wildpear

DAN WILT

HOW TO LEAD WORSHIP

AN 8 WEEK STUDY

WITHOUT BEING A ROCK STAR



SESSION 7

BECOMING A GREAT WORSHIP LEADER

"I've heard some teaching... about the investment and the enticement. God is trusting us with something in this generation. There's a new wave coming in worship, and it's exciting. You can catch a glimpse of it everywhere you go. But it's a holy thing that we're running with, so keep bowing down.

We keep seeing examples of people who've lost it. They've lost it with the Lord, and have disillusioned other people. So if God trusts you with something, just keep bowing down."[22]

Matt Redman (*Heart Of Worship*)

We never "arrive" as worship leaders. Every time we lead, we learn a little more, we sense a little more and hopefully, we grow a little more. Be a lifelong learner.

Read books. Join WorshipTraining.com. Watch those you respect as worship leaders, and take notes.

Pursue higher education that will deepen you in skills, spiritual leadership, formation, theology, biblical understanding, history and creativity. Take every opportunity to become a more effective worship leader, musician and arranger, as well as becoming a well-read and thoughtful pastoral leader.

From Functional To Effective

We want to move from being simply functional worship leaders, to becoming good worship leaders, and then on to becoming great worship leaders. There are certain qualities that run like a thread through the lives of consistently effective and authoritative worship leaders. Here are a few thoughts from my years partnering with these worship leaders in interdenominational, intergenerational and international settings.

Note: I must note here that not everyone is primarily called by God to be a worship leader. Some worship leaders are primarily servants filling a need that energizes them as well as serves a need. That's a beautiful heart in action.

Some are artists, serving as worship leaders. Nothing is better for an artist's soul than to enjoy the full extent of one's creativity and to lead people to God with accessible music. We all take our place, and serve.

You Can't Learn Calling, But You Can Learn Skill

Others, though, are called to this type of ministry in the Church, and it is clear that the hand of God is on them to effectively and authoritatively lead worship. We can't learn "calling;" we either are called to do it or we are not. Our gifting to lead worship will fall somewhere along a spectrum – embrace and pursue understanding as to where you are, and just be faithful.

Listen closely to God, and 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.

Growing Toward Greatness

"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."[23]

David Ruis (*You Are Worthy Of My Praise*)

How do you grow as a worship leader? The reality is that the more experience you gain leading worship, the more effective you may become. Sometimes we only reinforce bad habits over time, though, so a roadmap of some sort can be helpful.

There is no silver bullet for growth – growing as a disciple, growing as a spiritual leader, growing as a musician, growing as a pastor, growing as a lead worshiper, growing as a songwriter and growing as a human being all are factors in the development of a great worship leader. Every wedding you play at, funeral you sing for, and small group you lead into worship adds to your experience and wisdom base.

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 awhile. 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 6 or 7 songs over a half an hour, instead of stretching out 4 or 5. In other words, they know how to start and finish songs with confidence, and how to linger if the moment calls for it.
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> *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.
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> *Great worship leaders* know how to finish a song without feeling a need to meander, and know how to start another song with confidence.
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> *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 prepares you, in some way, to engage with the next.

Great worship leaders know how to let the songs lead worship and give the worshiper 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.

Great Worship Leaders… are equippers.

The most appreciated worship leaders have a streak of a trainer and 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, are relationally loyal, and share like-mindedness on many 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 youth, talent, and 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 who 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 to simply protect themselves in the "always-leading" worship leadership role.

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, or lead the devotional time, or speak before the church on Sunday morning if asked.

Great worship leaders know their scriptures, know how to sensitively pray for a cancer patient in a hospital, and know how to pray 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 – 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 needs 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, and are confident in their skill level.

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 make them sound sweet together with 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 as possible, and gain fresh musical ideas from them.

Great worship leaders love the old and the new, and seek to integrate the riches of the historic hymns (and ethnic expressions) 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 full of trust 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 worshipers 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.

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 need to generate outward emotion from the congregation 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 public authority as a worship leader is built on this ongoing, private integrity as a worshiper.

Great Worship Leaders… are committed to the community.

Great worship leaders are intent on creating an effective space for people to meet with God through the medium of music, sacred actions (communion, etc.), and other means. Great worship leaders do not expect the congregation to be a 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.
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> *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, yet are deeply aware of the power of artistic complexity in specific contexts.
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> *Great worship leaders* can pull out a children's song, a celebrative song, an intimate ballad – whatever is required in the moment.

Make it your vision to be the most effective 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 the same high calling.[24]

Session 7
Reflection 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 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. Name a worship leader for whom you have a high respect. How does he or she embody some of the qualities of a great worship leader spoken about in this session?

> What qualities do you see that worship leader modeling? Which qualities draw you to their leadership?

3. What is one next step you could take toward "greatness" in one of the areas mentioned in this session?

> Growth begins with the next decision. What is just one area in what you studied in this session that connected with you, and motivated you to want to grow?