THE WORSHIP MUSICIAN



5 Important Roles of The Worship Guitarist

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1: The Role Of The Worship Guitarist

The role of a guitarist is truly unique. All guitarists would more than likely say the role of a guitar player is, "playing big chords in verses" or "playing a melody line in choruses to add color". This is definitely true. And these are clearly defined roles of any guitarist in every music genre. But is there a different role for the worship guitarist? The short answer is Yes and No. And that's what we will discuss here in these 5 chapters.

A guitarist in any setting requires many of the same basic disciplines to fully implement their role as a guitar player. A guitarist must first and foremost understand their role. And then understand their role in their respective worship band.





So what about the role of the worship guitarist?

The worship guitarist definitely has to require the most basic roles of the guitar player. So what is the different role of the worship guitarist? The answer flows into the worship guitar player's focus not only on being technically sound. But being spiritually sound as well. Even though we will concentrate on some technical aspects of guitar playing in the worship context. We will also focus on the spiritual aspects, that I believe, are important as well.

As a worship guitarist, your worship leader is not only looking for a guitar player that can play the music well. But also a guitarist that co-leads in the worship service. So in this aspect, your role as a worship guitarist, is in fact, different than any role you might have in a mainstream band that plays on Friday nights around town. A worship guitarist is a different guitarist's role, and a very important one in the worship band.

With this brief but important tutorial. We will focus on five important things that I believe are some of the most essential aspects of a worship guitarist.

1. Knowing and defining your role as a worship guitarist (Explained in this chapter)
2. Attitude of the worship guitarist
3. Focus on the melody and where to play rhythm parts (Why this is important to divide)
4. Leading worship (Along with the worship leader) as a guitarist
5. Focusing on solid playing instead of flashy playing

These are five very important focus points that I wanted to accentuate in this brief eBook. I have always benefited from many teacher's brief lecture points in the past. Memorization and reference are key. Also for the fact that so many points can be consolidated into the same topics while getting the essential teachings across.





The worship guitarist adds an essential part of the worship team when they are of sound technical ability and spiritual focus. Knowing your role as a worship guitarist will enhance a worship service not only for you and your team. But for the congregation itself.

Take these next brief chapters to heart and meditate on the spiritual examples. The worship guitarist is a great piece of the band when focusing on the teachings Jesus gave us on humility and worshiping God in Spirit and in Truth. That combined with excellent technical ability can do incredible things in the worship service as the spirit moves and is ultimately glorified in these disciplines.

I wish you the very best on your journey to becoming sharper in your ability as a guitarist and as a follower of Christ. And I hope these words give you a broader understanding of what it means to be a worship guitarist.

2: Attitude In All Things

Many have read the verse about the humility of Christ. But do we really understand it? I've quoted this verse quite a bit in other books and in other tutorials. It's a verse that deserves our study and application. It is a verse written so eloquently by the apostle Paul on the attitude that every worship musician and human should have. So for our study. Here it is.

Philippians 2:3-8 New International Version (NIV)

3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, **4** not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.
5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:





6 Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
7 rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
8 And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

This passage gives us the quintessential guidance on attitude. Jesus exemplified the mindset we should strive for.

Worship services and rehearsals can be stressful to many. We will be stretched and pulled to show our strengths and weaknesses in times of trial. The attitude of Christ is an example of great strength in trial. He was and is the ultimate example of grace under pressure.

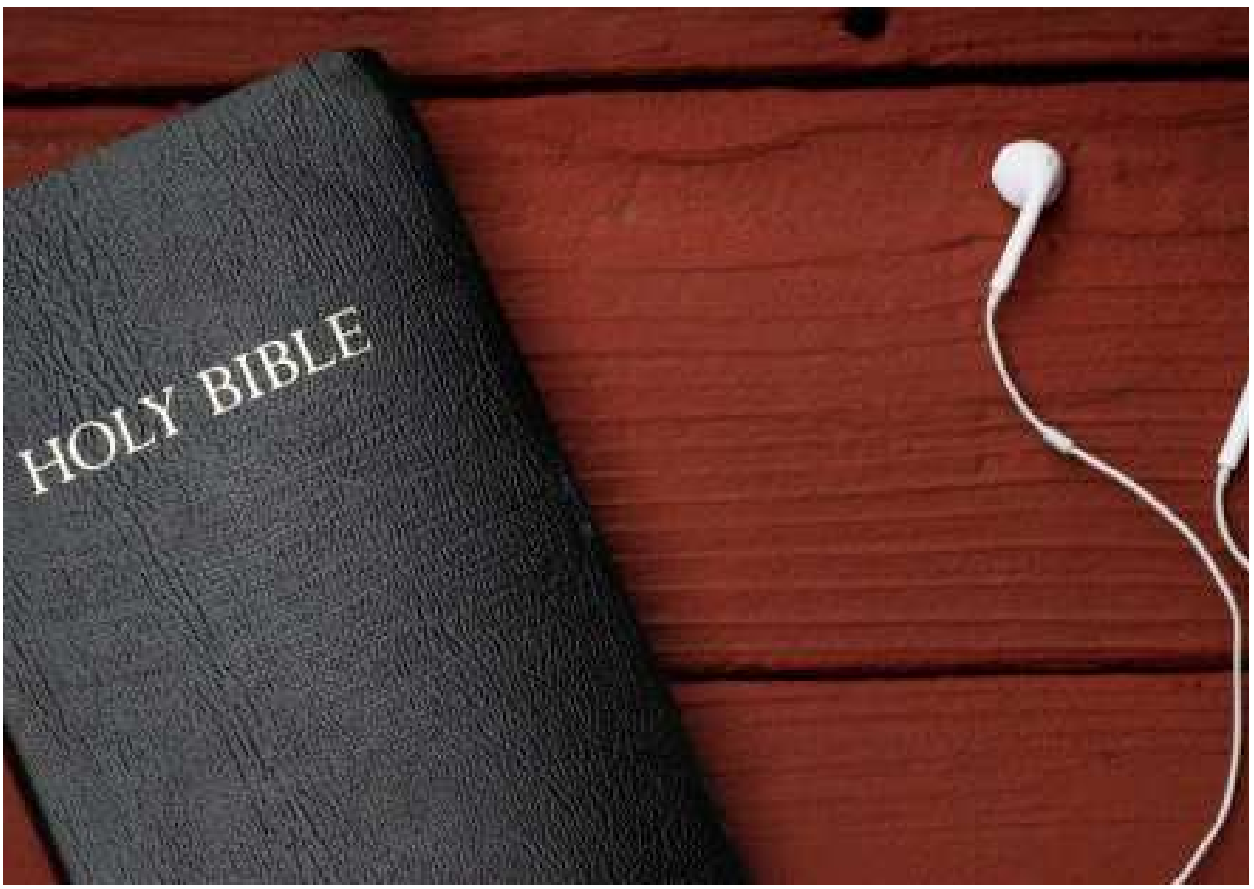
You will be tested in times of trial. And many times will you hear the voice of self beckoning you to demand your role be increased in a worship service. It is our nature. And a nature that we must be constantly be at war with. It can be tiring, especially for musicians. We struggle with the attitude of Christ because we are on a stage. A stage not designed for our glory. But for God's alone. A stage not designed to display the full range of our gifts. But to display the glory of God through us.

Jesus was on one of the grandest stages in human society of its time. The Roman empire was one of the grandest kingdoms at the time of Jesus and Jerusalem was its jewel. Jesus's popularity and audience grew exponentially after he began his ministry. While obviously, it turned to negative listeners as well as those who followed his teachings. Jesus understood this stage. He took it with great responsibility and became a servant to both his critics and followers alike. He did this all while being the creator of everything. The universe in all its 13 billion light years in measurement and billions of people populating the earth. He created it all. Everything. And yet, he humbled himself on the grandest stage in the universe. All while being fully the creator of all things and being fully human. Subject to every temptation and doubt. But Jesus prevailed and was without sin. He was victorious over his humanity and proved his deity.



7 rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
8 And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

While on our stage, we can be victorious over ourselves. Humble our hearts like our Lord and Savior and have this mind of Christ. The death to our selfish ambitions, while being worship leaders, demand this attitude of Jesus. It is actually imperative and a prerequisite of leading on a stage that can easily become a desire for us to become greater. But our greatness lies in the attitude of Jesus and to the death of self. This is our worship of the one true God.



3: The Melody and The Rhythm

There is such a demand for a guitarist to understand the difference between the melody and the rhythm. The reason is because they're used for completely different purposes.

There are some amazing guitarists out there. Some that can wow any crowd with electrifying solos and technical ability. But what sticks out the most for you? What sticks out the most to your congregation's worship experience?

The rhythm part should be the first thing that any guitarist tackles. It seems that we try to hard to conquer the solos though. Why? Because solos are the wow factor for most. But this point of view is backwards and doesn't serve the song. We should master the rhythm parts.





How to do this? Read below on some questions to ask yourself to improve on this discipline.

How often do you or your guitarist play with loops or a metronome?
How often do you or your guitarist play with a band?
How often do you or your guitarist listen to players that play solid rhythm parts?
What is most valued? The rhythm part? Or the flashy solo?

A worship song, is at most, a song that needs a guitarist's discipline. There are so many worship leaders that count on the guitarist to be the leader of how energetic and colorful the songs will be.

The discipline is to see the rhythm part first and see the solos as second. The guitar should be approached as an instrument to provide the wall of sound. The melodies are what add the flavor around the rhythm part. It takes discipline to think of the rhythm part for extended periods of time and play in patterns. Patterns that are consistent and repetitive. That have feel and creativity.

Patterns are parts that stay consistent and flow with the feel of the song. A pattern can be 4 measures long, 8 measures long, or however long a pattern needs to be.

A song's melody should be constructed or played in a tasteful way. For Instance, only use a catchy melody line in Intros, Turnarounds, and Outtros. Choruses and Bridges can have melody lines but used in a tasteful and sparing way. This should never be an improvised solo unless the song calls for it. Think about what the song needs and how it seems to lift it to another level.

As a guitar player, it's important to know your ability but also know your boundaries. It's imperative that you set rules for yourself to not step into a zone where you're a distraction and simply playing "too much".





Now let's talk briefly about the importance of where to place the melody parts.

Melody lines coincide with patterns. For instance, a typical melody line might happen every eight measures. A melody line would usually fall somewhere within the pattern being played. The melody line would need to be played so that it gives to color to a section and doesn't conflict with a vocal part and another melody line played by another instrument in the band.

It’s important to note that every note being played has meaning. This especially goes for the solo parts. The solos need to have as much meaning as the rhythm part. This really helps create the sound for the whole band. Everyone adheres to what you’re playing and how well you’re executing the melody and the rhythm within the song.

4: The Guitarist Leads

We all see many worship leaders leading worship with acoustic guitar. But in this tutorial, we aren't focusing on the acoustic guitar as much as we're lumping all the guitars in the worship setting together as one. We're mainly talking about the guitar in the accompaniment sense. Where the guitar is the secondary role, providing texture, melody, and secondary rhythm parts. Even though I'm saying this is a secondary role to a main guitar part. It, in essence, isn't really any different.

Why is this? A guitar player that's providing the tone, rhythm, melodies, and textures in the background is still very much a worship leader. The responsibility of this part is enormous on how the band and congregation interpret the sound and feel of the song(s). A guitarist is leading with these things.





The guitarist is the sound designer. A painter with sound, if you will. The guitarist's focus on being excellent in dynamics, tone, soft, loud, chunky rhythm, whole notes, high bell tone melodies, and/or tasteful solos is leading the congregation in understanding the sound of the song(s). A guitar player leads in this way.

In a worship band, everyone leads in their own role. But there’s a big difference in why the guitarist leads. The guitarist creates the sound of the song. You are the sound designer.

This is why it's important for a guitarist to have an incredible sense of melody. It's also very important for a guitarist to know the song arrangement, builds, and accents. You are not only doing your part to guide the band in the sound of the song. But also helping lay the road map of where the song is going.

The guitarist leads with his or her understanding of these things. You're the rock of the song(s). You create the song's layers and background. And you lead the way your role as a guitarist directs you to. As the song's sound designer.

Let's continue to talk a little bit more about "laying the road map" for the band. Or guiding the band in the song's direction.

The guitarist also leads with an understanding of these things. This goes hand in hand of what Chapter 5 will talk about. Being the “solid” guitarist. These all coincide with each other and there’s a big reason why. You’re striving for excellence.

When you understand the song’s direction. You’re saying, “I know where the verse is and what I’m playing on the guitar to communicate that verse section”. For instance, a verse usually is stated by a chunky rhythm part. The Chorus would usually be a melody line or a more involved rhythm part. Both verse and chorus should definitely set themselves apart from each other in the sense of rhythm and melody.

Whatever you choose to do in these sections. You’re accentuating these parts because of proper dynamics and you are showing everyone else what part of the song this is. The guitarist plays a voice that instructs loudness or softness to indicate that section of the song.





The guitarist as sound designer is not a new concept. But it is a concept that needs to be harnessed in a guitar player's understanding of how how the player leads worship.

You lead with rhythm and melody and with confidence in your arrangements. You also lead by saying, "Here’s where we are in the song and this is how the song should sound. Follow along."

This is how the guitarist leads.

5: The "Solid" Guitarist

Solid guitar playing requires musical maturity and practice. And musical maturity and practice come with adjustments. The band is not only counting on you for this but it will make you a better guitar player. More trustworthy.

Playing solid is simply playing with taste and spacing that everyone in your worship team can feel and play within. You might play more or less but your playing is solid. Your melody lines are simple, yet meaningful, and your rhythm part is part of the foundation. A solo isn't every bar or measure. But used sparingly and saved for an instrumental section designated as "solo" section.

The solid guitarist uses solos, when necessary, and has a focus on serving the song. The solid guitarist asks the question. What does this song need? Instead of, what can I do to make this song more "guitar like?" Of course, a song should not ever be uninteresting. But it shouldn’t be a guitarist's song either.





The guitarist should play within the song's context. That should be fairly easy to comprehend since a slow song is a slow song. A fast song is a fast song and etc. You will know where rhythm parts and melody lines should be played and how many of them to play.

It's important to focus on the simplicity of your playing and where you're at in the song. Being a solid player is a lot about understanding the road map of the music and not getting lost. I mean, we've all been at this point in the song and had no idea if we're going back to the chorus or to the outtro. But being a solid player is always knowing where you're at, where you're going, and how the song will end.

So you could say being a solid guitarist is more than just the technical aspects of playing. Absolutely. This all goes back to being reliable. If you wish to give your worship team a boost and flow. Then be a solid guitarist. You're doing your team such a great service by doing so.

The Worship Guitarist is a solid guitarist. He or she worships with their playing and is not a spectacle on stage to be a distraction to worship of God. There can be only be humility in it. Therefore, solid playing is required.

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