52 BEST PRACTICES
FOR WORSHIP LEADERS & TEAMS

WEEKLY TIPS TO EMPOWER YOUR MINISTRY





1 STACK THE SET

BEST PRACTICES

When the majority of a worship set is built on songs the congregation knows and loves, there is often immediate engagement in worship. Familiarity, when tastefully applied, can fan into flame the expression of peoples' hearts.

Stack the set with songs that connect quickly, then season it with new and less familiar songs.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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2 PREPARE FOR SPONTANEITY



BEST PRACTICES

Diligently plan the songs, transitions, and order of your set for the gathering. Then, after your band is secure and you are confident, suggest places in the set where you might move into a spontaneous moment, and what chord pattern you might choose.

If you prepare for spontaneity, your band will be prepared to deviate with you from the prepared set to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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3 DON'T BE SILLY



BEST PRACTICES

First, as worship leaders we should never take ourselves too seriously. However, as we know, leading worship is important, serious business. One could argue that worship leaders are spiritual leaders who should be as theologically reflective and as careful about what we communicate as any pastor.

As a worship leader, be light-hearted, but not shallow or silly in your public or online presence; we are spiritual leaders who should evidence maturity and wisdom in all we do.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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4 FOLLOW THE LEADER



BEST PRACTICES

Our ability to follow a leader is an art form that must be honed over a lifetime. Obedience to Christ is formed in us as we learn to respond with humility to those God has placed in roles of guidance in our lives (and in our faith communities). God gives us all leaders – just as He has given us to others.

Learn how to follow, and you will be honing your own ability to lead. It's the way of the Master.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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5 PRACTICE FOR PRACTICE



BEST PRACTICES

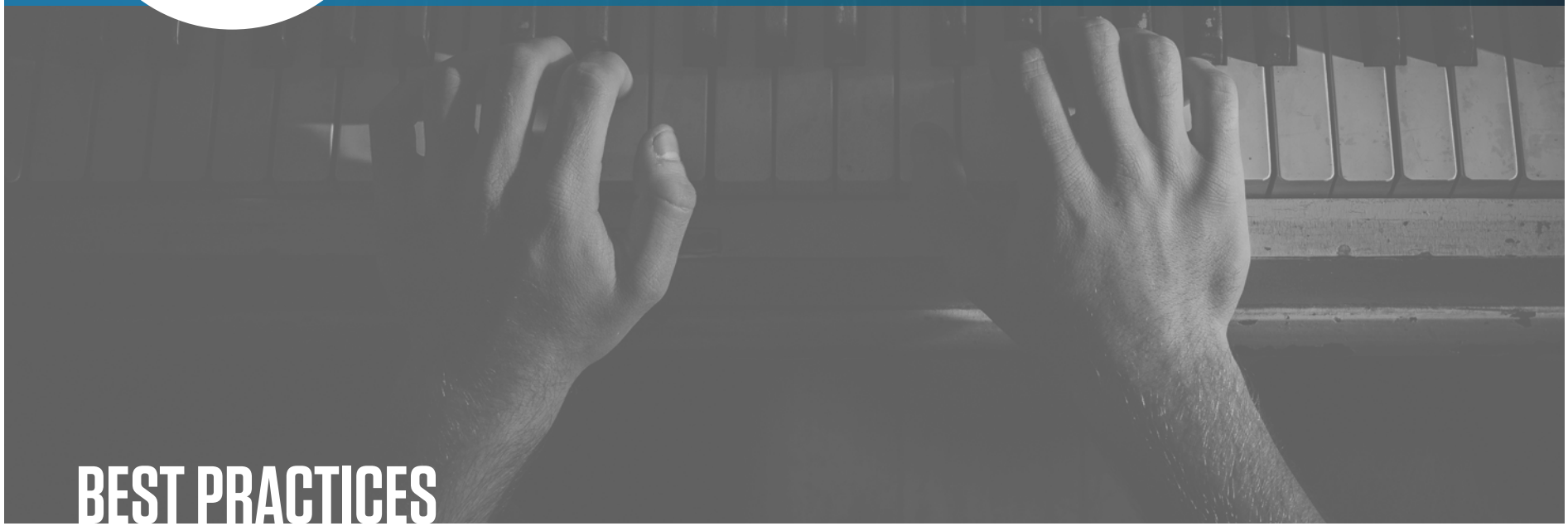
Before you meet with the band to rehearse, make sure you have practiced the songs yourself and know where you would like to go in your arrangements. This encourages band members to keep their chops up as best as possible between rehearsals, because they know you'll be exact about where you're going with songs when they get there.

Practice for practice, and be ready to confidently arrange the songs you'll be doing with the band.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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6 PLAY IN FRACTIONS



BEST PRACTICES

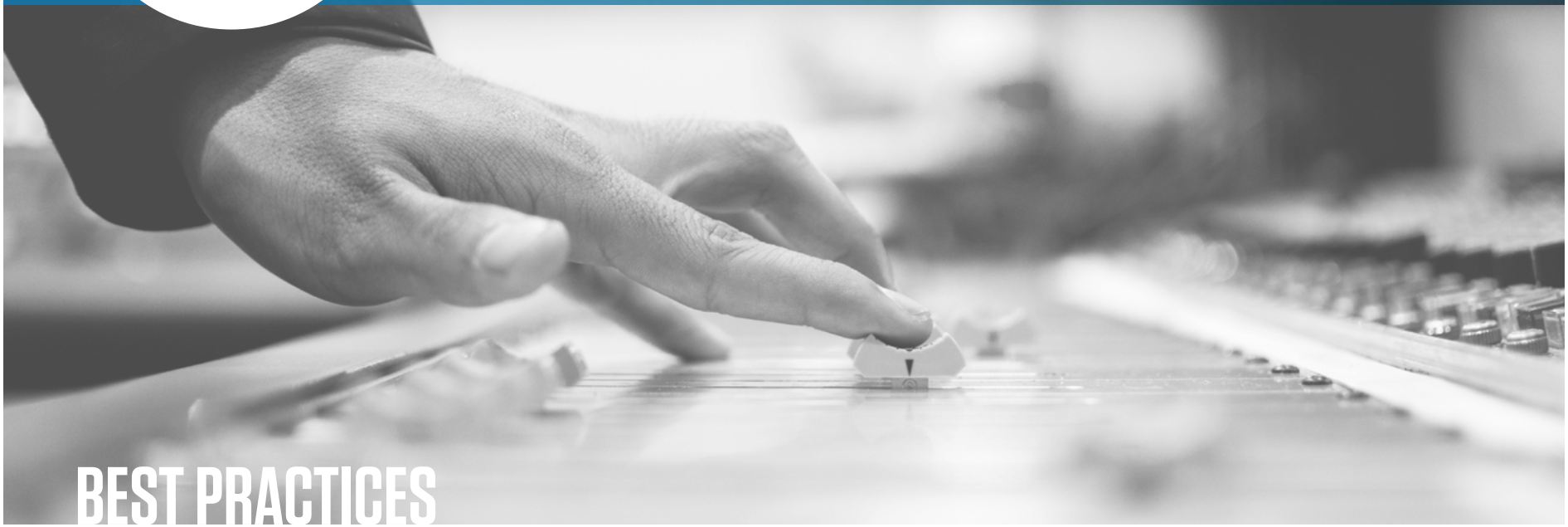
The sound of your band, if there are 7 musicians, should add up to "1" at all times. In other words, if there are 7 musicians playing, each of them should play about 1/7 of what they could possibly play. Not filling all the space in music creates "space," and allows the music to breathe. When a band is adding up to 7 – everyone playing constantly – the music is too dense and feels frantic.

Play in fractions, and the pleasing sound will support the worship – the reason we play in the first place.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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7 STEER THE SHIP



BEST PRACTICES

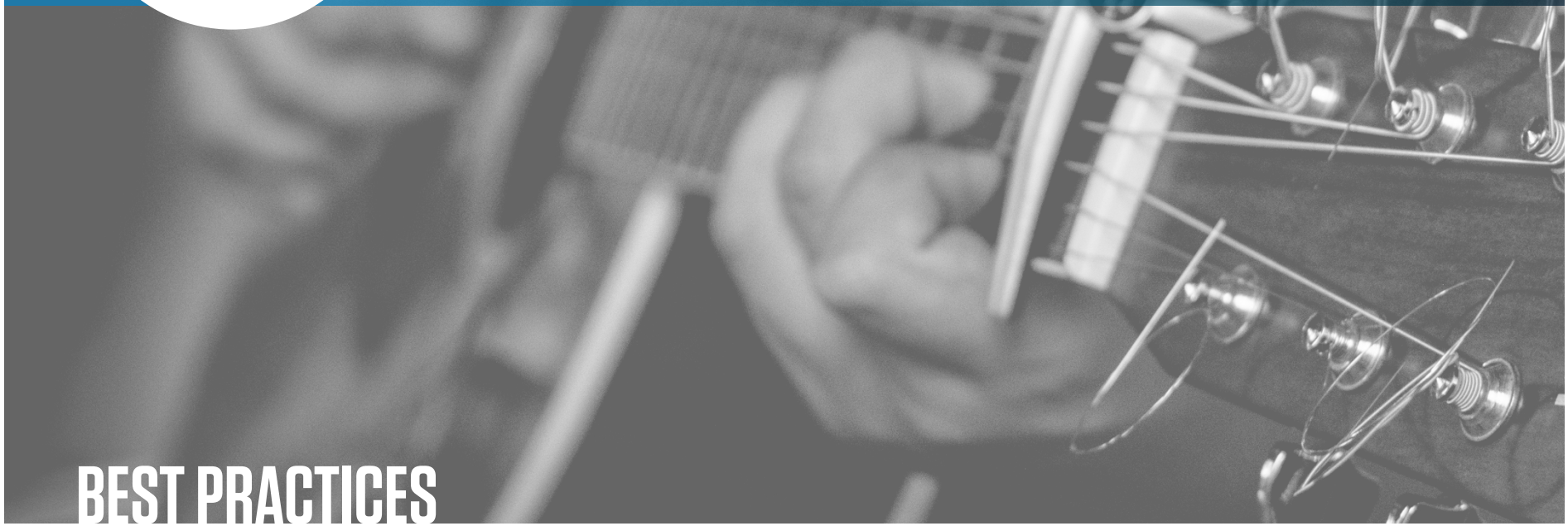
Don't be afraid to lead the congregation boldly in worship. While we want to be transparent and get out of the way at all the right times, congregations don't respond well to timid leadership. It is difficult to follow a shy leader. Work on your communication skills, and even memorize prayers or Scriptures that you can interject confidently into your set.

Steer the ship and bring directive yet humble guidance to the worship experience.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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8 STRIKE THE ANVIL



BEST PRACTICES

Like a blacksmith, when something is soft it is the best time to form it. When your congregation is in a "soft" season toward God's Spirit, provide extra opportunities for people to connect with God in worship, during the week or in special gatherings. If God is indeed doing something in your midst, the end result will be a deepened awareness of God's presence that will resonate throughout the following years.

Strike the anvil while the fire of God is heating up the heart of your church.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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9 GIVE YOUR BEST



BEST PRACTICES

Remember that those who are gathering for worship each week have come to meet with God out of their ongoing lives of work, family, and quiet battles of the heart. Even the weekly news can erode our sense of wellbeing as God's people, as negativity and cynicism eat away at our inner peace.

Every week, serve your congregation with your best energy, music, and passion. Lift them up by creating a quality space in which they can meet with God, and God can meet with them.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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10 SHAPE THE SET



BEST PRACTICES

More inexperienced worship leaders tend to jump from song to song without regard for severe musical shifts that "jar" the congregation. Creating flow in a set means doing more than stopping one song, changing the charts in front of us, then starting the next song. Ask your keyboard player to build a bridge between songs, or move smoothly from one song to the next with a Scripture or a prayer in between.

Shape the set so there is a sense of fluid rising and falling in the worship experience.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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11 TURN THE CORNER



BEST PRACTICES

It is easy to fall into a rut in our worship leading by resisting learning new songs and/or displacing old songs. While it's easier to coast on what we know and "have always done," God may be interested in us changing things up to stir the congregation in worship.

Turn the corner in your leadership, even if it's hard, by considering if there are any old habits in the way you lead that it's time to change.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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12 HONOR YOUR PASTOR



BEST PRACTICES

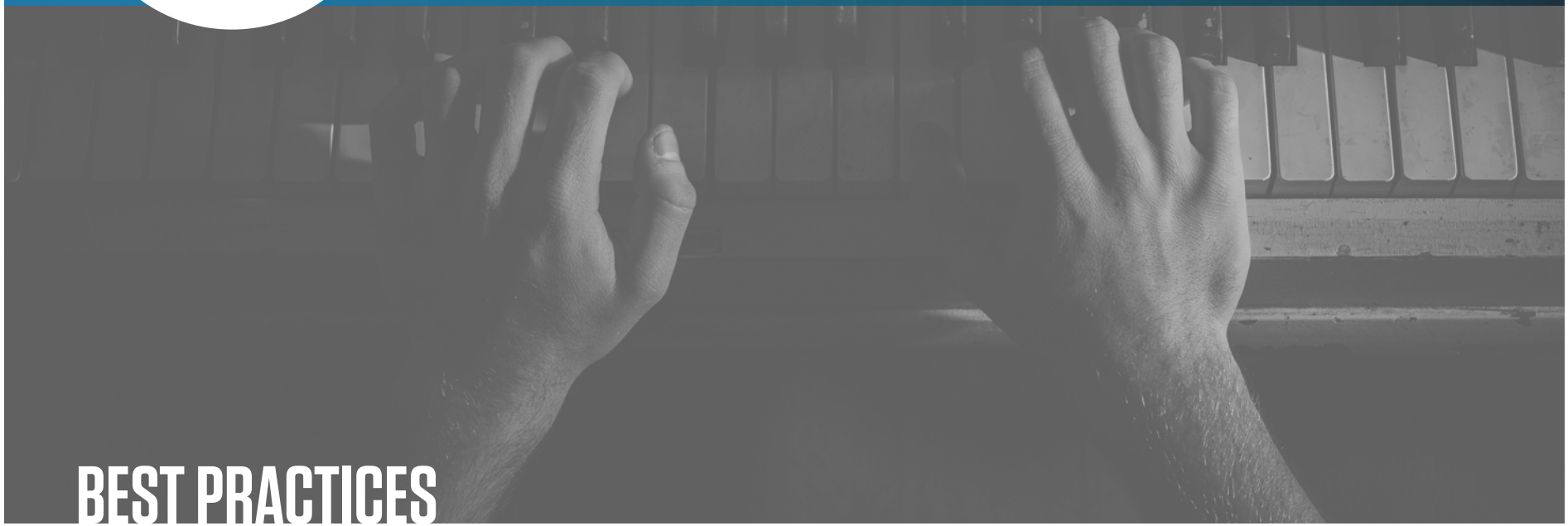
Your pastor is the one sitting in the front row thinking about the message they're about to preach instead of engaging in the worship time! Do whatever it takes to support, submit to, and serve this obedient saint, carrying the spiritual responsibility for the discipleship of your church.

Honor your pastor with prayer, and be willing to take direction. God will bless your deference and humility as you lead alongside the one God called to lead the church.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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13 LISTEN TO GOD



BEST PRACTICES

Preparing to lead a worship set, or preparing to play, can be one of the most intimate times a worship leader can have with the Lord. Set aside space for those times of integrating thematic truth with harmonious set flow, and linger in worship as you prepare to lead God's people.

Listen to God as you prepare your set, and give yourself plenty of time to connect with Him as you prepare. It is in these extended times that Scriptures and words can emerge that impact your congregation in powerful ways.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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14 UP THE ANTE



BEST PRACTICES

There are times when the quality of our worship music or our congregation's spiritual temperature seems to be dropping, It is in these times that a worship leader can raise the bar, for everyone. Extended rehearsals, or blending musical workouts with worship opportunities for your team, or creating special events for worship, can be just what the doctor ordered to awaken a sleeping giant.

Up the ante and raise expectations in yourself, and in everyone, for what God will do next.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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15 LIGHTEN THE LOAD



BEST PRACTICES

Keep a close eye on your worship team for signs of wear and tear. Breaks, seasonal tech/setup support teams, and even better planning to get songs and materials to your teammates before rehearsals can bring much needed lightening to the servant's load.

Lighten the load, intentionally and often, on those who are giving their time and energy to serve worship in your community.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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16 TURN THE TIDE



BEST PRACTICES

When in doubt, press in as a worship leader. If your congregational worship experience seems to be stagnating, don't give in to the idea that it's "just a season." Assume there is something God wants you and your church to learn. Seek counsel, and make changes.

Turn the tide by asking God to give you the next right ideas for fanning into flame the passionate worship He wants to receive from your congregation.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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17 KEEP THE FAITH



BEST PRACTICES

Your own spiritual growth is essential to your effective leadership of the congregation God has given you to lead in worship. Use Bible study plans, develop spiritual friends for prayer and accountability, and pursue your own spiritual development with passion.

Keep your faith alive by realizing that spiritual growth is intentional; make good decisions that enrich your journey with Christ.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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18 SAVOR A MOMENT



BEST PRACTICES

A favorite worship song may end with a lingering quality of intimacy or attentiveness to God that is almost tangible. Don't be afraid to end a song and move on, but also don't be afraid to allow an extra few bars for the music to facilitate a fresh encounter with Jesus.

Savor a moment, repeating a chorus or allowing for an instrumental section – it could be what opens your congregation up to a powerful moment of engagement with the Father.

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19 SEIZE THE MOMENT



BEST PRACTICES

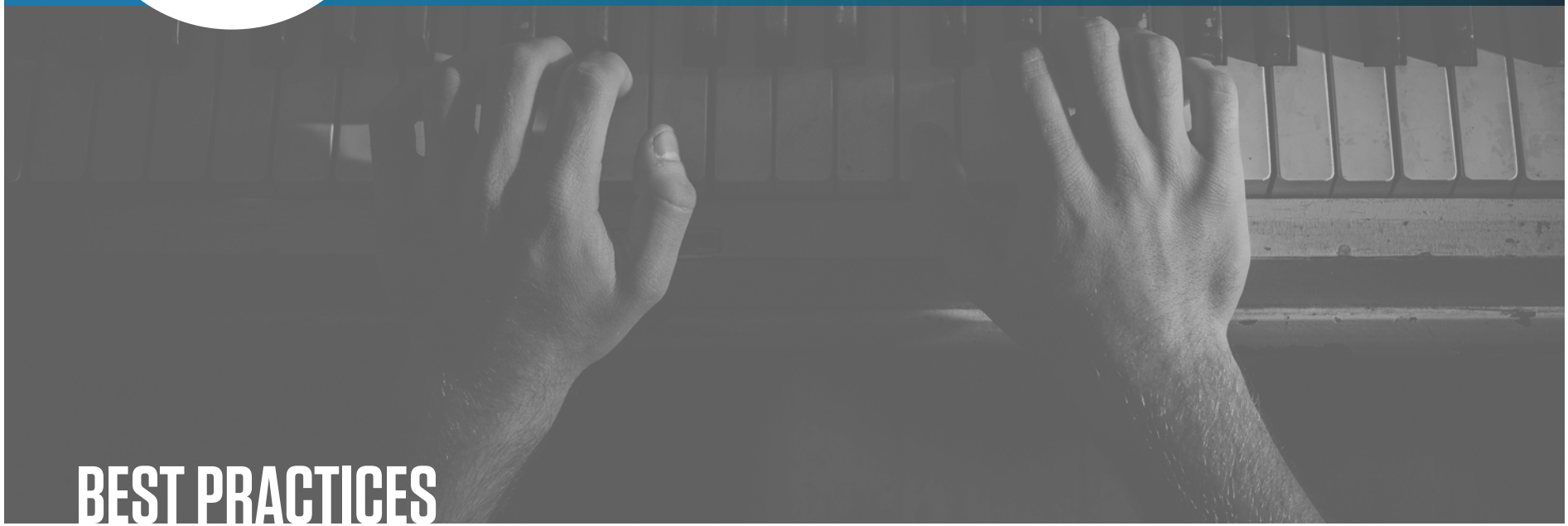
It is true that a congregation can feel used when a worship "cheerleader" is leading them. However, it is also true that a congregation can feel aimless when a worship "non-leader" is leading them. Learn the tools of your trade, apply yourself to growth, and then lead with humble confidence. God will help you.

In order to seize the moments of leadership, we must be prepared to seize them; get lessons on your instrument, get coaching as a pastor, and get tips on effectively guiding a band. It all matters when the next moment of opportunity to lead your congregation into an intimate moment with God presents itself.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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20 LIFT THE VEIL



BEST PRACTICES

The most spiritually rich congregations are usually those with the most spiritually rich leaders. A waning spirit in your congregation for the things of God may be the most identifiable in... you. A fresh vision of God in your life will inevitably catalyze a fresh awareness of Him in your church if you lead the way.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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21 STOP THE PRESSES



BEST PRACTICES

If it's clear in pre-service rehearsal that a song is not working out for the band, don't be afraid to just drop it from the set list. You heard God's voice telling you to do it – don't be afraid to hear His voice telling you to wait till a better time!

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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22 DELIVER THE GOODS



BEST PRACTICES

If you make promises to your fellow team members, either regarding how you will prepare for events, times you will show up, tools you will give, or development opportunities you will offer, then follow through. Artistic people can be inconsistent – leadership roles teach us to follow through on our promises.

Deliver the goods, but first consider what you are capable of delivering on. Being realistic and reliable are traits of an effective leader.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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23 PLAY THE SONG



BEST PRACTICES

If you have the technology, create an MP3 of the upcoming worship set with just you and your lead instrument a week or two before you lead (if possible). Not only will musicians come to rehearsal better prepared and more confident, but you will be more confident as well.

If you're going to use a previously recorded arrangement of the song, make sure they have that recording ahead of rehearsal or can hear it before you run through the song at rehearsal.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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24 LOWER THE ANCHOR



BEST PRACTICES

Often, mid-set, there is a moment where it is clear the congregation has engaged in a sweet corporate communion with God. Have the courage to drop anchor, and linger a bit longer on that song you're doing than you might normally. Many worship leaders are too committed to their plan to flex in those moments.

It is a skill of the best worship leaders to know when in a set to drop anchor – and let the Spirit take over.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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25 STILL YOUR SOUL



BEST PRACTICES

Your job as a worship leader is not to hype up the crowd, or to somehow evoke outward expressions of worship to make church leaders feel good. Your job is to lead people to Jesus. To do this, a worship leader must be centered as a disciple of Christ, and centered before they start to lead worship in any given event.

Quiet your soul before you play your first note to remember why we do this.

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26 SHARE THE LOAD



BEST PRACTICES

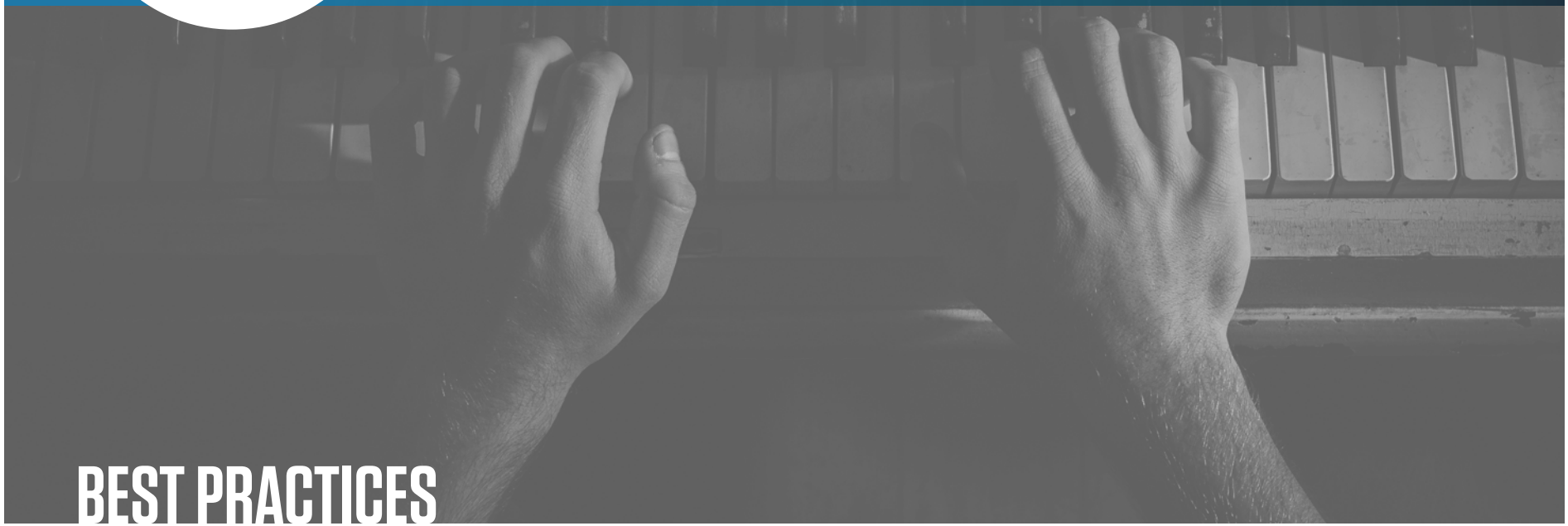
Name your areas of weakness as a worship leader, and find someone with a servant's heart who can cover that area of your weakness with their strength. This is how we love one another – working together in team to see more happen than could ever happen if we tried to do it all alone.

Sharing the load gives us an opportunity to grow, and gives another person an opportunity to grow as well.

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27 LOOSEN THE REINS



BEST PRACTICES

If you have a tendency to control too many details, or to over-dictate the how, when, and what of worship rehearsals and events, it may be time to experiment. Intentionally loosen up a bit on the reins, and give some others' ideas a bit of airtime.

Sometimes when we get out of the way, God can get in the way of our great plans. Put some slack in the system, and see where things go for a time.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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28 POP THE QUESTION



BEST PRACTICES

Never be afraid to ask a team member why they are involved in worship ministry. While it may be a difficult question for them to process, it is a necessary question. There is a natural loss of focus that can occur with those who have been serving on your team for some time.

A good question can refocus us, and remind us of our greater purpose.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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29 LEND A HAND



BEST PRACTICES

Actively model servant leadership as a worship leader, and as a team member. Your attempts to champion another by changing someone's strings, bringing them water, or stopping rehearsal to aid a musician struggling with a part, will not go unnoticed by your God or your band.

Lending a hand to others on your team is easier the more you are prepared before a rehearsal or worship event. Show up early, have your gear set up, and be waiting to help whenever you can.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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30 TRIP THE WIRE



BEST PRACTICES

When you start a worship set, picture yourself tripping a wire to an alarm system. As you start that first song, do so with confidence and expectation that something dear to the heart of God, and precious with God's people, is about to powerfully happen.

Expectation is a vital quality in a worship leader; if you believe that God is manifestly present in the room, others will follow your lead.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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31 TIGHTEN THE CIRCLE



BEST PRACTICES

When people feel loved, it is not hard to keep them committed. Work hard to create loving, called community within your team. Some churches like to allow anyone who would like to participate to join their worship team, but this can limit a sense of shared calling, cooperative growth, and joint focus.

Be discerning about how you build your team, and invest time and energy in telling team members how valuable they are to you.

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32 WIPE THE SLATE



BEST PRACTICES

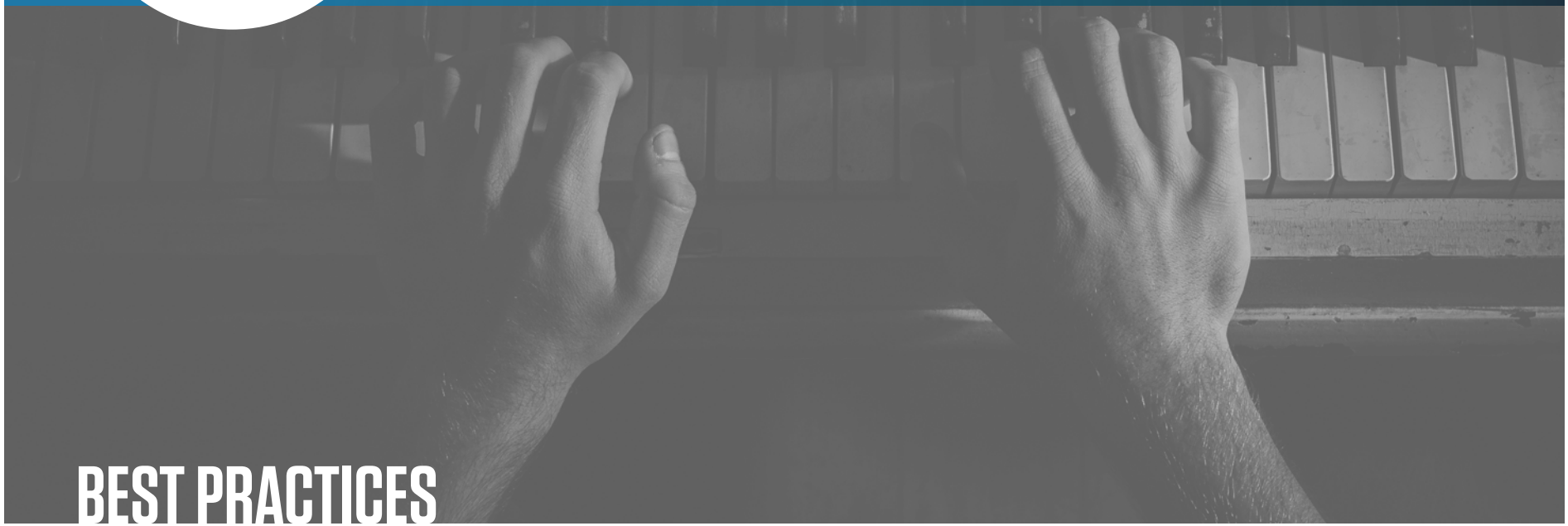
Be quick to forgive as a worship leader. A worship leader who lacks grace with a team member struggling in an area of sin is a worship leader who is set up for their own fall. Weigh the consequences of someone's actions, and err on the side of extending grace.

A forgiving worship leader still guides people on and off the stage as needed, but always does so in the spirit of friendship, leadership, and pastoral care.

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33 RUN THE RACE



BEST PRACTICES

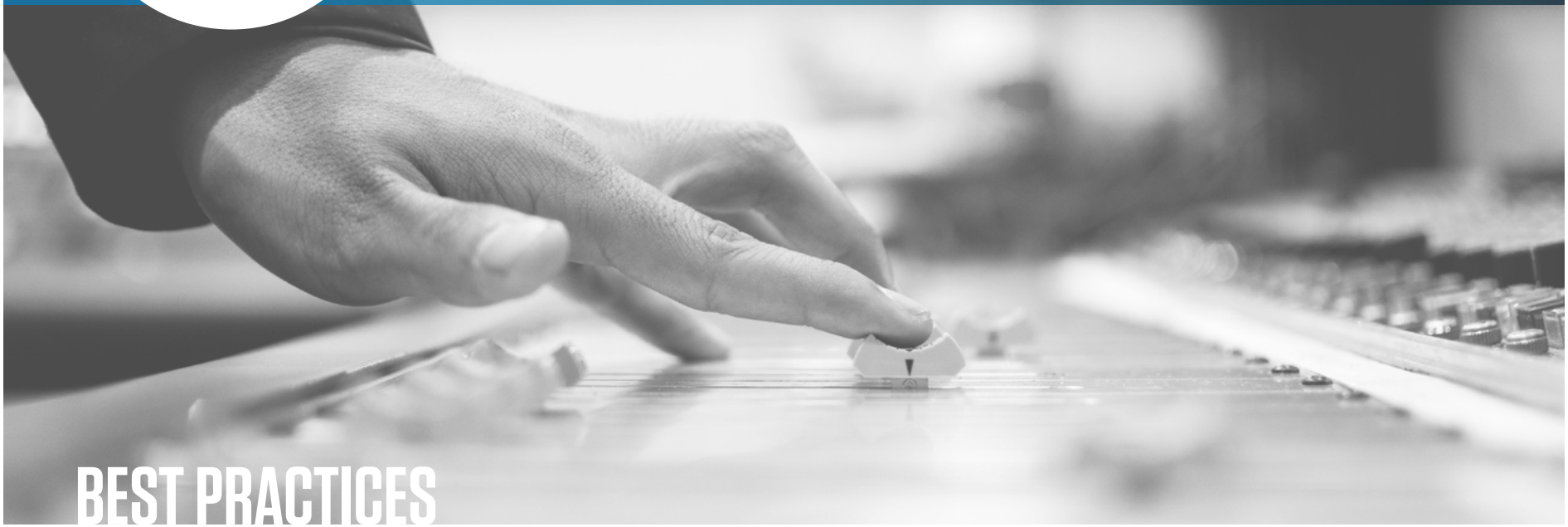
Worship leadership is not a journey for the faint-hearted. Don't give up as you grow through the challenge that is leadership. Though you may be afraid at times, God is interested in forming His character in you through the leadership you bring to others.

Run well, and run hard for the line.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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34 DARKEN THE DOOR



BEST PRACTICES

When you have a Sunday off, it may be appropriate for you to plan visits to other congregations of different traditions that you respect, to see what their worship times are like. Nothing brings needed perspective to your own situation quicker than seeing "how someone else does it."

Darken the door of some other churches in your town or city, and take some notes. You may find great ideas for your own leadership, and be humbled by the fact that God is active in many unique places every Sunday morning.

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35 MANAGE THE EXPECTATIONS

BEST PRACTICES

When enlisting a new worship team member, or revisiting values with current team members, be clear as to what your expectations are, and what their's can be. When people have some sense of what to expect, and vice-versa, they are more apt to communicate well and to give grace when needed.

Managing your team's expectations keeps people aware of the tracks that you all are running on.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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36 MIX IT UP



BEST PRACTICES

Nothing can reinvigorate a worshipping community more than a re-posturing of the musical expression of worship. In other words, if your church has a power band, plan in an acoustic set every once in awhile. Let the congregation know beforehand, and they will respond positively without feeling "gypped."

Interspersing special worship experiences along the course of a year can bring much needed renewal to your congregation's weekly gatherings.

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37 CHAMPION YOUR TEAM



BEST PRACTICES

Leading worship is not about a worship hero being appreciated while the supporting team stands waving in the background. When your team wins, everyone wins. Compliment your team regularly, privately and publicly, use “we” language in public, and celebrate together your joint leadership in worship.

Worship leadership is work worth doing – and every one of your team members makes it happen.

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38 EXAMINE THE EVIDENCE



BEST PRACTICES

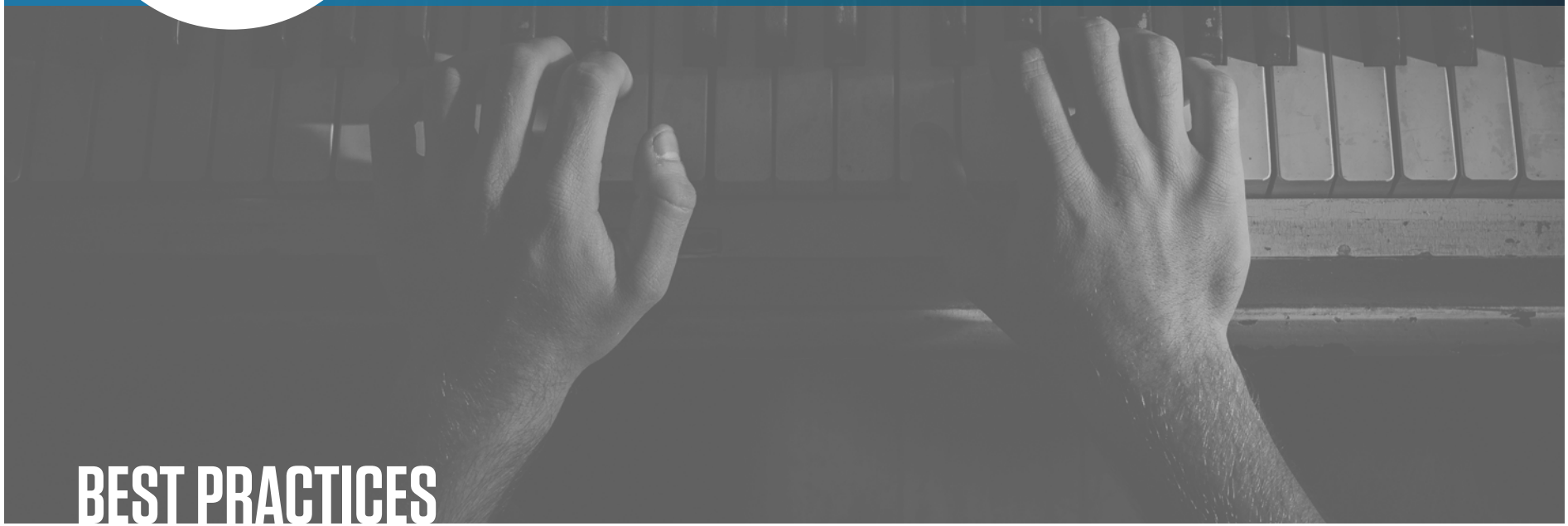
Many church leaders act as though they are afraid of what the congregation thinks about worship. Provide a written survey over two or three worship gatherings, with questions asking worshippers what they appreciate and what they find distracting about the worship experience in the Church.

Only asking people who give positive answers is not welcoming others to give perspectives that may be helpful. Whatever method you choose, tap the corporate wisdom of your congregation on this vital part of their regular experience.

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39 CHOOSE FOR DISCIPLESHIP



BEST PRACTICES

Your mission as a worship leader includes choosing songs that will disciple your congregation in healthy ways in their journey toward Jesus. They may not remember the sermon illustration, but they will hum the songs you pick.

Our job is not to always play the top 40 of worship music, even though we know people will engage with those songs we all love. We are also pastors. There are some things our congregation needs to sing that may not be the flavor of the month.

Choose songs that disciple your community well.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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40 PREPARE THE GROUND



BEST PRACTICES

Just as a good farmer plows the ground before planting seed, so too it is vital that you and your team both worship and pray together before you lead God's people into worship. The softening of your heart will pave the way for the seeding of everyones' hearts.

This is an unseen task that matters in the visible life of the church over time. Help your team to see themselves as intercessors, as well as seeing themselves as musicians and techs.

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41 PASSION MEET RESTRAINT

BEST PRACTICES

The most effective worship leaders and musicians are very passionate about how they do what they do. However, knowing when to restrain your own passionate expressions in the service of others is the greater good. There are times we can be indulgent in the music, and begin to lose the congregation.

The vibrant worship of the gathered congregation is our goal, and both passion and restraint should be held in tension, as both are necessary to effective worship leadership.

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42 LISTEN TO INPUT



BEST PRACTICES

Don't run away from your pastor's perspective, and counsel on how you lead worship. In their spiritual overseeing role, they have every reason to give input, direction and even strong suggestions to how you do what you do. If you will listen and pray, both your hearts will be shaped by the other.

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43 TRAIN THE TROOPS



BEST PRACTICES

It is shocking how little money and effort is often put into training the present and future generations of our worship teams. Every team member needs training, and even the most experienced can learn something from someone.

Find budget, or other creative resources, for lessons, training, and ongoing spiritual input for your bandmates/techs. It will pay off in the end.

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44 SAVE YOUR SPOUSE



BEST PRACTICES

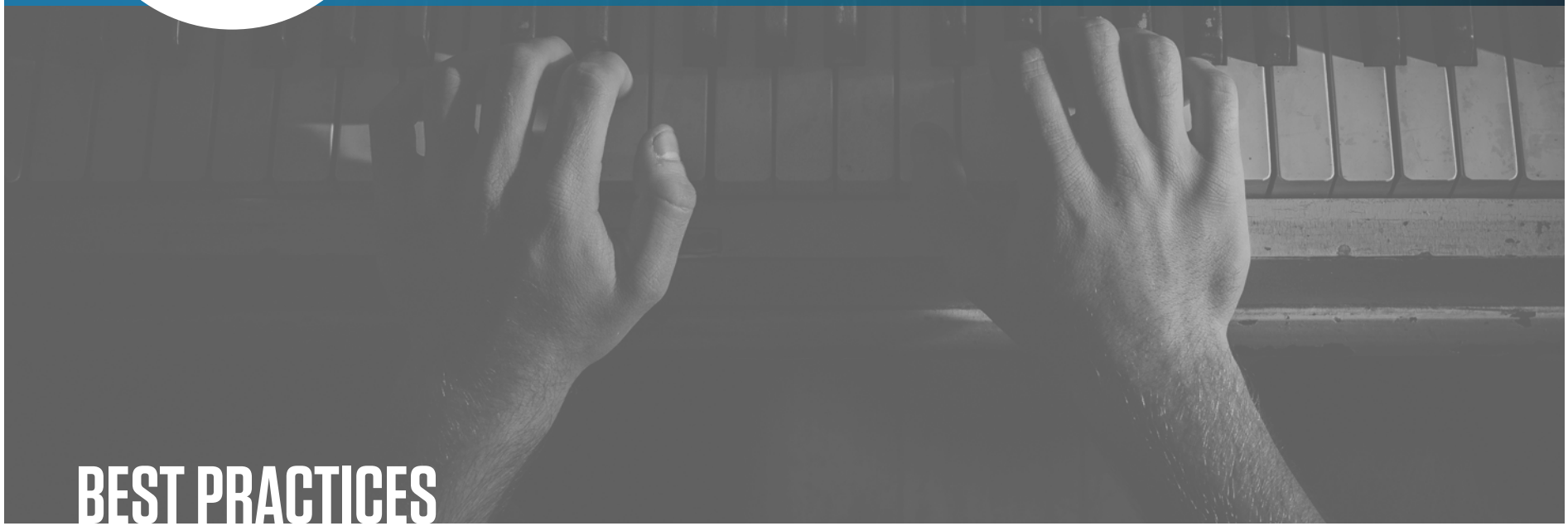
For those who are married, your spouse is your most important barometer of your balance between work, church participation, extracurricular activities, and family life. When he/she is indicating a state of emergency, you need to listen closely and do what it takes to meet their needs.

In the end, God will bless the honoring of a spouse if we prioritize them above everyone else (especially above ministry).

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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45 TEACH THE STUFF



BEST PRACTICES

Many worship leaders/pastors shy away from actively teaching their congregation what is happening in the midst of a worship time. Worshippers need to be intentionally taught, from the Scriptures and church history, what it means to embrace the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God in worship, what the symbols of worship (communion, singing, etc.) truly mean, and what it means to offer true allegiance to God.

Hone your skills at communicating, and begin now to prepare an effective article or message on "why we worship" for your congregation.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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46 SKIP THE SONG



BEST PRACTICES

You're mid-set, and you've rehearsed your band during the week on a particular tune. However, as you approach it, you feel like the song that follows it is far more appropriate to the moment. You need to make a decision.

Skip the song. Move to the next, and be confident in your judgement call. If you missed it, it's okay; God is not knocked off His throne and you have just had an opportunity to learn discernment on a new level.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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47 STAY THE COURSE



BEST PRACTICES

If you prayerfully planned the worship set during the week, and then feel like it's just not the right set of songs to do, stay with the impulse you had during the week.

As many experienced worship leaders know, nine times out of ten, your initial thoughts were stronger than your momentary wondering, and why you built that set earlier in the week begins to reveal itself as you lead it.

ESSENTIALS IN WORSHIP

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48 BEAT THE TRAFFIC



BEST PRACTICES

Leave early to head out to prepare for the worship time you're leading. Spend some time plugging in, getting set up and personally worshipping before the rest of the band arrives. It will shake out the jitters and renew your perspective on the worship time ahead.

Being rushed not only drags down you and the rehearsal, but it also models a half-heartedness to your team about worship leadership.

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49 COIN THE PHRASE



BEST PRACTICES

Find a few phrases that will support the climate you want to create for your team – and build them into your vocabulary. Try "When in doubt, lay out," "When in doubt, serve," or "Worship first; play second," meaning "get your heart postured to honor God before you attempt to lead others to that place."

Find other phrases that are quick "hooks" for the culture you want to create, and start to use them.

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50 MOTHER THE MUSICIANS



BEST PRACTICES

Extra encouragement, embraces, gifts, and words of value/appreciation all go a long way with we artsy types. Don't spend all your time whining about what makes musicians frustrating – celebrate the gift of who each person is and affirm what you want more of.

The extra time you take to give special attention to your team will always pay off in the long run.

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51 BLAST THE TRUMPET



BEST PRACTICES

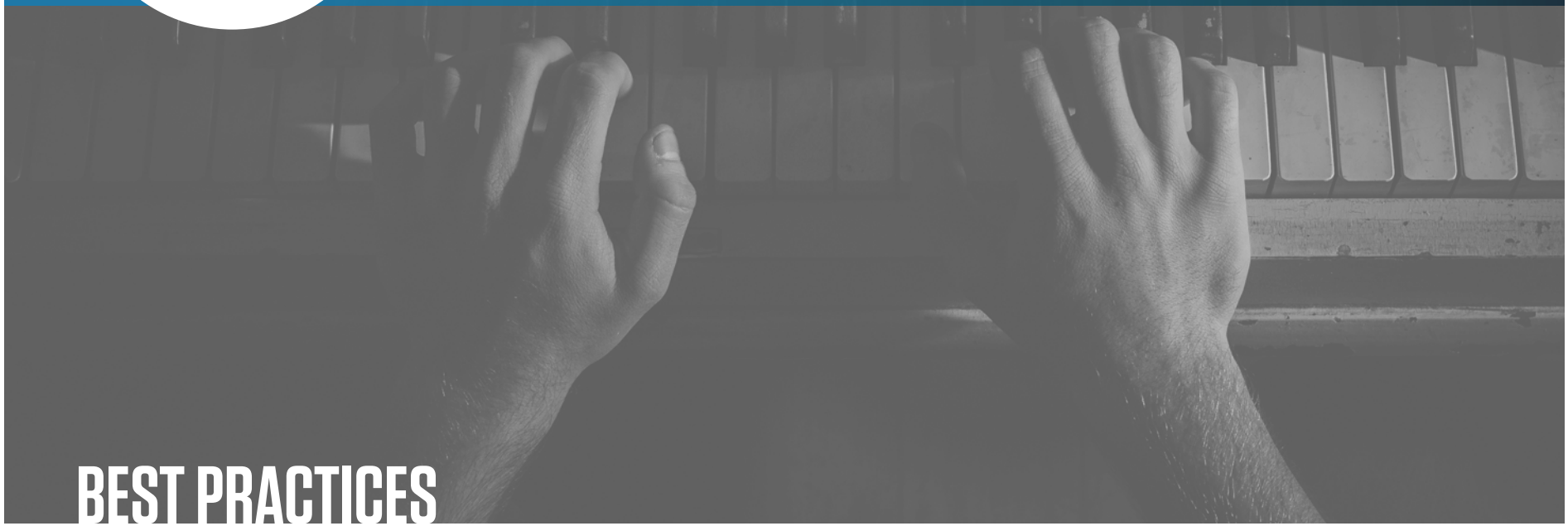
Sometimes your community may need someone to make a bold call to worship, either musically, or verbally. Stand up as a leader and call people passionately to draw near to God. Like a flame near paper, the fire in your heart will light the hearts of others.

Sound the trumpet, the call to worship. Then, lead the way.

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52 MAKE A PLACE



BEST PRACTICES

Assume that when people in your community have come to worship, they have truly come to meet with God. They are saying, deep in their hearts, "Where can I go and meet with God?" As a worship leader, you say "How about here and now? Let's worship."

There is no need to pump our congregations up to worship. Our job is to simply create a space for them to do what is in their heart to do – to worship. Lead the way by modeling, and effective music execution, and lead from your heart of worship.

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