. T. Wright, Personal Interview, Westminster Abbey, London UK, Spring 2003.

[27] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *From Devotional Classics edited by Richard J. Foster and James Bryan Smith* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, Rev. 2005) 274.

[28] Evelyn Underhill, *Worship* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002, orig. pub. 1937), 43–44.

[29] Webber, Robert. *Ancient-Future Time: Forming Spirituality through the Christian Year* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books 2004), 15.

[30] White, James. *Introduction to Christian Worship*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 52.

[31] White, p. 54.

[32] Ibid., 19.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid., 202.

[35] Wright, N.T., *N.T. Wright on Word and Sacrament: We Need Both*, http://reformedworship.org/article/september-2008/nt-wright-word-and-sacraments-we-need-both (Sept. 2008).

[36] Ibid., 122.

[37] White, James. *A Brief History of Christian Worship*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 17.

[38] Patrick Kavanaugh, *The Spiritual Lives of the Great Composers* (Nashville: Sparrow Press, 1992), 5.

[39] This story is excerpted by kind permission from Broadman Holman's *Perspectives on Worship: Five Views*, for which the author was the writer. This book is a rich conversation on the worship perspectives of our day, and this section reflects a portion of what I wrote in defense of the contemporary worship perspective.

[40] Robert Webber, "Wanted: Ancient-Future Talent," in *Worship Leader Magazine* (May/June 2004), 10.