

The Unquenchable Need for Servant Leadership in a Music Ministry

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Abstract

People tend to assume that the tasks music ministers must do can be accomplished in any way, so long as they fulfill the requirements of the congregation and other church leaders. However, this opinion is simply not true. This paper argues that servant leadership is the most effective leadership style for a worship minister, and without it, the church as a whole can suffer. Christ's example as a servant leader advocates this stance, alongside Scriptural mandates given by both Paul and Peter. Even in the modern business world, companies such as Starbucks Coffee Company and Southwest Airlines have incorporated servant leadership into their business model, helping them leap to the top of their industries. In order to be a servant leader, one must have daily habits of servanthood, which for a music minister includes Biblical study and developing musical skill. Since the fruit of one's labors is evident, servant leadership will help the effectiveness of a worship ministry, including when incorporating technology and modern media elements into the music portion of a church service. Because of the fallen nature of man, servant worship leaders must learn to handle difficult situations, conflict, and stagnancy in their ministry, while being both servant and leader. Finally, this paper concludes with a personal reflection on the importance of servant leadership in a music ministry.

Today's society is permeated by greed, selfishness, and a need to be better or greater than everyone else is.¹ Unfortunately, this seems oft times true in Church leadership as well.² Because “the greatness of an organization will be directly proportional to the greatness of its leader,”³ this must not be so. Although the term *worship* is not restricted to the Christian's gathering time of music, for the purposes of this paper, the terms *worship ministry* and *music ministry* will be used interchangeably, as is common in many Christian circles,⁴ and will primarily address the leadership needs of an evangelical, contemporary music leader. While often underestimated, the musical part of a church service is vital to the congregation, so a worship ministry leadership must be held to higher standards than a volunteer or small staff position personnel would.⁵ In a “me”-centered world, Christian worship leaders must strive to follow a model of servant leadership, perhaps the most effective leadership model in existence,⁶ in order to ensure the growth of the church.

Christ gives the perfect example of being a servant leader in the ministry, and both Paul and Peter speak on the importance of having a healthy church leadership. Even in the business world, *Fortune* 500 companies have incorporated servant leadership into their business model and have thrust themselves to the top of their industries because of it.⁷ Being a servant worship leader requires daily activities of servanthood such as Scripture meditation and musical development, both of which help the effectiveness of the worship ministry as a whole.⁸ Even modern media elements can be incorporated into a church service to aid the effectiveness of a

¹ Blanchard and Hodges, *Lead Like Jesus*, 3–4.

² *Ibid.*, 3.

³ Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 31.

⁴ Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 16; Best, *Unceasing Worship*, 47.

⁵ Noland, *The Heart of the Artist*, 36–37, 40.

⁶ Autry, *The Servant Leader*, xviii–xix, 241.

⁷ *Ibid.*, xiii; Gittell, *Southwest Airlines Way*, 21.

⁸ Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*, 30.

ministry when done properly.⁹ Because humanity is sinful and fallen, it is imperative that a Christian leader working in a music ministry practices servant leadership.¹⁰

Servant leadership has been defined in several ways by many people. Author James A. Autry defines servant leadership as being encompassed by five “ways of being” that include authenticity, vulnerability, acceptance, presence, and usefulness.¹¹ On the other hand, Robert K. Greenleaf, separates servant leadership to be defined as “the servant *as* leader,” addressing the negative, overused connotations of both servanthood and leadership in modern times.¹² At the same time, Rory Noland addresses servant leadership in Christian arts specifically as “the servant artist,” highlighting the servant artist’s need to live selflessly. For the purposes of this paper, servant leadership will be defined as leading selflessly while aiming to serve subordinates, authority figures, and those who are affected by that leadership position.

Jesus’ Servant Leadership

In 1 Corinthians 1:11, Paul writes, “Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ.”¹³ It would make sense then that Christians, especially those of influence, are to follow the example that Christ gave during His years here on the Earth. Jesus states in Matthew 11:28 that “...the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve...,”¹⁴ giving a perfect Biblical example of servant leadership. While Jesus is fully God, and thus is omniscient, holy, and mighty, He chose to come to serve the people who would eventually condemn Him to death without cause.¹⁵

⁹ Gal. 6:7; Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God*, 9–10.

¹⁰ Noland, *The Heart of the Artist*, 55.

¹¹ Autry, *The Servant Leader*, 9–10.

¹² Greenleaf, *The Servant-Leader Within*, 31.

¹³ ESV

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ John 10:27-30, 17:20-21; 1 John 3:20; 1 Sam. 2:2; Zeph. 3:17; Heb. 2:5-18, John 18:28-40

Christ's sacrifice allows all of humanity to come into the presence of God,¹⁶ a role that worship leaders are often held responsible within the church. This demonstrates an aspect of Christ as the ultimate worship leader, and thus His example on Earth should be followed by leaders of all kinds, especially those who lead worship.¹⁷

Later on His ministry, Christ was approached by a woman wanting her sons to sit at His right hand, an immense honor during those times. Once again, Jesus used his time here to provide an example of servant leadership. Scripture says that He gathered the people and spoke these words: "... You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave."¹⁸ Here, Christ is explaining to this woman that in order to be exalted by God, people must first lower themselves to the lowly state of servants. There is no room for exception in this matter, and He presents no other leadership model during His time here on Earth.¹⁹

One of the most memorable moments of Christ's work as a servant leader is when, during a meal, He rose from the table to grab the water basin and towel that were by the door to wash His disciples' feet.²⁰ Historically, when this took place the people would have worn leather sandals or walked barefoot on the dusty dirt roads. Because of this, the servants of the house would keep a basin of water and a towel by the door to clean the feet of the masters as they came in from outside. Being a Rabbi of such great stature, Jesus had no business removing Himself

¹⁶ 1 Timothy 2:5, Hebrews 10:19-22

¹⁷ Kauflin, *Worship Matters*, 52–53.

¹⁸ Matt. 20:25-27, ESV

¹⁹ Blanchard and Hodges, *Lead Like Jesus*, 12.

²⁰ John 13:1-20

from a place of honor to kneel before His disciples and take the place of a servant.²¹ However, giving the best possible example of a servant leader's role, Jesus took a risk of great magnitude during His time and knelt down to clean His disciples' feet.²² Jesus, the One who was soon to take on the sins of all humanity, lessened Himself to take on the task of a servant, modeling the ideal nature of a servant leader.²³

During His ministry, Jesus spent most of His time empowering His disciples to continue His work.²⁴ As Christ's ministry was coming to a close, He spoke to His disciples, saying, "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you."²⁵ During this talk with His disciples, Jesus speaks on the fact that He chose His disciples and that He appointed them to do great things.²⁶ Worship leaders hold a very similar job in that they must typically choose who is to be a part of their team, discipling them and training them.²⁷ Following Christ's example, worship leaders must then also lead their team to a place where they are no longer called 'servants' or considered mere team members, but can be allowed the freedom of being friends who can continue the ministry even without their leader.²⁸

Scriptural Mandates

Scripture is riddled with examples and mandates for church leaders to follow. Paul, while writing his first letter to Timothy, lists out many qualifications and guidelines for allowing a man

²¹ Wilkes, *Jesus on Leadership*. 156

²² *Ibid.*, 125.

²³ John 1:29; *Ibid.*, 156–157, 160.

²⁴ Blanchard and Hodges, *Lead Like Jesus*, 46.

²⁵ John 15:15 ESV

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 15:16-17

²⁷ Navarro, *The Complete Worship Leader*, 170.

²⁸ Blanchard and Hodges, *Lead Like Jesus*, 46.

into leadership.²⁹ During this time, leadership would have been exclusively male, but these principles can be applied to any modern-day church leader. Paul separates leaders into two categories, ‘overseers’ and ‘deacons,’ though the lists of qualifications hold many similarities and many scholars believe these to be nearly identical positions.³⁰ Nevertheless, both deacons and overseers are to be dignified, respectable, not quarrelsome, husbands of one wife, able to manage his household well, and not given to drunkenness.³¹ The only difference that is distinguished by Paul between these two positions is that an overseer is not to be a recent convert to Christianity, lest he become conceited.³² However, deacons are likewise to be tested in their faith before being allowed to serve.³³

The qualifications that Paul gives in 1 Timothy aid a leader in being able to serve their team well. When leaders address their team, and are known as dignified, respectable, and not quarrelsome, it is difficult for a team member to take offense, even if what is being said can be considered offensive. For example, in Matthew 16 when the disciples were travelling with Jesus, they were arguing over what to eat because none of them had brought bread. Just then, Jesus turned to them and said, “...O you of little faith, why are you discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive?”³⁴ In verse 12, Matthew accounts that “Then they understood...”³⁵ Here Jesus demonstrates that servant leaders have the ability to confront their team with bold questions such as He did, and know that because of their reputable status it will be well received.

²⁹ 1 Tim. 3:1-13

³⁰ 1 Tim. 3:1; Hawkins, “Orders and Ordination in the New Testament,” 340; Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 34.

³¹ 1 Tim. 3:1-13

³² Ibid, 3:6

³³ Ibid, 3:10

³⁴ Matt. 16:8-9a ESV

³⁵ ESV

While writing to the church in Philippi, Paul instructs them to “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.”³⁶ He continues by saying, “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”³⁷ These two sentences give clear instruction to the Philippians: working for personal gain will not contribute to the church what is required by Christ. Paul makes this clear when for the following six verses he speaks about how Christ followed this same approach to ministry, not daring to seek equality with God, even though He was God Himself.³⁸

Not only did Paul write on servant leadership, but Peter did as well. In his first letter to Christians dispersed in the northern regions of Asia Minor, he writes,

“...I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.”³⁹

Here Peter addresses many potential pitfalls of Christian leadership: manipulation, pride, and the tendency to want control over everything and everyone in the ministry. Instead of falling into these natural desires, Peter gives the reader a better option: servanthood. His servant leadership model includes shepherding the ministry team, willingly overseeing the ministry, and doing everything selflessly as an example to the flock.

³⁶ Phil. 2:3 ESV

³⁷ Ibid, 2:4

³⁸ Ibid, 2:5-11

³⁹ 1 Peter 5:1-3 ESV

Secular Approaches to Leadership Styles

Though there are numerous ways to approach leadership, according to research there are primarily three styles in which people lead.⁴⁰ Each style can be molded to fit into servant leadership, however, some take more work than others do. First, there is the *authoritarian* style, which is characterized by domineering subordinates based on expected laziness from those working in lower levels of the team.⁴¹ Authoritarian leaders expect that work does not come naturally to the workers, and thus they must be given strict rules, boundaries, and a structured hierarchy of personnel roles.⁴² Leaders who work in the authoritarian style restrict communication so that subordinates only communicate with their leader, in order to streamline the communication process.⁴³ This type of leadership is often quite effective in getting tasks accomplished, however, can potentially create a hostile working environment in which the workers begin to be dissatisfied with their work, and work environment alike.⁴⁴

Next, is the *democratic* leadership style. Leaders who use this style are known to make decisions with the input and collaboration of the entire team, never fully putting down a subordinate's idea, in order to obtain an outcome that the entire team enjoys.⁴⁵ These leaders work on the concept that workers have the capability of enjoying the work given to them and do not need to be forcefully told what to do in order to successfully complete their function on the team.⁴⁶ Because democratic leaders believe in their team members, communication is allowed to

⁴⁰ Lewin, Lippitt, and White, "Patterns of Aggressive Behavior," 271–299.

⁴¹ Northouse, *Introduction to Leadership*, 90.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Goodnight, "Laissez-Faire Leadership," 821.

⁴⁴ Northouse, *Introduction to Leadership*, 90.

⁴⁵ Smothers, "Assumption-Based Leadership," 53.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

flow freely between subordinates and leadership, without consequence.⁴⁷ The democratic leadership work environment is very welcoming, allowing for a healthy team mentality, however, it can often require a lengthy amount of time in order to get tasks accomplished.⁴⁸

Lastly, there is the *laissez-faire* leadership style. This leadership style is primarily characterized by the leader having a hands-off approach.⁴⁹ Essentially, this type of leader believes that workers can make their own decisions without any help from leadership, and thus is sometimes classified as “nonleadership.”⁵⁰ Because *laissez-faire* leaders believe in such a distant approach to leadership, this type of leadership can lead to other workers taking over as leader or simply not being motivated to accomplish anything that is set before them.⁵¹ Granted, sometimes workers under a *laissez-faire* leader thrive in such a hands-off approach because they feel that they have the freedom to do whatever is needed to accomplish their goal without leadership constantly looking over their shoulder.⁵²

Servant Leading within Various Leadership Styles

Servant leadership can only thrive when put into practice alongside an effective leadership style.⁵³ Incorporating servant leading into each type of leadership can be difficult; however, it is a necessity if a worship ministry is to thrive. Because of the veracity of authoritative leadership, being an authoritative servant leader can be quite exhausting, if not impossible. On the other end of the spectrum, a *laissez-faire* leader’s “non-leading” can be a place just as difficult to allow for servanthood, since oftentimes, these leaders are not involved in

⁴⁷ Goodnight, “Laissez-Faire Leadership,” 821.

⁴⁸ Northouse, *Introduction to Leadership*, 91.

⁴⁹ Smothers, “Assumption-Based Leadership,” 53.

⁵⁰ Northouse, *Introduction to Leadership*, 92.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Goodnight, “Laissez-Faire Leadership,” 820.

⁵³ Northouse, *Introduction to Leadership*, 94.

anything that happens on the subordinate level.⁵⁴ This being said, it is possible to conclude that the democratic leadership style is ideal in order to give adequate room for a servant leader to thrive. Incorporating servant leadership into the democratic approach allows a leader to maintain the three main functions of leadership as laid out by leadership theorist and author John Adair: (1) achieving the task, (2) maintaining the team, and (3) meeting the needs of the individual.⁵⁵

Servant Leaders through the Ages

Being a servant leader may seem unattainable, however, numerous people have paved the way for servant leadership to be accepted and utilized in many different capacities. First, servant leadership is effective in evangelism. Christ is the perfect example of servant leadership in missions work. His disciples followed Him, learned from Him, and desired to fulfill the ministry that He began, which is arguably the function of a worship leader as well.⁵⁶ Because His primary function before going to the cross was to spread the gospel, fulfill prophesy, and bring healing and hope to the people of the world, this indicates that servant leadership functions well when doing the work of an evangelistic leader.

Another Biblical servant leader is King David. He was one of the most famous people during his time, yet he was still found wanting to serve and be known by the people.⁵⁷ In 1 Samuel 18:16, while talking about David it says that, "...all [of] Israel and Judah loved him, for he was as one of them."⁵⁸ One of the marks of servant leaders is being humble enough to identify and serve those beneath them, as King David did at this time. As is famously said, God identified

⁵⁴ Ibid., 90.

⁵⁵ Williams, *Leadership for Leaders*, 31.

⁵⁶ Matthew 4:19-20, Luke 8:9, Acts 6:2-4

⁵⁷ Noland, *The Heart of the Artist*, 61.

⁵⁸ TLB

David as a man after His own heart, which further demonstrates David's amazing ability to not only lead his people, but to lead himself spiritually as well.⁵⁹

In contemporary times, servant leadership has helped thrust a *Fortune* 500 company to where it is today.⁶⁰ When Orin Smith took over the Retail North American business unit for Starbucks Coffee Company in 2001, as both President and Chief Executive Officer, he noticed that, "The passion and values were still there, but sometimes [they] spent more energy on [their] individual or department goals than focusing on... how [they] could serve each other and people around the globe."⁶¹ That same year, James Autry, a writer on servant leadership, inspired the corporate leaders at Starbucks to begin implementing servant leadership principles into the way the company was being run, helping eliminate the problems that Smith saw growing within their walls.⁶² Immediately, the company began to rise to the top, eventually landing where it is now. With this huge corporation servant leadership worked well, demonstrating that servant leadership principles are often effective in a variety of settings, including those where there is a distinct authority structure, such as in Starbucks.

Another company breaking the mold of hierarchical business leadership is Southwest Airlines. It is inarguable that Southwest is one of the most dedicated airlines companies in business today, having been named "the most successful airline in history" by *Fortune* magazine, and servant leadership is a big component of their achievements.⁶³ Instead of following a typical customer-first business model, Southwest Airlines encourages its leadership to have an

⁵⁹ Acts 13:22

⁶⁰ Autry, *The Servant Leader*, xiii.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., xii–xiv.

⁶³ Gittel, *Southwest Airlines Way*, 21.

employees-first outlook.⁶⁴ Herb Kelleher, the founder of the airline company, is credited with placing a higher priority on baggage handlers than on his own executives, in the beliefs that people in such ‘menial’ positions are more influential to the company because those are the people that are seen by the customers on a regular basis.⁶⁵

Colleen Barret, a corporate secretary who eventually became president of Southwest Airlines, is credited with having implemented the Golden Rule into the Southwest motto: “...whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them...”⁶⁶ This translated directly into servant leading, putting employees’ needs first and serving them well, creating an environment that cultivated other servant leaders.⁶⁷ In the year 2000, the year before Barret was promoted to president of Southwest, Vice President Jim Wimberly stated, “There is no other air carrier that has had the same continuity of leadership as Southwest. It has shaped this culture, and we are blessed with it.”⁶⁸ It is evident that servant leadership was running rampant throughout Southwest even before Barret implemented the Golden Rule into the Southwest motto. This only heightens the fact that servant leadership is contagious and once put into place it will not stop easily, even under new management.

The Daily Life of a Servant Leader

Being a servant leader is not possible unless fully incorporated into the daily life of the leader,⁶⁹ because an effective leader must be willing to grow spiritually, emotionally, and

⁶⁴ Lauer, *Southwest Airlines*, 15.

⁶⁵ Pandya and Shell, *Lasting Leadership: What You Can Learn from the Top 25 Business People of Our Times*, 24.

⁶⁶ Lauer, *Southwest Airlines*, 16–17, 19; Matt. 7:12 ESV.

⁶⁷ Wharton School of The University of Pennsylvania, *An Interview with: Colleen Barret*.

⁶⁸ Gittell, “Investing in Relationships.”

⁶⁹ Blanchard and Hodges, *Lead Like Jesus*, 20.

mentally in order to allow their ministry to thrive.⁷⁰ Leaders who cannot lead *themselves* are stifling the development of their organization.⁷¹ Growing as a leader can be as simple as going through mundane life experiences and learning the typical lessons that people are taught throughout life's journey; however, growing as a leader cannot be limited to only that.⁷² For a worship ministry leader, being prepared spiritually is as equally important as being prepared musically.⁷³ The apostle Paul demonstrates this when, directly following his conversion, he went away for many years preparing himself spiritually for what lie ahead before ever sharing the gospel.⁷⁴

In order to lead well, a servant leader must work to excel in their craft. For worship leaders, their craft is not only composed of music, but is also inclusive of spirituality.⁷⁵ Maintaining a healthy relationship with God is imperative for a worship leader, because without being filled by God, a worship leader will have nothing to give to the congregation or the ministry.⁷⁶ It has been said that, "If the way we live doesn't back up what we proclaim on Sunday morning, we're not only deceiving the church – we're misrepresenting the God we claim to be worshipping."⁷⁷ In other words, worship leaders must live out the spirituality that they claim, no matter what people are around, in order to ensure that the gospel message is promoted in a clear, Biblical manner.⁷⁸

⁷⁰ Greenleaf, *The Servant-Leader Within*, 40; Kauflin, *Worship Matters*, 43.

⁷¹ Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 31.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 34.

⁷³ Noland, *The Heart of the Artist*, 145.

⁷⁴ Gal. 1:15-2:1

⁷⁵ Noland, *The Heart of the Artist*, 40.

⁷⁶ Kraeuter, *Keys to Becoming an Effective Worship Leader*, 9.

⁷⁷ Kauflin, *Worship Matters*, 45.

⁷⁸ Noland, *The Heart of the Artist*, 37–38.

Living daily as a servant leader also requires advocating for the leadership above the position that the leader holds.⁷⁹ For example, in a worship ministry there is usually a director, a board, a pastor, or some sort of position above the worship leader to which the worship leader must report. Creating quality relations as a servant leader below the pastor can be one of the most beneficial aspects of servant leading because fortunately, servant leading can also be contagious.⁸⁰ When team members see their worship leader serving and advocating their pastor, they are likely to follow that example and do the same with the worship leader.⁸¹

The Effectiveness of a Servant-Led Worship Ministry

Leading a worship ministry deals with mostly heart matters, which makes discerning the effectiveness of a ministry oftentimes difficult.⁸² There are, however, several telltale signs of an effective worship ministry. Firstly, when a worship ministry is healthy, the congregation is engaged.⁸³ Because music is such an influential phenomenon, the depth of a person's engagement and spiritual encounter can be easily confused with the innate power of music.⁸⁴ Congregational engagement is not always as easily discerned by people raising their hands, crying, or jumping around when an upbeat song is being played. People standing still or sitting quietly in their seat while the music is being played can be just as engaged as the person weeping with their hands raised.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ Kraeuter, *Keys to Becoming an Effective Worship Leader*, 88.

⁸⁰ Kraeuter, *Developing an Effective Worship Ministry*, 91, 96.

⁸¹ Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 98–100.

⁸² Kauflin, *Worship Matters*, 21.

⁸³ Duck, *Worship for the Whole People of God*, 23.

⁸⁴ Best, *Unceasing Worship*, 166, 182.

⁸⁵ Kauflin, *Worship Matters*, 30.

An effective worship ministry helps the congregation see beyond Sunday morning gatherings and the music segment of a worship service.⁸⁶ It is shameful when people walk away from the music portion of a Church gathering ‘touched’ and ‘moved,’ but with little knowledge about the God that they are worshipping through music.⁸⁷ It is the job of church leadership to enable the congregation to delve into a deeper relationship with the Lord on their own time, not limiting themselves to once or twice a week at church.⁸⁸ Therefore, the servant worship leader must make an effort to get the focus off the music and emotion, though innately amoral,⁸⁹ and onto the God that is being worshipped.⁹⁰

Lastly, an effective worship ministry has a healthy team.⁹¹ When a leader is working with people who are angry, bitter, or have unresolved conflict, it can lead to the demolition of the entire ministry.⁹² Paul writes on this in Romans 12:18 when he says, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”⁹³ Servant leaders that are investing in their team will live this principle well, as to follow not only a Biblical mandate, but also to create a healthy environment for the worship team to be in on a regular basis. When spurred by the leader, a healthy team environment can determine the effectiveness of a worship ministry as a whole.⁹⁴

Being an effective servant leader in a worship ministry can sometimes mean delegating projects to others and taking off the leader role in that particular situation. For example, in Acts 6 the numbers of the disciples began to grow so large and meetings so long that the daily needs of

⁸⁶ Ibid., 17.

⁸⁷ Best, *Unceasing Worship*, 140.

⁸⁸ Kauflin, *Worship Matters*, 17.

⁸⁹ Best, *Unceasing Worship*, 147.

⁹⁰ Noland, *The Heart of the Artist*, 58.

⁹¹ Navarro, *The Complete Worship Leader*, 168–169.

⁹² Northouse, *Introduction to Leadership*, 249.

⁹³ ESV

⁹⁴ Kraeuter, *Developing an Effective Worship Ministry*, 92–94.

the widows in the town were being neglected.⁹⁵ Although the disciples did not realize this right away, as soon as it was brought to their attention, they appointed seven men “of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” to fulfill this churchly duty so that they themselves could continue preaching the word, and devoting themselves to prayer and the ministry.⁹⁶ Not only did this give the disciples the freedom to continue doing their duties well, it gave those seven men the opportunity to step into a leadership role, and begin a ministry of their own. Perhaps the most effective worship leader is one that can be absent and still have a fully functioning team.

Technology’s Place in Servant-Led Worship

With all of the technological advances in recent years, having a polished, well-rounded worship team with great lights and a quality sound system to match is quickly becoming a staple in worship ministries.⁹⁷ Regrettably, this brings on the fierce debate of whether or not new technology and high production value in a church setting should be considered purely entertainment, or if it has a place in the church.⁹⁸ As a servant leader, a worship director must decide if incorporating more ‘showy’ performance aspects into the music portion of the church service is actually serving the congregation or just being used in order to keep up with such entertainment-heavy times.⁹⁹

Some worship leaders argue that because entertainment value has become such a norm for modern-day culture, having a more produced church service cannot be avoided.¹⁰⁰ Others, however, will fight this trend in order to keep the church sacred, believing that adding production

⁹⁵ Acts 6:1

⁹⁶ Ibid 6:3-4 ESV

⁹⁷ Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God*, 7–8.

⁹⁸ Navarro, *The Complete Worship Leader*, 184.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 178.

¹⁰⁰ Hager and Kahn-Harris, *Religion and Popular Music in Europe*, 70.

to the service is sinful because it takes away from the power of God.¹⁰¹ No matter which way a worship leader or the church leadership decides to go, the focus on God must remain.¹⁰² If the advocates of little-to-no church production get so caught up in keeping things simple that they forget God's place in the service, then they have acted wrongfully.¹⁰³ At the same time, if the advocates of high production value get so caught up in the production value itself and forget that the Gospel is the reason they are working so hard, then they are also wrong.¹⁰⁴

This newfound battle of technology's place in the church has simply grown out of the age-old argument between traditional and contemporary music.¹⁰⁵ Because traditionalists argue so fervently for hymns and simple singing while contemporary followers long for a more engaging full-band sound, many churches have begun to separate services in order to accommodate both musical preferences.¹⁰⁶ It is interesting to note that while a worship leader can be required to change the instrumentation, song selection, and stage production from one service to the next, a pastor is rarely asked to update his sermon between the two gatherings.¹⁰⁷ Creating a division between these two services has advantages and disadvantages, however, if the worship leader comes into both services willing to serve the congregation how that particular church has deemed necessary, then that ministry will be fruitful.¹⁰⁸

Unfortunately, the Bible has no clear direction on modern-day entertainment value and if the newest sound and lighting systems should be allowed in a church building.¹⁰⁹ However, as

¹⁰¹ Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*, 28.

¹⁰² Navarro, *The Complete Worship Leader*, 75.

¹⁰³ Best, *Unceasing Worship*, 171.

¹⁰⁴ Kauflin, *Worship Matters*, 62.

¹⁰⁵ Hager and Kahn-Harris, *Religion and Popular Music in Europe*, 62–64.

¹⁰⁶ Best, *Unceasing Worship*, 74–75.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹⁰⁸ Gal. 6:7

¹⁰⁹ Kauflin, *Worship Matters*, 52. 54.

Harold Best would say, “Entertainment is dangerous only when it becomes the exclusive thing, cutting itself away from any linkage with active engagement.”¹¹⁰ As has been mentioned previously, an effective servant leader in a worship ministry helps engage the congregation in the music as well as in the reality of God’s presence.¹¹¹ Therefore, if the congregation is engaged during the music, there is no need to criticize those who use modern technology to enhance the experience. If, however, congregational engagement is being hindered by the use of modern media elements, the place of such technology should be reconsidered.¹¹²

Unfortunately, there is no clear-cut answer to the stipulation or banishment of technology in a church service, though technology’s presence should never distract the congregation. One way to tell if technology is getting in the way of congregational involvement is if the congregation begins to see musical worship as commercialism. Because so many Christian artists and worship bands have their own record deals and sell CDs by the thousands,¹¹³ it is easy for a worship team’s presence on the stage to come across prideful, and as one author puts it, makes it seem that “the actual message is see me, love me, buy my record.”¹¹⁴ While some church members would be distracted if no technology is present, others may be distracted by high production value. It is part of a servant worship leader’s job to determine which is ideal for the congregation and which best eliminates the element of distraction from the service.

Servant Leading in Difficult Times

On September 11, 2001, one of America’s greatest catastrophes occurred. As four planes were hijacked by terrorists, two of which were flown into the World Trade Center twin towers,

¹¹⁰ Best, *Unceasing Worship*, 185.

¹¹¹ Duck, *Worship for the Whole People of God*, 23.

¹¹² Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God*, 9–10.

¹¹³ Hager and Kahn-Harris, *Religion and Popular Music in Europe*, 52–53.

¹¹⁴ Petersson, “Editorial,” 3.

the nation went into chaos, and many airline companies lost a significant amount of their revenue.¹¹⁵ To call this a ‘difficult time’ would be an extreme understatement. Brian Lusk, Southwest Airlines’ Manager of Online Relationships and Special Projects, recalls, “It was probably the scariest time I’ve ever worked here and also probably the most rewarding time, just the way everyone all pitched in during a really difficult time...”.¹¹⁶ If the executives of Southwest had been working for their own benefit rather than the needs of their employees, they would have laid off almost twenty percent of their employees as other major airlines did during this time.¹¹⁷ Instead, Southwest maintained their current staff in the hopes that when their flights could once again leave ground, they would be able to pay everyone what they were due.¹¹⁸ On this matter another Southwest employee stated, “That’s part of our culture. We’ve always said we’ll do whatever we can to take care of our people. So that’s what we’ve tried to do.”¹¹⁹

Biblically, Christ also gives a wonderful example of servant leading when things are difficult. Right before He started His ministry, Jesus was, “...led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil.”¹²⁰ During this time, He very easily could have changed a stone into bread, as the Devil enticed Him to do;¹²¹ however, He was serving purposes greater than His own. Instead of giving into the temptation of appeasing His own wants and desires, Jesus surrendered all of His own needs in order to do the will of Father.¹²² Servant leading can be difficult even during some of the better times of ministry; however, servant leading without having eaten in forty days is the true work of a miracle. Christ demonstrates that

¹¹⁵ Lauer, *Southwest Airlines*, 20.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Gittell, *Southwest Airlines Way*, 24–25.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹²⁰ Luke 4:1-2a ESV

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 4:3

¹²² *Ibid.*, 4:8

even when things may be at their worst and leaders feel like they are in the desert land, being a servant leader is fully achievable if conviction and Scripture run deep.¹²³

When church situations are troublesome, leaders can be so easily engulfed in their surroundings that they forget their calling to love people well.¹²⁴ As Paul writes to the church in Ephesus, “I... urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love...”¹²⁵ For a worship leader, this can be demonstrated in various ways. Sometimes, this is taking the worship team on a retreat to rest and enjoy each other’s company, while other times it is bringing breakfast or coffee to a staff meeting unexpectedly. No matter what difficulty arises in a worship ministry, a servant leader will find a way to encourage their team in the midst of the struggle.¹²⁶

When Conflict Arises

Servant leading is tested when conflict arises. Though some leadership styles tend to ignore the problem or completely take over the situation, God has provided the servant leader with another way of conflict resolution. There is a common parenting saying that says, “If you are not part of the problem or part of the solution, stay out of it.” Luckily, the Biblical approach to conflict management seems to agree.¹²⁷ Matthew’s gospel lays out the Godly way to resolve conflict, starting with approaching the one who has sinned or started the conflict. If the brother does not listen, then the Scripture says to bring one or two other people as witnesses, with a last resort of bringing the brother’s sin to the church.¹²⁸ Revealing a friend’s sin to the entirety of the

¹²³ Ibid, 4: 5-13

¹²⁴ 1 Cor. 14:1

¹²⁵ Eph. 4:1-3 ESV

¹²⁶ Briner, *The Leadership Lessons of Jesus*, 27.

¹²⁷ Matt. 18:15

¹²⁸ Ibid., 18:15-20

church might seem like modern day madness, and is rarely practiced in today's culture, yet such is the Scriptural mandate for resolving conflict, and thus must also be the worship leader's approach to conflict resolution.

Leading in times of conflict can be wearying, but as Jesus says in John 16:33, "Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrow. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."¹²⁹ Countless times in scripture, readers are encouraged to take joy in their sorrows¹³⁰ and to not worry about what is to come.¹³¹ The same should be true for servant leaders. The servant leader oftentimes must play the role of mediator in the worship ministry and help resolve whatever conflicts may arise. When circumstances get difficult, and conflict comes about, the servant leader has an opportunity to shine through the darkness of whatever storm is happening and alter the situation in a positive way.¹³²

When the Church is Stagnant

A stagnant church is sometimes hard to identify, because it is easy for a ministry to have a prosperous façade. As John recounts to the church in Sardis in the book of Revelation, "I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead."¹³³ Luckily, the next verse gives the Sardis church a solution, "Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die... Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent."¹³⁴ Jesus addresses this same issue to a group of Pharisees by using what would be considered vulgar language in that time,

¹²⁹ NLT

¹³⁰ James 1:2-3

¹³¹ Phil. 4:6-7, Matt. 6:25-34

¹³² Autry, *The Servant Leader*, 222–223.

¹³³ Rev. 3:1b ESV

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 3:2-3a

calling them “whitewashed tombs” for looking great on the outside while being dead inside.¹³⁵

Scripture makes it quite clear that simply having the appearance of thriving is not sufficient.

There has to be more to someone than mere appearance.¹³⁶

One of the most easily faked parts of thriving in a church is the music ministry. Several factors go into this, but one of the greatest is that people like to appear as their best, no matter how untrue that may be.¹³⁷ Too often, people in the worship ministry are known for their ‘celebrity status,’ as people who are seen regularly on stage, but like all celebrities there is a dark side of humanity that they are stricken with by nature.¹³⁸ Unfortunately, for a church music ministry, if members are open and honest about their struggles, it can quickly be counted as the next scandal waiting to be published in the local news or threatening to split the church.¹³⁹ This line of thinking oftentimes traps worship ministry members into remaining where they are in their faith, never growing in the weaknesses that they are afraid to expose, which is opposite of the authenticity that worship leaders are called to express.¹⁴⁰

Because music ministry is such a personal affair for those involved, it is easy for heavy emotions to rise, jealousy to prevail, and the team health to suffer.¹⁴¹ An uncooperative, stagnant worship team can cause a slew of problems not only for the church leadership, but also for the church as a whole. When such a prevalent ministry or its members are struggling to grow in their faith, the congregation can see this and translate it as then being acceptable for them to remain

¹³⁵ Matt. 23:27 ESV

¹³⁶ 1 Samuel 16:7

¹³⁷ Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*, 78.

¹³⁸ Romans 3:23; Noland, *The Heart of the Artist*, 61.

¹³⁹ Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 230.

¹⁴⁰ Noland, *The Heart of the Artist*, 38.

¹⁴¹ Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*, 78–79.

stagnant as well.¹⁴² Countless times, Scripture talks about setting an example to live by,¹⁴³ so when dealing with a difficult situation such as this, a servant leader must simply tend to the team as best they can, encourage them with Scripture, and pray unceasingly over the situation at hand.

Non-Servant Leading

While being a servant worship leader would ideally be surrounded with acceptance, love, and happy gatherings, servant leadership also includes times of difficulty, strife, and confusion.¹⁴⁴ The sinful nature of man often displays itself in Christian leadership.¹⁴⁵ For example, while Jesus and the disciples were out doing ministry, in the midst of their awe from Jesus casting out a demon from a boy, the disciples got into an argument over which one of them was the greatest.¹⁴⁶ While Christ was performing miracles right before their eyes, even the disciples could not reject their prideful tendencies to be the greatest of all.¹⁴⁷ The same pride that was exemplified in the disciples happens in Christian leadership when they forget how much more important the work God is doing is over the recognition that can be attained from it.¹⁴⁸

Leaders who do not serve cannot truly lead. As Rory Noland writes, “People in the congregation can tell whether [worship leaders] are onstage to serve the Lord or merely serve [themselves].”¹⁴⁹ Non-servant leading allows the congregation to see self-serving acts as something that is acceptable to do in a ministry setting. Alongside this, if a leader expects their subordinates to serve the rest of the team or in this case, the rest of the worship ministry, they

¹⁴² Ibid., 81–82.

¹⁴³ 1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17, 4:9; 1Tim. 4:12-13

¹⁴⁴ Kauflin, *Worship Matters*, 60.

¹⁴⁵ Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 230.

¹⁴⁶ Luke 9:37-45

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 9:43

¹⁴⁸ Noland, *The Heart of the Artist*, 65–66.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 77.

must first set the example of serving.¹⁵⁰ It is often said that people best lead by example, therefore, if an example is not present, the team is highly unlikely to begin serving purposes other than their own in the ministry. Due to the sinful, fallen nature of man, the human tendency is not to serve others, but rather to be served, which is the exact opposite of what Christ came to do and the example Christians are asked to follow.¹⁵¹ Leaders must initiate the servant mentality in serving their team and those around them in order for a worship ministry to thrive.¹⁵²

Identifying and Approaching Non-Servant Leaders

When speaking about how to identify a false prophet, Christ gives the analogy of judging a tree by its fruit. He asks, “Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?”¹⁵³ This same logic can be applied to worship leaders. If the worship leader is leading by serving the team, there will be evidence that this is so.¹⁵⁴ However, if the worship leader is guiding the team through selfish ambition, there will be fruit of that labor as well. This fruit can blossom in many different ways, but identifying a non-servant leader can be fairly simple if approached correctly. Perhaps the best way to determine this is to talk to the team that serves directly above and below the leader. Those closest to leaders tend to know their strengths and weaknesses, and can have valuable insight on the way in which they lead on a daily basis. If there is anger, bitterness, or frustrations in many of the team member’s thoughts about a leader, then it is likely that that leader is not servant leading.

Once a non-servant leader is identified, the remaining church leadership should approach said leader. Ideally, if a leader is confronted with information regarding their non-servant

¹⁵⁰ Phil. 3:17

¹⁵¹ Mark 10:45

¹⁵² Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 31.

¹⁵³ Matt. 7:16b ESV

¹⁵⁴ Noland, *The Heart of the Artist*, 96–97.

leading, the remaining church leadership will set up an accountability or discipleship system to ensure that the growth of that leader continues, because one of the biggest, most obvious detriments of non-servant leadership is that it is unbiblical. James 3:16 says, “For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.”¹⁵⁵ When a leader attempts to lead a ministry with selfish ambition, according to this Scripture *every* vile practice will come. Scripture is also clear that followers of Christ, much less leaders in the church, are to look out for the needs of others, and do everything in humility, so this must be true in music ministry as well.¹⁵⁶

If a worship leader is approached with the Biblical evidence advocating for servant leadership and refuses to change his/her leadership style, that leader should be reconsidered for their role at the church. The Word is a living, infallible, manifestation of God¹⁵⁷ and must be treated with the utmost respect. If said leader cannot follow the authority of God in Biblical mandates and examples, then that leader will also not follow the authority of man. At this point, the leader has stepped into a position of rebellion, which Biblically is equitable to the sin of enchanting evil spirits.¹⁵⁸ This example of rebellion, if left unaddressed, can cause the entire ministry to crumble.

Conclusion

Domineering, egotistical leaders run rampant in the secular world, but Christian leaders must not conform to such things. In my ten years of worship leading experiences, I have encountered both phenomenal servant worship leaders as well as terrible non-servant worship

¹⁵⁵ ESV

¹⁵⁶ Phil. 2:3-4

¹⁵⁷ John 1:1-5, 14

¹⁵⁸ 1 Sam. 15:23

leaders. While some congregation members may have been clueless about these worship leaders' efforts (or lack thereof), the biggest impact that these leaders had was on the worship team and the other church leaders with whom they worked alongside of on a weekly basis. The most impactful servant worship leader I have ever worked under has a thriving and creative ministry. There is a rotating team of volunteers because there is simply not enough room to fit everyone in who would like to be involved; and not a single person on the team goes through the week feeling unappreciated. This ministry reaps the fruit of this worship leader's labors and sees growth and congregational effectiveness like no other ministry I have seen.

On the other hand, I have worked under an authoritarian leader who did not believe in serving the team. I personally watched the morale of this team crumble while the congregation saw the withering fruits of this leader's labors. While serving on this team, there was constantly fear of being ridiculed in rehearsals for making minor mistakes, and noticeable disdain from the leader when any trivial detail went wrong. Working in this environment led to team members quitting, an increase in church politics, and ultimately having this leader step down from the position because of a sex scandal. Scandals and politics happen in churches all over America; however, they can be greatly lessened when the leadership believes their position is one of servanthood. Although being a servant worship leader is not always easy, the benefits are unequivocal and Scripture calls for such leadership. Worship leaders seeking to serve their congregation, their team, and their fellow leaders can truly emulate Christ on Earth and eventually change the world.

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