wildpear

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HOW TO LEAD WORSHIP

AN 8 WEEK STUDY

WITHOUT BEING A ROCK STAR



SESSION 2
DEFINING OUR WORSHIP VALUES

"Within a few years of coming (to the Vineyard), I began leading worship in a Friday night believers' meeting. It wasn't quite a full band, but we had a keyboard and a couple of guitars, and sometimes a bass.

In those days, we were afraid of using drums because the Vineyard worship community was born with a desire to avoid any kind of performance mentality.

We wanted people to focus on God, not the band.
It wasn't until 1983 that we started using a drummer
consistently, and I remember asking him
to just play quietly.

Looking back, it's pretty comical."[2]

Andy Park (*In The Secret*)

In this quote, worship leader Andy Park is talking about the unique church situation he was leading in – the Vineyard. In this case, one of *his* worship

"values" was that of his *community of churches*. Wanting to avoid any type of performance mentality, they originally kept drums quiet on the stage. A value was in place that would mark the way worship leaders in this movement led worship for decades. While the Vineyard family of churches did eventually give drums a more prominent place (in a big way), the value behind Andy's early hesitation has remained important to that denomination and to almost every worship leader within it over decades.

In other words, the primary value of avoiding a disconnected sense of performance in worship leadership affects how every Vineyard worship leader does his/her job all the way to today.

Now, let's begin to think about *your* church, *your* group, and the values that will shape how *you* lead worship.

Who Is Your Church In The Church Of Today?

How we go about leading worship is greatly affected by the values behind our church's or denomination's story.

Many worship values in local churches are biblical values, such as the ones we looked at in the first chapter. However, many of our values (and this is a good thing) come from the unique immediate family of churches of which we are a part.

Let's begin with a key question that will lead us to many others:

"Who is your church in the Church of today?"

In other words, what

values,

traditions,

theological ideas,

approaches to faith and

approaches to the world around us

beat at the heart of your local church?

If you don't know the answers to these kinds of "who are we" questions yet, it would be good for you to ask these questions when beginning to lead worship in any setting in that community.

Here are some other questions that may help trigger your own.

Who are we as a church?

Where did we come from, and where are we going?

What values sit at the heart of our community,
our wider immediate family (denomination or movement)?

In what ways does our church, and our denomination, model something special about worship for the wider church?

How Was Your Church Or Movement Born?

Are you Methodist? If so, you should know something about the vibrant holiness teaching of John Wesley, and the immense body of songs Charles Wesley wrote before you jump into worship leading in your church.

Are you part of the Assemblies Of God? Then you should know something about the Pentecostal revivals that occurred early in 20th century America, and the part that gathered worship had to play in the rise of one of the largest denominations on the planet.

Are you Anglican? Charismatic? Lutheran? Presbyterian? Are you a part of a more recent denomination or church movement?

Do you know how your local church started, or how your denomination began? Understanding this can revolutionize the way you think about worship leading now in your local church.

My Denomination As An Example

I'll use my own church stream, the Vineyard, as an example of how I might go about answering these questions. Apply what I say to your own church situation. How do you think my denomination's worship story affects my values as a worship leader, and how does yours affect your values?

> *The Vineyard movement was essentially born in spiritual desperation. A small gathering of worn-out leaders were moved to deep repentance before God in the 1960s, and began to spend time worshiping through music and praying together in a living room in Yorba Linda, California. John and Carol Wimber were a part of this group.*
>
> *Songs of intimate worship became a primary lifeline for these people in the brokenness of those early days, and after leaving the Quakers where John was a church leader, and then Calvary Chapel, this growing group linked with an existing network of churches called Vineyards. Over time, these Vineyards, who were equally committed to the Holy Spirit being given specific opportunity to speak, touch and minister to them when they gathered, eventually recognized John's leadership. The Vineyard movement was born.*
>
> *John Wimber's influence on the worship renewal movements of the late 20th century cannot be overstated – he was a man with a heart for God, for the whole of the Church, and for the Holy Spirit's activity in our world. He was also a professional musician, producer and artist –*

who had a profound encounter with God that led him to bring leadership to the Vineyard movement.

Over the first ten years of John's life as a Christian he led hundreds of people to Christ. Christianity Today magazine called him a "beer-guzzling, drug-abusing pop musician, who was converted at the age of 29 while chain-smoking his way through a Quaker-led Bible study" (Christianity Today, Editorial, Feb. 9, 1998).

John was involved with the famed group The Righteous Brothers, and was a respected producer as well as being a studio-caliber musician on a wide variety of instruments. After laying down his highly successful music career to follow God's call on his life as a spiritual leader in the Church, John began to radically give himself to reaching people for Christ. As his influence grew, John began to teach courses at Fuller Theological Seminary, and he and Carol eventually planted a Calvary Chapel church in California.

Through the influence of George Ladd's writing, John embraced the "Kingdom of God" as he believed Jesus taught it – the in-breaking presence of God's active rule and reign. His dramatic encounters with the Holy Spirit, and the activity of the Spirit in healing, deliverance, miracles and "power evangelism," led John to join, and eventually lead, the Vineyard churches.

John and his own congregation experienced God in profound ways through times of intimate and honest worship, in contemporary sounds and language. Vineyard gatherings were packed with young people, many out of the Jesus People movement of the 1960s, and "come as you are" dress codes and the soft-rock musical styles of the day marked their gatherings.

The songs were written "to God," as opposed to just "about God," and a fresh wind of intimate interaction with their Lord Jesus through worship music began to stir the hearts of many across the globe.

> *They taught the Bible, and welcomed God to act in their midst. There was no hype, no charismatic worship leader trying to stir up the emotions of the crowd in those early days – just simple, honest worshiping, led by a band and a pastoral worship leader with a heart for God.*[3]

Can You Feel The Values?

Clearly, I've done a bit of homework. So should you.

Knowing something about my church movement's worship story may give you some perspective on why Vineyard worship leaders generally have the values that they do when leading worship. Respected names like Brian Doerksen, Brenton Brown, Kathryn Scott, Andy Park, David Ruis and others grew up in this "values" soil, and have had a great influence on the ways that worship leaders around the world lead.

Something else unique in the Vineyard's worship story is found in its leader's background as a professional musician. John had a profound spiritual experience where he saw a vision of hundreds of "garage bands" (a term for informal bands that rehearse in someone's garage, typically playing drums, guitars, bass, etc.) called to lead people into living worship. In the 1960s and 1970s, this was crazy talk to many churches.

But everything was changing, and a renewal in the church's worship expression was occurring. Truly, a "new song" was being put into the mouth of the church, with fresh ways of expressing that new song.

Studies have marked the Vineyard as one of the first truly postmodern church movements of the last century. Other movements, such as New Wine and Soul Survivor (from the Anglican traditions), attribute their beginnings to the significant influence of John Wimber and Vineyard worship expression, as well as others.

Your church family has a story like this, somewhere. *What is that story?*

The Worship Roots Of A Family Of Churches

After exploring your denomination and church's general history, we must understand the roots of the *worship expressions* of our particular denomination or church.

Let's look again at my church movement as an example to unpack the kinds of questions you might want to begin to ask about your church.

> *In the fertile soil of the Vineyard's call to worship, worship leaders and songwriters were both attracted to, and prolifically added to, the worship community of the movement. Songs such as* Isn't He, Faithful One, Change My Heart O God, Refiner's Fire, Only You, I Lift My Eyes Up *and many others began to powerfully impact the common worship life of the contemporary church.*
>
> *People beyond the Vineyard were singing directly to God, and not just about Him.*
>
> > *"Up until the 1960s, liturgy and traditional hymn singing dominated the worship landscape of churches across the Western world. When the 1960s came around, a fresh poetic voice was being heard from the American counter-culture. Guitars, long hair and heartfelt lyrics began to burst onto the social scene. As a generation of the aimless and searching began to encounter living truth in Christ, fresh songs of indigenous worship began to reflect such brutal honesty and hope. Churches began to center their entire worship service around extended times of singing and responding to God through song."*[5]
>
> *In review, my own movement was born in a living room, where a few people had gathered out of a deep hunger to encounter God*

intimately. Over the course of just a few decades, the Vineyard Movement has grown to be international, with nerve centers of Kingdom activity scattered across the globe.

Vineyard worship expression has always emphasized the work of the Holy Spirit among us as we sing, the belief that God is very present to minister to us in our broken state, and the undergirding value that worship leadership be gracious and pastoral, not marked by hype or unchecked emotionalism. Care for the poor is often represented in the lyrics of the songs chosen, and a hunger for God to act in society as well as in the church.

Guiding Values

In the Study Questions at the end of this chapter, you'll be asking similar questions about your own movement. How do the roots of your denomination or church affect your values related to biblical worship, and your unique musical expression of worship?

Explore the story of your church, and understand the gifts that lie beneath the surface. If you do this, you may find a strength in your worship planning and leadership that seems to go beyond your own abilities. Of course, God's Spirit is behind you in that work. But sometimes, having our church's history behind us is a powerful wave on which to ride.

To remember our past is to understand our present, and to lead with confidence into our shared future.

What Is Your Unique "Values Heritage" In Your Local Church?

Every church, even in a denomination, is very different. We all stand on some heritage of community, faithfulness, integrity and rich experience as

we come to lead worship in our local community.

In many cases, we weren't the ones to pay the price to see our church planted, or come to life. Who did pay the price? Why is your local church unique because of the price that was paid?

In the United Methodist Church in which I was mentored, we were led by a pastor with a passion for God's word, and a heart to see us as youth come into our own as spiritual leaders. When we began a small, contemporary worship team, he encouraged us as to how we could serve our peers that were our own age, as well as our silver-haired church members. He encouraged us to lead worship in other local churches as well.

We sang songs in ways that ministered to them instead of jarring them; that involved lyrics and sounds with which they could identify.

You may see your church's heritage in worship as a great gift to you, or a great hindrance to you leading worship effectively! Whatever is the case, knowing that heritage will guide you as you seek to care for your group as a worship leader.

Values Will Keep You Centered As A Worship Leader

Today, a multi-million dollar industry has now formed around the precious jewel of worship, and brought a whole new set of character challenges, musical challenges and leadership challenges to today's contemporary worship leader.

This challenge, and other challenges in what we uniquely inherit in our local church community, demand "big stone values" to keep us rooted and established in God's love (Eph. 3:17b-19) as we lead in worship.

Values are what keep us centered, focused and faithful. Primary values are the big stones, those values that form the basis for everything we do. Secondary values are ways we *express* our primary values – and those can vary from church to church, generation to generation.

We're going to take a brief look at what I believe are five primary worship values that apply to any community. These values, hovering near the center of our worship leading practices and principles, will ultimately help us to create disciples of Jesus who understand how to connect with God, and (more importantly) how God is connecting with them, in the midst of corporate worship.

We'll look at creating worship spaces that are 1) Intimate, 2) Accessible, 3) full of Integrity, 4) Culturally Connected and 5) guided by Kingdom Expectation.

Defining Primary Worship Values

Hopefully we all love Jesus, and are moving in the same direction across the worldwide Church. But, just as a lime slice changes the taste of water, each expression or movement of the Church has a unique twist – defined by its history, preferences, demographic and leadership.

In a day when the common person's musical palate is very refined by being inundated with music at every turn, there are a few core values that can guide us along as worship leaders as we seek to lead 21st century people into a place of worship encounter through contemporary music.

a. We Value Intimacy In Worship.

Intimacy, in any relationship, does not just happen when the lights are low and the music is 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-preservation; self-disclosure above self-protection.

God has chosen to make Himself intimately, honestly and vulnerably known to us.

He has self-revealed His love and the depths of His Person to us. When we turn to Him, and respond to His love with honesty, vulnerability and self-disclosure, then we are engaging in the intimate relationship into which He Himself is inviting us.

b. We Value Accessibility In Worship.

When a wheelchair ramp appears at the entrance of a corporate building, we immediately know what that business 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 easy; accessibility tries to make entry easy for everyone.

We want to make a way for everyone gathered in a room to find their way to God through the songs we sing. This is hospitality.

Our musical goal is not to impress people with the capabilities of the band, or worse yet, with the capabilities of an individual, but rather to beautifully create a musical space for people to meet with God.

We have one set of goals ever before us as a team. We are playing so that the congregation might remember God's saving acts, celebrate God's unchanging character, encounter God's loving presence, and find a clear way to lay down the burdens they walked in with at the feet of Jesus.

We are poised as a worship team to serve, to use all our musical gifting to get out of the way, and to make a way, for people to get to that place of encounter.

c. We Value Integrity In Worship.

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 show" is all about the leader and the musicians, and is less about the congregation meeting with God, they perceive something is hollow in the corporate worship experience over time.

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 we in our own lives are not actively questing to care for the poor.

For worship leaders and teams to effectively build a congregation as a discipled 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, 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.

In other words, we don't want to just look good or sound good – we want to actually be good.

d. We Value Cultural Connection In Worship.

We live in a time, and in a place in history. We embrace, to one degree or another, the sounds and musical textures of today's music, choosing to be true to who God has made us to be, and true to the communities we are seeking to reach.

For that reason our music is not dated in its sound (though in some settings this may be appropriate) but is current with the kinds of sounds today's listeners, and worshipers, love to hear.

We use video and other forms of cultural communication to connect with our attendees and our neighborhoods.

In considering the value of cultural connection as it relates to worship leading, we must hold some truths in tension. As a worship community we don't want to contrive our sound, making music we're not comfortable with, always trying to "keep up" with popular culture.

At the same time, we hold this in tension with the reality that we want to avoid "churchy" or "Christian sub-culture" musical styles that seem disconnected from the daily musical experience of the average person on the street.

What is the answer? We seek in our worship expressions to reflect the demographic of our local community (both inside the church and outside), and this means that we choose the music of today's culture with which to worship, integrated with the familiar music of the Church historic (i.e. hymns, etc.).

The sound that results from this quest is usually very culturally current music, that sounds like the tunes one might hear on the radio on any given day – but with lyrics that focus us Godward.

As we do this, we are laid back, and low-hyped, in our approach to worship. We seek to break down the barriers that people perceive between church life and everyday life.

We seek to make our church language as accessible as our street language, much in the way that the writer's of the New Testament did.[9]

For that reason, our church services and worship would be led 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 connect with our generation.

e. We Value Kingdom Expectation In Worship.

Rooted in the Jewish hope for a redemption to come, Jesus came to the world declaring to human beings that God's Kingdom is "within our reach."

In other words, God's Kingdom is now (among us), and not yet (still to come). He gives us tastes, like appetizers, of our future inheritance by the Holy Spirit – healing us, renewing our minds, encountering us in powerful ways – even as we worship Him. This idea we call "the presence of the future."

As we sing songs to God, and not just about Him, we make room for His Spirit to move among us. God's Kingdom begins to break in among us in powerful and even miraculous ways.

When we gather to worship, we expect every time that each individual, as well as our corporate community, will have an intimate exchange with God. We expect His Kingdom to break in at any and every moment, as He heals, delivers and transforms us as broken people.

We never want to lose the dynamic of creating worship settings that have plenty of "space," both musically and spiritually, for God to interact with His people. For us, worship is not about a shining worship leader and a killer band – its about serving God and people by making a way for us all to meet with Him.

How do these values apply to your denomination or community? How do each of these values get fleshed out in how your community is led into worship week after week?

Asking these questions is vital if we are to lead worship well in our churches and groups.

Session 2
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 is really all about?

2. How do values shape the way we lead worship?

    First, talk about your church's local history, and your denomination's history. How might the story of your particular church shape the way you lead worship in your community?

    Second, go through each of the five values mentioned one by one. First, ask what values your current church is good at, or emphasizes. Then, ask how each of these values would affect, in the moment, your worship leading? Imagine you are leading worship right now, and apply a value to that moment.

    How does it shape your thinking as you lead that song, or speak to the group?