wildpear

DAN WILT

HOW TO LEAD WORSHIP

AN 8 WEEK STUDY

WITHOUT BEING A ROCK STAR



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *How To Lead Worship Without Being A Rock Star*.

You've chosen an exciting and dangerous task.
This little booklet is your survival manual.
Do you accept your mission?

What's so exciting about worship leading? Using the medium of the music we love, we have the privilege of leading people in the greatest adventure a human being can undertake – the journey into reverent, intimate, transforming and surrendered relationship with God.

This study is about leading worship through music. It is only one of the ways we lead people in worship, but it has proven to be a very important way across history. In our day, new songs of worship have been put into the heart of the global church, and this book is about leading worship effectively through the gift and experience of music – without being a rock star or a musical superhero.

Let's get our calling straight as worship leaders – when we lead one person in musical worship, we are setting them up with a lifetime of songs, words and ways of talking with God that will forever strengthen them through the years. When we lead one person in worship, we are helping them to open up to the God who alone can heal and restore fragile human lives.

When we lead a community in worship, we are leading generations to come, through them, as we strengthen their legacy of faith. That's the point. Our up-front persona takes a back seat to the call to lead worship.

What's so dangerous about worship leading? In a culture that idolizes musicians, seeks personal glory and elevates emotions, we stand in front of people, behind a microphone, up on a stage, influencing them. Our own hearts sing louder than our musical instruments, and our true character touches people in ways we never before thought possible.

Excitement and danger – that is the privilege of worship leading.

So, now that I have your attention, never fear! The Holy Spirit is on our side, continually shaping and forming our hearts into the likeness of Christ as we rise to the high calling of worship leadership. Indeed, it is a calling, a vocation, and a privilege. It is God's to give that calling, and ours to respond.

This study has been designed to help you along in your quest to serve your church community with your passion to lead worship, and to grow in the skills and values that make a song leader into an effective worship leader. Serving, loving and leading in a local church is where the "rubber meets the road" of our discipleship. It's where we learn to be givers in this life instead of takers, followers of Jesus instead of self-sufficient or self-absorbed leaders.

As 1 Corinthians 12:7 says, each one of us is given "a manifestation of the Spirit" for the shared good of our community. We are given gifts and callings not for the service of our own visibility or personal sense of fulfillment – we are given the gifts we have to serve the others around us, while being energized by that service at the same time.

Welcome then, to the humbling, exciting, transforming, enlightening, shocking, challenging, artful world of worship leading. Please – *fasten your seatbelt.*

SESSION 1
WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO

"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]

Brian Doerksen *(Come, Now Is The Time To Worship)*

Head On: Addressing The Rock Star Paradigm

In every time period in history there are common associations with stages (stages are everywhere, and they elevate people), up front celebrities (how

many of us have our name known by our community, but their names are not always known by us), and public affirmation (it's intoxicating to have people like you).

Our age is no exception, and with the dawn of great sound systems, lit stages, and ambient visuals – in churches as well as arenas – we can get confused. We can confuse the values held by the *rock stars and celebrities* of our day with the values we must hold to as *worship leaders*.

Even if you think you've "been there, done that" on this topic, let's take a moment to check our hearts as we begin our study. There is nothing inherently wrong with being a hero, standing on a stage, and creating musical magic. People are called to many different things. However, the difference between the "rock star" value system and the "worship leader" value system is *massive*.

This simple chart will help us.

The Worship Leader	The Rock Star
Leader/Community Focus	Star/Audience Focus
Experiencing God's Presence	Experiencing Moving Music
Pastoral Leadership & Disciple Care	Celebrity Leadership & Fan Care

Spelling Out The Difference

The chart is clear. A worship leader headspace recognizes that we are leading a community of faith, through the vehicle of music, art and liturgy. Our goal is a living encounter with Christ and the formation of disciples.

The rock star headspace sees the congregation as an audience to some degree, desires to move people (maybe even in a sacred way), and yet is ultimately concerned with one's public persona and fan attraction.

Before we quickly move on, let me say this – this is not an "either/or" attitude. There have been many, many times in my own worship leadership career that I have been on one side or the other of the middle line, wrestling with God for attitudes that are formed by Christ rather than by my need for people to value "me and my music." It's true. Our souls are not static, they *move* according to our environments and circumstances.

We are always making choices to align our attitudes with the attitudes of Christ, having the same mindset as Jesus – the true hero we emulate (Phil. 2:5).

The Call To Pastor People In Worship

It is the *call to pastor people through the vehicle of worship music*, the worship arts, and the worship forms we choose, that sets the worship leader apart from the rock star.

The world is full of stages, and they each mean something to us. Know what the stage has meant to you in the past, and is meaning to you now. Get honest. What do you want others to notice about you on the stage, or to think about you when you're finished leading? Is your internal "stage set up" feeding all things good and right in your church?

The rock star age in which we live separates the artist from the crowd. Worship leaders resist this gap, and empower community as they lead in worship. They value being "accessible to their community," not "available to their audience." Our overemphasis on the musical expression of worship pushes us to "produce" in ways in which we were never intended. I.e. Relax. You're important, but not *that* important. It's a big story of

worship going on out there.

We all have different kinds of worship leaders and musicians that we emulate. Be aware of your role models as a worship leader, and ask if their pastoral call is what leads you to like them. If we don't talk about these differences in values on an ongoing basis, we may continually filter our worship leadership values through the sparkling stained glass of the stage hero. Why? Music, sound, visuals – and affirmation – mean something to all of us. Let's check our egos at the door, and, as Paul told Timothy, "examine our life and doctrine" with a close eye (1 Tim. 4:16).

Now, we're ready to move on. Before we talk about *what* we do as worship leaders, we must talk about *why* we lead worship.

The Worship Sandwich

You have been asked to make a sandwich. All of the meats, cheeses, vegetables, seasonings, 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," they say. "The sandwich isn't for you – it's for the guy sitting over in the corner."

Oops.

Someone told you *what* to do, but they never told you *why* to do it.

Why "Why" Is So Important

Why is a word that changes everything. Without a clear *why* behind what

we do, we assume the *how* and the *what*. In fact, we tend to assume that the *why* is about us – our own preferences, experience and tastes.

However, when someone clarifies why you are doing something, it changes both what you are doing, and how you are doing it. *Why* gives meaning to what we do.

You can't learn how to do something until you have a firm grip on why you are doing it.

In other words, there is no use talking about *how* to lead worship, until we have at least taken a moment to talk about *why* we lead worship.

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 our own tastes).

However, the preferences, needs, desires, inspirations, tastes and even allergies that we think about when we know why we're making a sandwich – in this case, to serve another person – guides us to make a very different kind of sandwich than the one we might naturally make.

Mimicking Style Without The Content

Let's make this practical. Today, many worship leaders are working very hard to learn the 'how' of worship leading from other worship leaders who represent their tastes in music, their style preferences, and more. This isn't bad in itself; we all need role models and heroes, and we can learn much from each other.

However, the worship "sandwich" can become about us.

I see many worship leaders working very hard to mimic a style of useful, passionate worship that they are seeing and hearing from mp3s, concerts

and conferences. I see those same worship leaders, in some cases, lacking a strong sense of the *content* behind that *form or style* they are trying to mimic.

They are missing the why behind the what.

In other words, they are re-creating someone else's sound without fully embracing their story. That might not be a problem – we actually get better at what we do when we mimic others who do it well.

But here is the problem when we are busy learning *how* to lead worship without taking the time to reflect on *why* we lead worship in the first place. When we are just focused on *how* to lead, our own preferences win every time. We get up on stages, and we perform (with a touch of honest worship leadership making it feel right).

However, when we are focused on *why* we lead, our own preferences are submitted to the needs of the community, the context we are leading in, and ultimately, to God's direction for our entire local church.

That congregation is no longer our audience; they are our family. We are serving them, and doing whatever it takes to create a space in which they can worship. Sometimes we'll get to do what we want; other times we'll be called to do what the congregation needs.

What We Want Isn't Always What We Need

Our local church community may not *need* that style or form you and I love right now. They may, but they may not. They may need the heart behind it, a taste of the story behind that worship expression we'd like to mimic. More than anything, however, they need opportunities to worship that actually work for them. They need for us to be authentic, and for us to be aware of who they are and where they are coming from.

Opportunities to worship must be delivered to them in a form that they can access – so that their intimate exchange with God in worship is served. If I walk into an old folks home, I may want to do all my favorite songs. What I need to do, however, is to find out what songs bring them life (and maybe me to some degree), and lead those.

In other words, when you are in front of people leading worship, the sandwich is not ultimately for you. The sandwich is not for me. When you are a worship leader, the sandwich is for the congregation (or group) you lead. You are serving them by the songs you choose and the way you lead them; they are not there to serve you as an audience.

A fellow pastor once said to me, "Dan, I finally figured out what it is about certain worship leaders that makes me love being led in worship by them. I feel like they are there for me. I feel like they have come to serve my need to meet with God in worship. I am not their audience; I am their family."

The Styles We Love

The styles you and I love are important to God, but they are not more important than what your congregation needs. Sometimes, there is a complete match. Other times, the worship leader must learn how to lead in a way that connects with their congregation.

If your style (and perhaps way of seeing worship) doesn't match your congregation, then you need to decide who you are serving – and make a sandwich that works for your community.

The Spearhead

Let me use one more analogy before we look at the *why* of worship leading. It's like a spearhead – the point breaks through the barrier, but it's the

weight of what comes *behind* the point that really opens things up.

The "point" in this metaphor is the "style" we lead in, the songs we love, or our unique "way" of worship leading. That style may be cool, and may even break through an initial barrier (say, getting people to sing with you or creating energy in the room), but if the weight of the biblical worship story is not behind it, and if the weight of your own local church's story is not behind it, the spear won't do any holy damage. It will just poke through and maybe leave a buzz.

For worship leaders, our shared worship story is the real weight of the spearhead. Backing up the style (or form) of your worship leadership is the "content" of your worship leadership. This is the "why" of worship. We may think the point is the music, the sharp tip, and that we should spend all our time honing it. Isn't that what musicians do?

In my experience, however, the weight *behind* our style is what is most important. Without a strong worship story, a strong *why* leading us, it's all just song leading. "A dull axehead," someone once said, "will chop a tree down faster than a sharp razorblade." You get the picture.

So right off the top, we're beginning to understand that song leading is not the same thing as worship leading. Song leading is a musical task. Worship leading is a spiritual vocation expressed in musical leadership.

We're ready now to think about *why* we're leading worship, and *who* we are leading in our gatherings. Then, we can spend the rest of our time talking about how we lead worship.

Why #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, did the planning, and showed

up.

But no. It's just not right, true or accurate to think that I invited this group to worship.

The true Host of any worship gathering is God. The Father of all creation sets the stage. The Son makes the invitation, and builds the bridge of wholeness in relationship. The Spirit empowers human beings to respond to God's all pursuing Love.

In other words, Jesus is the lead worshiper, and we are those who respond to His invitation to worship. The worship leader builds a set of songs with which we can all respond to God's invitation, and leads us in that response.

God reveals Himself to us, and we respond.

That is why we lead worship.

Why #2 – God Has Made A Vow To Us, So We Renew Our Vows

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 commitment that will help them to always *remember* their utter surrender to the love of the other.

I call what we do on a Sunday morning, or in our small group, or at the Youth Conference, *gathered worship*. Gathered worship is what happens when we welcome God's people to gather in response to God's invitation, in the Name of Jesus, and remind them just Who has made a way for us to meet with God in that place. Then, we facilitate that shared interaction of love.

We build bridges, through lyrics and music and sound, to amplify that

relationship between Bride and Groom. Then, the analogy changes, and we join in with the Bride of Christ in worship.

How strange it would be for the Best Man or Maid of Honor to begin making goo-goo eyes at the bride or groom! Yet, sometimes worship leaders do just that – we think it's about us (as the Best Man) and try to impress the bride, or (as the Maid Of Honor) ignore the bride altogether and blindly pursue the groom on our own! Neither works. We have a job to do in this wedding, and we are at our best when we're doing it.

A worship leader is most accurately a "facilitator" of worship – which is always more than just the music. Using the elements of music, scripture reading, creativity, and many other liturgical tools, we create spaces in which a community can meet with God.

We create spaces for our local church to meet with God, and to renew our vows before God.

That is why we lead worship.

Why #3 – God Has Pursued Us, So We Remember His Story

"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."[6]

Romans 12:1-2 (*The Message*)

What Is Worship?

Worship is a living act that encompasses all of our lives, offered to Jesus in complete and utter surrender. Whether we are singing songs on a Sunday morning, taking the bread and cup in communion, 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.

In other words, capital "W" worship is about our *life worship*, surrendered and responding to God with every activity in the human experience. The language of allegiance, love, loyalty and surrender are all words that capture this "whole life response" to God. Small "w" worship, in contrast, is our *gathered worship*. It has to do with the ways we express that worship, and how it feeds (and shapes) our capital "W" worship over a lifetime.

Worship Is A Response To God

The early Church father, Iranaeus 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 worshiper.

In other words, we put God at the beginning, middle and end of our every thought, choice and action.

God Is The Subject Of The Worship Sentence

However, are we the Subject of the worship sentence? No. God is the Subject of the worship sentence. He acts out the verb toward us, the Object of his love, care, healing, discipline and power.

When we put ourselves at the beginning of the worship sentence (and many worship leaders do), then we do the work, and God is responding to what we do. No. This should never come from our lips again. God acts. We

respond. Then God responds to our responses, and so on. Welcome to the exchange of love that is our life with God forever.

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

Creating Space For People To Respond To God

As a worship leader, your job is create a space for people to respond to God – not to do enough religious gymnastics so that God sees how hard we are all working and smiles on us.

Lighten your load, and take the burden off your back to hit a spiritual homerun every gathering. *Lead us in simply responding to God*, and lose the sense of need to "make something happen." Songs are a powerful media – lead them well, and let them do what they do best. We are there to respond. Lead us in that corporate response to 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 to which we go. I don't mean this literally, but just as the Internet is a "place" we go for certain encounters, so too songs are a "place" we go to meet with God. 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 in Psalm 42:2 – "When can I go and meet with God?" The worship leader responds, "How about here? How about now?" and leads us to that place of meeting.

The Role Of The Worship Leader

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 – that we would get 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.

We lead worship because all of creation is caught up in responding to God's love, and we are designed to do the same.

That is why we lead worship.

A Review: Why Do We Lead Worship?

So, to drive this foundation thoroughly into the ground, why do we lead worship? Worship is our response to God's love. Plain and simple.

We are in the role we are in, as lead worshipers, to make a way for people to respond to 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. If any other motive, any other purpose, begins to get in the way, we have lost our way in the journey of worship leadership.

Yes, it's fun to play our instrument, sing, and lead in songs we love. Yes, leading a small group, or a band, or playing in front of many in a worship context is energizing, but it will never be – must never be – the point.

God began the worship pursuit; it is ours to respond and remember. A worship leader leads a group of people in:

1) responding to God's invitation to intimacy,

2) renewing our mutual vows and commitments with God, and

3) remembering God's pursuing love and transforming story.

That is why we lead worship.

Now, with this in mind, we can begin to talk about *how* we lead worship.

Session 1
Reflection Questions

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 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 during your reading.

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

2. Why do we lead worship?

    In your own words, write out the reasons that a worship leader exists, and what our primary role is when we step up to a microphone.