

Worship Leadership

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Abstract

This paper describes worship leadership and is mainly directed to young worship leaders entering into the field of ministry. It provides them with ways to succeed by introducing topics that will be encountered in this type of leadership position. This research looks at authors such as John Maxwell, D.L. Moody, C.H. Spurgeon, Sid Buzzell, and many more that have studied and researched the topic of leadership within the church. The research also introduces practical musical ideas from current worship leaders such as Lincoln Brewster, Rory Noland, Bob Kauflin, Tom Kraeuter, and more. Ultimately, it encompasses the realities of the worship-leading ministry and offers helpful suggestions for prospering no matter what the circumstance.

Keywords: leadership, biblical grounding, servant leadership, courage, humility, integrity, wisdom, Christ, music, rehearsal techniques, recruiting, communication, criticism, listening, feedback, technical elements.

Introduction

God has gifted each individual with a calling and purpose for his or her life here on earth. As Christians, God calls us to our spiritual duties and commandments such as glorifying God with everything we say and do, making disciples, and lifting our worship to Him daily. Our purpose as Christian leaders is habitually bogged down by the monotonous daily routine, which in turn clouds the view of our purpose as a Christian. God has gifted and called us to do different tasks to strengthen the body of Christ. One of these tasks is leading His people and even more specifically, leading His people in the art of worship. Contemporary worship leaders are challenged with the task of how to capture the heart and spirit of the congregation, engage in meaningful worship, and connect the people with a God who wants a personal relationship. In order to accomplish this task, the worship leader must combine his or her knowledge of biblical truth, pursuit of musical excellence, and spiritual discipleship toward the people being led that resonates with the culture and heart of the worshipper. This task may seem large and hard to accomplish but there are many strategies and practical steps to effectively leading people, particularly the team of musicians at hand within a church.

To explore this topic, the first section of this thesis will analyze and discuss the importance of biblical grounding, which includes the vital examples of leadership in the New Testament and an understanding of who Jesus Christ is. The middle section will focus on issues of the heart: what it means to have a humble heart, how to be a successful servant leader, dealing with conflict and communication issues, and practical beliefs and ethics to look for in the hearts of the team members. The final section will strictly focus on musical excellence, which shows how a leader goes through the process of finding the correct instruments for the contemporary

church setting, recruiting and auditioning a team, and leading productive and effective rehearsals.

The Heart of a Worship Leader

Worship leading is not all about music and the talent behind the music making. Leading worship is based on the heart of the worshippers. As a leader, stewarding and shepherding this relationship between the person and God is vital for a team's dynamic, as is communication, conflict resolution, and learning to listen to the team God has provided. A leader is there to sharpen others around him or her and also be sharpened by the other members of their team. In Proverbs, the author writes, "As iron sharpens iron so one man sharpens another... As water reflects a face, so a man's heart reflects the man."¹ A strong spiritual team leads strong worship for the congregation, and the congregation can see and feel this important dynamic. The strength of the team not only relies on Christ and biblical leadership but also specifically on how the leader treats and guides the team. In his book, *Church Leadership*, Lovett H. Weems, Jr. discusses a few of the ways to building a strong team based on the heart. Some of his main points include: respect, involving people, fostering collaboration, sharing power, communication, spending time with people, recognizing and developing the team, and loving them.² Developing the types of thought patterns and characteristics that Weems explains propels the leader toward growth.

Biblical Grounding

Seasoned leaders know how important it is to be biblically grounded when entering into a church or ministry position. Worship leader Rory Noland states, "The accomplished worship

¹ Proverbs 27:17, 19

² Lovett H. Weems, Jr., *Church Leadership: Vision, Team, Culture, and Integrity* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 75-90.

leaders have vibrant spiritual lives nurtured by regular Bible reading, prayer, and other spiritual practices.”³ The different facets of this particular topic include knowing the church’s beliefs about the Trinity, their mission, and the overall vision of the establishment. This can also include being able to seek God’s will for the correct leader and team, obedience and dependence on Christ, and being firmly rooted in a love for God and His Word.

A leader’s personal theology and Christology is one of the most crucial facts about him or her. Christology is simply this: to interpret the significance and meaning of Jesus Christ for our own times in light of biblical and historical developments.⁴ What a leader believes about Jesus Christ and His works for us shows how he or she will direct a team. When a leader understands the importance of Jesus’ biblical leadership, an understanding of who Jesus was and is begins to develop on a personal level. This is then translated into his or her style of leading, which can ultimately create an incredible growth experience for everyone involved with that particular team. A person with poor understanding of this is not ready to lead a team. True Christ-like leaders can develop, shape, and shepherd a teams. Henri Nouwen says, “The Christian leaders of the future have to be theologians, persons who know the heart of God and are trained – through prayer, study, and careful analysis – to manifest the divine event of God’s saving work in the midst of many seemingly random events of their time.”⁵

Just as foundational as a strong belief in Jesus is seeking God’s will above all else. An exceptional leader is cognizant of where God is leading the team, the worship, and is constantly praying and communicating with God about the next move. D.L. Moody, an American

³ Rory Noland. “How Do I Get to the Next Level?” (California: Worship Leader Inc., 2015), 20.

⁴ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen. *Christology: A Global Introduction*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 9.

⁵ Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989), 88.

evangelist during the nineteenth century wrote, “One of the sweetest lessons we can learn in the school of Christ is the surrender of our wills to God, letting Him plan for us and rule our lives...the first thing a man must do if he desires to be used in the Lord’s work, is to make an unconditional surrender of himself to God.”⁶ As leaders, just as we put our team in front of our own needs, so we put God’s will in front of our own. This can be extremely difficult to do especially with a leader who is more practical and wants to have things done quickly. Learning how to be patient and trust that God will move and lead if it is the right time is the only necessary action in this scenario. Great leaders rely on Christ and His finished work on the cross more than they rely on their own works.

Dependence on Christ works hand-in-hand with seeking out God’s will. Showing that we need Christ shows more of our strength in Him than our weakness. The Psalmist says, “As the deer pants for the stream of water, so my soul pants, for you my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.”⁷ A leader’s reliance on God will never be a part of their weakness; it will always be a part of their strength. Steve Miller, author of *Moody and Spurgeon spiritual leadership books* says, “In many ways, a spiritual leader is like a water well. When we pour out spiritual nourishment to others, we must take care to replenish the supply or we’ll soon have nothing to offer. We can’t give what we don’t have.”⁸ Often as leaders we are so busy with leading and filling our teams that we forget to fill ourselves with Christ and others around us. A glass only has so much to pour before it is empty. “Only when we as leaders are constant in the quality intake of God’s Word can we give out instruction and counsel that truly satisfies the

⁶ Steve Miller, *D.L. Moody on Spiritual Leadership* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2004), 23.

⁷ Psalm 42:1-2 (The New International Version of the Bible will be used throughout this paper)

⁸ Miller, 108.

spiritual hunger of those around us.”⁹ Being filled by godly people, the Word, and God Himself will extend the overall direction of leadership.

Loving God and His Word is often different than understanding the theology and the meaning of a biblical passage. One of the biggest advocates for this stance is nineteenth century Baptist preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Spurgeon says, “Love to God will help a man to persevere in service when otherwise he would have given up on his work.”¹⁰ Just as reliance on God for seeking His will and on Him in our weakness is needed, so is reliance on Him when our lives and leadership seem to be going well. Leadership always comes with rough or dry patches, but staying firmly planted during these seasons will be the true test of a person’s leadership.

Leadership in the New Testament

Biblical characters and their example continue to be the main source of learning for leaders entering into the field of ministry. We can see this in both the Old Testament, with Solomon and King David, and in the New Testament with people like Timothy, Peter, and Jesus. Paul’s letters to Timothy were written near the end of his life. These letters are mainly of guidance for Timothy as a young leader. Since Timothy was young and in a church that had been in Ephesus for about ten years, Paul is giving him guidance to fit in with the more mature men in the congregation. He says in chapter 3 of his first letter,

He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap.¹¹

⁹ Ibid. 113.

¹⁰ Steve Miller, *C.H. Spurgeon on Spiritual Leadership* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2003), 99.

¹¹ 1 Timothy 3:4-7 NIV

As young worship leaders, neglecting blind spots will only hurt our leadership. A great leader will have balance in the areas that Paul writes about above. Our family includes our team members. An excellent leader will be able to obtain proper respect from his or her team. This can mean having a guided control of rehearsals, expectations, and shepherding the team at hand.

Peter was a seasoned and naturally gifted leader. People followed his leadership because he was a relatable leader. He did not walk above where the people were but he realized the sufferings and hardships of the daily walk with Christ and how to cope and encourage through hardship. His writings are experienced direction for leaders. William Barclay says this about Peter's philosophy of leadership,

Peter says to the leaders, 'Shepherd your people like God.' Our whole attitude to the people we serve must be the attitude of God. What a vision opens out! What an idea! It is our task to show people the forbearance of God, the forgiveness of God, the seeking love of God, the limitless service of God.¹²

As a worship leader, our end goal is to lead people to Christ through music. We are direct advocates for Christ just as much as the pastor is speaking a message. A genuine worship leader shows the love of Christ like Peter does, realizing that life is tough and our teams may get beaten down by the circumstances in their lives. We may get beaten down because of circumstances in the office or with our team or with our musicianship.

'Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you' (1 Peter 5:7). The Christian leader need not fear that care of the flock of God will be too heavy a burden. By God's invitation, the leader can transfer the weight of spiritual burdens onto shoulders bigger, stronger, broader, and durable.¹³

This is Peter's main point in chapter five of his first book: no burden will ever be too large or too much to bear when walking with Jesus. Many times in leadership, we will feel like failures and

¹² William Barclay, *The Letters of Peter and Jude* (Edinburgh: St. Andrews, 1959) 156.

¹³ Sanders, 50.

become discouraged, but remembering that reliance and rootedness in someone stronger than we could ever be will help us lead like Jesus.

Servant Leadership

During Christ's time here on earth, he displayed one trait many were attracted to but did not fully understand until after he had ascended into heaven. Servant leadership continues to be one of the most important characteristics when stepping into any field of ministry. Just as Christ served his disciples and the others around him, we too desire to serve the people Christ has surrounded us with. The art of servant leadership does not come naturally to many people, but it can be learned. J. Oswald Sanders says,

“True greatness, true leadership is found in giving yourself in service to others, not in coaxing or inducing others to serve you. True service is never without cost. Often it comes with a bitter cup of challenges and a painful baptism of suffering... The real spiritual leader is focused on the service he or she can render to God and other people, not on the residuals and perks of high office or holy title.”¹⁴

The leader is a servant just as much or even more than he or she is a leader. By being a servant first, the person becomes more of a leader because he or she is learning how to serve others as Christ served the Church, His disciples, and followers. By serving, leaders move others to serve and lead through that servant posture as well.

We see plenty of acts of service throughout the Bible especially with the story of Christ. In *Handbook to Leadership*, the authors write about the story of Jesus washing his disciples' feet in John 13, “Here Jesus demonstrated the upside-down values of God's kingdom: The greatest leader is the lowliest servant. When He had finished washing the disciples' feet he said that what He had just done was an example for what they should practice. Real servant leadership follows

¹⁴ J. Oswald Sanders. *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1994), 13-14.

this radical, no-holds-barred directive.”¹⁵ A leader is willing to go out of their way to serve their team even if it means washing their dirty and charred feet.

Collectively in the Church, there are many rulers but what Jesus asks for are servants. A ruler is disrespectful and flippant while a servant shows how to be respectable. Larry Richards says, “The ruler is ‘over’ those he leads. But the servant is ‘among.’ We cannot be servant leaders if our position or role or our own attitude tends to lift us above others and makes a distinction between us and the rest of the people of God.”¹⁶ People crave for a leader who will be respectable yet authoritative equally. This is not someone who will boss them around and micromanage, but someone who desires to help them grow as musicians and disciples for Christ.

The Heart and Humility

Humility shows servant leadership to the team being led. Paul writes in his letter to Philippi saying,

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.¹⁷

A person who walks in humility sees worldly selfishness but chooses God-centeredness. Humble leaders have the three traits Paul talks about in this passage: position, obedience, and patience. Leaders know their position in Christ. They know they are to be a servant to others and by doing this they demonstrate leadership. Leaders also take into account what God is showing them,

¹⁵ Kenneth Boa, Sid Buzzell, and Bill Perkins. *Handbook to Leadership: Leadership in the Image of God* (Atlanta: Trinity House Publishers, 2007), 667.

¹⁶ Larry Richards. *A Theology of Church Leadership* (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 106.

¹⁷ Philippians 2:3-7

whether physically, mentally, or spiritually. Dr. Sid Buzzell states, “A humble leader doesn’t impose his or her will on God, but submits to God’s commands.”¹⁸ A humble leader also shows patience in waiting for God to lead. Just as they do not superimpose their will above God’s they do not grasp for power or leadership before it is given to them.

Part of growing in humility is facing weaknesses. A humble leader knows how to cope with his or her weaknesses and find joy through strengths and triumphs. Noland writes, “True humility means having an accurate view of ourselves, thinking we’re no more or less than we are. We must know our strengths. We must know our weaknesses. We must know what we’re good at, and accept what we are not good at.”¹⁹ Our weaknesses show us what we can improve upon yet let God shine through our hearts to others.

Humility is one aspect of the heart, but something often left in the shadows regarding the heart of a leader is wisdom and discernment. Both these traits appear throughout the biblical narrative in many passages but none more prominent and startling than with King Solomon. His father, King David, had just passed away and Solomon was still very young to be a king of a nation. When given the opportunity by God, as he assumes the leadership of the people of Israel, God tells him to ask for whatever he would like to better serve Him in this new role. He had numerous options that could have helped him succeed as a leader: wealth, victories, conquest, and a godly walk. Even though he had literally *carte blanche* from God, he desired to lead his people well and says this, “So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong.”²⁰

¹⁸ Boa, 67.

¹⁹ Rory Noland. *The Heart of the Artist* (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 59.

²⁰ 1 Kings 3:9

Just as Solomon asked the Lord for wisdom, we too as leaders entering the field of music ministry should ask the Lord for wisdom and discernment daily. Maxwell states, “Discernment is an indispensable quality for any leader who desires to maximize effectiveness...It enables a leader to see a partial picture, fill in the missing pieces intuitively, and find the real heart of a matter.”²¹ As a worship leader, seeking wisdom from the Lord and other wise people around will save countless hours of frustration in the long run. Wisdom is immeasurably more than craft and knowledge. Wisdom comes from the Lord and only from Him. Wisdom derives from fear of the Lord, which in turn shows anyone, leader or follower, the sole reliance and trust in God.

Courageous leaders are hard to find, which is why it is important to know how display and act on the courage God provides. “Leadership, by its very nature, inspires people to move in directions they would not otherwise have been willing to take. From time to time, good leadership requires excursions into unexplored territory, and draws on a leader’s courage.”²² Humility and wisdom are nothing without action. Courageousness is boldness. Bold courage is one action but using the other two traits to round out the boldness is a completely different story. “ ‘Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.’ ”²³ Leaders who display courage move forward knowing this is what God has called them to do. They seek discernment from God and others and then they act with patience and wisdom, rather than acting purely from instinct. Fear is not from God but courage comes directly from His hands. “God has not given us

²¹ John C. Maxwell, *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader*, (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1999), 47-48.

²² Boa, 41.

²³ Joshua 1:9

a spirit of fear-sometimes translated ‘timidity’ or ‘cowardice’ – but a heart that the Spirit of God has filled with courage. And it takes courage to make difference.”²⁴

Part of being a courageous leader is accepting failure. In music specifically, there will be times where the service does not go as well as hoped. There will be times where failure feels raw. Courageous leaders know the risk and the reward but do not let the failure sink its roots. There is always someone who will not like the choices a leader makes. Courageous leaders know how to make challenging decisions when they are needed even when it does not seem fair. For example, there will be a time when the leader will have to say to someone, “I can’t have you on the team anymore because you are too difficult to work with” or “You haven’t been practicing enough to be able to handle this right now.” The only alternative is to leave someone on the team who will hurt more than help the team grow as a unit. An effective team consists of people who want to be on the team for the community and for the Lord, not people who feel entitled or do it for a paycheck. “Courage deals with principle, not perception. If you don’t have the ability to see when to stand up and the conviction to do it, you’ll never be an effective leader. Your dedication to potential must remain stronger than your desire to appease others.”²⁵ Courageous decisions will not always be easy but God placed the leader there to make them out of humility, wisdom, and discernment for a larger purpose.

All of these traits are useless without integrity. According to John Maxwell, “When I have integrity, my words and my deeds match up. I am who I am, no matter where I am or who I

²⁴ Gordon T. Smith, *Courage and Calling: Embracing Your God-Given Potential*, (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 115.

²⁵ Maxwell, *21 Qualities*, 41.

am with.”²⁶ Leaders with integrity display a type of transparency, which is not seen in the average person today. Lovett Weems, Jr. states,

A survey across many denominations a decade ago found that the most important factors in personal leadership are (1) the degree of service without acclaim, (2) personal integrity, and (3) Christian example...the most detrimental factors in pastoral effectiveness are (1) self-serving ministry, (2) undisciplined living, and (3) emotional immaturity.²⁷

People in the Church want pastors, elders, and worship leaders to set the Christ-like example of integrity by putting others’ needs before their own and before creating their “dream ministry.”

Christlikeness means transparency, honesty, and loyalty. As a leader, the team and the congregation count on us to follow through with what we say we are going to do. They trust our wisdom, courageousness, and humility because they trust our integrity.

Communication, Criticism, and Learning to Listen

Communication between team members and the congregation can generate significant problems for a leader. Just as much as communicating musically with the band is important, so is communicating thoughts and concerns. In the book of Proverbs, Solomon writes, “Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”²⁸ The biggest problems leaders run into are often how to communicate truth, good or bad, with love. Especially for musicians, this is a double-edged sword. Critiques about our musical skills go straight to the heart because music is an emotional and personal experience. With it being emotional, we are vulnerable to what people have to say about us or what our team has to say. Noland says, “Another reason we feel vulnerable is because we are constantly being evaluated. We evaluate ourselves, wondering how our audience liked what we did... Artists often feel as if their validity

²⁶ John C. Maxwell. *Developing the Leader within You* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1993), 35.

²⁷ Weems, Jr. 126.

²⁸ Proverbs 12:18

is at stake whenever they step out on the stage.”²⁹ When people “attack” our emotions, it does not bode well for the person delivering what may be a kind and genuinely heart-felt message. In the book of James, he says to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. When leading a team of musicians a leader must practice these traits regularly. Dismissing what someone is saying comes across as rude but taking what they are saying and looking at the truth in the statement will help the growth of the leader and of the team.

Good leaders are good listeners. For example, when someone on the team suggests a musical idea, attentiveness to their idea shows them we value what they have to offer. Leaders can better understand the hearts of the people around them when they learn to listen. John Maxwell says, “Listening to your people will add to your success and to their development. When you listen to their ideas and opinions, especially before you make decisions, you give them the chance to increase their contribution. Each time you use their ideas and give them credit, they will feel valued, and they will be encouraged to keep contributing.”³⁰ The volunteers on the team should not feel afraid to express themselves. Ideas are vulnerable. Telling people their ideas will not work is hard, but brainstorming and accepting ideas can make the world of difference to a volunteer.

Musical Excellence

Excellence is perhaps an overused term in many circles including education, business, ministry, and music. Excellence comes from the Latin word *excellere* or *excellentia*, meaning to surpass. It is one simple word: excel. This simple word still has the same meaning as the Latin root but conclusively presents this: excellence is surpassing and outdoing what is the norm.

²⁹ Rory Noland, 161.

³⁰ John C. Maxwell, *Developing the Leaders Around You* (Tennessee: T. Nelson, 1995), 115.

Musical excellence is more than just surpassing what is normal, and more than just being the best. Musically excellent people not only strive to surpass the others around them, they strive to surpass themselves. They learn from what they are doing right or wrong, from mentors, and from their competition, and strive for the next level aiming to always be better.

Tom Kraeuter, worship leader and Executive Director of Training Resources, a ministry desiring to help people strengthen their relationships with God and each other, writes, “We in the church need to grasp the concept of excellence more fully, especially in the music department. Too often I hear things like ‘Well, it’s good enough for church’ or ‘The congregation will be singing along so they won’t notice our mistakes.’ This attitude is totally opposite from God’s attitude.”³¹ Kraeuter challenges the overarching thought process in the church and says this may explain why many tremendous musicians do not get involved with a mediocre music program. When we as leaders pursue excellence within our musical choices and intricacies we help draw excellence to and from our teams. This may attract musicians in the crowd or may draw specific skill sets out of the musicians on stage. A great leader desires to help them learn and express their talents for others and for Christ.

Creating excellent worship versus making it more of a concert or performance are two different expressions. Both types have their place in a contemporary worship service, but it all depends upon where the heart of the worshipper is centered and if it will be hindering people from the true meaning of worship. In Matthew’s Gospel, he says, “In the same way, let your light shine before me, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”³²

³¹ Tom Kraeuter. *Keys to Becoming an Effective Worship Leader* (Hillsboro, MO: Training Resources, 1991), 108.

³² Matt. 5:16 NIV (The New International Version of the Bible will be used throughout this paper)

When others see the good works of Christ displayed through the excellence of a band, they may be moved to a different state of mind where they would like to serve and love God like the leader or the musician. God has called us to stand out from the crowd, and when we blend in with all the ‘average’ or ‘good’ worship teams, we are not creating a realm of excellence within our team. Ultimately, it starts with the leader. When the leader desires and pursues musical excellence, this thought pattern and practice trickles to the rest of the team and then this is administered well to the congregation.

Musical and Technical Elements

Establishing the meaning of excellence is one task but defining the philosophy of excellence is a completely different task. Having the instrumental and musical knowledge for leading a team in worship is essential in order to create a high quality worship environment. A worship leader aims for a basic knowledge of all musicians on stage, their instruments, the music theory that goes with creating music, and what instruments are needed in any given contemporary worship service.

A leader is not only there to lead the congregation, but also to lead the technicalities in the music. Bob Kauflin outlines three important aspects of musicianship. He says, “Being skilled musically involves different components. Number one is *technique*, which simply means mastering the mechanics or building blocks of a style or instrument.”³³ Leaders are more responsible for mastering their musical craft than the musicians they lead. This does not mean they need to be the best instrumentalist in the church but it does mean they need to master their craft to the best of their ability. This may involve practicing certain technical aspects of the

³³ Bob Kauflin. *Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 39.

instrument that may not be particularly enjoyable such as scales, difficult passages, chord progressions, and staying on tempo.

Kauflin continues, “A second aspect of musicianship is *theory*—understanding how music works.”³⁴ When a leader understands what is happening in the music theoretically, it becomes easier for he or she to explain to the band what specifics are being sought after within the song. This knowledge not only establishes the leader as a musician, it earns the respect of the team being led when he or she can articulate their sentences to make sense musically. The final trait Kauflin explains is *taste*. He says, “You can excel at technique and theory but still make music that’s cold, boring, or inappropriate... *Taste* is knowing what fits.”³⁵ A musical leader seeks wise discernment when it comes to specific parts of songs in order to make them interesting and worshipful.

Often this is achieved by musical phrasing, dynamics, builds, climaxes, and releases within songs. Taste can also refer to the song choice in general. Dr. Allen Schantz, professor emeritus of Colorado Christian University, says this about song choice,

Does the work function effectively for the purpose for which it is intended? Does it suit the occasion? An aesthetically excellent symphony does not work effectively as a marching band piece without some major changes, nor does a marching band piece work effectively in a concert hall. A good hymn, for example is intended to enable everyone in the congregation to worship God effectively through music. In judging a good hymn, aesthetic excellence must be coupled with effectiveness in ministry to the body of Christ and universality in its appeal to the church as a whole.³⁶

The worship leader knows what types of songs fit with the culture of the church and its beliefs. If the song is not in line with the main doctrinal beliefs of the church, then it is ultimately the

³⁴ Ibid. 39

³⁵ Ibid. 39

³⁶ Allen Schantz. *Music, the Arts, and the Bible* (Lakewood, CO: Aesthetic Arts Press, 2015), 53.

worship leader's call to decide what step to take next. In churches today, we fight the battle of keeping people engaged in what is in front of them. The worship leader can help people stay connected by making the song musically interesting. Sometimes all it takes is one simple phrase, verbally or musically, such as, "Let's raise our voices" or getting the congregation involved by clapping. This can help some increase their level of participation in a normal worship service.

Instrument Choice

Strategies for finding what instruments are needed for a worship service are a crucial factor when putting together and developing a band for a contemporary church. A basic requirement for a worship leader entering the field is proficiency in leading from an instrument other than the voice. Musical versatility and flexibility is a sought after trait in churches, even though it is not required, it will ultimately help strengthen the leader's musicianship. Piano and guitar are the most common because they are chordal instruments as opposed to bass, drums, or other stringed instruments, which are more rhythmic and lead instruments. With all instruments in a contemporary worship setting, leaders can communicate openly about what they are looking for in regards to rhythm and overall sound mixture. When a leader knows where each instrument is in regards to range, he or she will help create diversity within the sound of the band.

When assembling the rest of the worship team, a leader should start by finding a competent pianist. Competency consists of a basic understanding of music theory and the ability to outline the rhythm, bass, and harmonic structure in order to create a distraction free sound for the congregation. A worship pianist is much different than a solo pianist because blending with other instruments requires different actions that are not always taught in classical piano lessons. In classical piano technique, the thought is that the pianist accompanies himself or herself by playing the bass, harmony, and melody. While this can still be true of a worship pianist when it

is the sole instrument, it becomes less true when put in the context of a band with a bass and electric or acoustic guitar.

The piano no longer has to carry the bass line and rhythms, even though this can still be important to add effect or emphasis to a part in the song. Most of the time the electric guitar will cover the middle or upper range for leads or rhythm, and with an acoustic guitar in the mix holding down the rhythm, what else is there for a piano to add? In all bands there will inevitably be parts that will be doubled. Piano has the widest range of any instrument in a worship band so it could be used for the ability to double specific parts. If the electric guitar has a high lead line, the piano can cover the low to middle range to help bring fullness to the sound. If the bass and acoustic guitar are playing a specified rhythm in the lower range, then the piano could cover the middle to upper range.

When there is great rhythmic unity within the band, the congregation can fully connect and feel the music within their bodies. Bass is one of the instruments that creates the greatest rhythmic diversity. Dr. Allen Schantz in his book, *Arts in the Key of Joy*, highlights bass as one of the seven aesthetic raw elements of music along with melody, harmony, rhythm, layers, colors of sound, and form. Since the seventeenth century, bass has been one of the foundations of harmonic structure.³⁷ Greg Scheer states, “This unsung hero lays a foundation of tempo and rhythmic style upon which the rest of the team builds—if the bass is not in the groove, neither is the rest of the team. So much musical responsibility rests on the bass player because music is understood from low to high.”³⁸ Especially in contemporary worship, people like feeling the

³⁷ Allen Schantz. *Arts in the Key of Joy: Aesthetic Excellence in Action* (Lakewood, CO: Aesthetic Arts Press, 2013), 30.

³⁸ Greg Scheer. *The Art of Worship: A Musician's Guide to Leading Modern Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 147.

bass in their chests. For musicians, there is something about feeling the root of the chord and knowing there will be harmonic and rhythmic stability with an exceptional bass player.

While a bass has strong rhythmic responsibility and influence, which can make the music feel settled, a skilled drummer has a unique role in establishing the rhythmic impulse for a band. The worship leader can lead the song, but it truly is the drummer leading the dynamic contour. Although the drummer may be focusing on the melodic structure of the band, they will also focus heavily on the rhythmic framework more so than many of the other musicians. Rhythmic structure and communication between the leader and the drummer is an important factor when rehearsing and leading the worship service. For example, if a song is building and the team has a less experienced drummer, the leader can say, “I want you to play an eighth note build on the snare and floor tom going into this next chorus.” Being specific with the rhythm and where it should be played will save time and energy within a rehearsal.

When it comes to singers and adding different harmonic layers to each part of the melody a few important factors can be utilized. Harmonies are there to support the lead or melody line of the worship song. If vocal harmonies are distracting musically, this can cause problems for the people out in the audience and for the musicians on stage. As a leader, the goal is to create an excellent but distraction-free zone for others to be able to worship freely. Therefore, a backup singer with accurate pitch who matches the worship leader’s pitch, vowel shapes, and cutoffs can help create an environment of tight vocal harmony. Closer harmonies typically convey a more cohesive sound that is more accessible to the congregation and carry greater power. If a female is leading a song, it is important for a male backup singer to choose a harmony that is closely related above or below the melody note. The two notes will create a sense of stability within the overall sound. The notes will fundamentally create a dynamic chord to fit within the rest of the

instrumental music. Ultimately, knowing the basic concepts for each instrument in the band, including vocals, will lead to better and more excellent music making.

Recruiting and Auditions

The musical leading of worship takes nearly half of the service in most contemporary churches. The pastor usually speaks for thirty to forty minutes and the worship team usually takes between twenty and thirty depending on the church. Therefore, the team that is chosen to lead the worship is a crucial part for the overall unity of the church. With this being said, the recruiting and audition process for a worship team needs to be systematic in its approach and firmly rooted in the core values of the church, the worship leader, and the Bible.

The effective leader of any team will have expectations, guidelines, and non-negotiable commitments when developing a brand new team. From a musical standpoint, it is of deep concern to the leader to know what type of musical demographic there is within the church. If a worship leader only has a beginner drummer and an advanced guitarist auditioning, creating a vision for that specific team is what is needed moving forward. This vision might be choosing songs that have simple enough drumbeats but give the guitarist freedom to express his or her musical talents within the song. On the other hand, if there is a surplus of talented musicians in the church, deciding who to take for the team and who to not take comes down to some basics.

Lincoln Brewster, long-time worship leader and recording artist, says, “We believe in the three C’s: character, chemistry and confidence.”³⁹ By looking at these things, Brewster says they can determine whether these people will be a good addition for the team musically and on a character and integrity level. In the interview process, the leader can ask specific questions and

³⁹ Jeremy Armstrong, “Audition Process,” *Worship Leader*, published March 1, 2013, <https://worshipleader.com/leadership/the-audition-process>.

gather important facts about a person. This may include the person's passions, strengths, weaknesses, and overall thoughts and beliefs about worship. The leader can also gather practical facts about the person such as their musical abilities and their thoughts on rehearsal and service etiquette. In this process, the leader can potentially gather valuable information in that will aid their final decision. Brewster says, "I believe leaders have a responsibility to protect the people on their teams. Adding someone who shouldn't be there is not good for anyone...In the end we are trying to minimize what could be a harmful experience for people."⁴⁰ Ultimately, the worship leader has to pray for wisdom and discernment when choosing a team for both the spiritual and musical aspects.

Productive Rehearsals

When dealing with other people, the leader realizes every minute matters from the beginning of the rehearsal until the end when everyone is packing up to go home. He or she remembers that people are busy and time is money in many cases, especially when dealing with professional musicians. Having a detailed plan for each rehearsal can be a beneficial addition for leaders. Music educators have much to offer in modeling good rehearsals. Scott Rush, a high school band director based out of South Carolina says,

One of the most important factors in establishing a great program is answering the question 'How do you rehearse?' Effective classroom and rehearsal management starts with an environment designed for success. Our students need to see that we are ready for instruction to begin...our visible written plan should also reflect what we intend to accomplish, not just for a particular rehearsal, but in subsequent rehearsals.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Scott Rush. *Habits of a Successful Band Director: Pitfalls and Solutions* (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2006), 37.

Establishing guidelines for the team to follow is a fundamental part of each rehearsal. If band members have some setup to do before rehearsal, asking them to show up fifteen minutes early instead of five will help them to be prepared to start when the leader is ready. Some team members may be running from a job to a “volunteer” rehearsal. A great leader learns to respect volunteers’ time in that fashion as well. Answering the question of what will be accomplished in this rehearsal will help a leader know what to have their band work on in the days before a Sunday service

Some people thrive on minute-to-minute planning. By planning out each minute of a rehearsal, some leaders may find it beneficial to help keep a practice orderly. This way the leader is free to stick to that plan no matter what happens in between. He or she knows when a song needs to start in the rehearsal and when it needs to end. Some leaders have a strong sense of internal time and can base their rehearsals off how well the songs are going. If the team feels solid on a specific piece, then one run-through of that piece might be all that is needed. Leaders are able to read the attitude of the room and are aware of the needs and mood of the team. Greg Scheer states, “Groups of people are just like individuals—they have moods and personalities. Be sensitive to the atmosphere at rehearsal, discerning if there are issues that need to be addressed.”⁴² The worship leader must be a servant leader first before he or she is a musical leader. He or she is always aiming to connect with the team members before starting a rehearsal to see how the team members are generally doing. When a leader aims to do these simple tasks, it creates a positive attitude in the rehearsal, especially with musicians who may be stressed about how he or she is doing musically. As worship leaders, encouragement will always be more

⁴² Scheer. 204

beneficial than condemnation. Musicians are people too and encouraging them even when they fail will continue to help them grow as musicians.

Often as musicians, we lose ourselves in the technicalities or performance of the music and miss the central point of what we are doing. This is when the service can become a performance and unity is missed on a deeper level. Stephen Rhodes music educator at Lipscomb University and journalist, states, “It is during rehearsals that a true back and forth between what is on the page and what is not begins.”⁴³ Rhodes goes on to talk about how learning notes correctly, articulating trouble spots, interpreting style, finishing phrases and notes, and shaping the music can help save time in the long run.⁴⁴ Worship leaders often neglect these trouble spots and do not fix them before it is too late. Practices are for mistakes to be made and mistakes to be fixed and properly executed. Practices such as the ones Rhodes describes above distinguish a great leader from a mediocre one.

Tom Kraeuter lays out several points that are important to remember when it comes to rehearsal: Worship, prayer, practicing new, old, and special music, and going over previous services.⁴⁵ A worship team that does not participate in these elements at some point in their practice time together is just another band playing music for people. At times, we may forget prayer is a type of worship and something that should be regularly included within a rehearsal and service. We all need prayer in some fashion and by praying together as a team, we become more connected and unified as a body of believers and a body of worshippers. Dr. David Peterson, the author of *Engaging with God*, says this about prayer, “Prayer and praise should

⁴³ Stephen Rhodes. “Past the Page: Moving from Reading Notes to Beautiful Performance” (Illinois: The Instrumentalist Publishing Co., 2016), 16.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 16-18.

⁴⁵ Kraeuter, 100-116. These points are a chapter in Kraeuter’s book.

characterize Christian living in every context and must, therefore, be at the heart of any corporate engagement with God.”⁴⁶

Unity between a team can also happen when practicing new or old songs. Old songs bring a team together because they know the song well, can enjoy themselves, and freely worship without thinking about all the musical technicalities of the song. For example, using a song that everyone on the team would know such as ‘How He Loves’ or ‘Forever Reign’ opens the gateway to explore the different avenues of their instruments. Many people do not get the privilege of playing with a band on a weekly basis. Utilizing this privilege and the knowledge of a well-known song will create unity within a team’s rehearsal time. New songs can create disunity. They provide unity because the band really has to listen to each other and what each person is doing in order to create a worshipful atmosphere for all. There is also a connection when the team can spend some time together talking about previous weeks and what went well and what could be improved upon. Kraeuter says, “This is not a time to be super-critical. Simply look at what happened for the purpose of learning. A great deal can be learned from sincere evaluation.”⁴⁷ Even though as musicians we tend to be over-critical, it is always beneficial to reflect on positive actions and positive worship experiences.

Remember the Head

We can possess high quality musical skills, excellent people and administrative skills, and understand the theology of worship leadership but if we do not seek Christ above all else, our work is completely useless.

The basic reality that Scripture presents is that the church is a living organism with Jesus Christ Himself functioning as head. In seeing Jesus as head, we must

⁴⁶ David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 195.

⁴⁷ Kraeuter, 70.

take seriously the notion that He is not head ‘emeritus.’ He is not some titular “chairman of the board” who is given nodding acknowledgment while others run His organization. He is not the retired founder of the firm. No, God has appointed Jesus ‘to be head over everything for the church, which is His body.’⁴⁸

Jesus lives and is active in every decision we make within our ministries. Even though Jesus is continually the head, we as His people are the other limbs of the body. We use each other to strengthen our weaknesses and become competent. As musicians, we will not be successful at every aspect of music. The Lord will surround us with musicians, mentors, pastors, professors, and friends to continually show us the lifelong learning process of becoming a well-rounded leader. Dr. Peterson states, “Wherever we go and whatever we do, we need to remember that we belong to the community called to reflect God’s character and purposes in the world and to the world.”⁴⁹ A leader does not need to be a spotless lamb without blemish; this is why we have Christ. Leaders simply need to live and lead as Christ leads His Church, daunting as that may be. He chose each of us to be in the positions we are in daily because of a specific purpose.

God chose us before the foundation of the world because He loved us. But why did He choose us? Not so that we might endlessly reflect on ourselves, but for the ‘praise of His glorious grace.’ When we worship God, we join an activity that began in eternity and will continue forever...⁵⁰

All this is for our King. Everything we say and do is all for the glory of God. Making His name great is no small task, but to get there a leader will need a big God. Only then will we be able to fulfill our potential as a leader for the Almighty God.

In Closing

In the end, the process of becoming a musical leader in a church is multi-faceted and has a high level of risk and failure, but it can truly be one of the most rewarding experiences of a

⁴⁸ Richards, 14.

⁴⁹ Peterson, 203.

⁵⁰ Kauflin, 176.

person's life. There will always be more to add to help strengthen our leadership, but with the traits and practices listed in the previous pages, one can begin to learn and succeed in leadership God's way.

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